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THROUGH LITERATURE TO LIFE

To
THE EDITOR AND READERS
OF
“THE TEACHER’S WORLD”
WHO GAVE TO THE SERIAL FORM OF THIS BOOK
IN THE COLUMNS OF THEIR JOURNAL
SO LONG A HOSPITALITY
AND
SO KIND A WELCOME



THROUGH LITERATURE TO LIFE

AN ENTHUSIASM AND AN ANTHOLOGY

by
ERNEST RAYMOND



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PREFACE

WHEN I was about thirteen years old, and a lazy, unbidable pupil at St. Paul's school, I chanced to have a master (as will be told in the first chapter of this book) whose sheer burning enthusiasm for literature and stuttering expositions of his favourite passages and long spoutings of them—all delivered when he ought to have been teaching us something else—suddenly lit in me the same flame, and determined the whole trend of my life. From that moment I—I of all people—had a passion for books and the things of the mind, so they were not school books. I then resolved to commence on the practice of literature at once; and having no originality and very few brains, I floated a new magazine on the school, in collaboration with another Pauline. My first contribution to it was a poem; one begins with poetry—always. I had cast around for a worthy subject, and found a truly magnificent one in the illness of King Edward VII and the postponement of his coronation; and, as far as

I can remember, my opening stanza was the following :

There will be no Coronation,
The King is stricken down,
Oh, who will occupy the Stands,
Oh, who will fill the Crown ?

which, though not good, was no worse than the output of a distinguished poet of that day, who achieved the couplet :

Along the line the electric message came :
He is not worse, but much the same.

In due time I became a schoolmaster myself and attempted with my boys the methods of this master to whom I owed all things ; then I became a lecturer and attempted something similar from the platform ; and now I am attempting it in a book. This book is no more than the enthusiasm of one man, with many of the passages that he loves embedded in it ; but so much, I fancy, is all that is wanted ; and it is my hope that it may prove a book for those who long to catch a love for literature and those who long to give it ; for those who want to write, and those who want to help others to write ; for teachers to put in the

hands of their senior pupils, and for parents to give to their elder children, when they see the dawn breaking. I have not, alas, the wide knowledge and the wealth of allusion of that tireless hunter on the hills of literature, my master, Mr. Elam of St. Paul's ; but I have a small portion of his spirit ; and I pray that, if the hands that have written this book be the hands of a veritable Jacob, the voice may sound like the voice of Elam.

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THROUGH LITERATURE TO LIFE

CHAPTER I

PORTRAIT OF ELAM

AS I look back upon my schooldays I fill to the brim with theories on education and with criticisms, mostly damaging, of public schools as I knew them twenty years ago, as they are now, and as they certainly will be twenty years hence. These theories are all in line with the journalistic attacks in the silly seasons. I could write a magnificent series of articles for the next outbreak of anti-public-school agitation ; and very wordy, very highly-seasoned, quite sincere articles they would be. There would be one on the appalling worship of sport and the appalling contempt of scholarship (for there is no need to be original, once the outbreak is raging) ; there would be a better one on the dangerous tendency of the public school to force boys into a single mould by punishing with derision those who exercise their originality, develop their peculiar personality and differ from the standard shape ; there would be a serious indictment of public flogging, and especially flogging by prefects, on the score that

it tends to develop sadism and other unhealthy appetites in boys ; there would be an article—and a deeply-felt one—on the snobbishness of the public schoolboy, and another on his insular hauteur and jingoism ; and, lastly, there would be one which, I hope, a deep sincerity, a deep anger, and a deep pity would inform with power on the barrenness of formal public-school religion and the soul-murder it means.

But as these theories rise like a mist out of my memories and begin to solidify into something like constructive ideas, there comes a figure so vivid, so stable, so pathetic, so laden with proofs of success, and therefore so destructive of all theories save one, that each of my fine indignations and each of my schemes for reform begins to melt into mist again. His name is Elam. It is an easy name to remember, and I trust it may be remembered long.

My school was St. Paul's, and Elam was an unimportant master, a soured little clergyman, who taught us in the lower forms when we were about thirteen. He did everything that was wrong and scandalous in the eyes of theorists. He was slovenly in his dress and dirty in his person ; he was violent in temper and would thrash us in hot blood ; in sudden brain-storms he would shake a boy as a savage woman shakes a child ; his language, when indignation overcame him, though brilliant with wit, malice, vindictiveness

and humour, would certainly not have passed muster with the police in Victoria Park ; he was grossly unpunctual, wandering on splayed feet up to his class-room door long after other masters had taken their thrones and the corridors were silent. He had no dignity and no system in his conduct of a class, but would quite often go to sleep, with a handkerchief over his face, his chair tilted back, and his feet on his writing-desk ; he would vilify the school and not a few of its masters, declaring that their souls had long been destroyed and that his own was moribund, but still, thank God ! had spasms of life ; he would abuse our parents ; he would pour scorn on the High Master ; most risky of all, he would tell us his spiritual history, analysing his loss of faith in the Church's creed and his resultant degeneration into " a hungry usher, at a shilling an hour." When, in his later years, to the humorous delight of the whole school, a good woman married him, he would discuss his domestic difficulties with his pupils, dilating on the exacting punctuality and " absurd fastidiousness of this woman I've married " ; and, in a word, he was undoubtedly mad.

By all theories such a man was the last person to whom adolescent boys should be trusted. And yet the High Master—the famous F. W. Walker, last of the school of terrifying heads—though he knew perfectly well that Elam, whom he had once called " no gentleman " in a deep-throated rage

—and by heaven ! which of us, masters or boys, have forgotten the deep-throated roar of Walker in a passion, a roar so like the roar of a lion seeking his meat from God ?—though he knew perfectly well that Elam was in the habit of shouting, “ *I shan’t report you to the person calling himself the High Master ; if I did, I should only be called ‘ no gentleman ’ by a man that I despise above most of God’s creatures* ”—never did he remove the mutineer from his place or interfere with his methods. To be sure, I believe that, though not on speaking terms with the man, he liked him best of his colleagues. I know that once I was in Elam’s class-room, and my master was asleep with his feet on his desk and his bandana handkerchief over his eyes, and Walker entered. As that ragged beard and billowing silk gown showed itself round the door, I think we expected the room to totter and its windows to crack. But the High Master only looked round, saw the situation, and walked out quietly so as not to disturb the slumberer.

These things sound incredible, but everything about Elam was incredible—incredible that from such a man I, for one, should have learned nothing but good ; learned, in truth, almost everything that has been of value to me since, enabling me not only to earn my bread and butter in the practice of an art, but to live as fully as possible and drink deeply of the glory of life while I have time.

Others have said the same. In those days, at thirteen years of age, I had already determined to be a novelist, and the ambition was mightily heightened by Elam, and be sure I had pigeon-holed Elam as a great comic character for an early book. He would certainly have been used by me if, unfortunately, Compton Mackenzie, another Old Pauline, hadn't got in first. You will find Elam, nothing exaggerated, in the first volume of "Sinister Street," which closes on the note that all the best his hero had learned at school he learned from this lunatic master.

How was it done? What was the secret? Simply that Elam was a burning enthusiast for literature, art, and all products of Man's creative genius. We caught alight at such sizzling, spluttering enthusiasm; as he held forth on Micawber, Peggotty, Don Quixote, Uncle Toby, Hamlet, Tartuffe, Hogarth, Titian, Plato, Aristophanes, our imaginations flared up; came penetration, understanding, sympathy, feeling. And because humour and imagination make allowances for all roughened edges, we have no malice for Elam's temper and tongue, but only gratitude for the divine fire whose sparks he tossed to us.

Here is Elam in class. Say we were doing Ovid. Well, Elam didn't like Ovid. He was not happy with him; he had too much taste, virility, and humour. His one idea was to escape to nobler, loftier souls. Perhaps a fine simile or

epithet would provide him with wings for this flight. He would seize on it, explain its beauty, and then traverse whole continents of literature in search of cognate beauties. One thing would lead him to another. He would quote from Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley. In the neighbourhood of Shelley he would espy Byron, and fly after and overtake him in Greece, and die with him at Missolonghi. In Greece he would meet with Socrates, and we would be taken on quiet, reverent feet into the immortal death-chamber, and see that old martyrdom more vividly than Crito saw it. From Socrates to Plato was an easy flight, and on Plato's bosom this little soured parson soared into the empyrean.

We could not follow him now, but stared at him with thrilled and captured eyes. There was silence in Elam's class-room. We sat back in our desks, put our hands in our pockets, and abandoned ourselves to the restfulness of pure recipience. We hardly smiled when, in his gathering excitement, he stuttered for words, and even spat a little over the boys in the front row. The clock, alas! showed us, all too soon, that the hour was spent; a vile bell jangled in the corridors, and called us to algebra or French verbs or other such lifeless things. And Elam came to a breathless pause and muttered: "There! People'd maintain I ought to have been stuffing you with those twenty lines of Ovid. We've only

done four, but that's quite enough of such a snivelling fool. You'll fail in your examinations at the end of the term, and your parents'll abuse me, and I shall be called 'no gentleman' by a man that I despise above most of God's creatures, but I don't mind! I'm not here to drive sixteen ounces *avoirdupois* of Latin into your memory, but to give you a liberal education—at a shilling an hour. I don't care twopence about giving you *facts*—anybody can give you *facts*—the official in the next class-room can do *that*—and anybody can remember facts. *I'm* going to give you ideas. I don't think it matters much if the ideas are right, so long as they are ideas—so long as you *think* and *feel*. I don't want to teach you to *know*, but to *interpret*. See? Any fool can *know*. Wisdom comes when you begin to interpret. Your brain shouldn't be a cold-storage chamber, but a power-house. Now run along to whoever's going to waste your next hour. He probably has finicking ideas about punctuality, and I don't want to get you into trouble—you're good-hearted lads at the bottom."

Often it was we who tired first of the weeping Ovid, and were restless to escape into Elam's wonderlands, and then one of us, more impudent than his fellows, would suddenly ask: "Sir, Sir, was it Mr Peggotty who said 'Income, twenty shillings, expenditure, twenty shillings and sixpence; result, misery——'?" But he got no

further; the artillery of Elam's wrath and indignation were turned upon this willing martyr; Micawber was avenged; Dickens, his creator, was analysed and explained with the fervour of a lover; the virtues of humour and humanity, of kindness and toleration, were proclaimed and instanced from a hundred examples in literature and history—and, alas! the bell rang again.

I went on, as I grew older, to other masters, and I feel gratitude to many of them for their patience and skill; but none is so vivid, none lays such claims to my affection, as this slovenly little splay-footed figure. Perhaps it was that he caught us at the right hour—at an age of blossoming and rapid development. Perhaps old Walker was an even greater general than many of us suspect, and stationed this *mitrailleuse* at precisely the spot of strategic importance. Certain it is that of the generation contemporary with me at St. Paul's, and therefore presumably a generation that knew the quickening touch of Elam, an extraordinary proportion has attained to some degree of prominence, especially in literature, art, and the stage.

So, as I said at the beginning, the figure of Elam leaves for me only one stable theory of education. It is this: that if I were a head master and had to choose my assistants, whether they were to teach mathematics or mensuration, chemistry or cricket, I would favour those who had a fine,

proselytizing enthusiasm for literature and art, even though their manners were atrocious and their methods abominable ; because it is chiefly in the things of art that the fire of imagination is lit, and hence the master will possess imagination, penetration, and sympathy, and he will light up in his pupils their smouldering humour, their essential humanity, their inalienable hunger for beauty, and their inborn desire to create beauty for themselves ; which things it is the final business of education to educe.

And since these things are the business which this little book has set before itself, I shall seek to borrow something of Elam's manner—not, dear soul, of his manners, the law of libel being more active in the world than it was within the walls of St. Paul's school ; I shall seek to talk as enthusiastically as possible of my own enthusiasms in literature, quoting passages at length, as Elam did ; nor (with all humility) have I the least doubt that my chapters will be helpful to some, for all that matters is enthusiasm and enthusiastic expression, which at least they will certainly possess ; they may have few ideas that are new, many that are old, and plenty that are wrong ; all of which is of little importance, so there be one enthusiastic person venting his views and other enthusiastic persons liking them, disliking them, criticizing them, massacring them, inspired by them, or indignant at them—in short, so there

be literary enthusiasms in the air. If you will, we shall wander easily and carelessly over wide fields of literature, now waxing excited over some shapely blossoms of poetry, now pursuing some flitting fancy, no matter how far astray it may lead us, now picking to pieces some current novel and anon returning to some ancient favourites; ready always to insult chronology and mix up Aristophanes and Rabelais and Euripides and Shaw; for that is the way literature is talked in life, and it is from such talk, I believe, that living inspiration comes. Which being agreed, let us (as Meredith would say) to the story, the froth being out of the bottle.

CHAPTER II

THE APPROACH TO LITERATURE

I

HERE ARE two things : yourself and the world's literature. If you approach the world's literature in the desire to get into communication with it, what is it that you should expect it to give you ? Entertainment ? No ; not primarily ; sometimes it will be entertaining, and as you get more and more attuned to it so will it be more and more frequently entertaining ; but not always—certainly not always ; there will be, and should be, times when it is nothing less than dynamite to your complacency, an uncomfortable, disturbing factor, a solvent to old assents and easy inertias, a destructive force that leaves you with much to repair or build anew. So entertainment is not the primary thing you expect from it. And by the same argument, not relief and solace. These gifts often it will deal to you, but by no means always. An escape—is it this, as some have said ? An escape from the brutalities of the real world to more perfect realms of the imagination, where the women are more fair and the men more heroic,

and love lasts, and children are grateful, and justice is done by the good? By heaven, no! Not that! Not for adult souls. This for the children, perhaps; and for those in the ante-rooms of literature, but not for those who desire to approach the presence.

What is it, then? Simply this, and exactly this: that you may have life, and have it more abundantly.

What is Life? In an old discredited book, Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," there is a definition which for our purposes is an excellent one. Life, it says, is conscious contact with environment. We are more and more alive in so far as we are in touch with a larger and larger environment. A tree is alive because its roots are in active contact with the soil, drawing from its richness a substance that it can transmute into expressions of its own, and because its branches are at the same employ with the transient sunlight and the environing air. But it is fettered to a limited environment. A bird, in contrast, can move and see and sense the wind; daily it can establish communication with new things. It knows what lies behind the hill, and the warm places of the south. It can apprehend the insect on the stream, the love-song of its mate, and the helplessness of its young. And, climbing to Man, you find him—what but a mass of contacts, an instrument alive to countless

things to which lower organisms are dead ? To his natural powers of apprehension he has added by a thousand mechanical devices the means to establish contact with immeasurable heights and depths. He is *en rapport* with the universe. He is hugely, gloriously alive. And by far the greatest of these devices for increasing life is the written word, whereby he sets up communication with the master spirits, seeing with their keener eyes, hearing with their livelier ears, thinking with their subtler brains, feeling with their larger hearts, and touching God on their wings.

"I am a part of all that I have met," said Ulysses. "All environment," said Drummond, in a good sentence, "is an unappropriated part of ourselves." And of the environment that awaits us in the world what can equal the recorded experiences of the grandest, the pioneering souls ? If we neglect it we shall fail at several points to come alive. And it is a terrible thing to be partially dead.

Let us be perfectly clear that a work of literature is not an idle tale to entertain and relieve the reader in his lazy hours but, rather, the cry of a great soul at the spectacle of life he sees before him. (And, remember, a soul is great exactly in proportion as it sees more than other men.) Why do I call it a "cry" ? Because a cry is the expressed reaction of a soul to something external. Roughly, there are three cries : a moan, the cry of

pain ; a laugh, the cry of amusement ; and a cheer, the cry of excited approval. So a cry may well be called literature in its infancy ; I like to call it the protoplasm from which great literature is evolved.

Some of our great souls have been intolerably hurt by the spectacle, and the cry that they have given us has been *tragedy*. A marvellous succession are these, from Æschylus to Hardy. Some have hidden their hurt under savage *satire*, so that the unsubtle of us have accused them of pitilessness, and of these the supreme example is Swift. Some have been moved to genuine and uproarious laughter by the farce of life and the pretensions of men, and wonderful form has their *comedy* taken in the creations of Molière, Dickens, Rabelais, Sterne, and all the gay company. Many, thank God, have seen the heroisms of men, and the grandeur of life and the joy of it ; they have said their " Yes ! " to life and greeted it with a cheer.

It is my conviction that, as the greatest literary artists must be the best balanced, so all these three cries—the moan, the laugh, and the cheer—must sound in their work ; and that we, if we would draw from literature a complete, full life, must taste all three fountains in them, and coming to the lesser men, correct the bitter taste of one with the sweet taste of another, and after a draught of the morbid vintage of a Strindberg,

seek the invigorating tonic of a Browning. For *Life is*, I believe, almost equally a matter for tears and laughter and applause ; which is to say, in school-girl's tongue, that it is too perfectly thrilling for anything.

Consider the greatest. How Christ exemplified these three attitudes to life ! How He could suffer ! " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, weep for yourselves and for your children." How He could laugh ! " You poor, dear Pharisees, while you strain away the flies you drink down the camels whole." How He could cheer ! " O woman, great is thy faith ! " " Much shall be forgiven her, for she loved much." " Blessed are the compassionate, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who have borne persecution in the cause of Righteousness. . . . Be joyful and triumphant, for great is your reward." Or Shakespeare. How he could suffer and shudder ! " The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action." " Vex not his ghost : O, let him pass ! He hates him much that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer." " How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me the uses of this world." " What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven ? " " Get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour must she come. Make her laugh at that." How he could

laugh! "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" "Motley's the only wear!" How he could cheer! "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty, in form and moving. . . . How like a God!" "This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle . . . this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

2

Literature, because it is a blending of cries, makes us not only feel about more things, but feel more about them. Or as the same idea has been well phrased, it "heightens our awareness." It reveals the significance of one object after another; and with every new significance thus revealed to us we are larger men—men of more penetration, more sympathy, and more reverence. And after it has done this kind office for us a few thousand times, lo! we find that we are doing it for ourselves without the aid of literature; we find we cannot look upon any object without, consciously or unconsciously, piercing our vision right through it to thoughts, implications, references, relations, that, a year or two before, we should never have glimpsed behind such a dull object. Dull—that's the point! It would have

been dull before literature gave us this eager awareness ; it is thrilling now. It would have been a solid, opaque thing in those old days ; it is rarefied and diaphanous now. We, too, have become poets and interpreters.

We have become awake and aware ; and to be awake and aware is to be alive, while to be asleep and unaware is to be dead. This being indisputable, it is obviously true that to become more and more awake is to become more and more alive ; which vivification, as we protest again and again, is the gift of literature—this, and not entertainment, solace, relief, or a drugging anæsthetic. (Fancy regarding literature as an anæsthetic—as quite fifty per cent. of readers do—when its main purpose is the direct opposite : to heighten our *æsthesia* ! *Æsthesia* is only the Greek word for *perception, sensibility* ; and it is no uncommon thing to hear people, who are very ready to speak of their æsthetic appreciations, argue as if their beloved poems and novels were their favourite anæsthetic.)

Now let us take the first half of our text : “ Literature makes us feel about more things.” Here is a small example of what I mean. I am going to quote you a poem by a modern American authoress, and I’ll guarantee that not one of you, though daily as you walk to your work you have passed the trees at the pavement’s edge, would have thought the thought contained in this poem

unless the poetess had enriched you with it. I'm sure I shouldn't have perceived it. And yet here, beautifully imprisoned in twelve short lines, is a sad indictment against *one* of the damaging mutilations of our present urban civilization. The poem is called "City Trees," and is by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

The trees along this city street,
Save for the traffic and the trains,
Would make a sound as thin and sweet
As trees in country lanes.

And people standing in their shade
Out of a shower, undoubtedly
Would hear such music as is made
Upon a country tree.

Oh, little leaves that are so dumb
Against the shrieking city air,
I watch you when the wind has come--
I know what sound is there.

Or take a pillar-box that you passed. A pillar-box, at the first thought, strikes one as, perhaps, the most supremely ugly thing that civilization has produced. And yet—and yet Mr. G. K. Chesterton once, walking (as I conjecture) to some Elizabethan inn near King Lud's gate, where there was good-fellowship and good ale, paused to

look at a pillar-box. I imagine that the people in the street swirled round him, as he stood there lost in contemplation of its surpassing beauty. He then wrote an essay on it. What he said about it I forget, for I was a boy when I read this essay, but I know that a pillar-box has never been the same to me since. Think of all the life-stories that converge on that red dove-cote, roost there for an hour, and then radiate away again. Think of the *cris de cœur* it contains, the outpourings of love—literate and illiterate, the messages of dramatic alarm, the farewells, the reconciliations, the halting Nemeses, the waiting ruins, and the coming joys. And because the poet's vision sees these things, to him the pillar-box can be as full of wonder as the star-strewn heavens—nay, perhaps more so, because it is more urgent with life; he can see more of God in the pillar-box than in the Pleiades.

Can you feel much about bread-crust and sheets and blankets? "No; on my soul, no!" Then you are less awake to the wonder of *everything* than Brooke. Listen:

I have been so great a lover . . .
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets . . .
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names

Golden for ever . . .

These I have loved :

White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,

Ringed with blue lines ; and feathery faery dust,

Wet roofs, beneath the lamplight, the strong crust

Of friendly bread ; and many-tasting food . . .

Then, the cool kindliness of sheets, that soon

Smooth away trouble ; and the rough male kiss

Of blankets . . . the keen,

Unpassioned beauty of a great machine ;

The benison of hot water ; furs to touch ;

The good smell of old clothes ; and other such . . .

Dear names,

And thousand other throng to me !

3

Mr. Masfield in his "Cargoes," in three short verses, turns a light of beauty on a dirty British coasting vessel, and irradiates it with colour and romance ; Mr. J. C. Squire, in his "Winter Night-fall," plays an enchanter's beam on a dilapidated old stucco house ; Mr. Hardy, in his "Afterwards," seems to claim no other epitaph than that he was a man aware and awake—its haunting refrain is "He was a man who used to notice such things. . . . He was one who had an eye for such mysteries" ; and Mr. Arnold Bennett, in his

preface to a recent edition of "The Old Wives' Tale," tells us frankly how he saw the whole novel in an old woman, "fat, ugly, shapeless and grotesque," who wandered into a Paris restaurant to dine. "I reflected, concerning this grotesque diner: 'This woman was once young, slim, perhaps beautiful. . . . There is an extreme pathos in the mere fact that every stout, ageing woman was once a young girl with the unique charm of youth in her form and movements and in her mind. And the fact that the change from the young girl to the stout, ageing woman is made up of an infinite number of infinitesimal changes, each unperceived by her, only intensifies the pathos.'"

About sunsets and roses and moonlit glades and little children and partings and death we can all feel; the above are a few examples—the first that occur to me—of how literature takes things that are normally commonplace or even repellent, and makes us feel about them too. The final result of literature's education is, undoubtedly, to make us see thrilling significances in *every single thing in the universe*; which happy condition always seems to me to outbalance the frictions and woes of life by a very creditable margin. The above are small examples, I say; if you want the whole universe changed for you, *deepened* for you, so that your thinking will never be quite the same again, try Count Keyserling's "Travel Diary of a Philosopher"; wherein we see a very fine mind,

deeply spiritual, making a journey round the world—but what I can only call a subterranean journey—I mean that he travels not on the surface of things, but down among the significances of things—significances being his favourite word. It is not an easy book, but, as we said at the beginning, our use of literature mustn't be a seeking after entertainment or play, but an effort to come gloriously alive; and biology seems to show that this is never done without drive and striving.

4

Having glanced at the meaning of the sentence, "Literature makes us feel about more things," let us pass on to its successor, "and it also makes us feel more about them." I suppose that if there is any one question by which we can test the greatness of a piece of literature it is this: "Has it made us feel more deeply about something which disturbed us but little before?" Every novel, drama or poem must submit itself to this trial if it claims admission into the ranks of "great" literature. I examine my memory for novels of recent publication which have thus enlarged my compassions, and three candidates at once present themselves for election to the shelves of honour. Surely there can be little

question that Sinclair Lewis has written two big novels in "Main Street" and "Babbitt." All the time I was reading them I received the impression that he had been really *hurt* by the stupidity of the things he was satirizing; and it is probable that the greatest literature, let it take what form it likes—laughter, burlesque, bitterness, savage denunciation—must spring, in the last analysis, from the hurt of a highly sensitized soul. In "Babbitt" the author was really wounded by the aridity and essential failure of the life of an outwardly successful big-business man; by its loss of all the lovelier things that the spirit can enjoy; by the hunger, dissatisfaction and restlessness that this loss involves; and by the pathetic gropings after beauty that its secret heart must know.

So also in "Main Street"; he was wounded by the shallow vulgarity, the blind self-confidence, of a typical Middle Western town, and he was compelled to write this merciless book if he was to ease his hurt.

The third book that persists in its claim to be regarded as an enlarger of my compassions is Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy." Now, here is a book that instances a truth which we shall shortly propound with some passion: namely, that real literature has not necessarily a great deal to do with correct prose and good "style"—so it be the outpouring of a fine mind, deeply moved. If "An American Tragedy" be

a masterpiece, it is the worst written masterpiece that has ever made a compositor say : " Why, I could write better English than this myself." But in this turgid medium Theodore Dreiser has given us—what ? I don't know—just a terrible piece of life—the story of a boy whom we shall all of us probably pretend to despise, but shall know in our inner hearts to be a portrait of ourselves. To an easy judgment he is an odious little snob and time-server ; and through a succession of tiny chances he is led—always as a result of faults that are common to us all—to murder and the electric chair ; and yet, as I see the last of him, I forgive him everything, because he is so palpably my brother. I think as I close the book : " There, but for better luck, goes myself."

But this idea that literature makes us awake and aware to the things that surround us, and then intensifies and intensifies our feelings about these things, I can instance better from poetry, from little poems that turn a pin-light on little things. Few of us are unmoved by a linnet's singing, but which of us, until the poet has touched our lazy hearts, are carried by it to such a thought as Flecker trembled on when he wrote :

A linnet who had lost her way
Sang on a blackened bough in Hell
Till all the ghosts remembered well
The trees, the wind, the golden day.

At last they knew that they had died
When they heard music in that land,
*And some one there stole forth a hand
To draw a brother to his side.*

All of us like blue flowers and the sight of the merlin flying in the sky, and the rime that lies on the trees in winter or the light that falls on a bee's wings in a summer sunset, but which of us feel so intensely the beauty of these things that we consider them to have established the credit-balance of life, paid in full measure for all its pains, and justified the ways of God to men? And yet this, I take it, was what Ralph Hodgson meant when he wrote "After."

"How fared you when you mortal were?
What did you see on my peopled star?"
"Oh, well enough," I answered her,
"It went for me where mortals are!"

"I saw blue flowers and the merlin's flight,
And the rime on the wintry tree,
Blue doves I saw and summer light
On the wings of the cinnamon bee."

Many of us have laughed at the well-known triolet, "Why do you walk through the fields in gloves?" but have we felt its deep feeling for so simple a thing as the touch of the wild grasses

on the hand—which is the essence of the poem, its hurt, its indignation.

Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
Missing so much and so much ?
O fat white woman whom nobody loves,
Why do you walk through the fields in gloves
When the grass is soft as the breast of doves
And shivering-sweet to the touch ?
Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
Missing so much and so much ?

And here again, in Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," is this matter of the bird's song :

From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
From your memories, sad brother, from the fitful risings
and fallings I heard,
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in
the mist,
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
From the myriad thence-arous'd words . . .
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
A reminiscence sing. . . .

Demon or bird !

Is it indeed toward your mate you sing, or is it really to
me ?

For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I
have heard you.

Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer,
 louder, and more sorrowful than yours,
A thousand warbling echoes have started within me,
 never to die.
O you solitary singer, singing by yourself, projecting me,
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease
 perpetuating you,
Nevermore shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was
 before what there in the night,
By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,
The messenger there aroused the fire, the sweet hell
 within,
The unknown want, the destiny of me. . . .

CHAPTER III

WHERE IS ROMANCE ?

I

THEN ROMANCE lies behind everything in the world—everything from the largest to the smallest, from the sublimest to the most ridiculous, from the loveliest to the ugliest, from the firmament of stars on this cloudless night to the speck of lamp-dust that has fallen on my paper as I write.) That is what we have arrived at. We are agreed that Literature, once it has revealed its full message to us, and we, surrendering to it as the Life-giver, have attuned our ears to its remotest over-tones, will flood *all* things with significance. Thanks to the vision it has given us, nothing now is prosaic or unromantic ; our eyes are wide, wide open ; no longer are we on the mental level of the film-goer who limits romance to the moon-light on the lake or the coming of young love, but we see it, without effort or strain, in the commonest, aye, the dirtiest of everyday things. Schopenhauer phrases it thus : “ If the subject be in a receptive mood, almost everything now falling within his apperception will begin to speak to

him, *i.e.*, to create in him a vivid, penetrating, and original thought. Hence at times the aspect of an unimportant object or event has become the germ of a great and beautiful work." And Baudelaire: "In certain almost supernatural states of the soul, the depths of life reveal themselves completely in anything that may happen to meet the eye, no matter how commonplace such a sight may be. It becomes the symbol."

The principle of life in us is such that, when we think a profound or wide-sweeping thought, we feel heightened, exalted, more *alive*. It is a thrilling experience, and I know of nothing else which gives us a kindred sense of exaltation, except love. But love, alas ! is capricious in its visitation, while literature is with us every day for the taking ; so when the exaltation of love elude us, or leave us, let us seek other exaltations again in the company of this one inalienable friend. He is wiser than the other wild visitant, really ; and if he cannot give us that all-absorbing love for an individual, he does indeed give us something like a quiet love for everything in the world. (Do you know, it is a common experience for a novelist to be asked, "Aren't you afraid you'll one day have nothing more to write about ? Won't your subject matter give out ?" And the novelist, if he is a real novelist, and not just an entertaining plot-contriver, stares in amazement. He knows that his great trouble is that there is

insufficient time, and that he has insufficient energy and certainly insufficient ability, to write all that he sees. He wonders why his questioner never asks of a painter, "Aren't you afraid that one day you'll see nothing more to paint?"

I make the claim that the first object on which our eye falls can, once we have these powers of vision, be seen as the focus of all the thoughts that the world holds. From this focal point we could, had we the knowledge, work our way over the entire history of the universe, and, had we the mystical experience, rest finally in the eternal. There is no "particular" incident behind which the universal truth cannot be glimpsed, no finite object behind which the infinite cannot be felt, no temporal movement through which the eternal stillness cannot be reached. And is not this to find the sublimest romance everywhere?

I will test it. As I write at my desk I look up, and the first thing I see is a paraffin lamp. It is an ugly, standardized thing; and, to be frank, it's rather dirty, for last night I allowed it to smoke as I wrote, and the lamp-black settled. Now let me try to put down the train of thought it sets moving in me. "This artificial light—why it was True Man's first conquest over nature; he and he alone discovered fire and staked out his squatter's rights in the surrounding darkness; and, by heaven! now I come to think of it, this, his first invention, has not only been the probable cause

of his survival, but is for ever the perfect symbol of all that he has done, and all that he can ever do—though he attain the end of knowledge and find God *Extending ever further and further outward his squatter's rights in the darkness !* And strange ! strange ! now I come to think of it, this first creative act of True Man is identical with the first creative act of God. Does this mean that it is the *same* creative power at work ? . . . Oh, the unsurpassable beauty of that opening to the vast Bible story ; never again will such a majestic opening be possible to man. It is done once, and done for ever. *'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void ; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light.'* To meditate on it for a few moments is to find that it is almost too beautiful to be borne. *'In the beginning God.'* Curiosity seizes me. How does the vast story end ? I cannot say off-hand what are the closing words of the Bible. Are they worthy of this ; do they stand on this topmost summit ? Let me look and see. *'He which testifieth of these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen ; even so come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.'* Wonderful close ! Wonderful answer to that opening, *'Let there be light.'* Even to those who cannot accept all the claims of Christi-

anity, it is the only perfect close to the vast story here set forth ; while to those who accept all, it is unspeakable in its beauty. . . . Where were we ? Oh, yes ; we were thinking of a paraffin lamp."

Try it for yourself. What are you looking at now ? A page in a book. Consider its implications.* The paper on which it is printed : how strange that the Chinese should have invented paper a thousand years before it reached Europe ! And to think that these letters which the compositor has set in type were invented by the Phœnicians who, as we're so fond of telling our children, came trading for tin in the Cornish creeks ! I suppose, being keen business men, they had to invent something for registering their trade. Really, when I begin to think about these printed letters, I can see that the whole of known history is concealed in them. The Greeks adopted them from the Phœnicians, and then the Romans had a hand in altering them, and then the monks of the middle ages, labouring on their manuscripts, created out of the old capitals the running hand which, for the printer, has become these little letters. But the capitals ; they are no different from those on the Roman monuments to-day. And the language that these letters and words are building up for me to read—why, the whole

* For many of these implications I am indebted to Robinson's "The Ordeal of Civilization," Harper.

of known history is in that, too ! The Saxons and the Vikings brought it from their Scandinavian creeks, and the Normans came and emptied into it a gracious cargo of Romanesque words, wherein lies all the story of Imperial Rome ; then the Renaissance poured the Old Classical World over it again, and the New Science chiselled out of its riches innumerable new words of remarkable lucidity and precision. The loyalists of Virginia and the Pilgrims of New England carried it to the New World, where, nowadays, a young, vigorous, creative nation is busy enriching it with new words full of life and energy. Probably, since the future greatness of the world will lie about the Atlantic and the Pacific, it is the universal language that, one day, all nations will speak.

You see ? We cannot escape romance, even though we lower our gaze from the skies and let it fall on a page of literary criticism.

One more focal point. There is hanging in my room a little ebony and bronze crucifix that I bought years ago in a shop outside St. Sulpice, Paris. It is not the figure on which I am looking, though that, of course, whatever we may believe about its story, holds the profoundest spiritual thought ever compassed by the soul of man—not the figure, but the four letters “INRI.” We might look through those letters, as through a magic glass, and see in a pageant almost the whole

sweep of pre-Christian history ; the world-movement of the Hebrews from Ur of the Chaldees to the fall of Jerusalem, the world-movement of the Greeks with all that Marathon and Salamis meant, and the world-movement of the Romans from the first settlements on the Tiber to the *Pax Romana* of Augustus Cæsar. How ?

2

Well, to begin with, they summon at once to our minds the haunting words “ And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. . . . And it was written in Hebrew and Greek and Latin.”

“ Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.”

It was said of the late Cecil Rhodes that he “ thought in continents ” ; these three words should set us thinking, not in vast tracts of space, but in vast tracts of time ; they should throw instantly on the screen of our minds these three incomparable pageants of history—the world-movement of the Hebrews, the world-movement of the Greeks, and the world-movement of the Romans or Latins. The first thing I see is a Man with an Idea, crossing an eastern river with his wife and his camels and his asses, and a considerable following of people. He may be

deluded, or he may not, but he is making this move because he is convinced that he must break with the religious idolatry of his own people. Under those wide eastern skies he has suddenly glimpsed something better, and he is now, with an immense vision of the future, venturing into a new land to found a new nation which shall worship his lonely desert God in purer ways. For the sake of this Idea, he is crossing the Euphrates. Abraham, of course—the first great Pilgrim Father. Because he had the courage to venture into the Blue with his Idea, he became the Father of the three great monotheistic religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. That is the beginning of the world-movement of the Hebrews—which word simply means “those from the other side of the river.” No space here to pursue the amazing story further, the long tragedy of his children who became the martyrs of history, crushed now by Egypt, now by Assyria, now by Babylon, now by Rome, but ever holding aloft the blazing idea that they alone had the truth of God. No time to speak of that unique phenomenon, the Hebrew Prophets, who ever arose to blow the torch to flame again whensoever it glimmered towards failure. No time to speak of the sedimentary deposit of all this great tradition on the “little hill of Zion.” Enough to say that the Hebrew people were a people with a supreme genius for religion, and that Jerusalem, their

capital, became the spiritual capital of the world.

Greek. The word contains the whole picture of the world-movements of the Greeks. We see them, two thousand years before Christ, a stream from that great Indo-European watershed, moving from their pastures along the Danube, through Thrace and Thessaly, till their migration is held up by the sea. The wine-dark seas of Greece! And over the water the blue islands. Lofty mountains, still air, cypress trees and olive trees; a warm but temperate sun bathing all; little wonder that they became the devotees of beauty and the apostles of intellectual light. One terrible moment when it seemed that the heavy Oriental would crush these gifted sons of the morning—but no! Marathon—Salamis—and it was decided that the Persian should go and the Greek stay. No space for more. Enough to say that the Greek people were a people with a supreme genius for culture, and that Athens, their capital, became the intellectual capital of the world.

Rome. Those astonishing farmers and their children, the Legions! Their gradual spread, more for the sake of business than anything else! That hard-headed, merciless business-man Cato bringing the figs from Carthage into the House of Commons, and demanding the destruction of that dangerous trade-rival, Carthage! The drama

of the conflict with Carthage, and its decision corresponding to the decision of Marathon and Salamis, that the Semitic should go and the Indo-European stay ! The one great mental product of these so material people. Roman Law ! The roads ! Enough to say that the Latins were a people with a supreme genius for empire and order, and that Rome, their capital, became the material capital of the world. Our trilogy is complete : Jerusalem and Athens and Rome—the spiritual, the intellectual and the material—answering exactly the tripartite division of man into body, mind, and spirit.

And then the converging of these great movements on to that focal moment when a wood-cutter hewed down a tree, and a wood-sawyer made a plank from it, and a soldier painted the little plank white with gypsum, and at the command of a haughty Roman pro-consul, inscribed on it the words, IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDÆORUM, that have been the rich, swelling seed of these thoughts. Was there ever such a moment before ? The Greeks with their culture had spread over the Roman Empire, carrying a sort of universal language that was ready to be the vehicle of something new. The Jews of the Dispersion had been scattered over the world, and established strategic centres for the peaceful penetration of the new thing. The Romans had reduced the world to order, and laid their roads for the feet of the new

messengers. The *Pax Romana* brooded over the earth.

No war or battle's sound
Was heard the world around,
The idle spear and shield were high up hung :
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood,
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng . . .

The new thing came and the world began again. I tell you, for its wide-sweeping reach, there is no dramatic story to touch this. And it is all, if we like, focused on that little white plank with its trilingual inscription.

We might continue the story right up to our own day and far beyond. We might think of that little man, rather lame, rather blind, and very irritable, who carried the new thing to Jerusalem, the spiritual capital of the world, and fought for it there ; to Athens, the intellectual capital of the world, and argued it on Mars Hill with the descendants of Socrates and Alcibiades ; and lastly to Rome, like the good general he was, to capture the strategic centre of the Empire and the material capital of the world. We might show that the spirits of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem still divide the world, and must continue to do so as long as man is made up of body, mind and spirit, and is inclined to enlarge one part of him and let the

others atrophy. We might tell our children that we shall never be full men till Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem are capitals of equal strength in our natures.

I hope I have made my point : that your eye cannot fall on anything, be it ever so small, without its being a potential crystal in which the whole of Romance can be seen. Romance is everywhere. "Lift the stone and you shall find me ; cleave the wood and there am I."

CHAPTER IV

THEN WHAT IS REALISM ?

I

IF ROMANCE is everywhere, then there is no contrast between Realism and Romance. Realism is but part of the great whole. It is for this that I am contending, but, to avoid confusion, let it be admitted that there is a narrower use of the word *Romance*, wherein it is limited to that type of literature, very grand in its way, which turns its eyes from the brutalities of life and provides for us an escape into a world of finer heroes and heroines and more perfect happiness than any we know. If used thus, it is rightly set in contrast to Realism. Manifestly we must have some word to describe the difference between Scott and Zola. And though, as I have suggested on a previous page, this brand of literary output must be, normally, unsatisfying to 'completely adult minds which have known suffering and frustration and disillusionment, and therefore think a Fool's Paradise a place for fools, yet let it not be denied that great men can produce great literature from such material.

We cannot remind ourselves too often that *every* type of literature has a perfect right to present itself as a candidate for greatness, and this attribution of greatness will depend, not on any label we can attach to it, but simply on the strength, the vitality, the vision, and the dynamic drive of the mind which puts it forth. A great man will write "as he jolly well likes"; in any form, be it outdated, or unheard-of, or even theoretically impossible; in any mixture of irreconcilable styles, though all the world assert that such a mixture is critically insufferable; and in any prose, verse, or structural method, how heretical soever, so long as it satisfies himself as the one perfect vehicle for what he has to say. All that matters is that he should succeed in that which he has attempted; and this he is bound to do if his "drive" is strong enough. All that matters is that we should feel, as we read, that we are in communion with the mind of a man who is "above par"; and that this is the medium, whether we like it or not, which the vigorous, exciting, irrepressible creature has elected, in his sovereign independence, to employ. If the mind is by no means "above par," and the surge of creation is not really in it, then it will make an appalling hash of its unorthodox dishes, and will quickly be forgotten.

It is useless to say that Romance was only suited to a young and foolish world, so long as

Shakespeare is admitted by all to be the greatest writer who has, thus far, appeared. Shakespeare knew—none better—that much of his romance was illusory; but he knew also that there is a place for illusion in life, so it be good enough. “A Fool’s Paradise? Well, why not? There is a time for Folly.” It is useless to say that the historical novel can never, in the nature of things, be the greatest fiction so long as “Lorna Doone” looks down from its commanding height on the crowd of little realistic novels, and makes them feel very small indeed. It is no good saying that the novel of marvellously staged scenery and marvellously upholstered puppets whose strings you can see working all the time, has no place in modern literature, so long as a writer like the author of “Jew Suss” can blaze a trail for such work all over the world. It’s no good saying that sentimentality and archness went out with the Victorians, and thank God for it, while a genius so delicate as Barrie’s is electing to use these things for our delight. It’s no good saying that plays in which the characters are not differentiated individuals but mere mouthpieces for the propaganda of the author, and in which nothing happens except talk, are not plays at all—it’s no good saying this, so long as a man, mounting the intellectual guns of Shaw, chooses to write them. It’s no good saying that social propaganda, theological dialogues, and historical essays have no right in

a novel, if a Dostoievsky comes along and decides to write a "Brothers Karamazov," or a Tolstoy appears, offering us a "War and Peace." All we can do in the face of such portents is to extend the meaning of the term "novel," or call their work something else, and then embrace these welcome guests.

And, again, do let us realize that all of us, even the most catholic in sympathy, are limited by our temperaments to the appreciation of a limited field of art ; and that, therefore—though we may be temperamentally averse to some work of literature, and even horrified by it, we must not necessarily deny that it is good and possibly great. We are perfectly entitled to say "I don't like it," and God forbid that we should hesitate to do so just because Chelsea and the best people are beginning to swear by it ; but we are not entitled to say, "It is repulsive, and, therefore, since Art's final effect on us should be one of beauty, not of repulsion, it must be bad." Our first premise in this syllogism is unsound, because evidently the work is not repulsive to all. So let us say, "I don't like it, I confess—nay, more, I hate it ; but that only shows that it is not *my* art." There may be—there must be—æsthetic experiences in life of which we know nothing, and it is right that these experiences should be expressed by artists who have felt them, for the satisfaction of those who have felt them too.

But we have strayed a long way from our starting-place—as, to be sure, we have every right to do, since we are getting excited. Romance, we were saying, has a narrower meaning as well as the all-embracing meaning I have given it in my last few pages ; it can be used to denote only that field of literature wherein we escape from the hard realities of life. And its adjective “ Romantic,” of course, is also applied to all those poems, dramas, novels, and pictures that rebelled so gloriously against the tyranny of Græco-Roman classicism. But as I have so far used it, it means that beauty which, to the vision of the artist, lies behind everything in the world.

But no ; *Beauty* is hardly a better word, for beauty, like romance, has a narrower and a wider meaning. In the narrower use it is applied to that which is sensuously beautiful *without the vision of the artist*—to flowers, children, women, sunsets, and moonlit seas ; and in its wider sense it is applied, not only to these, but to all that æsthetic gratification which the great artist is able to distil from things that are sensuously ugly. Now, as it is this latter gratification which I desire to examine throughout this chapter, it is best to find a word or a phrase less confusing than *romance* and *beauty*. I have it, I think. What is it that the realist, who deals so often with sordid places and squalid people, extracts for our delight ? It is—significance. And significance—profound

significance—affects us, for some reason or other, as much as a beautiful sunset. *Beautiful significance*, then, is my phrase. Let us go seeking it in the realistic literature so dominant to-day.

2

Let us take two or three realistic novels, whose protagonists are anything but perfect heroes and heroines, and whose “settings” are generally sordid rather than pleasing, and consider why they should give us, in the final count, such satisfying delight. We have decided that it is not beauty, in its narrower, everyday meaning, that they present to us, but “beautiful significance.” What are some of the ingredients of this “beautiful significance” ?

Probably the first of all these novels was the Abbé Prévost’s “*Manon Lescaut*,” published about 1730. I shall examine this famous story, together with three of the present day, Knut Hamsun’s “*Growth of the Soil*,” Bennett’s “*Riceyman Steps*,” and Sheila Kaye-Smith’s “*Sussex Gorse*.” The large number of French realistic novels that followed the lead of the Abbé Prévost and seem to cry for inclusion in this examination—the novels of Flaubert and de

Maupassant, those arch-realists, for instance—I shall not attempt to deal with, because, much as I admire them, I cannot respond to them with that enthusiasm and love which is desirable if the best penetration is to be achieved. The magnificent realistic novels of Russia—Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" and "Resurrection," and Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment," "The Idiot," and "The Possessed"—I leave alone by a self-denying ordinance, because they are so vast and complex that any short examination of them would seem an impertinence. The four well-rounded, comparatively short, easily remembered (or easily accessible) novels that I have chosen will serve my purpose exactly.

Two of them—"Manon" and "Riceyman Steps"—move only in sordid surroundings and deal with weak and theoretically contemptible types; the other two, though projecting nobler characters, never blind their eyes for a moment to the repulsive facts of Nature, and, close to the earth as they are, have ample opportunity for seeing unpleasant things. Why should these novels delight us when the facts that they describe, in real life, would repel us? Well, before I come to this convenient and compendious term "beautiful significance" let me remind you of one æsthetic theory, submitted, I think, by Mr. Roger Fry in his "Vision and Design." It is, roughly, that any emotion, if it takes place in our

imaginative life instead of our actual life, and is therefore freed from the necessity of immediate action—e.g., *fear*, freed from the necessity of immediately running away, or *horror*, freed from the necessity of screaming out our indignation, or *pity*, freed from the necessity of forgetting its delightful self in the fuss of first aid—that these emotions, purified from the actions which would follow them in real life, are capable, in their quiet, disinterested, Olympian contemplation, of seeing much more and much deeper into the truth of the objects beneath their contemplation.

This seems to me a wonderfully simple and sane æsthetic theory. But I am persuaded that a fine realistic novel provides us with something more than an opportunity for the quiet enjoyment of our own emotions—or, rather, that it provides scope, not only for the emotions of fear, dislike, indignation, pity, and sadness, but also, and predominantly, for the exquisite emotion of admiration. And that which we admire with such delight is this “beautiful significance.” I will try to give you a few of its constituents—not all, for I am not really a thorough-going analytical critic but just a thorough-going enthusiast. We admire, I submit (a) *the significant form of the novel*; (b) *the imitative gifts of the author*, his “eye,” and the consequent truth-to-life of his creations, however repulsive; (c) *the sublimity of that which conquers in the novel*, for there is always

conflict of a sort in a novel or drama, and something must win that conflict, be it only the Brutal World, or the Brutal Social Order, or Brutal Nature, which things the author may obviously detest ; but inasmuch as they win in the end, they take on the sublimity which belongs to all that is massive, dour, and unconquerable ; and (d) *the vision of the author*, which reveals for us nobilities hidden from our nearer sight. What I mean by this last can only be got at when we turn to the selected examples. ✓

Significant form is a term we owe, I believe, to Mr. Clive Bell and his writings on Art. It is much in the air to-day, and is an apt phrase. To analyse the significant form of a novel is difficult, but it is *felt* ; it is made up of the author's skilful selection of significant material, the march of the central idea, the consistency of the author's mood which throws a unity over the whole composition, and, lastly, the final impression of something harmonious and patterned. "Sussex Gorse" is simply the story of a tough old Sussex farmer's fight with a hill whose stubborn soil he is resolved to bring to the plough. The determination to conquer the hill becomes an obsession, in the service of which he loses everything : his wife, whom he treats as little more than an instrument for bearing children to help in the great fight, dies ; his children run from his slave-driving ; the one woman who might have brought some beauty

into his life is lost to him ; and at the end he is old, white, and entirely alone, *but* the slopes of that hill are gay with corn, and the old man, looking over his conquest, says in the closing words of the book, " I who have lived so near to the earth all my life shall not now be afraid to lie in it at the last." This is Form, and I think you will agree that, because it is Form, it is beautiful.

Similarly, " Riceyman Steps " acquires much of its form from the obsession of the principal character. Here we have an old bookseller whose ruling passion is the saving of money, and he serves his sovereign idea with such devotion that he dies for it ; that is to say, rather than be untrue to it by paying a penny to the doctors after he has starved himself to the point of death, he dies ; and, truly, there is something magnificent about such self-oblation to an idea. At any rate, an obsession like this is most useful for giving unity and form to a novel, because it runs like an iron rod through the story, and everything else has to shape itself around it. Or take " Manon Lescaut " : here is an obsession again. Superficially read, it is the story of a contemptible, cheating young man's love for a perfidious girl, but his slavery to her beauty is so complete and selfless that he seems to rise above all questions of morality into a lofty and lovely figure, the eternal type of quintessential love. And to all readers the treacherous Manon is ennobled for

ever by being bathed in the atmosphere of such a love.

This revelation of something noble—a perverted nobility, maybe, but grand with the grandeur of which men are capable, even in their manias and obsessions—this extraction by the artist of a beauty where the dull vision can see nothing but ugliness is what I meant by my fourth constituent of “beautiful significance”: *the vision of the author*. Is it not that we are too clear-sighted and sophisticated now for the old-fashioned, *obvious* beauties that the romantic novelists gave us: the praiseworthy hero with his *obvious* renunciation, the heroine with her *obvious* loyalties, the stern fight with its *obvious* grandeur? We want something remoter, and it will seem the more beautiful for its distance and its elusiveness; we want a Bennett to show us that, after all, there is something beautiful hidden behind the tragedy of an old miser, and a Sheila Kaye-Smith to show us that the silly, selfish, and merciless obsession of a bull-necked Sussex yeoman is, perhaps, the rustic echo of something sublime.

3

A moment of recapitulation. At all costs let us be clear about what it is we are striving to say.

We have asserted that what we admire in a realistic novel which deals often with sensuously ugly or morally displeasing things is its "beautiful significance." And we have disentangled four at least of the ingredients of this "beautiful significance," to wit :—

(a) The Significant Form which the author has given to his work.

(b) The imitative powers of the author, his "eye," by which he paints pictures and portraits so satisfyingly true to life.

(c) The sublimity of that which conquers in the story ; and

(d) The author's vision which pierces to remote and elusive beauties where duller eyes can see only ugliness and repulsiveness.

In our previous section we examined the first and the last of these things as being the more difficult and slippery. On then, now, to the author's "eye," and to the "sublimity of that which conquers." His "eye." What an excellent word ! What a literary moment it was when some one, instead of struggling with heavy words like imitativeness, representational powers, verisimilitude, histrionic gifts, meticulous accuracy, and what not, just said : "What an eye the man has !" It was a Frenchman who said it,

and of what novelist I forget. "So-and-so," said he, "*c'est un œil !*"

There is no doubt that we get from a marvellous word-picture and analysis of a character, however repulsive, the same delight that a marvellous representation of a repellent character can give us on the stage. In the four novels before us, Manon Lescaut is indubitably such a study, and so are the old bookseller of "Riceyman Steps" and Reuben Backfield, the tough old farmer of "Sussex Gorse." Of Manon let Guy de Maupassant, who, above all, is entitled to speak on behalf of realism, give us his message. "It is by these subtle yet profoundly human traits," says he, "that the Abbé Prévost has made of Manon an inimitable creation. This changeful girl, complex, variable, sincere, odious and adorable, full of inexplicable sensations, incomprehensible sentiments, of whimsical calculation and of criminal frankness, is she not admirably true to nature ? Let us again look at this Manon. . . . We perceive the clear, cunning look which seems always smiling and promising, which causes to pass before us plain, but troublous images ; we know the lively false mouth ; the small teeth within the tempting lips ; the fine, well-pencilled brows ; the vivacious and coaxing movements of the head ; the charming motion of the figure ; and the fresh fragrance of the youthful body beneath the toilet redolent of perfume ! No woman has ever been evoked so

clearly, so completely as she ; no woman has ever been so womanly, nor ever contained the quint-essence of her sex as this famous person, so sweet and so perfidious ! Is it not curious and instructive to notice how this book has survived, and will continue to live, by the mere force of the sincerity and the startling truthfulness to nature of the characters it depicts ? ”

You see, as we hurry through life on our practical ends, we never really *look at* anything. A few signs—a pair of trousers, a bowler hat and a moustache—and we think we have looked at, and really seen, a man. But we haven't. Our brain has received a few impressions, sometimes only one or two, sometimes more, and with them we have hastily deduced a stranger or an acquaintance, and passed on. Perhaps we noticed that his back was a little bent and his gait slow, and immediately imagined that we had seen an old man. But we hadn't seen him—no, no. This is what it is to *see* an old man : “The older man, Mr. Shushions, was apparently very old. . . . He seemed to be so fully occupied all the time in conducting those physical operations which we perform without thinking of them, that each in his case became a feat. He balanced himself on his legs with conscious craft ; he directed carefully his shaking and gnarled hand to his beard in order to stroke it. When he collected his thoughts into a sentence and uttered it in his weak. quavering

voice, he did something wonderful ; he listened closely, as though to an imperfectly acquired foreign language ; and when he was not otherwise employed he gave attention to the serious business of breathing." That is Mr. Arnold Bennett in "Clayhanger." I do not swear by Mr. Bennett quite so confidently as many, but I know he is one of the best "eyes" writing to-day. "Riceyman Steps" has a hundred examples of this eye of his which never fails to turn its pin-light on anything that is the least significant.

"The sublimity of that which conquers" ; this remains to be examined as one of the things in a realistic novel that stir us to a strange delight. Often in the work of the realists—in fact, more often than not—it is not the hero that conquers but the conditions with which he is in conflict—Society, perhaps, or Nature, or Economic Law, or Family Power, or some other inexorable, unpitying force. He goes down before it, and the unconquerable Thing towers above his fallen body, magnificent in its pitilessness—silent, austere, sublime as a mountain. If, on the other hand, the hero *does* conquer, as in "Sussex Gorse" and in Knut Hamsun's "Growth of the Soil," then we are thrilled with a sense of the indomitable spirit of Man, and the Sublime is towering near us again. Of Reuben Backfield's lifelong conflict with his stubborn hill (in "Sussex Gorse") and the price he paid for final victory I have already

spoken. Let me speak now of that hauntingly beautiful story that comes from Copenhagen, "Growth of the Soil." Probably you have read it ; if not—well, I envy you your evenings with it. If only my first reading of Isak's gentle conquest of his virgin valleys, and of Inger, his hare-lipped woman, could still lie in front of me—an experience still to come ! What is it about—this "Growth of the Soil" ? What do its four hundred pages tell ? Simply how a strong, coarse fellow, with a red iron beard and little scars on face and hands, staked out his claim among the virgin forests and mountains of the north, and tamed the earth to be a habitation for him, and for Inger, his mate, and for the children of their union and for the animals in his stalls. Simply the ups and downs of his life through the seasons, and the gradual extension of his conquest. Simply a tale of persistence and silent progress ; of shoulder-shrugging under disappointment and quiet joy in success ; of little domestic tragedies and simple bucolic pleasures ; of a fine farm in the end, wrung by a life of labour from which happiness was seldom far away, but to which ecstasy and the higher experiences never came ; of a conquest—slow, intermittent, but dour in its irresistible advance.

I tell you, you feel as he puts up each new shed, or encloses a new piece of virgin ground for the pasture of more flocks, as if you were yourself

conquering a little estate in this world, for your strong old age, for your sons, and their children and their children's children, who will hardly have heard your name. And it is all told in a naïve, rhythmic, singing style that suggests nothing quite so much as the crooning of a peasant, and is therefore the perfect musical accompaniment to a tale of the peasant people. See Isak, as he comes toward the forest-land that he is to conquer :

He comes ; the figure of a man in this great solitude. He trudges on ; bird and beast are silent all about him ; now and again he utters a word or two, speaking to himself. "Eyah—well, well. . . ." so he speaks to himself. A few hours' rest, and he is on the move again : "Eyah, well. . . ." moving northward again, noting time by the sun ; a meal of barley cakes and goat's milk cheese, a drink of water from the stream and on again. So through the day, noting time by the sun. What is he seeking ? A place, a patch of ground ?

And see him as he appears in the last pages, walking over the fields of his conquering :

Isak at his sowing ; a stump of a man, a barge of a man to look at, nothing more. Clad in home-spun wool from his own sheep, boots from the hide of his own cows and calves. Sowing—and he walks religiously bare-headed to that work ; his head is bald just at the top, but all the rest of him is shamefully hairy. 'Tis Isak, the Margrave.

A tiller of the ground, body and soul ; a worker on the land without respite. . . . Nothing growing there ? All things growing there ; men and beasts and fruit of the soil. The evening sunlight lies on the seed that flashes out in an arc from his hand, and falls like a dropping of gold on to the ground. All is majesty and power—a sequence and purpose of things.

Is this not beautiful significance ?

CHAPTER V

THE CHILD IN LITERATURE

I

I HAVE musing hours when I wonder that the Child, as a principal subject, should have been given such a very poor show in the long pageant of English literature; that right up to the hinder parts of the procession, by which we understand our modern times, only a few little children, and they but frail and unhealthily silent, should peep from the skirts of the Kings and Queens, the Knights and Ladies, the Clowns and Chambermaids. Certainly there is a fine jostling crowd of them at the hither end; a noisy, assertive, "here-we-are-at-last" and "this-is-our-show" sort of crowd; and the delightful thing is that they follow behind a serious-eyed, unhumorous old man with side-whiskers and a black cravat—*one* William Wordsworth, who must surely in his lifetime have been a little terrifying to children, and who yet now leads them towards their rightful

* For many of the quotations in this chapter I am indebted to Susan Miles's delightful "Childhood in Verse and Prose."

place in literature, bearing before them a banner on which is embroidered :

Thou child of joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
shepherd boy !
Ye blessed creatures, I have heard the call
Ye each to other make ; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee ;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all. . . .

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy ;
The youth who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended. . . .

It needed that magnificent shout of old Wordsworth, "Heaven lies about them in their infancy. Here—here, if you would peer for the profoundest truths, if you would seek the lineaments of God, if you would probe for an ultimate wisdom, if you would find the wistfullest beauty in the world, if you would rejoice in quintessential humour"—no, I fear old Wordsworth had no eyes for this last point—"here, if anywhere, is your subject. A proper study of mankind is children." With that loud proclamation the grand old man began the triumph. And, as he were the Pied Piper himself, the children rushed after him into literature: Principals now, no longer Supers; here they come: Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, Paul Dombey, Henry Esmond, Maggie Tulliver, Alice, Harry Richmond, Richard Feverel, Oliver Twist, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Pet Marjorie, the children of "The Golden Age," Michael Fane, Jenny Pearl, Jeremy, Christopher Robin, and hundreds of others who pass too quickly for me to name them; and here come their poets and prophets and interpreters: Alice Meynell, Francis Thompson, Edmund Gosse, Christina Rossetti, Robert Louis Stevenson, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Kenneth Grahame, Katharine Mansfield, George Macdonald, Walter de la Mare, and dear knows how many more; the victory is complete—truly it is like the Emancipation of

Women in the political world, for the adults are hard put to it to hold their own in fiction and poetry, even as the wretched men are in industry and the professions; and Wordsworth was the Mrs. Pankhurst for them all; he was the great Liberationist; to him we owe some of the loveliest children of our acquaintance and some of the most appalling, some of the delicatest expositions and revelations from the finest minds, and alas! and alas! some of the sloppiest, sickliest, shockingest stuff that has ever been written; the which, however, was inevitable and a fair price, since in the wake of every triumph must come the loons and the half-wits, the gypsies and the camp-followers and the cheap-jacks.

I believe I have not exaggerated. I believe you can draw a perpendicular line across the march of English Literature, that line being Wordsworth's Ode, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," and see how sparse and unreal is the population of children on the farther side of it, and how dense and substantial on the nearer. Name me the pre-Wordsworthian children; they are but incidental furniture, even in the vast palace of Shakespeare, from whose universality at least we might have expected something more; they are pretty stage-properties; tear-compelling adjuncts to heighten the pathos of the really interesting person, the adult, the Macduff, the Constance, the Virginia.

Shakespeare's children are Arthur, Mamillius, the Son of Coriolanus, the Little Princes, and Little Macduff : what a thin little company ! And yet we have glimpses of what they might have been, had the fashion run to be interested in children. Hark to Mamillius :

Hermione (his mother). Take the boy to you : he so troubles me. 'Tis past enduring.

(No false sentiment there !)

First Lady. Come, my gracious Lord, shall I be your play-fellow ?

Mamillius. No, I'll none of you.

(Well, there now ! Did you ever ?)

First Lady. Why, my sweet lord ?

Mamillius. You'll kiss me hard and speak to me as if I were a baby still. . . .

Hermione. What wisdom stirs among you ? Come, sir, now I am for you again : pray you, sit by us, and tell's a tale.

Mamillius. Merry or sad shall't be ?

Hermione. As merry as you will.

Mamillius. A sad tale's best for winter. I have one of sprites and goblins.

Hermione. Let's have that, good sir

Mamillius. There was a man——

Hermione. Nay, come, sit down ; then on.

Mamillius. Dwelt by a churchyard. I will tell it softly ; yond crickets shall not hear it.

Chaucer, though he seems to have ranged round for types, has no child among his pilgrims, and mentions but one or two in the *Tales*, the *Litel Clergeon* and the *Children of Erl Hugelyn* ; and here again they are but furniture for the achievement of terror or pathos. Tenderness, apparently, was the only emotion that children stirred in the *Mediævals* and the *Elizabethans* ; no interest in the workings of their minds ; and certainly no vision, no glimpse of an immortal light, no wonder at the wisdom which they bring. One small, but very sweet voice can sound for them all : the voice of little Isaac, in the miracle play of “*Abraham and Isaac*” :

Father. I am full sore affeared
To see you bear that drawn swerd ;
I hope for all the myddel earde
You will not slay your child. . . .
If I have trespassed any degree
With a yard you may beat me.
Put up your sword if you will
For I am but a child.
Would my mother were here with me.

Between Shakespeare and Wordsworth I can think of but three seers who saw the vision and sang it right prophetically ; but they had not Wordsworth's influence to compass the revolution ; and they are Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, and William Blake. They saw it, being mystics all ; for sure their songs were the undoubted seeds of Wordsworth's inspiration ; and we shall have to heed them well, when we come to the deepest things that have been written of childhood.

But what is this vision so prated of ; what is this value in children so lately discovered as a vehicle of illumination ; what is this tremendous import that makes them subjects as well worth writing about as any in the world, and better than most ? Four elements I think I can disengage in it : the children bring with them, though it is a fading and unconscious quality, a wisdom that savours of the eternal and is seen to be the same wisdom as that to which all the saints and sages come, for the spiritual odyssey of the saints and sages has always been a circular journey, away from the trust, the forgiveness, the acceptance and the serenity of childhood, through doubt, disillusion and a dark night of the soul, back to the acceptance and serenity of childhood again ; they bring to the world of their visitation an artist's eye and a poet's fancy ; they, more than any other healing instruments, touch the worst of us back to nobility

again and quicken the wilting sanctity that is immortal in us all ; and lastly they are unconscious vessels brim-charged with that humour which is the noblest we can enjoy, the humour that is lambent with beauty, stirring laughter poignant with tears. Terribly briefly, under these four heads, which I may call "eternal wisdom," "temporal vision," "healing touch" and "poignant humour," we will now consider their literature.

2 .

Let us take these in inverse order, the last and lightest first. Laughter is stirred in the human midriff, if Bergson and its other analytical chemists are to be trusted, by one or other of two qualities in a statement or a happening, or by both in happy juxtaposition (when surely we have some of the best laughter in the world) : *one*, incongruity and *two*, irreverence. If one of the most magnificent sights we are privileged to see on our daily round is a policeman on a horse (as it is), one of the funniest is a policeman on a bicycle : so much dignity and weight on anything so tenuous is incongruous, it is top-heavy, and we laugh as soon as we dare. If

the Colonel, shouting orders to his battalion on parade, is suddenly pitched over the head of his horse, the incident is so incongruous that not even the risible muscles of the Sergeant-Major are at strict attention ; if somebody describes an elephant as being coy, we are amused ; to attribute archness to anything so monstrous and so pendulous, so slow and composed and philosophical, seems to us exceedingly incongruous. And if Mr. Max Beerbohm shows us in a cartoon the late King Edward VII, when long past middle age, being stood in the corner by his mother, we are, I am ashamed to say, pleasantly tickled by the irreverence, though in this case our pleasure may be marred by *too much* shock ; and if Miss Rose Macaulay suddenly describes the sublime Atlantic as "that shocking mass of water" we reveal by a sharp laugh our natural turpitude and delight in irreverence.

Now children, their minds being unfettered by logic and co-ordination, will always give us incongruity at its best, because at its least artificial ; and they will always give us irreverence at its best, because from their lips it comes unmarred by the faintest tint of offence and, in fact, beautified by innocence. How much funnier than Mr. Max Beerbohm's, because how sweet and pure, is Miss Daisy Ashford's picture of Edward VII :

The Prince smiled kindly I am pleased to see you Lord Hyssops he said in a regal voice.

Then the Earl chipped in and how is the dear Queen he said reveruntly.

Not up to much said his Highness she feels the heat poor soul and he waved to a placard which said in large letters The Queen is indisposed.

Presently his Highness rose I think I will have a quiet glass of champagne he said you come too Clincham and bring your friend. . . .

They all went out by a private door and found themselves in a smaller but gorgeous room. The Prince tapped on the table and instantly two menials in red tunics appeared. Bring three glasses of champagne commanded the prince and some ices he added majestikally.

And surely the most delightful jest in history, because it is at once the most shocking and most sweetly innocent, is the same young writer's definition of one of her characters as "a sinister son of Queen Victoria."

But Daisy Ashford had a greater predecessor, and one who had but six years to her nine, Marjorie Fleming, of whom you will read in perhaps as lovely a piece of child literature as England can show, Dr. John Brown's memoir of Scott's little favourite. And for incongruity what can touch this? It would be nonsense and empty laughter for us, did we not know that it was true and had come labouring from the chewed pen of a six-year-old child:

The Divel always grins at the sight of the bibles ; bibles did I say ? nay at the word virtue I should like to learn Astronomy and geography ; Miss Potune is very fat she pretends to be very learned she says she saw a stone that dropt from the skies, but she is a good christian. An annibaptist is a thing I am not a member of ; I am an Pispikian (Episcopalian ?) just now & a Presbeteren at Kerkaldy my native town which though dirty is clein in the country ; sentiment is what I am not acquainted with though I wish it and should like to pratise it I wish I had a great deal of gratitude in all my heart and all my body The English have great power over the franch ; Ah me peradventure, at this moment some noble Colnel at this moment sinks to the ground without breath—& in convulsive pangs dies ; it is a melancholy consideration.

It is clear that irreverence, to attain to its most perfect blossoms of humour, should be at the expense of the highest we know, which is Deity itself ; and such irreverence can come without the offence that mars the pleasure, and even with an extrinsic charm, from one source alone, the innocent and well-meaning heart of a child. He would be tight-laced indeed who could draw aught but delight from such a prayer as this :

Make me, dear Lord, polite and kind
To every one, I pray,
And may I ask you how you find
Yourself, dear Lord, to-day ?

Or from the following dialogue, which happened not a stone's throw from the desk at which I am writing :

Small Son. Mother, were all the wicked people drowned once ?

Mother. The Bible tells us so, my dear.

Small Son. Yes, but who did it ? Who drowned all the wicked people ?

Mother. Well, God, I suppose.

Small Son. Stout lad !

Of course the innocence may have a splash of villainy about it, and then the incongruous mixture produces a different, but none the less luminous beauty of its own. Where laughter and pity mingle, there is always beauty ; and they mingle here :

All these matters (wrote Sir Edmund Gosse in " Father and Son ") drew my thoughts to the subject of idolatry, which was severely censured at the missionary meeting. I cross-examined my father very closely as to the nature of this sin, and pinned him down to the categorical statement that idolatry consisted in praying to any one or anything but God himself. Wood and stone were peculiarly liable to be bowed down to by the heathen in his blindness. I pressed my father further on this subject, and he assured me God would be very angry, and would signify His anger, if any one, in a Christian country, bowed down to wood

and stone. I cannot recall why I was so pertinacious on this subject, but I remember that my father became a little restive under my cross-examination. I determined, however, to test the matter for myself, and one morning when both my parents were safely out of the house, I prepared for the great act of heresy. I was in the morning-room on the ground floor, where, with much labour, I hoisted a small chair on to the table close to the window. My heart was now beating as if it would leap out of my side, but I pursued my experiment. I knelt down on the carpet in front of the table, and looking up, I said my daily prayer in a loud voice, only substituting the address "O Chair!" for the habitual one.

Having carried this act of idolatry safely through, I waited to see what would happen. It was a fine day, and I gazed up at the slip of white sky above the houses opposite, and expected something to appear in it. God would certainly exhibit His anger in some terrible form, and would chastise my impious and wilful action. I was very much alarmed, but still more excited; I breathed the high, sharp air of defiance. But nothing happened; there was not a cloud in the sky, not an unusual sound in the street. . . .

My father, therefore, was not really acquainted with the Divine practice in cases of idolatry.

But for humour at its loveliest; where pity is stronger than laughter, and wonder and admiration are stronger than both; where one bows one's head as in worship before a mystery, and asks

oneself if the reason that childhood is so inadequately treated in literature is because no one, not even the greatest, not even the Shakespeares, can return into the strange, opalescent, dawn-lit country of a child's mind ; for a last example, which shall be a final proof that it is reserved for the children to mix humour and pathos and vision into a perfect whole, I give you one "Child's Saying" from the collection of Lady Grey :

"*Death*," he shuddered as he lay in bed, "I wish it wasn't *called* that ! I don't think I should mind it so much if it were called Hig."

3

That the touch of our children on us is a sanctifying touch ; that in contact with children the good people are very, very good, and the bad people are good for once ; that in our parental habit alone are ninety and nine of us truly Christian, knowing selflessness for the first time and practising pity and patience and forgiveness ; that thus the children, be they never so tiresome, scatter beauty about, among whomsoever they run ; all this, meeting with few gainsayers, will

show what a heightened value a child, or many children, may bring to a book, for they reveal truths that might else be missing and divine a virtue in unlikely places. Any of the famous children of the books might be summoned to exemplify this; and it is almost at random that I call up a slatternly little wench, who tosses dark heavy locks out of gleaming black eyes, as she runs towards us. There is brightness in her face at first, for she is an affectionate child, but sulkiness clouds as we hint what is toward; and I think I hear her say, "I don't *want* to do anything that would show Aunt Glegg up in a good light. I hate Aunt Glegg." Nevertheless, Miss Maggie, we are going to use you, hate us all as you will. You were the touchstone that revealed all that was precious metal in your dear, cantankerous, litigious, puzzleheaded father, Mr. Tulliver; in your indigent and weary Aunt Moss; in your silly heifer of a mother, Bessie Tulliver; and at the last in the dire, dictatorial, and most dislikeable Aunt Glegg.

George Eliot, in "The Mill on the Floss," wrote no tenderer chapter than that which she entitled "Mr. Tulliver shows his Weaker Side." The poor miller, fuming with wrath at the high-tightness of Aunt Glegg (as well he may) rides off to his sister Moss's, resolved to call in the money he has lent to her husband, so that he may

pay off his debts to the Glegg woman and send her about her business. He sees Mrs. Moss at her kitchen door, a baby in her arms and the children playing about her in the yard. Afraid that his purpose will weaken, he abides on his horse and scarcely looks at her; but she in her talk, all unconsciously, plays a marvellous series of trump cards: she praises Maggie, his "little wench"; she says that she has four "gells" and four boys, and how she hopes the brothers will love their sisters and care for them, when they grow up. "The lads'll never be the poorer for that," says she. And she goes on, "Not but what I hope your boy 'ull always be good to his sister, though there's but two of them, like you and me, brother." Mr. Tulliver's resolution is now almost in complete dissolution, but fortunately Mr. Moss turns up, and so feeble and feckless is he that Mr. Tulliver is able to rejoice in indignation and to build up his purpose again. "You must raise the money as quick as you can," says he; and rides off.

No man could feel more resolute till he got outside the yard gate and a little way along the deep-rutted lane; but before he reached the next turning, which would take him out of sight of the dilapidated farm buildings, he appeared to be smitten by some sudden thought. . . . Evidently after his fit of promptitude, Mr. Tulliver was

relapsing into a sense that this is a puzzling world. He turned his horse and rode slowly back, giving vent to the climax of feeling which had determined this movement by saying aloud, as he struck his horse, "Poor little wench ! she'll have nobody but Tom, belike, when I'm gone."

Mrs. Tulliver is a fat and foolish woman, but twice does Maggie, whom she never loved as much as Tom, come close and throw a loveliness over her : once after the failure of the mill, when the poor mother turns the child away from the rougher housework, saying "Let it alone, my dear ; your hands 'ull get as hard as hard. It's your mother's place to do that. I can't do the sewing ; my eyes fail me " ; and again, when Maggie returns disgraced to the mill and her brother drives her from the door—"Slowly Maggie was turning away, with despair in her heart. But the poor frightened mother's love leaped out now, stronger than dread. 'My child ! I'll go with you. You've got a mother.' "

And Aunt Glegg ! An unexpected line of conduct in that steamroller of a woman ! The family disgraced by Maggie, of whom she had always prophesied ill ; what on earth would Aunt Glegg say and do ? Creation seemed to wait for a signal cataclysm from that lowering quarter—but no :

As long as Maggie had not been heard of, Mrs. Glegg had half-closed her shutters and drawn down her blinds. She felt assured that Maggie was drowned ; that was far more probable than that her niece and legatee should have done anything to wound the family honour. When at last she learned from Tom that Maggie had come home, and gathered from him what was her explanation of her absence, she burst forth in severe reproof of Tom for admitting the worst of his sister until he was compelled. If you were not to stand by your kin as long as there was a shred of honour attributable to them, pray what were you to stand by ? . . . It was not for her own friends to help to rob the girl of her fair fame, and to cast her out from family shelter to the scorn of the outer world, until she had become unequivocally a family disgrace. . . . She quarrelled with Mr. Glegg, whose kindness, flowing entirely into compassion for Lucy, made him as hard in his judgment of Maggie as Mr. Deane himself was ; and, fuming against her sister Tulliver because she did not come at once for advice and help, shut herself up in her own room with Baxter's "Saint's Rest" from morning till night, denying herself to all visitors, till Mr. Glegg brought from Mr. Deane the news of Stephen's letter. Then Mrs. Glegg felt that she had adequate fighting ground—then she laid aside Baxter and was ready to meet all comers. While Mrs. Pullet could do nothing but shake her head and cry, and wish that cousin Abbot had died, or any number of funerals had happened rather than this, which had never happened before so that there was no knowing how to act—Mrs. Glegg only hoped that Mrs. Wooll, or anyone else, would

come to her with their false tales about her own niece, and she would know what to say to that ill-advised person.

But over this power that resides in children to draw the best from us we need not long delay ; our own lives and our own reading will furnish us with abundant testimony to it ; it seems to me that if I take two examples of it at its culmen, all its lower forms may be taken as read. And its culmen is surely reached when a child is in dangerous sickness or has already given its hand to that too-early visitor, Death ; then, if ever, will the child, or the child's memory, touch us to sanctity. These two following passages are both true heart-cries, not drawn from the realms of fiction ; so we may know that in the culminating examples we have chosen artifice has had no place. The first is from the letters of the late George Wyndham, and the second is from Evelyn's " Diary " ; and there is little doubt that had they been deliberate and polished works of art, a poignancy of effect would have been aimed at by a reticence and compression which they do not possess ; but these men were writing in the first rush of their pain, and men may well be extravagant and inartistic then.

MY DEAR CHARLES (writes George Wyndham),

What can you think of my silence ? I postponed my reply until my return here from visiting ; but—

you will sorrow with us to hear—no sooner was I back than my little Percy was severely injured by a fall from his pony. His thigh is broken and alas! very near the socket. . . . I was more than an hour with him on the ground, alone, before help came. I can't think of it without strangling. Then I got him on to a plank and into a cart. . . . I cut him out of his little clothes and boots, for he would allow no one else to touch him. When the Doctor said it was his thigh I broke down, but I pulled myself together for I was the one person he trusted, and stood by him while he took the ether, and pulled his poor beautiful little leg while they set it; and yesterday I held him fast for fourteen hours, while he rode out the storm of pain. . . .

Yesterday was more terrible than any horror I had ever imagined; but it brought us together in such a fire of agony that I believe to-day, as I have never yet been able to believe, that neither death nor any eternity after death can ever part me from my beautiful little child. He believed that my hands helped him, and fixed his fever-bright eyes on mine with love and trust, even as the paroxysms came on, calling out "Hold me tighter, Papa, hold me tighter, here it comes." Well, to-day he is not in such pain, and I have never felt such gratitude to God. Dear Charles, forgive all this. . . .

And Evelyn; after the death of his little boy, five years and three days old:

Such a child I never saw: for such a child I blesse God in whose bosome he is. May I and mine become as this

little child, who now follows the child Jesus that Lamb of God, in a white robe whithersoever he goes ; Even so, Lord Jesus, *fiat voluntas tua !* Thou gavest him to us, Thou hast taken him from us, blessed be the name of the Lord. That I had anything acceptable to thee was from thy grace alone ; since from me he had nothing but sin, but that thou hast pardoned ! blessed be my God for ever, Amen.

4

Sometimes I make the wild statement that I would never give my complete confidence to a writer, be he novelist, essayist or poet, if he were not a family man. And I say this absurd thing because I remember how, directly my own two children encompassed the arts of unlimited locomotion and unlimited loquacity, they proceeded to reveal to me a whole population of miracles, in the garden and the streets and the countryside and the bathroom and elsewhere, which, I sigh to record, had long ceased to appear to me as other than dull, commonplace, everyday affairs. I found myself looking around upon the world with three pairs of eyes instead of one, and had the grace to perceive that the two younger pairs were vastly the better for an artist to work

with. It had not occurred to me, or, rather, I had forgotten, until my son rediscovered the fact, that the water swirling in a vortex round the plug-hole of the bath and catching the light of a paraffin lamp and gurgling with a fine peroration to its climactic disappearance and leaving a silence in the universe like the silence of eternity, was a matter to stare at and brood over for a considerable space, and every way as wonder-worth as the whirlpools below Niagara. I was grateful, also, to be reminded that the voyages past our garden-front of a charabanc, a traction engine, a flock of sheep, the Vicar, Mrs. Marlinspike, the dog from next door, or a couple of tramps were all equally well worth rushing to the window for, to ponder over deeply. And that the traction engine might just as sensibly be called a "Pycee" (which would result in an economy of time) and that the tramps might with far more genius be described as "scatchments" were thoughts that enlarged one not a little.

But I did a wrong to the novelists and the poets when I supposed that they must necessarily lack this gift for wonder, unless their children returned it to them: that was to judge them by my own limitations. And it is perfectly clear that this gift more than any other is the source of all John Clare's, W. H. Davies's, Walter de la Mare's and John Masefield's most delectable work. Words-

worth was responsible for the very superior observation that to most dull eyes a yellow primrose by the river's brink "a yellow primrose was, and nothing more"; and he thanked God that in this matter he was not as other men. But to John Clare it was wonder enough that the yellow primrose should be a yellow primrose and nothing more: and, in truth, it *is* wholly remarkable. I beg you to note the exact similarity between the exquisite "child-saying" preserved by Mrs. Alice Meynell in her "Fellow Travellers with a Bird": "'Lift I up and let I see it raining' the child bids; and told that it does not rain, resumes, 'Lift I up and let I see it not raining,'" and Mr. W. H. Davies's "I could sit down here alone, and count the oak trees one by one," or his famous:

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep and cows.

Most charmingly does he entitle one of his poems "A Great Time," and in it describes how once he went out for a walk in the country and was fortunate enough to remark two beautiful things going on at once, a rainbow shining and a cuckoo singing. Well, well, was not this to be having a great time?

A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,
How rich and great the times are now !
Know, all ye sheep
And cows that keep
On staring that I stand so long
In grass that's wet from heavy rain—
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again.

And for a child-story to set against this I would give you one which I ask you to approach with a mind as free from all our adult shames as the mind of a six-year-old child ; then shall you see in the simplicity and sanity of the child the light of a wisdom better than our own. A small boy was walking with his mother along the hedgerow when, seeing two field animals engaged in the caresses and business of love, he quickly inquired what might be the significance of this mystery. And his parent, being a modern mother, laid hold of the moment to tell him with the utmost naturalness how the generations, whether of trees or sheep or men, reproduced themselves, and so the world wagged on. The child listened, his eyes solemnized by his earnest attention only, not by the reasonless abashment of an adult ; and at the close of this most delightful miracle-story, he commented, " Then I suppose we have just seen a rather rare and interesting sight ? " To which the mother replied with an

inward smile, "Interesting, certainly, but hardly rare."

In this section of our subject we are, you perceive, considering the third aspect of the child's worth to literature—that aspect which we agreed to call his "temporal vision," or the "artist's eye and poet's fancy" which he brings to the world of Time; and the upshot of our reflections should be the recovery of an indisputable truth which is so little glimpsed by the many that its statement may come to them with something of shock; and it is this: that the artistic eye is *not* the fastidious eye; that the poet's vision is *not* squeamish, but all-embracing; that it does *not* differentiate between the lovely and unlovely facets of our world, but pierces to the loveliness and the wonder behind all things, from the Grand Canyon to a porridge plate, from Christ to a tadpole. "Art is Selection" you will submit in refutation; but that beloved tag of the critics does not mean that the artist is over-nice in the selection of his subject, but only that he must make choice between the ten thousand significances that any one subject on earth can reveal to him. The child comes naturally endowed with this unfastidious vision, and loses it by contact with a civilization highly selective; the artist retains it or recovers it, and as he grows he improves it; the sage and mystic, through a chain of spiritual experiences, win to it and to

another tremendous truth beyond it. Thus we shall step naturally from this peak, which we have called "temporal vision," to our last and topmost point which we have called the child's "eternal wisdom."

But a word or two more about temporal vision. You have largely lost, have you not, this sense of the wonderfulness of any single, conceivable object that may meet your gaze. Consider: were you coming towards the object with your first look, as does a little child who is being led about the world; or with your last look, as a man who must hang to-morrow and is being taken on a farewell journey; how then? This first look and this last look are the same look; they are the poet's look. "Look thy last on all things lovely," sings Walter de la Mare; and for my present purpose I make bold to change that into "Look thy last on all things—and you shall see that all are lovely"; "I could sit down here alone, and count the oak trees one by one," sings W. H. Davies. And Walter Pater writes:

It is false to suppose that a child's sense of beauty is dependent on any choiceness or special fineness in the objects which present themselves to it, though this indeed comes to be the rule with most of us in later life; earlier, in some degree, we see inwardly; and the child finds for itself, and with unstinted delight, a difference

for the sense, in those whites and reds through the smoke on very homely buildings, and in the gold of the dandelions at the roadside, just beyond the houses, where not a handful of earth is virgin and untouched, in the lack of better ministries to its desire of beauty.

And he should have written "other ministries" instead of "better ministries." But Walter Pater was a highly civilized adult, not a child or a poet.

So let us as a bridge from the child's artistic vision of this world to the sage's wisdom rooted in eternity, which is also the unconscious possession of a child, take a famous passage from one of our most heaven-eyed writers on childhood and mysticism, Thomas Traherne :

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold ; the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees, when I saw them first through one of the gates, transported and ravished me : their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men ! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem ! Immortal Cherubims ! And young men glittering and sparkling angels, and maids strange, seraphic pieces of life and beauty ! Boys and girls, tumbling in the street and playing were moving jewels.

I knew not that they were born or should die ; but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. 'Eternity was manifest in the light of the day, and something infinite behind everything appeared, which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins, and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun, and moon, and stars ; and all the World was mine, and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it. I knew no churlish proprieties nor bounds nor divisions ; but all proprieties and divisions were mine ; all treasures and the possessors of them. So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world. Which now I unlearn, and become as it were a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.

5

And this attitude which the child, by the light of nature and without awareness of it, presents to the world—an attitude of universal acceptance and admiration, of unworrying forgiveness and time-free raptures—is really the earthward face of his eternal wisdom. Now the essence of this eternal wisdom is not easy to define ; either

Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" is intelligible to you or it is not ; if it is meaningless no words of mine can make it clear. An attempt to do so would involve us in a whole book on mystical theology, and for those who desire this I can do no more here than recommend them to Bishop Chandler's *Ara Coeli*. Let me now just recall to you my earlier words : "The children bring with them, though it is a fading and unconscious quality, a wisdom that savours of the eternal and is seen to be the same wisdom as that to which all the saints and sages come, for the spiritual odyssey of the saints and sages has always been a circular journey, away from the trust, the forgiveness, the acceptance and the serenity of childhood, through doubt, disillusion, and a dark night of the soul, back to the trust, the forgiveness, the acceptance and the serenity of childhood again" ; and, having repeated these words, let me turn the shaft-lights of the poets on to this matter and leave its inmost nature, thus illuminated, to whoso's eyes can see it.

First John Earle, born in Shakespeare's day : he had a glimmering of it.

A Child is a Man in small Letter, yet the best copie of Adam before he tasted of Eve or the Apple. . . . He is purely happy, because he knows no evil, nor hath made meanes by sinne, to be acquainted with misery.

He arrives not at the mischief of being wise, nor endures evils to come by foreseeing them. He kisses and loves all, and when the smart of the rod is past, smiles on his beater. . . . The elder he growes, he is a stayre lower from God ; and like his first father, much worse in his breaches. . . . Could he put off his body with his little Coate, he had got eternitie without a burthen, and exchanged but one Heaven for another.

There lifts the morning star that foretells the dawn of Wordsworth ; and now comes the dawn itself in Traherne and Vaughan, for though we have called the dawn " Wordsworth," they are a great part of it, since they, beyond doubt, were his immediate inspiration. Vaughan, with " The Retreate " and " Childehood," must speak for them both.

Happy those early dayes ! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white Celestiall thought. . . .
But felt through all this fleshly dresse
Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.
O how I long to travell back
And tread again that ancient track !

And in " Childehood " :

I cannot reach it ; and my striving eye
Dazles at it, as at eternity.
Were now that Chronicle alive,
Those white designs that children drive,
And the thoughts of each harmless hour
With their content too in my pow'r,
Quickly would I make my path even
And by mere playing go to Heaven.
An age of mysteries ! which he
Must live twice, that wquld God's face see ;

How do I study now, and scan
Thee more than ere I studied man,
And only see through a long night
Thy edges and thy bordering light !
O for thy Center and mid-day !
For sure that is the narrow way.

And before leaving Vaughan let us remember
that it was he wrote that mighty opening to a
poem :

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light. . . .

Very simple and wistful, after the high abstractions
of the others, sounds the pale echo from the voice
of Tom Hood :

I remember, I remember
The fir trees dark and high ;

I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky :
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heaven
Than when I was a boy.

It is strange that in all Blake's " Songs of Innocence " I cannot find a single quotable passage, so concrete and childish are they ; to catch the far meaning of any one of them, one must know the most of Blake, and then one knows that the whole of his thought slants this way ; no other. And so to the familiar clarion of Wordsworth :

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity ;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind
Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.

But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,

Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence ; truths that wake
To perish never ;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy !
Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

The giants among dramatists and novelists have seldom been saints ; they have loved this world and have set their feet on its firm earth, rather than in the skyey realms of otherworldliness ; they have been egocentric rather than theocentric ; whereas to be a saint is to dismiss the ego and be theocentric, no more and no less. Now, though a child is never theocentric, it has many of the symptoms that theocentricity gives ; and perhaps that is why so few of the greatest writers have given us great children or great matter about children ; they have had the imagination to see that the mental country of a child is (though the child may

not know it) a place of serenities and forgivenesses and gladnesses, about which, since they left it long ago and are not heading for it now, they have neither the competence nor the profanity to speak. And even where sanctity is married to genius and we have the perfect seer at last, he speaks of this country only in parables, and only to those who have ears to hear. But there is no hesitation in his voice. When the disciples inquired of Jesus who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, he acted his answer; he took a little child and set him in the midst of them. We have no record that he essayed any explanation of his meaning; he left the action to be remembered by them in later years, and the parable to be understood.

And the spiritual genius of the ages has done a like thing: it has set a little child in its midst for its contemplation and its worship. Whether the story of the Child of Bethlehem is a God-originated parable or a man-originated parable skills little to my present aim; all that matters is that this divine story can be considered, if not in its genesis, why then in its acceptance and its treatment, as a folk-creation; a folk-creation into which has been distilled all the noblest thought of the spiritual folk of the world. And it is incomparably the noblest word that has ever been uttered or ever will be uttered about God and about Man; we shall never express Him, nor

Ourselves, better than in this parable which has a child for its heart ; it is ultimate.

These abide ;
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

In the Bethlehem grotto ; in the Mother and Child ; in their rest on the things of earth ; in their crowding out from the guest-house ; in the break-through of Heaven, which lies so close, with an angels' song and a star ; in the bowed, assenting heads of the unlettered shepherds, and in the bowed assent of the ages' wisdom, brought like incense by the Wise Men ; and lastly, and very subtly, in the instant threat and fear without—in all this lovely picture we see as much as earthly eyes shall ever see of the truth of God. All that human lips have power to say about Love and Pity and Pain, about Birth and Growth and Service and Death, about the Spiritual Seeking that is common to the kings on their thrones and the shepherds on the hills, about the Divinity in Humanity, and the Humanity in Divinity, and the closeness of Eternity to Time—all has been said here more exquisitely than it will ever be said again. All is here. Even the animals are present—the ox and the ass with their stupid eyes—yes, all who have a burden to bear or a death to die for the brethren. For some it is

all told in a myth more perfect than any Plato devised ; for others it is written in historical fact ; but for both it is Truth. For both, the essential truth of God, so far as it is capable of being received by men, and the essential truth of Man himself, have been incarnated in a parable. The Word has been made flesh and dwells among us in the story of a little child.

CHAPTER VI

HOW TO MASSACRE INNOCENTS

I

AND NOW that we have dealt with the Child in Literature, here seems a pretty place for interpolating a diatribe against the mutilation of childish minds which is sometimes practised by teachers who, though they would be the last to admit it, are really insensitive to the frailer, remoter beauties of life, and of life's expression, which is literature. To achieve this mutilation it is quite unnecessary that the executioner should be one of those who say frankly, "I am the practical sort. Music means nothing to me; poetry I can't appreciate; mysticism I regard as so much hot air and vapour. Such prose as I read I confess I read for entertainment and not for improvement. The very idea of being improved puts up my back." An honest rogue, this; and one feels he will be forgiven hereafter for the dulled and maimed pupils he must have left in his jovial wake. No, my first example shall be from a certain teacher of English, and one who therefore conceived himself as enrolled among the

elect (as all teachers of English should, else have they no right to touch such a subject—only let them by diligent heart-searching make their calling and election sure). My friend, the English teacher, took me to task for what he alleged to be a piece of faulty composition in a certain novel of mine (which fact may account for any bitterness in my treatment of him ; but I hope not). A warm argument ensued—most naturally. His solid, immovable platform was “It is my profession to teach this sort of thing, and I ought to know.” My platform—though perhaps it was more of a swing—was “It is my profession to write this sort of thing, and I ought to know.” We clamoured at each other across the chasm, and I soon extracted, by impassioned questions, that my opponent was of those who fetter the free, joyous limbs of their pupils with all the very dubious old rules of the English Composition books.

Some of his rules I will examine. Our ancient friend, the Split Infinitive, I will leave alone, save only to rejoice that I exasperated the enemy beyond endurance by insisting that the Genius of the Language, which is far more powerful than all the grammarians, since it was before them and is their only begetter, would finally establish the Split Infinitive in triumph, even as it had established “than whom” and many another grammatical error. Of course my friend fought

bravely for the old rule about "the preposition and the little word at the end of the sentence"; and his terrific reply to my hint that he rewrote in his own order "The thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to" and "Makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of" and "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" was that Shakespeare was Shakespeare—the exact force of which I have never been able to understand. He was very proud of his rule: "Use Saxon words for phrases addressed to the emotions, and classical words for those addressed to the intellect"; and I allowed that it was quite excellent as a guiding line, and quite damnable as a rule, since its rigidity was for ever destroyed by such a lovely phrase as Wordsworth's "an incommunicable sleep." But perhaps his most astounding rule was this: "Every parenthesis or use of brackets is evidence of careless writing." Oh, my patience and my pity! I knew his mind from the minute he told me that. Had he ever tried to express with subtlety, precision, and emotional strength an emotional state, he must have known that only by parentheses could you sometimes show how elusive changes of thought and irrational flashes of recollection impinged upon the consciousness. I thought of the young Lambs and the young Shelleys who in his well-meaning class-room were being submitted to this steady ossification by grammatical rules; I thought of

these young virgin minds being planted with an irritation against, and even a youthfully pedantic superiority to, much that might be great literature in their own day just because they found it joyously ignorant of these amazing fetters ; and I tell you my heart hardened at the crime.

Oh, by all means let these rules be examined and discussed in the class-room, and the value of all such mental discipline be emphasized, but when this has been done, let the class, I pray you, say forty times : “ Only in writings devoted to intellectual exposition have these rules much weight ; in the province of emotional expression, which is ninety parts of literature, they are dangerous lies ” ; and fifty times : “ Literature is not a task discharged, or a game played, according to set rules ; it is a vital spirit finding its expression *in the mode it likes best* ; and all that matters is that the vital spirit should get out clearly, precisely, and beautifully the emotion that is surging within him ; and just in so far as he is vital will his emotion, if need be, burn through rules as a fire burns through tow.”

My next example is a kindred one. It is that of a Logician, and one very proud of his logic as all logicians are—Heaven help them and guard them from danger ! It was in a school parliament, and the subject of the debate was “ The Problem of the Miners.” One of the boys, in a speech of real feeling declared, “ You can’t pay too much to

men who risk their lives in the pit daily"; and on to this speech the Logician turned all his guns—not, to be sure, on its emotional content (which was all that mattered) but on its mathematical accuracy (which was quite unimportant). "You say," said he, "that one cannot pay miners too much. That, to begin with, is an overstatement. If you paid them a thousand pounds a week, you would obviously pay them too much. Argument is not possible unless the premises from which you argue are as indisputable as a postulate in Euclid." O Life, O surging High Spirits, O all Generosity and Fine Excess, O noble Violence, O divine Hyperbole, and detestable cheese-paring precision! I assure you that my contribution to the debate, when it came, was even more irrelevant than the Logician's, for it was no defence of the miners against Mr. Evan Williams, or of the mineowners against Mr. A. J. Cook, but a defence of Life against Logic, of Youth and Enthusiasm and Generosity against Euclid and Exactness and Geometry.

But these are light examples, you may think. What of this? If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

2

What of this: a science master of a famous public-school writing in the school magazine "The Chemical Explanation of the Illusion of Beauty"? Beauty analysed in the laboratory and satisfactorily explained! In an article of some two thousand words—an article which, with the utmost charity, I could not acquit of being saturated with the leakings of a hidden pride—he explained the beauty of "Œdipus," "Antigone," the Book of Job, "Paradise Lost," and I know not what else, in terms of—well, I forget if they were biological terms or pathological; but they were something of that sort; and I hope that every one else who had the misfortune to read that article may have forgotten them too. Beauty, that phosphorescence on the marsh, that glow behind the horizon's curve, that light which ever eludes our pursuit, whose reflection we may catch but whose nature we may never understand; Beauty, which can be found not only in such golden ores as these, but has been wrested by the great realistic artists from the world's ugliness and filth and squalor and brutality; Beauty, whose kingdom is infinite space, this excellent, well-intentioned man had caught in a nutshell and laid on the slide of his microscope.

Not that there was no room for such an article,

had it been done with humour and humility, and a reverence for that marvellous overplus of spiritual beauty which must always transcend our measuring rods and our understandings ; but this article was a revelation at every point of a mind which believed in no values but scientific values ; and though such minds have every right to exist, they are an offence in the teachers' world. I shall elaborate this statement further, but at the moment a young voice is crying in my mind his right to be heard on this issue ; a young voice from behind Shakespeare's time ; Kit Marlowe's. What was it he said ? Let us fetch down our " Tamburlaine " and read.

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then ?
If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feelings of their masters' thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds, and muses on admiréd themes ;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poetry,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of human wit ;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.

I have every sympathy with science masters

To be a science master is a terribly dangerous thing, and therefore an honourable; for, look you: though a science master may say to a literary enthusiast, "*I* teach hard facts, proven laws, and mathematical certainties, while *you*, as far as I can see, chase after airy nothings, cloudy visions, and misguiding Jack-a-Lanterns," the truth is really the opposite. When I listen to such a contention, I always carry the war into the enemy's camp; I declare roundly: "On the contrary, the science master is one who is in permanent danger of teaching untruths, the literary master seldom. Science is proved faintly wrong with every forward step it takes. What errors did the University professors teach in the name of science when the books of Aristotle were still their Bible! What awful untruths the science masters must have taught their pupils in the hegemony of Victorian materialism! What ossification of young minds must have taken place then! And it is all discredited now! Whereas the spiritual values—the goodness, truth and beauty—the *something* that lies behind Homer, Æschylus, Isaiah, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Goethe, and the rest has the suffrages of all time."

If there be an argument for a Classical education rather than a Modern (and I don't think there is, since the argument seems to be for both and not for one or the other) it is not the old tale about

the "magnificent mental gymnastic," but just this: that the spiritual value of Plato is flooded with truth that time cannot shake, whereas Newton himself sooner or later yields place to Einstein and the ultimate atom to the air. Great scientists have generally recognized this *minus* in their work; witness Newton, Descartes, Gauss, Helmholtz, and that fine artist and potential mystic, Einstein.

But does some reader in a gathering restlessness urge, "Come, come, mathematical truths, at least, are true for all time." Would you believe it, but I do not accept even this without a reservation! Mathematical truths are indisputable in the sphere of mathematics, certainly, but not over the whole surface of life. To take a very simple illustration: if I advertise a concert in the newspaper columns as follows: "Albert Hall. Kreisler," I have made an effect to which we will give the power of x , but if instead of once I write it twice, viz.:

Albert Hall. Kreisler.

Albert Hall. Kreisler.

any advertising expert will tell you that the effect on the reader is quite considerably more than twice the single announcement, probably we could call it $3x$ or $4x$; while if we print

Albert Hall. Kreisler.
Albert Hall. Kreisler.
Albert Hall. Kreisler.
Albert Hall. Kreisler.

the reader is like to be overwhelmed with the importance of the occasion, and is within an ace of getting up and 'phoning for a ticket straight-way, lest he be the only person of substance who isn't there. I tell you that here $4x=40x$, which is absurd.

Or to take a beautiful example from our real province, which is literature (and not advertising). Many have noticed that the big, breaking heart of Cordelia, in the presence of her tortured father, can only find a vent by expressing its emotions twice. "Do not laugh at me," says King Lear, "for, as I am a man, I think this lady to be my child, Cordelia." To which Cordelia: "And so I am; I am." And Lear continues:

Be your tears wet? yes, 'faith. I pray, weep not.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong;
You have some cause, they have not.

And Cordelia pleads, "No cause, no cause."

You catch my meaning, do you not? Had

Cordelia said "I am" only once, and "No cause" only once, how immeasurably less than half would the emotional effect have been! No, there are many places in life when two times is a world more than twice.

I begin to suspect that the sum of this chapter might have been stated in a single unattractive sentence, which (and here is yet further illustration of how misleading mathematics can be) would have told the whole truth and at the same time have left it, for all real purposes, unsaid. I might have written "Life must be measured not only quantitatively, but qualitatively as well." I hope that now, with several charged pages behind it, that ugly sentence means something. And it is because Literature is nothing else but the qualitative measurement of life that I insisted in the beginning on its inescapable necessity for every teacher; and especially—oh, especially—for those whose sphere is in the quantitative sciences.

CHAPTER VII

A SALUTE TO DIFFICULTY

THE MAIN purpose of these chapters has been the contention that only through literature can we attain to the fullest, deepest, widest, highest-powered life of which we are capable. You possess a wireless set, surely. To tune it up to a higher power you turn the little pointer which has printed above it "Filament Increase." The valves grow brighter as you turn. This is exactly what literature does for us. Or, perhaps, we might say that we are mere crystal sets till we have linked our wires to the great high-tension batteries, which is surely just what the mighty writers of the past are; then we become valve sets, and can make our loud speakers speak very loud indeed. (I fear that, to an electrician, the foregoing sentence may be perilously like nonsense, but I am quite sure he takes my meaning.) Or let me put it that, as we take all that the mighty writers can give us, we change from three-valve sets to five-valve sets, and from five-valve sets to eight-valve sets, till at last there is no remote

and rarefied thought floating about the ether that we cannot pick up and give out to our friends.

This power is the greatest gift that literature brings to us ; a gift far greater than the passing entertainment, the transient delight. Entertainment and delight it *will* administer to us ; and it may be that when we are eight-valve sets that is all we shall be conscious of receiving from it. But while some of it is still rather difficult and rather frustrating, our delight may well be buried awhile beneath exasperation. This exasperation often discourages us from pursuing our journey with a difficult writer. To our eternal loss it has discouraged many of us from the systematic reading of poetry. Well, let us brace ourselves up to the truth that, if we surrender thus, we surrender life. And let me, if there be one amongst my readers who says : " I read only for delight—not for exasperation. I invariably put down any book that I find is going to be an obstacle race,"—let me make for him one great point : " Dear Sir:—You are missing, then, one of the greatest delights of all, because you can never know that extraordinary sense of joy, exhilaration, and enlargement which comes when you have read the last words of a difficult book that you have conquered." I am sure that a book or poem abides with us much longer, and is a dearer possession in our memory, if it has its difficult passages and carries around its name

the recollections of our conquest. Easy come, easy go.

I take it, too, that we are all agreed that we *do* want to heighten our life-power; and manifestly we can do this only by books that extend our faculties. Every athlete must stretch his muscles to the verge of strain if he is to develop them to their utmost. My words are a plea, then, that we all read sometimes some difficult stuff. Not exclusively, but fairly regularly; and soon there will not be left a great deal that seems to us unreasonably difficult. Then, with a secret delight, a surging *joie-de-vivre*, we shall dare to wonder within ourselves if we are really approaching adulthood—if we are really in sight at last of becoming full-grown.

I would be a sign-post to the two great delights that lie at the end of some huge and difficult book: the joy of triumph, and that curious joy (since we have skipped not a word) which we call “a sense of completeness.”

Two tests books. The works of Milton and the works of Sir Thomas Browne. Those who have read them and conquered them are doubtless in the position (and rightly and naturally) of wondering why I call them difficult. But I am remembering how difficult they seemed to me when first I struggled through them, and I cannot but believe that there is a majority of people on the hither side of such books rather

than on the farther side ; and it is to them that these words are addressed. To you who are on the farther side this chapter can give nothing except, perhaps, the pleasures of reminiscence and the legitimate sense of satisfaction in your conquest.

I choose these two books because I believe that, once a man has completed his Milton and entered upon these delights that I have mentioned—the joy of difficulty surmounted, the sense of completeness, and the sense of an abiding possession—he will not again feel any fear or hesitation about approaching poetry ; and, similarly, once he has completed his Browne, any prose will seem, if not easy, at least pleasurable in the richness of its texture, and in the majestic roll of its periods. He will certainly return from these masters to lighter works, but so unforgettable will his experience have been that there will descend upon him at times a homesickness for the “ grand manner.” Those who have trafficked well with the complete cycle of Beethoven’s symphonies are perfectly entitled to love and enjoy the Sullivan operas, and generally *do* love them, but there are deeps in their being to which the deep must call again.

Soon we are going to speak of the great “ closes ” of literature ; I point you now to the precious moment you will enjoy when you reach the superb close of “ Paradise Lost ” :—

In either hand the hastening angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliffs as fast
To the subjected plain ; then disappeared.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand ; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.
Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon.
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide :
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Having once savoured that, can you do without it in your life ? Just read it aloud till you *hear* it.

And then old Sir Thomas Browne, grand old Sir Thomas Browne, the Norwich doctor who, in an age boisterous and murderous with civil war, was content to live with his books and his profound meditations ; he who was “ more moved to eloquence by the discovery of urns in Norfolk than by the execution of a king.” Hear his great close to his “ *Hydrotaphia* ” :

And if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation, ecstasies . . . the kiss of the Spouse, gustation of God and ingression into the divine shadow, they have already had a handsome anticipation

of Heaven ; the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth is ashes unto them.

To subsist in lasting monuments, to live in their productions, to exist in their names and predicament of chimeras, was large satisfaction unto old expectations, and made one part of their Elysiums. But all this is nothing in the metaphysics of true belief. To live indeed is to be again ourselves, which being not only an hope but an evidence in noble believers, 'tis all one to lie in St. Innocent's Churchyard as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as with the Mole of Adrianus.

Read it more than once ; great passages of prose, like great pictures, yield their secrets slowly. And when you have read all of Sir Thomas, you will begin to feel with him that "man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave" ; you will know with him that enlargement of the whole being, that rarefication, that (I had almost coined a word, copying this lordly old master) *divinification* which can contrast itself with the whole round globe and find itself the larger : as in this mighty passage :

'The world that I regard is myself ; it is the microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on ; for the other, I use it but like my Globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation. Men that look upon my outside, perusing only my condition and fortunes, do err in my

Altitude, for I am above Atlas his shoulders The earth is a point, not only in respect of the Heavens above us, but of that Heavenly and Celestial part within us ; that mass of flesh that circumscribes me, limits not my mind ; that surface that tells the Heavens it hath an end, cannot persuade me that I have any ; I take my circle to be above three hundred and sixty ; though the number of the arc do measure my body, it comprehendeth not my mind ; whilst I study to find how I am a Micro-cosm or little world, I find myself something more than the great. There is surely a piece of Divinity in us ; something that was before the elements, and owes no homage unto the Sun.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RAINBOW ARCH

A LITTLE holiday now. A little delighting together in one or two of the "great closes" of our literature; since these closes are in the air. Before I proceed to more analyses, more dissecting of the lily, more diagramming of the rose, more of this botany and chemical experiment with literature, I want to—I *must* deliver myself of an excitement that has surged up in my mind from the moment we wandered on to this subject. I cannot go on to that which I propose to examine next, so long as the exquisite close to Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy," the long rolling *coda* to his "Sohrab and Rustum," the lovely evening-calm diminuendo that descends on the last pages of Izaak Walton's "Compleat Angler," and the night of stars and music that ends the tale of Portia and of Shylock, are clamouring at my brain doors for admission into our argument. Were I lecturing to you, I should at this point undoubtedly burst out into a series of recitations from these passages, to the grave disorganization of my

lecture. I fear something very similar is going to happen now.

But perhaps we shall learn something from it. I have spoken of Form, of the sense of Pattern, Harmony, and March, which is one of the great æsthetic joys that a work of literature should give us ; and I have a strong feeling that it is in almost exact proportion to the aptness, the tonal truth of the close, that the Form will emerge from the cloud of words in our memory and shape itself before our unstriving and delighted eyes. *Finis coronat opus*—the tag is leaping to all our lips. But I don't think I mean just what this tag, on its first utterance, suggests. By a perfect close I think I mean a *diminuendo*, rather than the *crescendo* passage which *coronat* suggests ; I can enjoy, of course, a great crashing close to a drama or a novel ; I can enjoy the sharp surprise which concludes the American short story ; but I do not think they approach in beauty that "falling close" which quiets the tale into a murmur of receding music, wherein, before its last note is heard, the Form has a chance to appear. The Greeks were clear about this ; their tragedies closed, not on a terrific curtain, but in the healing of a lyric. If we conceive of a thunderstorm in summer as great natural work of art, at what point does it best end ; at the last crash of thunder, or at the moment when the rainbow arch is spanning the whole theatre of the conflict, and,

in the stillness, memory is shaping the magnificent drama that is overpast ?

Take the twenty-ninth psalm. Take it in the Bible version and for "the Lord" substitute the name "Jehovah" everywhere. It is a great lyric, describing God's manifestation in the storm. The first two verses are a prelude to the central incident. On the third verse, the storm gathers and breaks :

The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters,
The God of glory thundereth ;
Jehovah is upon many waters ;

during the next six verses the storm increases in intensity :

The voice of Jehovah breaketh the cedars. . . .
The voice of Jehovah breaketh the flames of fire. . . .
Jehovah shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. . . .
The voice of Jehovah maketh the hinds to calve. . . .

And then, at the tenth verse, the calm gathers :

Jehovah sitteth upon the flood,
Yea, Jehovah sitteth King for ever.
Jehovah will give strength unto his people,
Jehovah will bless his people with peace.

"Bless his people with peace." The rainbow arch is over the scene of the storm.

With this key to its grandeur read it again—and aloud; and see how its falling close enables the Form to be *heard*. Here, to my thinking, on a very small scale, is the perfect shape for every drama, novel, or epic.

I need but remind you of that last scene in “The Merchant of Venice.” The conflict is over, a dreadful moment has passed without the knife descending, Shylock is worsted, and we have suffered with him as he went out—“I pray you give me leave to go from hence. I am not well——” and now—

The moon shines bright : In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees—

in such a night for lovers—such a night as saw Troilus mounting the Trojan walls to sigh his soul towards his Cressid, or Dido with a willow in her hand wafting her love to Carthage, or Thisbe fearfully o’ertripping the dew, or Jessica stealing from her father’s house—in such a night, come Musicians, “come ho, and wake Diana with a hymn”—

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank !
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears ; soft stillness, and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven

Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.

Two superb closes are Matthew Arnold's. Matthew Arnold, a classic to his finger-tips, loved the long Homeric, or Virgilian, simile. This simile differs from the similes we employ to-day in that its purpose is less a happy aid to understanding than the addition of an elaborate ornament. An ordinary simile to-day would be, "The boat forged through the water like a plough through the soil," and the sudden picture of the plough is of great assistance to us in picturing our main subject, the boat. But Homer (and Virgil, imitating him) having entered upon this simile of the plough, would have left the boat to look after itself and given us a page or more of glorious word-painting of the plough—its oxen, its driver, its furrow, its flashing in the sunlight, its disturbing of the birds, its completed task at night-fall, and its rest by the barn-house wall. The simile would have come to full life and existed in its own right, as a lovely picture, independent of the main story. Good, then. Hear Matthew Arnold, at the close of his long poem to the Scholar Gypsy—an Oxford scholar who fled from all his kind to a gypsy life on the hills, taking his hopes and dreams away with him to some place where,

perchance, they might survive, far from "this strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry, its divided aims, its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts." "Fly our paths," says the poet, "our feverish contact fly!"

Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfixed thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made :
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.
Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles !
As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægean isles ;

And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
Green bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine ;
And knew the intruders of his ancient home,
The young light-hearted Masters of the waves ;
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail,
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the Western Straits, and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come ;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

So again, in "Sohrab and Rustum," after an epic description of the great fight, by the banks of the Oxus, between these two heroes (in which Sohrab is slain and Rustum learns that he has killed his son) the poet closes his poem, not with a picture of Rustum "drawing his horseman's cloak, Down o'er his face," and sitting on the sand to mourn his dead son, but with this :

And Rustum and his son were left alone.
But the majestic River floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
Rejoicing, through the hushed Chorasman waste,
Under the solitary moon : he flowed
Right for the Polar Star, past Orgunjé,
Brimming and bright and large : then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents ; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foiled circuitous wanderer—till at last
The longed-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bath'd stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

Lastly, may I remind you of the charming close to the "Compleat Angler" ? The pleasant dis-

coursing of Venator and Piscator is over ; and Venator, averring that he has learned much, declares that henceforward, when he would beget content, he “ will walk the meadows by some gliding stream, and there contemplate the lilies that take no care and those many other little creatures that are not only created but fed by the goodness of God, and therefore trust in Him.” “ This is my purpose,” says Venator ; “ and so let everything that hath breath praise the Lord, and let the blessing of St. Peter’s Master be mine.” To which adds Piscator : “ And upon all that are lovers of virtue ; and dare trust in His providence ; and be quiet ; and go a Angling.”

CHAPTER IX

ENGLAND'S HUMOUR AND EUROPE'S WIT

I

WE CLOSED a previous chapter with Sir Thomas Browne's magnificent sentence : " There is surely a piece of Divinity in us ; something that was before the elements and owes no homage unto the Sun." In our last chapter—we also closed with a sentence high in import and deeply informed with religion : the beloved Izaak Walton's, " I will walk the meadows by some gliding stream, and there contemplate the lilies that take no care and those many other little creatures that are not only created but fed by the goodness of God, and therefore trust in Him. And so let everything that hath breath praise the Lord, and let the blessing of St. Peter's Master be mine. And upon all that are lovers of virtue ; and dare trust in His providence ; and be quiet ; and go a Angling."

Now look at these two sentences carefully. Both have their sources in the highest exercise of which man is capable, the mystical acceptance of a Goodness which, we believe, lies behind all the

warring elements of the "world of experience"; the mystical rest in a Purpose of Things, which our spirit, defying the logic of reason and the troublesome evidence of the senses, *feels for* in its earliest flights, and then *apprehends*, and then *knows*. But into the second sentence, has not something crept in—something that I can only call a twinkle of the eye? "Upon all that are lovers of virtue; and dare trust in His providence; and be quiet; and go a *Angling*." I would not swear that the same twinkle is wholly absent from the more imperial prose of Sir Thomas Browne. "Owes no homage unto the Sun." I wonder. But it is as ever present in the work of Izaak Walton as the blink of a lightship out at sea.

And we English can't do without it. That is the moral of my next few pages. I have not the complete knowledge of Continental literature that I should like, but I feel perfectly secure in saying that, though other nations may find it necessary, if something in their souls is not to burst out into unseemly laughter, to twinkle every now and then, when they are writing of the deepest things of their hearts, there is no nation that is compelled to do it quite so often as the English. In a word, there is no nation in which humour surges up quite so rebelliously. It surges up in a form that is now *sui generis*; the *Englishness* of our humour is unmistakable. And it is unconquerable. I shall show you how we have often tried to batten

it down under the veneer of this culture or that—under classicism, under French realism, under Puritan gravity—but always it has cracked the veneer and burst boisterously through. When I remind you that it more than once cracked the veneer of Matthew Arnold, and peeped out impudently, you will understand its strength. His was a classical veneer.

Consider Mr. Arnold Bennett. He did his best—having, I fear, no small doubt about this English humour—he did, I say, heroic things to brick it up behind a dark and heavy wall of French realism, but, praise God, it burst through, scattering its prison, right and left, exactly as if it were Sir John Falstaff himself! What else could it have done? Did not Mr. Bennett coom fra' Bursley?—I fear that's Oldham's brogue rather than Bursley's, but for my part I can never tell t'other from which, and in any case, it's all the same: the point is that the man who cooms fra' Bursley or Oldham, Battersea or Oxford, comes bringing (under whatsoever distressing brogue) a brand of humour that is unmistakably English, and subtly different from any other humour that the world has seen. (Sometimes the world doesn't see it, but every Englishman does.) I am satisfied that it is the most perfect humour that the laughing human animal has produced; that, with English poetry (which it invades most scandalously), it is England's richest

gift to humanity ; nay, that it is more than all this—that it is Humour itself ; that, just as quite the best answer to the question, “ What is Poetry ? ” is to say, “ Why, the Five great odes of Keats, of course,” so the best answer to “ What is Humour ? ” is to say, “ It is England when she laughs.”

One cannot define Pure Poetry ; one can only point to it. One cannot define Pure Humour, one can only take the inquirer and show him the English at war, whether conquering or retreating—but better if they are retreating ; the English in a General Strike ; the English in hospital ; the English on the sea ; the English writing literature.

Now all this is introductory to a considerable and, I hope, enthusiastic descant on English Humour—that purely English creation to which we may well give so large a proportion of our space, since it is the thing in which we have triumphed beyond all men. And I would introduce the subject with a caution. There is in most of us an idea, difficult to cure, that the writer or actor who makes us laugh is—well, a good fellow, certainly, a comic fellow, an excellent companion, but—how shall I put it ?—not to be taken seriously like the writers who make us frown or the tragedians who make us sad. He is a clever chap in his way, but it is rather a low way. I dare avouch that, in some of us, especially the would-be refined, there is a suppressed idea that,

delightful as he may be for our occasional relief, he is really rather contemptible. I have seen people roar with laughter over some of the better jokes of Mr. F. W. Thomas (which, at their best, touch the highest order) and then exclaim, "The priceless ass ! Listen to this idiot !" Their exclamation is appreciative, of course, but has it not a faint tang of superiority ? If so, they were never more mistaken in their lives, for they are putting the inferiority on the wrong foot. Their own attitude condemns them ; it proves that they have not the vision to see the fine philosophy, the essential religion—aye, the potential mysticism that is the soil, be the writers aware of it or not, from which their laughter springs.

Always a vivid example is better than columns of exposition ; always an argument comes to life if we dramatize it in a person. One figure of to-day, and the attitude of our neighbours towards it, will give you all I mean. We have in our midst a comic genius of such an order as has seldom appeared, and his name is Charles Chaplin. The whole critical world, now that its more penetrating leaders have declared their faith and blown the snobbery away, has accepted this fact ; but as usual, the would-be refined, the spiritual descendants of those who thought Dickens great when he was drawing Agnes Wickfield and coarse, if not contemptible, when, abandoning himself to his real genius, he was creating Dick Swiveller,

Mrs. Gamp, and Mr. Micawber—as usual, the would-be refined—do we not meet them in any room in which the cinema is discussed?—affect to be above the sublime fooling, the inspired “vulgarity,” the clear vision, the surging creativeness of this super-normal mind. Blinded by their own pseudo-refinement, they see nothing of all this. They will affirm their tolerance for a pretentious, philosophically worthless film like “Metropolis,” and say in genuine amazement, “How can you!” to anyone who swears he would not exchange the smallest Chaplin comedy for ten thousand “Metropolises.”

And the truth of the matter is that Chaplin, as a creative comic genius, sits in the company of Molière, Cervantes, Rabelais, Dickens, and Gogol. All these men have created figures truer than life itself, and Chaplin is the only living artist who has, as far as I can see, *for certain* created another world-figure which can, without being dwarfed, link one arm in Mr. Micawber's and the other in Sir John Falstaff's; and that figure is the lovable little tramp we know as Charlie Chaplin. Why, how delighted both of these giants would be with this little man's company! How they would recognize a kindred soul! Micawber would surely debate somewhat verbosely with Sir John on the wisdom of taking the little man to see the Medway, in the hope that some employment might turn up there which would be worthy of his talents;

and Sir John would undoubtedly take him into the Boar's Head, treat him to some sack at Mistress Quickly's expense, and enlist him right away in his Company for the wars, shaking his fat sides, all the while, with delight in his new possession. The large implications of his figure will emerge, I trust, when we discuss the philosophy, the religion, and the wistful mysticism that lie behind all our national humour. Let me only remind you here that it was an Englishman who created this profoundly significant little vagrant; and that none but an Englishman would have done it.

2

Let us, as a first step towards a deeper appreciation of the English humorous literature, consider this peculiar and incomparable English laughter as it appears, not in its finest efflorescence between the covers of great books, but in its protoplasmic form: in our streets, our schools, our public halls, our barracks and our fire trenches. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding, Smollett, Johnson, Goldsmith, Peacock, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith, Wells, and a posse of splendid young writers of to-day are but this street laughter writ large. It is, I have con-

tended, Pure Humour—Humour itself. It is this because it is a compassionate laughter, a laughter of love, unlike the delightful laughter of the French, which is a laughter of malice and often of hate. It is this because it turns so easily inward upon ourselves, and is thus a solvent for all pomposity and overseriousness and disproportionate extremism, unlike German laughter, which is splendid when facing outwards, but turns with difficulty inwards upon the Fatherland and the Fatherland's high seriousness. The same laughter has appeared in other nations, of course—notably in Cervantes, in Spain—but it has not echoed unceasingly, as it has with us, down the corridors of their national literature and history. Let us listen for it in its simplest forms.

In our schools. Why is it that, as a rule, no French or German master can handle a class of English boys, whereas English masters are not at all unsuccessful on the Continent? It is simply because this English humour (whether it is understood consciously or not) must be possessed by the man who would control a class of English boys or lecture to a group of English undergraduates. And it is not understandable by the foreigner; nor is it always consciously understood by the English themselves; it is just possessed by them.

Here is an excellent instance of all this. I was at the Oxford Summer Meeting on Shakespeare

last year, and Professor George Gordon, lecturing in a way that delighted the many Germans, French, and Italians there as much as it amazed them, since his lectures, while deeply informative, were as punctuated with laughter as a lecture by George Robey, declared that, splendid though German Shakespearean criticism was, it could not equal English criticism, once Sir John Falstaff and Bardolph, Bully Bottom, and Dogberry, Sir Toby Belch, and the soldiers of Henry V were on the stage. Of course it couldn't; it could like it and enjoy it, but it couldn't understand it as *we* could. This statement provoked no little opposition, and one attractively serious young German schoolmistress argued the case with me at great length up and down the High. The Germans, said she, very sweetly, were the one other people who could understand it, because they were in blood so close to us. I shook my head; the blood relationship was there, I agreed, but we had had the inestimable privilege of our fogs, our summers, and our intractable seas; and these, in the course of fifteen hundred years, had taught us, as no other nation had ever been taught, what Humour was. You can imagine she didn't like that. So I submitted her to a test. "You will admit," I said, "that every German, and all honour to him, went into battle singing 'Deutschland über Alles,' and that every Frenchman charged with great *elan* declaring that he was

ready to die 'pour la Patrie.' ” She agreed, and was, indeed, properly thrilled. “Well, what would you say,” said I, “if I told you that every English soldier marched up to the line talking sedition rather than patriotism, and when he got really tired and fed up, would call out along the column, to the immense amusement of his officers, ‘What do I care for the British Empire? I’d sell it for five bob.’ ” She stopped still in the High, and stared at me in incredulous amazement. “There,” said I, “and now do you believe you can understand Faulconbridge and Falstaff *quite* as well as we can?” Call a Frenchman or a German a coward, and he will summon you out to a duel. The Englishman won’t wait for you to call him a coward; he’ll say it of himself first, and then fight just as well. Falstaff always pretended to be a coward, and most of the German critics think he was. Only we English know, and hug our secret.

Take English discipline. There is, for sure, no other such phenomenon in the world. The Germans understand discipline; the French, on the whole, do not—at least, not for long. English discipline is hardly discipline at all; it is based, less on authority than on humour. Listen to this. When the Armenian army broke in panic at Baku, I was in a building with about forty Worcesters, and we received flying orders to “hold it to the last man.” It seemed sentence

of death, for a division of ten thousand 'Turkish regulars was attacking the town. We waited for the fight and the end. Then came a different order, "Report at Headquarters at once." We went, expecting to be sent to fight somewhere else, but learnt that the English were going to be evacuated from an impossible position. We were told to follow a guide, and he led us towards the ships that meant safety. It was the most wonderful, most sudden moment of reprieve that any of us had experienced. We marched joyously, because it is good to live. Especially good when death has looked straight into your eyes. Then came a runner after us, and told us that it was all a mistake, and we were to go back to that building and "hold it to the last man." Our men stood stock still for a second, expressed their views on being "b——d about," and then swung round, grouching a little, grumbling a little, and joking a lot. As we toiled back to the building the sergeant said to me, "Well, I reckon it's sacrificing good lives for nothing," and before I could answer, turned to the rather talkative men behind and slanged them for being out of step. "'Ere! Smarten up a bit! You ain't Armenians. . . . You didn't expect to join the army and *live*, didjer?" They laughed a loud denial, and a blasphemous; and marched up the street singing, "Only one more b——y route march." For the exact equivalent of this you'll search German,

French, and Italian literature in vain ; but read of Faulconbridge, and how he spoke to his master, of the English soldiers at Agincourt, and how they spoke to King Henry V, of Sam Weller, and how he spoke to Mr. Pickwick or the Judge, and you will see that this song is a song *plugged* in our merry English revue.

The English can stand a deal of seriousness, but *not too much*. That is why they have never had a blood-letting revolution. The minute an impassioned orator works himself up to such a peroration as would draw *Hochs* from the Germans, or send the French with flaming brands to the Bastille, he is in danger of hearing from an English audience, "*Wow-wow!*" He has gone beyond what their humour will allow, and in that "*Wow-wow!*" the revolution perishes. I should be grateful if any of my readers could supply me with a continental word which is exactly the same in signification to the Englishman's "*Wow-wow!*" after a purple passage ; I know of none myself. I take it there isn't one ; hence continental history ; and hence ours. The Frenchman in the war could declaim that he was fighting "*pour l'humanité*" ; the German could bring himself to compose and sing a Hymn of Hate ; the English soldier could only say, "This 'Humanity' ; I reckon it's all bilge myself ; I reckon nothing to it" ; and yet he was the most humane soldier on any front ; he was the only one

who, from first to last, could never be taught to hate ; he was the only one of whom it could be conceived that, when he took his prisoners, and they asked him what they could do in return for his petting of them, he would reply, " Sing us the Hymn of Hate." This is Humour in perfection, because Humour can only issue in Humanity.

3 .

We have been approaching a study of English humorous literature through the humour of the English common man. Of that literature I have something very large to say, but the fine castle to which I am driving is not an easy one to come at, and I fear I shall ramble, divagate, and turn back upon my traces more than once before I really succeed in showing you its mist-hidden outlines. I am not, on the whole, apologetic about this, because I believe it is the best way to come at a difficult thought ; it is the way of enthusiastic, unbuttoned, smokeover talk ; and that, we agreed, was to be the way of this book. The idea will dimly emerge, every now and then, from the rambling discussion, and as a result of these repeated glimpses it will have shaped itself fairly clearly in the smoke, by the time we rise

from our chairs, knock out our pipes, and go to bed.

What I am trying to get at is something like this : the English are not pre-eminent as philosophers, religious writers, or mystics, but they have a wonderful vehicle for the expression (usually a quite unconscious expression) of their excellent pragmatic philosophy, their deep-seated humanitarian religion, and their essential, if inarticulate and unrealized, mysticism. They only express these things perfectly when they think they are furthest from them, when in a damn-the-consequences, devil-take-all-seriousness mood they abandon themselves to that surging, bursting fount of comic creation which is, I firmly believe, a property of English blood more than of any other blood in the modern world. It has burst through, as we have already said, all literary theories, all classical restraints, all so-called "taste" to the immense enrichment of the world's literature. And it has carried on its flood all the best that the English have to say of their characteristic philosophy, religion, and mysticism.

Examples leap to my mind. Wells. Hasn't he tried to write social philosophies and new religions ; hasn't he tried to analyse through the intellect the answer of his heart to the call of Gautama Buddha, of Lao-Tse, of Christ, and of St. Francis of Assisi ; and haven't these intellectual

analyses left us, generally, with a sense of his frustration; whereas, when he has given his intellect a holiday and has opened the battens to allow a surging *something* in him to gush forth, hasn't he shaped for us those parts of his work which remain eternally significant, the characters of Arty Kipps, Mr. Polly, Mr. Preemby, Mr. Lewisham, and all their comico-pathetic tribe? These poor little frustrated people are wrapped round with the St. Martin's cloak of his humanity, his pity, and his low-lying mysticism. "Mr. Polly, sitting on his gate, untrained, unwarned, confused, distressed, seeing nothing except that he is netted in greyness and discomfort—with life dancing all about him; Mr. Polly, with a capacity for joy and beauty, at least as keen and subtle as yours and mine." Thus he describes Mr. Polly; but he is best when he just creates him and doesn't analyse him; the temperature of his creativeness drops directly he begins to discuss Arty Kipps, Mr. Preemby, and Mr. Polly; let him just present them to us—that is enough; and in his presentation, though Mr. Wells would probably fly the words, lies the indignant rebuke of all the preachers: "These are they for whom Christ died." Dickens. I should be preaching to the converted if I argued at length that whenever Dickens thought he was writing high social philosophy and preaching Christianity he only succeeded in being extraordinarily common-

place, whereas when something snapped and the amazing mixture of pity, ridicule, delight, sympathy and love (which is what we mean by Dickens) gushed up, bearing and bouncing like corks the grotesque figures of Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Gummidge, Mr. Boffin, Dick Swiveller, and The Marchioness, he in his own way was saying all that St. Francis of Assisi said in his.

For our English comic literature I claim nothing less than an unexpressed, generally unconscious, Franciscan mysticism. It is a remarkable fact that almost all the great English comic characters are either down-and-outs, or scapegraces, or the very poor, or the very simple. Our humour cannot release itself fully unless it is flushed through with pity and love; and it is here that it differs so vitally from the humour of the French or the humour of the Irish (strangely enough). Swift and Shaw are Irish, and though they have written in English and made a big contribution to the library of English books, they are manifestly outside this English tradition of which I am speaking. And it is worth noting that they cannot create these comic characters who strut in our memories with a life more abounding and real than the life of any of our acquaintances.

Dare I whisper, what I half believe, that there is nobody but ourselves who can? I hardly like to do so, because I am aware that my knowledge

of other literatures is insufficient to justify so tremendous a whisper ; but there ! let it float on the breeze. Molière, do you say ? Well, are not his characters types, shadowy *humours*, when put between the monstrous proportions of Sir John Falstaff and Mr. Micawber ? Cervantes ? The Don is magnificent, but isn't he a mechanical figure when brought into the presence of my Uncle Toby ? Gogol ? I can only say that I have read "Dead Souls" with as keen an appreciation as the next man, but even apart from the fact that it is Dickens in Russian and so far English, I have no particularly vivid memory of its characters. Dostoievsky ? Yes, Dostoievsky has come very near it with the figures of Lebedyév and General Ivolgin, but here again the inspiration is undoubtedly English ; and besides, in the dark atmosphere of a Dostoievsky novel, such characters move and breathe with difficulty ; for the cloud of gloom is so heavy about us that our laughter, if it comes, is uncomfortable and ashamed ; in short, English humour is not at home in a Russian novel. (And I should just think not !)

A young American writer has "done it" most conspicuously with the character of Babbitt, but is not Sinclair Lewis straight in the Anglo-Saxon tradition ? His father was Wells, and his grandfather Dickens.

But we stray. Our point of departure is the strong Franciscan note in our English humour ;

the swelling pity that is nine parts of our ridicule ; our preferential treatment when we are busy on this loving banter for the poor or the theoretically disgraceful. Sir Toby Belch and Sir John Falstaff are drunken rascallions ; Bully Bottom and all his gang are the poorest cockney artisans ; Parson Adams is a penniless country clergyman ; Mr. Tulliver is a provincial muddle-headed miller ; Kipps and Polly are the smallest of counter-jumpers ; the whole pageant of Dickens is a pageant of the poor and the foolish and the outcast. And if these our comic characters are not poor in worldly goods they are poor in some other sense ; they are objects for this laughter that is nine-tenths pity and love because they are limited, frustrated, cramped, distorted : because they are prisoners caught in a social net.

What is Babbitt but the infinitely laughable, infinitely pitiable figure of a man enslaved by the soul-destroying machine of Big Business and hungering for beauty all the while ? He is Everyman, like all the other great comic figures ; and because he is Everyman he is an Ass. That is the message of all the English comic creators ; but it is a message delivered in a laughing pity. And it is exactly St. Francis's message ; he openly addressed his earthy nature as Brother Ass. Shakespeare, being an Englishman, said the same thing differently ; he created Bully Bottom,

making him pompous, self-assertive, conceited, and wholly lovable, and then crowning him with a donkey's head. Meredith created Sir Willoughby Patterne, the Egoist, and bade us look on ourselves and laugh and forgive. Charles Chaplin created Charlie Chaplin, as perfectly typical a figure as any of them, a supremely diverting and supremely moving study of Man the Wistful, Man the Wanderer, Man in bewildered Rebellion against the whole silly scheme of things, Man in the character of "He Who Gets Slapped." Whether Chaplin is conscious of the deep significances that hang about the figure he has created I do not know. It is possible he is, for we read that he is an eager student of philosophy; but it is also quite possible that he is not, for genius often does not know how big a thing it is doing—especially when it yields itself blindly and unrepentantly to an insistent, surging *something* that wells up from the deeps of an English nature.

I hope that my meaning is beginning to emerge. Only beginning.

4

We have done well, I think, to use the figure of Charlie Chaplin as a little vessel into which are

distilled the essences of English humour. The cinema appeared in the world as a new medium for the exercise of the world's dramatic urge, a new field to which its creative force could turn, and there was bound to come an illuminating revelation in the differing experiments which the nations tried on it, of the differences between their national temperaments. The English, it seems to me, were as certain to produce Charles Chaplin as the French were to produce Adolphe Menjou or the Germans their highly serious producers, with all their deep-thought-out expressionistic theories. In its small way the contrast between Adolphe Menjou and Charles Chaplin is the contrast between the whole trend of English dramatic art and the whole trend of French dramatic art. So also the contrast between the German philosophical producer and Charles Chaplin is an echo of the contrast between the "Second Part of King Henry IV" and the "Second Part of Faust." Your French comedy is always like Adolphe Menjou, witty, arch, ogling, naughty. Your English comedy, when it is not submitting itself to alien influences, is always uproarious and pitiful, slightly outrageous and wholly humane.

A like contrast might have been developed between other typical figures. It can be seen in the national drolls: England could never have produced Grock, who has given to the art of the

clown the exquisite finish and gloss of a Sèvres vase; France could never have produced Dan Leno, who kept the laughter of his audience tottering on the brink of tears. No drama is written in France which would supply a rôle for the creative genius of Mr. Horace Hodges; and we English would be hard put to write a play in which the art of the Guitrys would feel perfectly at home. The French draw their laughter from situations; we, at our best, from characters.

And these characters, as has been shown, have to move us to a Franciscan pity ere we will elevate them into national possessions. I would leave with you one figure as a type and touchstone of this: my Uncle Toby. More than Falstaff is he the patron saint of England's tumultuous masque-ball, her glorious comic rout. And he is this just because he is less witty than Sir John, more foolish, more tender, and more pitiable. Falstaff sounded very clearly the notes of pity, loveliness, and being-the-butt which later were to become the dominant chord, but they are not dominant in him. He manifests no pity himself, but he becomes pitiable in the heart-breaking close to his life, when, after hearing Prince Hal's rejection of him—"I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers"—he turns to Master Shallow, and with desperate hope says: "Do not you grieve at this; I shall be sent for in private to him; look

you, he must seem thus to the world"; and on Shallow's shaking a dubious head, persists; "Sir, this that you heard was but a colour." "A colour that I fear you will die in, Sir John," says Shallow. And Falstaff, though we know that his dead heart cries "Nay" to his brave words, answers tremblingly: "Fear no colours; go with me to dinner. Come, Lieutenant Pistol; come, Bardolph; I shall be sent for soon at night." He is lovable, but why, God knows! presumably because he is High Spirits Incarnate. He is so lovable that we believe completely in Bardolph's groan at his master's death—Bardolph, whose brilliant nose had suffered so outrageously from that tongue which now is silenced from wit: "Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or hell!" He is often a butt for the practical jokes of his cronies, but he is a butt who is generally one too many for his persecutors; and thus he is never foolish or simple. And something of foolishness and simplicity was destined to become an inalienable ingredient in all his wonderful successors. Therefore choose we my Uncle Toby.

My Uncle Toby is the Highest Common Measure of these our comic creations. He is often a mark for our laughing pity, but he is also a throbbing heart of pity himself. He is often very, very simple and foolish, but we feel that his simplicity and folly are nearer God than all the wisdom of

ninety-and-nine of the wise. Here is my Uncle Toby, when we know not whether to laugh or to cry at him ; when he and his faithful servant, Corporal Trim, are living their old battles again, and thus they speak :

“ My brother maintains that a great deal more depends, Trim, upon Christian names than what ignorant people imagine—for he says there never was a great or heroic action performed since the world began by one called Tristram—nay, he will have it, Trim, that a man can neither be learned, or wise, or brave——”

“ ’Tis all fancy, an’ please your honour. I fought just as well,” replied the corporal, “ when the regiment called me Trim as when they called me James Butler.”

“ And for my part,” said my Uncle Toby, “ though I should blush to boast of myself, Trim—yet had my name been Alexander I could have done no more at Namur than my duty.”

“ Bless your honour ! ” cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, “ does a man think of his Christian name when he goes upon the attack ? ”

“ Or when he stands in the trench, Trim ? ” cried my Uncle Toby, looking firm.

“ Or when he enters a breach ? ” said Trim, pushing in between two chairs.

“ Or forces the lines ? ” cried my uncle, rising up and pushing his crutch like a pike.

“ Or facing a platoon ? ” cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock.

"Or when he marches up the glaxis?" cried my Uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.

Here is he, when filled with pity for one in pain :

The sun looked bright the morning after, to every eye in the village except Le Fevre's and his afflicted son's; the hand of Death pressed heavy upon his eyelids, and hardly could the wheel at the cistern turn round its circle, when my Uncle Toby, who had rose up an hour before his wonted time, entered the lieutenant's room and, without preface or apology, sat himself down upon a chair by the bedside. . . .

"You shall go home directly, Le Fevre," said my Uncle Toby, "to my house—and we'll send for a doctor to see what's the matter—and we'll have an apothecary—and the corporal shall be your nurse—and I'll be your servant, Le Fevre. . . ."

The blood and spirits of Le Fevre, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart, rallied back—the film forsook his eyes for a moment—he looked up wistfully in my Uncle Toby's face—then cast a look upon his boy—and that ligament, fine as it was, was never broken.

Or, again, that we may have Sterne's own feeling for my Uncle Toby :

"A-well-a-day ! do what we can for him," said Trim, maintaining his point, "the poor soul will die."

"*He shall not die, by God !*" cried my Uncle Toby

The Accusing Spirit, which flew up to Heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in ; and the Recording Angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever.

And, lastly, the most famous passage of all. To the tooth of our unsentimental age it has often seemed a thought too sweet, but to me, though I try to be as sophisticated as most, it ever yields the same shiver of delight, remaining eternally moving, eternally valid :

"Go," says he, one day at dinner, to an overgrown fly which had buzzed about his nose and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time, and which, after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew to him. "I will not hurt thee," says my Uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going across the room, with the fly in his hand. "I'll not hurt a hair of thy head. Go," says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape, "go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee ? This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me."

Good, then. Let my Uncle Toby, in his dressing-gown and with his crutch and his toy fortifications, sit in our hearts to typify that pity in English humour which I have called Franciscan. We shall have another aspect of this humour to consider before we can arrive at

our biggest thought ; and that aspect is its closeness to the earth and to the unvarnished nature of man, its nearness to crudity, its tactless boisterousness, its " coarseness " if you like—that which to the French and all apostles of " taste " is grossness, but to me, as I shall seek to show you, is simply wisdom unaware.

5

There is this coarseness in English humour, then ; let us admit it. Some of our more fastidious critics admit it with a resigned grimace ; not so I ; I admit it with something of exultation, for I believe it is valuable evidence for the big claim I am striving to establish on behalf of English humour. I believe that it is a symptom that must have appeared, and must recur, if this humour really does spring from sources of quite such depths as those we are peering into. There was bound to be (if I am right) this upswelling, uncontrolled rioting, " tasteless," *tactless* delight in the coarser facets of life.

Before I go any further let me instance the kind of humour I mean. Enter Sir Toby Belch ; and to him Olivia, saying : " By mine honour, half drunk. What is he at the gate, cousin ? "

"A gentleman," says Sir Toby. "A gentleman!" exclaims Olivia, "what gentleman?" "'Tis a gentleman here——" begins the befuddled Sir Toby, and then most vulgarly justifies his surname of 'Belch,' after which unfortunate incident he swears, "A plague o' these pickle-herring!" Now we may say that Shakespeare introduced these episodes to amuse the groundlings, but I don't believe it. I believe that Shakespeare, in his complete identification with Sir Toby, knew that he would certainly "go off" at that point and was as hugely delighted with the explosion as, confessedly, am I.

But that is not a very violent example. For a "wicked" one, I commend you to Falstaff's entry in the famous Boar's Head Tavern scene in "King Henry IV," Act ii., Scene 4. "Here comes Sir John," says the hostess; and in he comes, singing, "When Arthur first in court . . ." and the parenthetical sentence which he here whispers to the tap-boy I simply dare not quote, but as I am confident you will all look it up (and unless you are familiar with it, use a glossary), I can continue my argument from it. To my mind, by this one skilfully admitted sentence—and mark you, it's no piece of ogling French suggestiveness, but just a frank recognition of nature at its coarsest—Falstaff instantaneously becomes solid flesh and blood, and own brother to ourselves—to the great advantage of all that he says and

does afterwards. The French would have worked this jest differently; they would have achieved the laugh by a witty and winking *double entendre*; and to this day they remain shocked at our unrefined, unsubtle methods; but if the method is shocking, the matter is so much the cleaner for it, since, as some one has well said, an open ditch is fresh and natural compared with a closed drain. And surely an immortal jest of Jorrocks, in its simple, honest crudity is very much to the point; do you remember how, at the supper after the hunt, he was sent to the door to see what sort of night it was; how, in his intoxicated condition, he went to the larder-door instead of the street-door; how he opened it, peered about, and when the merry-makers repeated their question, "What sort of night is it, Jorrocks?" replied, "Hellish dark, and smells of cheese." This, having no sly prurience, or veiled, winking dirtiness, but simply its own glorious absurdity, is English to the core. A thousand instances from Fielding, Dickens, Hardy, and Wells might stand at its side.

A frank delight in absurdity, clowning, and sheer verbal nonsense is an essential property of this surging, earthy high-spirits which reckes so little, in its sudden devil-may-care uprush of subtlety and artistry and technical taste. It is here that Lear and Lewis Carroll and Wodehouse and F. W. Thomas and all our finest piffers come

so satisfyingly to our aid. There are times, it would seem, when this irrepressible *something* must escape into nonsense ; in the words of the Frothblowers (themselves no bad example of what I am talking about), we must gollop our piffle with zest, or perish. Why, oh, why should you and I take such indubitable delight in :

I thought I saw a city clerk
A-getting on a bus, `
I looked again and found it was
A hippo-pot-a-mus,
If that should come to dine, said I,
There won't be much for us.

If that doesn't ruffle all the strings of your being with a wholly irrational delight, you are no true Englishman. Oh yes, we more than any other modern people have a joy in nonsense ; and strange as it may sound when spoken of so unphilosophical, so reserved, so practical, so grimly grouching a people, this delirious joy in nonsense is really the overplus of the eager "Yes!" we give to Life.

We say "Yes!" to Life. We accept it, and declare that it is good ; we look out upon our kind with a laughter that is made up of love, pity, forgiveness, and a delight in their existence. Oh no, we do not say this in so many words—we have too much humour to do that, so we grouse instead

—but we say it in our laughter more certainly than anyone else has ever said it.

Now at last we are in full sight of that to which I have been leading. Down in their unconscious places, from which this laughter wells, the English possess the whole of mysticism ; such humour as theirs, traced to its ultimate sources, will be found to rest on something that is divine, eternal—*absolute*. For what is mysticism, and what is the mystic's attitude to life ? The mystical experience—so all who have been through it tell us—is a moment of illumination when, not by the powers of the brain, but by the powers of the heart and the spirit, we suddenly become conscious of our at-one-ness with the totality of everything ; suddenly see the harmony and order that underlies the conflicting appearances of things : suddenly find a perfect rest in our unity with the world, our unity with this basic order, and our unity with the Purpose that we have glimpsed. From this strange experience in which the “ world of appearances ” is for the moment, as it were, annihilated in order that we may see the truth that underlies it all, we return to a consciousness of this temporal life, bringing a new sense of kinship with our fellow-men, a new inexhaustible love for them, and a new forgiveness upon which they may draw, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven. It is the crowning experience of life on this

plane ; nay, it is more than that, for it is the birth of a new creature ; that “ being born anew,” that “ new creation ” of which every great teacher has striven to tell.

Its results in us, then, are a joyous acceptance of life, in the certainty, let the evidences of our senses be what it may, that it is fundamentally good ; a high-spirited identification of ourselves with all life, not only with human life, but with the life pulsing in the common earth ; an ability to rejoice not only in that which is manifestly lovely, like the flower of the lily, but also in that which is coarse and crude, but rich with elemental life, like the earthy roots of the lily, under its stable manure ; and, lastly, an attitude towards men that is akin to the attitude of the gods, both in its detachment, from which it looks out over the world in amusement and pity, and its identification, wherein it seeks to serve, sustain and advance the world.

This amused pitying attitude, to which nothing, *nothing* is wholly repulsive, is faintly experienced by all men and women, in one relation at least—their relation to very little children. Is it not so that the coarsest episodes of the daily round, when seen in little children, are only amusing and love-provoking ! Grubbiness, dirtiness, nose-running, gluttony, biliousness ; and even moral coarsenesses like sulkiness, selfishness, temper, and sheer hate—if a little child displays such turpitude,

what have we for it but laughter, forgiveness, and a heightened love? And the English, at their best, look out upon the world of their fellows and see it as a playground of children.

Now do you see what I mean when I say that, though the English as a whole are incapable of conscious mysticism, the symptoms in their laughter are the symptoms of the profoundest mysticism possible to men; that, though they may not, and do not, live up to their inarticulate creed in their lives, yet, when they are writing their humorous literature and their strangely unconscious vision is at its clearest, they are not far from the Kingdom of God?

CHAPTER X

ENGLISH HUMOUR'S "FARTHEST WEST"

I HAVE said that English humour, at its highest, bears all the marks of an unconscious mysticism. What if it became conscious of its mysticism? Is it all written from this side, as it were, of the gulf that separates the "world of experience" from the "stillness of Eternity"? What if a great English comic genius, perhaps the greatest, were to make the *salto mortale* over the gulf and to write us a book from the other side? It has been done once, and, as far as I know, only once. Shakespeare may be another who has done it; for no one can be quite sure from what far-distant point of thought Shakespeare was sometimes writing. But apart from Shakespeare, it has been done by one man only, and done of deliberate intent, and done terrifically. The book with which I am now going to deal stands so completely alone, is so indubitably the one book in the world that deserves the epithet "unique," that it is well that I accord it a chapter to itself. And a single chapter, when dealing with a book

of such immeasurable depths, can be little more than a signpost. A thousand or twelve hundred words cannot be twisted into a plumb-line for sounding these fathoms. And, indeed, there is but one plumb-line long enough, and that is the two hundred and fifty thousand words of the book itself.

It was written by an American, certainly, but one of English stock, and one whose comic genius is unmistakably English. In its magnificent, singing prose are reiterant echoes, very pleasant to catch of all our noblest writers. The tones of Shakespeare are heard again here: and the rhapsodies of Isaiah; and the rolling periods of Sir Thomas Browne; and the loud laughter of Fielding and Smollett and Dickens. We know from what breasts this Hercules of a writer drew his mother's milk. And therefore I place it here, at the close of our talk on English humour, as the mark of the "farthest west" to which that great wind has carried its vessels.

Those of you who have read this book have already guessed that I can be speaking of it, and of none other. It is Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." Of course it is.

How can I say what this book is about? The book itself cannot say it. Nobody can tell ineffable things. But music can sing them; trumpets and drums can sing them; and a great story, loaded with meanings and bearing over-

tones and undertones that reach away beyond the compass of our intellect, can sing them too. Dostoevsky sings them, but not with laughter. Herman Melville, and he only, set out to sound this music in the far echoes of his uproarious laughter.

How fitting that this book should be the story of a ship and of the illimitable sea beneath it and around? What less than the sea could it traffic in, if it were to be completely that which it sets out to be? And, like a ship, does it not come sailing towards us, its masts and rigging and sides heavy with the atmosphere of unchartable latitudes? Or, again—since one can only hint at this book's meaning by parables—how fitting that it should be the tale of a conflict on the surface of the sea, whose infinite depths lie beneath the visible incidents all the time! This, in itself, is a picture that hints at the nature of the book. On the face of it, it is, as you all know, the narrative of Captain Ahab's relentless chase of, and final battle with, Moby Dick, the White Whale. But under that thrilling story what depths lie!

Mysticism, we saw, was Acceptance. Acceptance of what? Of *everything*, even evil itself—but only the mystics know exactly what such a sentence as this means. Herman Melville knew. Hark at this great note. The scene is in the Nantucket chapel, and Father Mapple, that

sea-salt Elijah, is preaching to those who shall put to sea after the sperm-whale.

"Shipmates . . . I have read ye by what murky light may be mine the lesson that Jonah teaches to all sinners. . . And now gladly would I come down from this masthead and sit on the hatches there where you sit, and listen as you listen. . . . Oh, shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe there is a sure delight; and higher the top of that delight than the woe is deep! Delight is to him who against the proud gods and commodores of this world ever stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him when the ship of this base, treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from the sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight will be his who, coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath: 'O Father—chiefly known to me by thy rod—mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing: I leave Eternity to thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?'"

Apart from the mysticism here, do you not catch the tones of the Authorized Version, of the Hebrew prophets and Job especially? And can you not tell that Herman Melville was steeped in Donne and Milton and Sir Thomas Browne?

And mysticism is a profound sense of the im-

permanence of the "world of experience," a profound sense of the stillness and harmony that lies behind all conflict. In the chase and fight that compose this breathless story, Ahab, that most grotesque and yet most majestic of all the sea captains of literature, is surely the representative of our poor, scarred human *psyche*; and Moby Dick, the White Whale, no less majestic, no less strangely beautiful, is surely Evil itself—or what we call Evil. Ahab I take to be the spear-head of humanity in its everlasting fight; and the dull, tall, invulnerable brow of the Whale I take to be the very front of that which threatens and destroys us. How sublime is Ahab in his mad refusal to do other than fight it and go under. He destroys Moby Dick and Moby Dick destroys him and all his crew; and the wide, indifferent sea engulfs them both, "rolling on as it rolled five thousand years ago."

For one hundred and fifty pages we hear talk of this terrible Captain Ahab, and then, at last—what an art of preparation!—we see him:

As I mounted to the deck at the call of the forenoon watch, so soon as I levelled my glance towards the taffrail, foreboding shivers ran over me. Reality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck.

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a

man cut away from the stake, when the fire had over-runningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them. . . . Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender, rod-like mark, lividly whitish. . .

Not a word he spoke ; nor did his officers say aught to him ; though by all their minutest gestures and expressions they plainly showed the uneasy, if not painful, consciousness of being under a troubled master-eye. And not only that, but moody, stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face ; in all the regal, overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.

I place Herman Melville with Shakespeare. I place him with the Hebrew Prophets. And that others place him no less high let us take for witness Miss Viola Meynell, quoting from the excellent little preface she has written to the edition of "Moby Dick" in the World's Classics.

"It will not surprise readers of 'Moby Dick,' " says she, "to think that after it was written its writer passed from them, in a sense. Already in this book one is carried to the comprehensible limits of a marvellous imagination. There the reader can stay in safety, *transfigured with the great gifts that have been added to him*"—is not this the message of all this little book of ours?—"even while not being of the nature that conceived them. But the nature that conceived them has its course still to run. Herman Melville:

has here endowed human nature with writing that I believe to be absolutely unsurpassed. To read it and to absorb it is the crown of one's reading life. But from the laws of mind that made it the reader is still apart and immune. It is the wildest, farthest kind of genius. . . . In the works that follow this he (Melville) is called transcendentalist and metaphysician, writing of exotic philosophies, with an echo of gargantuan laughter."

I think I have not done amiss in styling "Moby Dick" the "farthest west" of English humour. And let us be proud that, even if other literatures shall one day carry their laughter so far, it is not possible that they should carry it farther.

CHAPTER XI

A MOMENT FOR AN OUTSIDER

A SECONDARY object of this book is the selection and strong recommendation, after analysis, of books that are not necessarily those that the writer loves best, or those that he admires most, or those that he thinks will most greatly heighten the candle-power of his readers' lives (*that* is its primary object), but those that carry, in his opinion, a rich cream of pure *literary* training and will accordingly leave their students fatter men, fuller grown in pure literary sensibility. Books that will heighten their literary taste, literary sense, literary flair; phrase it how you will. English humour, when it is in the true tradition, teaches one how to live, rather than how to be literary; and is sometimes all the better humour for that. But there is no harm in being highly literary as well as highly alive; it is indeed an added grace to life. So now to an English humorist who, standing in the company of Congreve, the Restoration wags, the French wits and our modern cynics and satirists, is quite outside the true tradition but is, like them, a master

of literary language and a model of literary charm. I go to my shelves and take down two small green-backed volumes which cost me only half a crown each and bear the titles "Peacock, Novels, I" and "Peacock, Novels, II." The two little volumes do not total a thousand pages and are, therefore, no longer than many full-length novels of to-day, so we may treat them here as a single work.

Why do I select them as such excellent trainers for the literary aspirant? Let me say at once, lest this unpleasant word "train" should frighten anyone away from them, that, though you may begin to read them in a weary pursuit of instruction, you will soon have forgotten all about our present processes of improvement or deterioration and be galloping over them in a hasty pursuit of entertainment; for Peacock, like all good school-masters—like the true begetter of this book, Mr. Elam—is one who keeps his students in the pains and tears of unremitting laughter. I cannot understand why there is not a rush to his classroom; but there is no such thing; it is remarkable how few, even of the pundits, pay adequate attention to Thomas Love Peacock.

He is a supreme teacher of the young *littérateur* for these reasons:

(a) His prose is what I should like to call the *canon* of English prose; by which I mean that if an

English Academy had fixed for ever a prose that is the only correct English prose—supposing anything so horrid could have happened in our richly free and rebellious island—it would have been a prose very like Peacock's.

(*b*) He was a luxuriously erudite scholar, and as we read his polished novels we move in such an atmosphere of elegant scholarship that we begin to catch the craving for scholarship ourselves.

(*c*) He lived a long life at a transitional period in the history of English literature, and has therefore relations with a sweep of English writers from the earliest Augustans down to Mr. Aldous Huxley; and

(*d*) He exhibits so many different facets, all perfectly cut and beautifully polished, if rather small, of the comic writer's art. He flashes at us Swiftian satire, kindlier Thackerayan irony, witty Shavian epigrams, genial Dickensian humour, jolly Meredithian conviviality, and, at times, pantomimic Harold Lloydian low comedy.

We will examine these points of his. His prose. I do not want anyone to write this exquisite Peacockian prose, so perfectly turned and balanced, so chaste (as his friend, Shelley, called it), unless he has behind it the same Peacockian mind, a classical, sceptical, immensely elegant, faintly foppish, immoderately civilized, eighteenth cen-

ture, Versailles sort of mind. I would have a man write more warmly, easily, romantically, and rebelliously, if the surge of his creative force demands a free and immediate style. But you will agree that we should exercise ourselves long and often in the chaste and orthodox movements of our language before we feel at liberty to invent and execute new movements of our own.

His scholarship. Let us allow that it ran to pedantry ; but we are, in the last account, gainers by it. He seems to have ransacked all Greek and Roman literature to find ornaments and garnishings for the brilliant dialogue of his talkers. Was there ever such dinner-table talk before ? The bottle goes round—it is never far from any Peacockian orator—and, inspired by Madeira or port, ale, or mead, the clashing disputants adduce all the poets from Æschylus to Plautus in support of their preposterous theories. The only thing that emerges solid from this battle of the pedants is the impression that we can be sure of nothing in this world except its nonsense ; which was probably the sum-total of Peacock's philosophy. Once accept that philosophy, and there is nothing to do but laugh uproariously. Which Peacock did, to our immense profit.

His focal position in the history of English literature. He lived from 1785 to 1866, and spans, therefore, the long stretch from the classicism and elegance of the eighteenth century, through the

soulfulness of the Romantic Revival, to the heart of mid-Victorian self-satisfaction and prudery. If you read his seven short novels, one a night, you will simply *feel* the march of the generations, each with its different crotchets and whimsies, passing under the merciless enfiling of the Peacock maxim-guns. Byron, Shelley, the Lake Poets ; Progress, Industrialism, Paper Money ; Machines, Popular Education, "The March of Mind"—all are riddled with the tracer-bullets of his satire ; or, to change the metaphor, it is as if the generations were mirrored and distorted in the flashing facets of Peacock's diamond mind. Only do this : only with some history refresh your memory of all that happened between 1785 and 1866, and then read Peacock's seven novels, one a night ; and within the short week you will have lived and laughed with the mocking *intelligentsia* of eighty vital years. You have my full leave to skip the poetry with which the pages are interlarded ; it is as wearisome and third-rate as the prose is stimulating and first-rate.

This much of literary and social history can you draw from him ; but another important fact may escape you. Let me ask you, as you read him, to keep your eyes on the look-out for the seeds of a multitude of Peacockian followers, both in the generation that is gone and in the generation that entertains us to-day. If once you know your Peacock, you will never be able to read Thackeray

in satirical mood, Meredith in coruscating vein, or Shaw when he is feeling devastatingly talkative, without hearing the echo of that old laughter. Have they acknowledged their indebtedness to him? I know not; perhaps they are hardly aware of it themselves. But the most remarkable example of indebtedness is Mr. Aldous Huxley. Surely his highly diverting novel-essay-dialogues are but Peacock in modern costume. And all the scintillating young writers who count themselves of Mr. Huxley's school, are they not really the progeny of Peacock? Wherever you get the house-party novel wherein the characters exist simply as mouthpieces for amusing and preposterous talk and for long draughts of good drink, you can be sure that the ghostly laughter of Peacock is sparkling in the wine.

And lastly, the breadth of his art as a comic writer. I have said that he is by turns satirical, ironical, witty, convivial, uproarious, till he descends to gorgeous low comedy. Perhaps it is best to let him define in his own words the completeness of his comic attitude to life; certainly no one will turn the definition into better sentences than he; and thus the quotation will serve, not only as a statement of his creed, but as an example of his delicate and most *literary* handling of our language:

None shall laugh in my company, though it be at my

expense, but I will have a share in the merriment. The world is a stage, and life is a farce, and he that laughs most has most profit of the performance. The worst thing is good enough to be laughed at, though it be good for nothing else ; and the best thing, though it be good for something else, is good for nothing better.

CHAPTER XII

LACRIMÆ RERUM

I

LACRIMÆ RERUM (~~the tears in things.~~) The phrase is Virgil's, and one of his greatest. It is the best of its kind, I think; stronger and somehow nobler than Wordsworth's "the still, sad music of humanity"; much stronger and much nobler, because of its quieter emphasis, than Mr. Wilfred Gibson's "the heartbreak in the heart of things." But all these three are beautiful sighing phrases that breathe on the same chord in our natures and stir us to such a mood as I would have us indulge now, while we consider the literature of the world's pain.

On an earlier page I suggested that the cry [†]was the protoplasm from which all great literature [†]was evolved. A cry, be it a cry of pity, or a cry of amusement, or a cry of admiration—be it a sigh, a laugh, or a cheer—is the expressed reaction of a sensitive soul to the spectacle of life before him. In a child it is inarticulate; in Shakespeare it attains the perfection of articulation; but from beginning to end of this evolution it remains,

in essence, the same thing.) Some writers express one of these cries only ; I cannot think Molière expressed much but laughter ; or Hardy, though he enjoys a melancholy amusement in his rustic clowns, much but tears. But for me, no writer is supremely great unless these three cries blend in his work and coalesce into a love that I imagine to be very like God's love for His created things, or that I know to be very like a parent's love for his children. Let one of them be absent from an author's work, and though it may be vastly amusing and enjoyable, or vastly useful as a destructive solvent, it is less than the complete truth. The "Maximes" of La Rochefoucauld, for example, in their merciless malice, are delightful reading and a valuable medicine for softly sentimental minds ; but a medicine, though its tang may be pleasant, is not the true wine of life, and overdoses of it tend to poison the system.

It is for this reason that I so much prefer English humour, on which we have been discoursing at such length, to French wit ; French wit relies for its flavour on a good bitter hate, as the names of its master-chefs are sufficient to prove : Rabelais, La Rochefoucauld, Boileau, La Bruyère, Voltaire, Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudelaire ; English humour, being strangely close as we have seen, to pity and admiration, has no power to hate at all ; to prove which I might give such a chain of names as this French procession, but shall mention in-

stead one person only—Mr. Thomas Atkins conducting a war. Therefore, I say it is much nearer truth than your one-sided French cynicism. Indeed I have gone further, and hinted that it was the truth itself. Yes, in the greatest writers hate can never survive ; for the simple reason that if their attitude is properly balanced and they “see life steadily and see it whole,” these three things—pity, admiration, and laughter—must blend into an antiseptic that makes hate impossible.

Let us take Lamb as our wings of transition from the literature of laughter to the literature of tears. My previous arguments have achieved nothing unless they have shown that almost any English humorous writer could equally well have lent us his wings for this journey. But let Lamb do the service. Under all his gay laughter sounds—oh, surely sounds—the still, sad music of humanity. I am writing this on the last day of December, and instantly I remember how Elia turned his smiling but wistful eyes on “the skirts of the departing year,” and how the sigh that is in us all as we watch the night through, sighs through his essay on “New Year’s Eve”:

It is no more than what in sober sadness every one of us seems to be conscious of, in that awful leave-taking. I am sure I felt it, and all felt it with me last night ; though some of my companions affected rather to manifest an exhilaration at the birth of the coming year,

than any very tender regrets for the decease of its predecessor. But I am none of those who "welcome the coming, speed the parting guest." I would scarce now have any of the untoward accidents and events of my life reversed. . . . Methinks it is better that I should have pined away seven of my goldenest years, when I was thrall to the fair hair and fairer eyes of Alice W——n, than that so passionate a love-adventure should be lost. It was better that our family should have missed that legacy which old Dorrell cheated us of, than that I should have at this moment two thousand pounds *in banco*, and be without the idea of that specious old rogue

If I know aught of myself, no one whose mind is introspective can have a less respect for his present identity, than I have for the man Elia. I know him to be light, and vain, and humorous . . . a stammering buffoon; what you will; lay it on and spare not . . . but for the child Elia, that other me, there in the background—I must take leave to cherish the remembrance of that young master—with as little reference I protest, to this stupid changeling of five-and-forty, as if it had been the child of some other house, and not of my parents. I know how it shrank from the least colour of falsehood—God help thee, Elia, how thou art changed! I know how honest, how courageous (for a weakling) it was—how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful! . . .

Not childhood alone, but the young man till thirty, never feels practically that he is mortal. He knows it indeed, and if need were, could preach a homily on the fragility of life; but he brings it not home to himself, any more than in a hot June we can appropriate to our

imaginations the freezing days of December. But now, shall I confess a truth?—I feel these audits all too powerfully. I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like miser's farthings. In proportion as the years both lessen and shorten, I set more count upon their periods, and would fain lay my ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel. I am not content to pass away like a weaver's shuttle. These metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide that smoothly bears human life to eternity. I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets.

Need I remind you of his essay "Dream Children":

Then I told them (the children) how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness and difficulty, and denial meant in maiden—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out of her eyes with such a reality of representment that I became in doubt which of them stood before me, or whose bright hair it was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding and still receding, till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the utter-

most distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech : “ We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing ; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been ”—and immediately waking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor chair, where I had fallen asleep with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side. . . .

My “ Works of Charles Lamb ” is open on my desk before me, and as I glance through its pages, seeking the brave, sweet sadness that I love, and that I wanted for the illustration of this essay, I find nearly a hundred passages marked—*Old China, On Some of the Old Actors, All Fools’ Day, Letter to William Wordsworth*—“ My attachments are all local, purely local. I have no passion to groves and valleys. The rooms where I was born, the furniture which has been before my eyes all my life, a bookcase which has followed me about (like a faithful dog, only exceeding him in knowledge) wherever I have moved—old chairs, old tables, streets, squares, where I have sunned myself, my old school—these are my mistresses. Have I not enough, without your mountains ? . . . ”—“ On Books and Reading,” “ A Quakers’ Meeting ” ; and I want to quote from them all, but that would be to make of this an essay by Elia himself, which, alas ! it is not. One thing I must be suffered to interpolate : if the ambition

of any of us be to convert by enthusiasm one here and there who is still a little book-shy, or to confirm by the same enthusiasm a brother book-lover in his happy faith, then I have a suspicion that a single essay by Lamb, "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," could achieve the whole result. The man who can read that essay, and not hunger to surround himself with books, is past the medicaments of us all. To it, those who have never met it; and to it again, those who have forgotten its whimsical delights. And then we will get on with this business of "the heartbreak in the heart of things."

2

A poem, a play, or a novel approaches a greater beauty and earns the suffrages of a larger body of men in so far as it expresses, with a restrained poignancy, the tears in things.) There is no other road to the deepest places of our hearts.) A play or novel that is all wit may, and does, delight us, but it has little power, you will have noticed, to *haunt* us; and we are slow to award it the final prize of the word "beautiful." But only let a sadness hang somewhere behind its humour, and it has its chance of troubling our memory and

eliciting the coveted word. And since, to my mind, the real measure of a book's greatness is its power to haunt, it would seem that something of the world's pain should find a voice, even in a book that is mainly laughter.

There is something not a little pathetic in this universal appeal possessed by a work of art that has caught the music of human suffering; it tells so clearly that the only universal language is the language of tragedy; comedy has no such universality, for the laughter of the West is not the laughter of the East, nor is the wit of the palace the wit of the tenement house; but the pain of all the children of Adam is the same pain.

Great as are Shakespeare's comedies, can we think them as great as his tragedies? Admittedly he is the most universal writer that wrote, and yet—how eloquent is the fact!—in France and Russia he is only known to the majority by "Lear," "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Othello."

But because of this enormous appeal of pathos; because in the race to win a wide public the odds are heavy on the pathetic horse, pathos has been so commercialized and exploited—though not always consciously—that our ear for the true *cri de cœur* in a piece of literature is sadly debauched and needs training anew. And I am at a loss to say definitely what that training is. Indubitably no small part of it is that we should ourselves suffer. Another part of it, probably, is the practice and

development of a real and active sympathy with the pain of others. Another, of course, is to make ourselves conversant with the verdict of past generations, and to believe that a multitude of men has been more likely than any single man to sift the true from the false.

One thing we cannot do ; we cannot say that because Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Racine, or any other great one wrote such and such a scene, therefore it is true 'pathos ; because they all—*all*—were guilty at times of forcing the pathetic note. They all saw its power and worked for it ; and it does not come by working. It comes only by a real pain in the author, and its language generally is less volitional than involuntary. If I can trust my own judgment, Euripides has some terrible moments of forced pathos in every play he wrote, especially in "The Trojan Women," "Alcestis," and "Hippolytus" ; but he has also—nay, what impertinence it seems on my part thus to allow him beauty !—some moments when he was but an organ through which the world's pain could vent in poignant utterance. Some of Phædra's and Theseus' speeches in the earlier parts of the "Hippolytus" are quite unreal, but how grand is the last scene between Hippolytus and Artemis, the goddess of his unfailing worship ! Hippolytus, you remember, is dying, the victim of his father's unjust curse ; and Artemis has descended from heaven to vindicate her faithful

servant. Then she rises in her cloud "that she may not watch man's fleeting breath, nor stain her eyes with the effluence of death." And Hippolytus breathes after her :

Farewell, farewell, most blessed ! Lift thee clear
Of soiling men ! Thou wilt not grieve in heaven
For my long love ! . . .*

Here speaks Greek austerity at its noblest : Hippolytus accepting the dread thought that the gods, even though we worship them all our lives and die for them in the end, are too high above us to pity in our poor human fashion ; and blessing his goddess as she leaves him to suffer his last pain alone. As we witness the scene we dare to wonder whether this austere creed has not a grandeur that Christian "trust in God" can never by its nature achieve. Having bidden Artemis farewell, Hippolytus turns to his father :

Father, thou art forgiven.
It was Her will. I am not wroth with thee. . . .
I have obeyed her all my days . . . Ah, me,
The dark is drawing down upon my eyes :
It hath me ! . . . Father ! . . . Hold me ! Help
me rise !

His father supports him, and Hippolytus says his good-bye :

*Professor Gilbert Murray's translation.

Farewell ;
A long farewell, dear Father, ere we part ;

at which his father cries out in agony :

Not yet ! O hope and bear while thou hast breath

Then Hippolytus' lovely words :

Lo, I have borne my burden. This is death. . .

“Lo, I have borne my burden.” Here is the note of Greek tragedy, sounding deep and bell-clear. It sounds again in the last chorus of Sophocles' “*Œdipus Rex*,” of which the mournful echo, “Call no man happy until he be dead,” follows the king as he staggers out, blinded and empty, the victim of an inscrutable destiny. It sounds in the noble words of the Greek commander, Nicias, who, when he learned that all was lost and there was nothing to do but surrender, said simply, “Other men, having done what men may, have endured what men must.” Incomparable words ! How small they are, and yet do they not hold, not only the austere courage of Nicias, but also something of high perseverance of all our human kind ?

“Lo, I have borne my burden.” I will not add to it. Those who have not ears to hear its far reverberations will profit little from any

exegesis of mine. Let us be carried on those reverberations, naturally and easily, to one but lately with us, who looked out upon the spectacle of human suffering with eyes very like the eyes of the Greek tragedians, and who learned, I suspect, his grammar of life at Æschylus' feet—Thomas Hardy. In Hardy's novels the pathos and the tragedy, if we think of the characters and incidents alone, are undoubtedly forced; for his vision shows him, less the tragedy and pathos of individual persons, than the tragedy of Humanity itself. His hero is not Jude, or Yeobright, or Winterborne, or Tess, but Man—Man the sport of the Immortals, Man who in his acceptance of fate and his dour courage is grander than God. If we think of his novels like this—not as convincing stories of lifelike people, but as the vehicle wherewith Hardy sings his own sad song—we shall recognize his voice as one of the sincerest voices that have ever cried the news of the cosmic pain. Just because this is so true, his poems are immeasurably finer than his novels. A poem is the lyrical cry of the man himself, not the analysis of fictitious emotions; it is his own emotion stirred (nearly always in Hardy's perfect lyrics) by a single sight; it is not the manufacture of an intricate plot, or the stringing together of a long concatenation of events. "Lo, I have borne my burden." For every novel that Hardy has written this might

stand as the motto on the title page. Think of Tess, of Jude, of Casterbridge's Mayor, and of Marty in "The Woodlanders." "Lo, I have borne my burden." There are few of his poems that it might not head.

Hardy's mind is even austerer than the Greeks'. I shall not analyse it half so well as he has pictured it—deliberately—in his significant description of Egdon Heath; nor would my analysis engrave it half so completely on your memory. Hear, then, how he broods on Egdon :

Precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. . . . The spot was, indeed, a near relation of night, and when night showed itself, an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. . . .

It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champagnes of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issue than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its

admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualities which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but, alas! if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings over-sadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of Nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. . . .

Egdon was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring . . .

And the next chapter is headed "Humanity appears upon the scene, hand in hand with trouble."

3

Like Euripides, Shakespeare forced his pathos not seldom ; and like Euripides, he not seldom breathed out the world's pain with such a truth, such a charged restraint, that the words he formulated, if our imaginations can drink their full draught, are wellnigh intolerable.

There is no doubt that a *cri de cœur*, to all men of imagination, is heightened in force if it is understated, and diminished to evaporation-point by overstatement. Great literature is simply this : great emotion couched in great words ; and it is just in proportion as the emotion packs the words to their uttermost and, breaking beyond them, allows its excess to escape in overtones, that you have a passage which is trembling very near to beauty ; and, conversely, it is just in proportion as the words are in excess of the emotion—too many for it, too large for it, too pretty for it, too emphatic for it—that you get highfalutin, purple passages and so-called “fine writing.” In a word, while restraint and high compression are desirable everywhere, they are more than desirable if you would achieve pathos—they are indispensable. The true restrained words are not easily found. All of us can imagine pathetic situations—a dead child, a weeping mother—but not until, by a triumphant effort of

the creative imagination, we have *become* the suffering person and are actually suffering the same pain will the restrained, charged, inevitable words burst from us, and, being written down, carry conviction to all who read. Only let us begin to "work up a situation," to "exploit its possibilities," and we shall have turned our backs on beauty, and with every step be moving from it farther away. So, as critics, we must possess this loyal and instant nostril for exploited pathos if we are to separate the false and vulgar from the sincere and beautiful.

Here are two kindred Shakespearean passages, in one of which the master evaporates his pathos by straining to develop it, and in the other of which, by a complete identification of himself with the suffering man, he says no more than the poor stricken creature would say, and so ends by expressing vastly more—expressing universal things—expressing not only the tragedy of a single individual, but the tragedy of humanity.

The first is in "King John," Act iii., Scene 4. Constance is bewailing before King Philip and Pandulph the incarceration of her boy, Arthur.

K. Philip. Bind up your hairs.

Constance. Yes, that I will; and wherefore will I do it?

I tore them from their bonds and cried aloud:
"O that these hands could so redeem my son,

As they have given these hairs their liberty !”
But now I envy at their liberty,
And will again commit them to their bonds,
Because my poor child is a prisoner . . .
But now will canker sorrow eat my bud
And chase the native beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And so he'll die ; and rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven,
I shall not know him ; therefore never, never,
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more.

Pandulph. You hold too heinous a respect of grief.

Constance. He talks to me that never had a son.

(Now, that last line is beautiful ; an inevitable and heartbreaking sentence ; and we shall see how Shakespeare, recognizing that he had lost it here, in a mass of clever but insincere fancies and conceits, used it again, and then with intolerable perfection.)

But meanwhile :

K. Philip. You are as fond of grief as your child.

Constance. Grief fills the room up of my absent child
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form ;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief.

Fare you well : had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do. . . .
O Lord ! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son !
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world !
My widow's comfort and my sorrow's cure !

Now turn, for the contrast, to a scene in
"Macbeth," Act iv., Scene 3. Macduff and
Malcolm are in England, and Ross comes from
Scotland to tell Macduff that King Macbeth has
surprised his castle and slain his wife, Lady
Macduff, and all his children. Mark the tense
sentences as Ross forbears to break the terrible
news ; there is no elaboration or exploitation now.

Macduff. How does my wife ?

Ross. Why, well.

Macduff. And all my children ?

Ross. Well, too.

Macduff. The tyrant has not battered at their peace ?

Ross. No, they were well at peace when I did
leave them.

Macduff. Be not a niggard of your speech : how
goes it ?

But Ross still prevaricates :

Ross. When I came hither to transport the tidings,
Which I have heavily borne, there ran a rumour
Of many worthy fellows out ; . . .
Now is the time of help ; your eye in Scotland

Would create soldiers, make our women fight,
To doff their dire distresses.

Malcolm. Be't their comfort
We are coming thither. . . .

Ross. Would I could answer
This comfort with the like ! But I have words
That would be howl'd in the desert air. . . .

Macduff. What concern they ?
The general cause ? Or is it a fee-grief
Due to some single breast ?

Ross. No mind that's honest
But in it shares some woe ; though the main part
Pertains to you alone.

Macduff. If it be mine,
Keep it not from me, quickly let me have it.

Then Ross tells the story, and, Macduff not answering, Malcolm sees his stricken condition, and bursts in :

Malcolm. Merciful heaven !—
What, man ! Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows ;
Give sorrow words : the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break.

Macduff (not heeding him, but turning to the messenger again). My children, too ?

Ross. Wife, children, servants, all
That could be found.

Macduff. And I must be from thence !—
My wife killed, too ?

Ross. I have said.

Malcolm breaks in again :—

Malcolm. Be comforted.

Let us make medicines of our great revenge,
To cure this deadly grief.

And now are the pitiful words of Constance
used again :

Macduff. *He has no children.* All my pretty ones ?
Did you say all ? . . . *All ?*
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop ?

Ross cannot answer, and Malcolm intrudes his
rather heavy comfort again :

Malcolm. Dispute it like a man.

And then comes Macduff's intolerably beautiful
sentence, which seems to carry, in its tiny words,
not only the completeness of his tragedy at that
moment, but something of the tragedy of
humanity :

Macduff. I shall do so ;
But I must also feel it as a man.

4

It is because compression is so indispensable to true pathos, and expansion is so destructive of it, that little short poems and tense one-act plays often hold it better than larger vessels which tempt the author to be diffuse or explanatory. I have already referred you to the whole volume of Hardy's lyrics, almost all of which are perfect little *cris de cœur* ; I have space now for no more than a mention of the plays of J. M. Synge and Anton Tchegov. In Synge's "Riders to the Sea" we hear, as well as literature can sound it for us, the long sob of the women who give their men to the sea off the wild west coast of Ireland. Tchegov's plays are meaningless only to those who cannot hear for themselves, without a lecturer to explain it, the note of the world's pain that can sound in the common talk of petty, frustrated, futile people.

Tchegov is probably the most consistent artist in compression that has ever put pen to paper ; all the other writers who have been possessed by a deep pity for created things have sometimes yielded to the temptation to be eloquent ; Tchegov never. We read that, in his dread of diluting the potency of an episode, he would reduce a whole act to a single speech, and then, after a night's rest and long thought about it,

reduce that speech to a single sentence, such as "She is a wife." He trusts to his actors to fill those words with all the pain that he knows them to contain ; or if the play is to be read in the study, he trusts to the imagination of his reader. Often he must trust in vain, for the great majority of people have ears that are quite untrained for catching, without an actor's or an expositor's aid, this hidden music. Sometimes I have been amazed to hear people reading Tchehov aloud and passing unmoved over sentences that ought to have broken their breath.

Here is a tiny little poem by Mary Coleridge which holds in poignant grasp an experience common to us all :

Some hang above the tombs,
Some weep in empty rooms,
I when the ivy blooms
Remember.

I when the cyclamen
Opens her buds again
Rejoice a moment—then
Remember.

Besides their high compression which inhibits a vulgarizing exuberance, there is another reason why poems should be perhaps the best vessels for capturing a distillation of "the tears in things."

It is a subtle reason that was clearly understood of the Greeks. It is this : A subject-matter which, uttered in cold prose, would be too painful to be beautiful, is "reconciled"—that was their word—to our acceptance by the balancing beauty of the music and the words. The pain is flooded with an extraneous beauty so that it is no longer unbearable, but is converted into that exquisite troubling flavour which is the dominant ingredient in the composition of a lovely thing. The delicacy of the music and the perfect comeliness of the words are the healing unguents that make the pain bearable. We know how, when their great tragedies approached moments whose anguish might be so terrible as to leave beauty behind, the Greeks stayed the action and allowed the chorus to heal us and to reconcile us by outbursts of lyrical song. And never did they send their audience away from the theatre at the culminating point of the tragedy as we are disposed to do, but healed them first with music.

Somewhat at random I take a poem (its author I have forgotten) which, rewritten in prose, would wound a fine imagination too deeply for him to call it beautiful ; but as it stands I suggest that it is a lovely thing :

Bend down your head a little ; let me see
Or think I see your eyes ; yes, I am going.
For us there waiteth in this world of earth

No bridal torch, no clasp of wedded arms,
No voice of children at the fireside knees ;
Breaks at my feet the ocean I shall sail
To that wan world, obscure as destiny,
Wherein our fathers rest ; and I shall change
To something other than I am, and lacking
The memory and love of thee, and between us two
Perchance no love shall be for evermore.
So kiss me while my lips are warm.

And here is an "Epitaph," written by Mr. de la Mare ; though of this poem I am doubtful whether even its delicate workmanship can reconcile us to its unspeakable pain. The answer to that question must be a matter of individual taste ; for me it is, I think, just valid.

Here lies, but seven years old, our little maid ;
Once of the darkness, oh, so sore afraid !
Light of the World, remember that small fear,
And when nor moon nor stars do shine, draw near.

There is a little poem* of less than fifty lines which must often make us novelists shake our heads over our own medium, the hundred-thousand-word novel. Fifty lines, and I can only say that its effect was more vivid with me, and its pictures more memorable, than many of the countryside

* "The Farmer's Bride" by Charlotte Mew.

novels which it so resembles. It tells just such a story as Miss Kaye-Smith would love to tell—the story of a farmer who “*chose a maid, Too young maybe—but more’s to do At harvest-time than bide and woo.*” After their marriage the child turned afraid of love, and the poem is simply the tale of an old farmer’s rebutted endearments, and his ultimate reverence for her timidity. He accepts her recoil and abides hungry. As we read it we wonder whether the three hundred and twenty closely-printed pages of a novel could add anything; whether they would not rather dissipate much. Without the powerful emphasis given by metre and rhyme, without the atmosphere generated by the music alone, how many pages of prose would be required to limn a picture as memorable as this :

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,
To her wild self, but what to me ?

Or this—why, here is a whole chapter of a novel :

She does the work about the house
As well as most, but like a mouse
Happy enough to chat and play
With birds and rabbits and such as they,
So long as men-folk keep away.

“Not near, not near!” her eyes beseech
When one of us comes within reach.
The women say that beasts in stall
Look round like children at her call.
I’ve hardly heard her speak at all.

Countryside novels by the hundred have rejoiced to describe at length the fall of the year towards Christmas, and the scenes of Christmas junketing: have any of them done it better than this?

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,
The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,
A magpie’s spotted feathers lie
On the black earth spread white with rime,
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.
What’s Christmas-time without there be
Some other in the house than we?

And could pages cry more pitifully of the farmer’s love, his hunger, and his rebuttal than these five lines?

She sleeps up in the attic there
Alone, poor maid. ’Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,
The soft young down of her, the brown,
The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!

Henry King, a Bishop of Chichester, who lived through the first seventy years of the seventeenth century, has sent a *cri de cœur* down the generations in his famous elegy on his young wife. Is it not very pleasant to think that during that period of heated politics, of bloodshed and of civil rebellion, and during the lax licentious years of the Restoration that followed it, this simple little tale of married love and loyal memory was being lived out? Universal, elemental, independent of time or space, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever is the emotion that speaks here. "*This will go onward the same, Though Dynasties pass,*" as Hardy has it, in his "In Time of the Breaking of Nations." With the pin-light of his vision resting on an eternal thing, he says (you remember):

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by :
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

Here are the closing words of Bishop King's exequy :

Sleep on, my love, in thy cold bed
Never to be disquieted !
My last good night ! Thou wilt not wake
Till I thy fate shall overtake,
Till age, or grief, or sickness must

Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves ; and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.
Stay for me there : I will not fail
To meet thee in that hollow vale.
And think not much of my delay :
I am already on the way,
And follow thee with all the speed
Desire can make, or sorrows breed.
Each minute is a short degree
And every hour a step towards thee. . . .
'Tis true—with shame and grief I yield—
Thou, like the van, first took'st the field ;
And gotten hast the victory
In thus adventuring to die
Before me, whose more years might crave
A just precedence in the grave.
But hark ! my pulse, like a soft drum,
Beats my approach, tells thee I come ;
And slow howe'er my marches be
I shall at last sit down by thee.

He was eighty-seven when he died.

5

The ultimate pain of the world, if it can be brought within the compass of a single definition,

is the aching excess of our cravings over their satisfaction. Life fails us ; and fails us more and more as we become larger men, of higher sensibilities and rarer, subtler hungers. Romance fails us ; love fails us ; all human relationships fail us (if sometimes, thank God, only a little !) ; cruder things like prosperity and fame fail us to the extent that they dwindle into contemptible things ; nothing, not even our best achievements when we escape into the world of art and strive to make a perfect pattern there, comes near our ideal harmonies ; always there is a disparity, very large for the great ones and quite large enough for the little people, between the perfect things we can imagine and the poor, troubled things we can achieve. Each of us, in the last analysis, is found to be quite alone and very hungry.

That is why every mystical teacher who has appeared in the world has taught that for the elect the only road to tranquillity is over and beyond that terrible mountain, the complete annihilation of self. Buddha carried it so far that he preached not only the destruction of all carnal desire, all worldly desire, and all intellectual desire, but even, by an amazing reach of his spiritual vision, that we should pass beyond all spiritual desire. The last selfishness, he saw, was the hunger for personal immortality and a personal communion with God. Nirvana lies on the other side of these things.

As Christian mystics we may think that this last selfishness is selfishness sublimated so high that it has ceased to be selfishness at all, and has become self-fulfilment—self-fulfilment through self-surrender and self-giving. Certain it is that it is the only human desire which is within seeing-distance of its perfect satisfaction. But I have not mentioned these matters to argue them here ; simply I have led up to the word Nirvana because it contains in itself the definition and indictment of the world's pain.

Now, could a book carry in the atmosphere that hangs around it the breath of this ultimate pain, our reading of it would be an experience not easily forgotten. I make so high a claim for a short, slight novel that has recently appeared and earned from others no niggardly applause : Miss Rosamund Lehmann's "Dusty Answer."

I see "Dusty Answer" as harp music rather than the dense texture of an orchestra ; but it is a very wonderful melody that has sighed along the strings of the instrument that produced it ; no less, I think, than the melody of the ultimate pain of the world. Briefly, it is the story of a girl who craved much more from personal relationships than they could yield her, and who offered to the world much more than the coarse world could take. But who shall say what music is about ? We succumb to it, that is all.

Two dissertations on this novel interested me,

Mr. Arnold Bennett, in one of his weekly articles in an evening journal, was marvellously superior. He allowed that Miss Lehmann wrote with some humour, and was disposed to see things from her own standpoint, all of which, said he, was to the good ; but he confessed that he was quite unable to read the book to the end, and the article became an argument as to whether any book has ever been written that was worth reading through. His sound common sense was a revelation to me of what I have always suspected—that in certain rare altitudes Mr. Bennett's antennæ become quite insensitive. I made a note of what a dangerous, mutilating thing your superlative common sense could be.

The other note on the book was by Mr. H. C. Tracy in "The New Adelphi," a quarterly that is something of an oasis in the arid landscape of modern thought. After some rather cheap jesting with two such outworn hats as "best sellers" and the United States—jesting quite unworthy of the fine words that follow—Mr. Tracy says : "Even though it sells I refuse to give up believing in the book. Believing in it means experiencing it in a peculiarly vivid way and finding it, not *about* reality, but of the stuff of reality, and the substance under and behind dream." He now becomes unnecessarily obscure, but the words are worth struggling with ; they are (at least to me) an effort to say

something better about this book than anyone else has said :

To maintain this fabric intact (*i.e.*, the substance under and behind the dream) seems to me the work of a proper human person ; to embody it achievement enough. Here is a book that puts to play in dramatic relation strange, appealing and faith-corroding matters that attack our humble little wondering soul. Yet if they waste us it is not we that are pathetic, but the cleverer, quicker persons who consent to the waste : the faith-breakers. We may seem, at the end, empty, drab, frustrated, but we have not broken faith with things. What things ? Autumn, if you will, and blue mist and smoke trails ; bird-song and dawn and dusk. All these, and more, are empty egg-shells to those who have broken faith. Of course, faith and loyalty (to those others) are words. The Roddys and Julians (in the book Roddy, Julian and Jennifer are three of the people to whom the heroine offers her over-abundant love, and who fail her so desperately) cannot afford the huge expense of converting them into realities ; experiential facts. And the Jennifers who could afford it will not. There remains a forlorn and loving human psyche more than susceptible to beauty and pain. It must go through its pain-bearing as it can, happy if it can spread its perceptions on a scroll where they form a picture of one's poignant and perishing modern world.

More than once have I insisted that the dominant note of this, our little *Causeurie*, was to

be the thought that literature's work with us is to make us awake and aware ; and not only awake and aware, but highly responsive also. It is to heighten our life by a double process, a process of widening and deepening, a process making us not only feel about more things but feel more about them. Well, we have arrived at the issue, which we must not shirk, that if we are willing to come highly alive like this, we must face the price ; and the price is that we enter upon new fields of pain. We must be prepared, as Mr. Tracy phrases it, to become " more than susceptible to beauty and pain." With every step forward we must be prepared to meet a bitterer consciousness of that margin between our hungers and their satisfaction, and of the like case in which sit all our friends, who will then be co-extensive with the whole world. There is no incumbence on us to go forward ; we may stay where we are, or even fly back ; but we shall have no doubt, when we have made our decision, which was the road of manhood. To which thought a sonnet by Mr. S. R. Lysaght, in his " Poems of the Unknown Way," seems not inapt :

It love should count you worthy, and should deign
One day to seek your door and be your guest,
Pause ! ere you draw the bolt and bid him rest,
If in your old content you would remain.

For not alone he enters : in his train
Are angels of the mist ; the lonely guest
Dreams of the unfulfilled and unpossessed
And sorrow, and life's immemorial pain.

He wakes desires you never may forget,
He shows you stars you never saw before,
He makes you share with him for evermore
The burden of the world's divine regret.
How wise were you to open not ! And yet
How poor if you should turn him from the door.—

CHAPTER XIII

THE JOYOUS OVERPLUS

I

WE HAVE been engaged for many pages with the literature of tears. Of the world's greatest literature it is probably, for reasons that we have seen, the largest part. And yet—and yet does that mean that life, could its essence be distilled, would be revealed as a phial of bitterness—salt with Mara's water? There have been many who have believed it so, and who, in lonely loyalty to this truth as they saw it, have cried their sorrowful news; and very lovely, sometimes, has been the song that lifted itself from their pain. It is the dominant song to-day. Hardy sang it. Housman sang it:

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
Are from eternity, and shall not fail;
Bear them we can, and if we can, we must,
So shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.

And these are the heroes of the young men to-day. Nearly all our younger writers who are

seriously taken sound the note of a complete pessimism. Many of them, acknowledging Mr. Aldous Huxley as their leader, tune down their song to a deathly laughter, as who should say, "All is a mockery; let us mock too." And though there may be some of us who cannot accept this skull-grin gospel, let us admit that it can produce a strong and significant literature; for literature is to be called good by you and me, not alone when its words fit happily with our sentiments, but wheresoever and whensoever its words are the true and comely utterance of the writer's real feelings; and for such a complete pessimism as is really and honestly felt by many to-day this cynical laughter is the perfect language.

But if despair is the truth for the majority of our singers to-day, it is no truth for me. Something instinctive and elemental rises up in me to resist and rebut such doctrines; and as I shall strive to show you, I believe that indignant force to be life itself—life rising to rebut a libel and proving itself, by the very instantaneousness of its demurrer, more good than bad. I can hearken to the whole argument for despair and admit its cogency, and yet—how do you answer this?—I *enjoy* the argument, I declare the talk to have been magnificent, I beg my opponent to continue it for it is too early to go to bed yet, I point out that he is as thrilled and delighted as

I am, I say that there is no pleasanter way of spending the night than this: "Let us on with the tale," I say, "for what a joy there is in cudgelling our brains for words and what a keen relish when we have shaped them well!" In short, the zest we have put into our argument for despair is the argument's conclusive denial: we became very much alive in our excitement, and lo! the sensation of being very much alive was a sensation strangely good. Yes, always life stands royally above reason, justifying itself by nothing more cogent than a proud thump on its own breast.

Let us look into this further: what I would say is that the essence of life is zest, and zest is good.

If I have attained to a creed which henceforward shall be indestructible for me, it is this: Life, in whatever forms and ebullitions you study it, is in its essence zest; and zest is always beautiful. Certainly there are forms of life from which the zest has almost gone, but they are rare when compared with the multitudinous forms in which it is active and rioting; and even in them there is a little of it left, still holding up. When it flickers out, life is no longer life, and death takes its own. But it *was* once in that prize of death, and while it was there, it was good.

So now let us finish this book with a few pages on the literature of zest in life. I had thought

to bring it to its climax in our examination of tragedy and our analysis of the ultimate pain of life. But that, perhaps, would be to leave an impression of pain on the throne, and such an impression would be no true picture of the present writer's philosophy. He believes with final conviction in the credit-balance of life—that life has far more on the credit-side of its account than on the debit-side—and he would like that his last notes should be echoes from the songs of those who have hymned, after seeing all and evading naught, the joy of living.

In all living things there is a boundless excess of life over the needs of living: that is the fundamental fact. And this ebullient excess, in trees and hedgerows, bursts into flower; in larks and nightingales into a cataract of song; in children into romping and shrieking and laughter, or into the most wonderful day-dreams and the vividest make-believe; in adolescent youths into ragging and rough-housing, or into towering ambitions and splendid egotisms; in men and women into hobbies, into enterprises, into voyagings, into research, into art, into sport, into dancing, into good works, into long, long talks, and into long, impossible dreams. And though in a few men it would seem to be totally perverted, and though in all of us it is occasionally misused, yet a thousand times more often than not it is bearing us on waves of happiness so

soothing and serene that we mark them no more than we mark the hours they fill, and thus in the last audit of our lives we credit them with immeasurably less than their due.

But the poets mark them and sing them ; and the novelists ; and the essayists. They know that there is another thing to sing besides love or loss or conflict or self-sacrifice or aggression, and that maybe it is a more fundamental thing than they all ; and it is what ? it is the hour when life is tingling at its highest in our veins, and sense of fitness and well-being rises till it is a lovely dryness in the throat, and for some exultant minutes we are not rational but wise. Yes, I believe we are in a mystical touch with wisdom when that dryness assaults our throat ! We are on horseback, let us say, and the head of the horse is turned for home, and he strains on the rein, and we yield him his mouth, he heads for the horizon, like a greyhound slipped ; our knees grip, our lungs tighten, our eyes sting, our ears whistle, and then, suddenly, our throat comes alight with a tingling, dry exhilaration. . . Or we are dancing. Perhaps the perfect type of all the forms into which this excess of life can flower is the dance ; it is the primitive expression ; it is the first conquest that rhythm and pattern made of this irrepressible uprush of life ; it is the mother of all the arts. And it carries us to the same wisdom.

Permit me to quote from a book of my own which has no point whatever unless it be the point I am making now ; I cannot escape from this quotation, much as I should prefer to do so, because when one has once sought and found the words that will hold one's meaning, one's brain will race for that familiar place and resist direction towards any other. In "Morris in the Dance" occurs this passage :

It was a long time before they advanced to dancing a *pas de deux* together, with the pianist, Miss Grant accompanying them. But when at last he found himself dancing with Pandora, and dancing, as he knew, with grace and deftness, the practice became a joy from which he would be loth to desist. He could not start the delight too soon, nor stop it too late. His hunger for it was almost like the desire for a drug. And indeed it seemed to give him the rest and the transports of an opiate. All care and apprehensions fell away from him, as he sailed into the dance ; the past was not, and the future was not ; he danced in a timeless region where all discords were harmonized in an exquisite silence, and all clashing colours blent into a perfect white ; his exultation in life was raised to such a power as was almost ecstasy, and his sense of well-being, and of optimism, and yes, of a transcendental wisdom that must glorify and worship the totality of things, was a physical delight that dwelt like a silver sparkle in his throat. That wisdom and happiness should hide, not in the mind, but in a physical thing—that lovely thirst in his throat ! He understood,

dimly, then, why the mystics danced. They danced that they might see the One, and, while their bodies moved tirelessly, might rest in the stillness of the Infinite.

Or here is a girl playing hockey, and she is not far from the same knowledge, but unlike the dancer in the preceding quotation and like the enormous majority of people, she is quite unconscious of it :

Daphne was early captured by the game, mind and body. She was nearly always in possession of the ball, and the repeated running had damped her forehead and shortened her breathing ; she felt the rises of her breast and a delightful dryness and thirst stabbing her low down in the throat. There was a breeze that would not have been perceptible but for the dampness on her brow, and when it touched that, it strangely heightened her pleasure. It carried fugitive thoughts of long drinks, the spray of the sea, or immersion in bath or lake. Once she had fallen heavily, and the smell of dried earth on her palma toned exactly with the thirst, the quick breathing, the sting of gathering blisters, and the coldness on her temples. Health and optimism had become sensuous things. And how was it that these sensations, though within her, were at one with remembered things without—with firelight on old wood, mellow evenings, birds and squirrels, and sentences in Hans Andersen : “ She flew away as if she were flying straight into the sun ” —with all that beauty that one day she would capture and put into books !

2

Yes, in these moments when we have given to the joyous overplus of life that is in us its vent in violent exercise; when our lungs are tight and our breathing short and quick; when fitness tingles its triumph in our throat, and health and optimism are sensuous things; when our limbs ache pleasantly and fatigue is an exquisite possession, then, as I have phrased it above, we are not rational but very wise. We are not rational because we are not thinking; we are past thinking; we just *know*. All your mystics have called their vision of the ultimate harmony *knowledge*, and they have told us how this knowledge is reached, never by the mind, but only by the spirit; and though I would not suggest that your sporting Englishman, who has just left his horse with the groom and is wiping his forehead with one hand, while with the other he thwacks his crop on his riding-boots, is consciously establishing a mystical communion with the One and the Eternal, or would even understand what such an alarming jargon meant—nay, God forbid such a suggestion—nevertheless, just as I have contended through many laborious pages that all laughter, and especially English laughter, has its farthest roots, unseen and unrecognized, in this mystical knowledge, so most assuredly I believe that these moments when

our superabundant life has effervesced in us with a silent cry : " I am Life and I am good ! " are moments of perfect wisdom, of right knowledge. All can touch them—the seer in his rapture, the prize-fighter at the end of the tenth round, the blacksmith when he lays down his hammer, and the child when the whistle blows and the match is lost or won. All are enjoying knowledge, but only by the first of these is the knowledge known.

Laughter. Let us back to laughter for a space, for it is the simplest, most universal blossom into which this joyous overplus can burst. And as we have heard a thousand times it is a vent discovered by man alone ; almost might we say he announced his promotion to be *True Man* and proclaimed that he was now a living soul, when first he began to laugh. What an argument for the optimists is here, that *Homo Sapiens* was the first to let loose a laugh ! Ah, yes, say you, but he was also the first to weep. Well, even if that be true, and I could gainsay it very effectively, yet I have you on the run ; for would you dare to maintain, though Life has truncheoned you more than most men, that you have wept more often than you have laughed ? You *would* ? No, no, sir ; go to, go to. You forget how often you have laughed.

There are famous moans in literature, like the " cry from within " in " Agamemnon " ; there

are famous shouts like—Nay, take my word for it, there are such things, though not one, at this important juncture, will approach my memory ; is there a most famous laugh, an isolated laugh, a thing of terror and a joy for ever ? What is this one that I hear echoing distantly, and demanding with growing insistence that it be honourably mentioned here ? It has a savour of Carlyle, and it protests that coming from that laughing, grim transcendentalist, it is the exact illustration of all that I would say. Ah, “Sartor Resartus,” my memory mutters ; surely it was none other than Professor Teufelsdröckh, who let loose that laugh. Aye, here we are :

Certainly a most involved, self-secluded, altogether enigmatic nature, this of Teufelsdröckh ! However, we gladly recall to mind that once we saw him *laugh* ; once only, perhaps it was the first and last time in his life ; but then such a peal of laughter, enough to have awakened the Seven Sleepers ! It was of Jean Paul’s doing. . . . The large-bodied Poet and the small, both large enough in soul, sat talking miscellaneously together, the present Editor being privileged to listen ; and now Paul, in his serious way, was giving one of those inimitable “Extra-harangles” ; gradually a light kindled in our Professor’s eyes and face, a beaming, mantling, loveliest light ; through those murky features, a radiant ever-young Apollo looked ; and he burst forth like the neighing of all Tattersalls—tears streaming down his cheeks, pipe

held aloft, foot clutched into the air—loud, long-continuing, uncontrollable; a laugh not of the face and diaphragm only, but of the whole man from head to heel. The present Editor, who laughed indeed, yet with measure, began to fear all was not right; however, Teufelsdröckh composed himself, and sank into his old stillness; on his inscrutable countenance there was, if anything, a slight look of shame; and Richter himself could not rouse him again. Readers who have any tincture of psychology know how much is to be inferred from this; and that no man who has once heartily and wholly laughed can be altogether irreclaimably bad. How much lies in Laughter; the cipher-key, wherewith we decipher the whole man! Some men wear an everlasting barren simper; in the smile of others lies a cold glitter as of ice; the fewest are able to laugh, what can be called laughing, but only sniff and snigger from the throat outwards; or at best, produce some whiffling, husky cachinnation, as if they were laughing through wool; of none such comes good. The man who cannot laugh is not only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; but his whole life is already a treason and a stratagem.

Yes, a treason to the truth of things, though, poor man, he may not know it. Herr Teufelsdröckh, we remember, did his best to see the dark and dirty underside of the world, and—under your correction—never man painted it with a blacker paint, but he laughed—yes, he unmistakably laughed—and in the end he set his

“Everlasting Yea” against the “Everlasting No.”

Look now upon this picture, and on this. It is night, and Teufelsdröckh, sitting in his high attic and overlooking the whole city of Weissnichtwo, is distinctly atrabiliar.

That stifled hum of Midnight, when Traffic has laid down to rest ; and the chariot wheels of Vanity . . . are bearing her to Halls roofed in . . . and only Vice and Misery, to prowl or to moan like night-birds, are abroad : that hum, I say, like the stertorous, unquiet slumber of sick Life, is heard in Heaven !

Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a Fermenting-vat lies simmering and hid ! the joyful and the sorrowful are there ; men are dying there, men are being born, men are praying—on the other side of a brick partition, men are cursing ; and around them all is the vast, void Night.

The proud Grandee still lingers in his perfumed saloons, or reposes within damask curtains ; Wretchedness cowers into truckle beds, or shivers hunger-stricken into its lair of straw ; in obscure cellars, *Rouge-et-Noir* languidly emits its voice-of-Destiny to haggard, hungry Villains while Councillors of State sit plotting and playing their high chess-game, whereof the pawns are Men. The Lover whispers his mistress that the coach is ready . . . the Thief, still more silently, sets-to his picklocks and crowbars, or lurks in wait till the watchmen first snore in their boxes.

Gay mansions, with supper-rooms and dancing-rooms are full of light and music and high-swelling hearts ; but, in the Condemned Cells, the pulse of Life beats tremulous and faint, and bloodshot eyes look out through the darkness, which is around and within, for the light of the stern last morning. Six men are to be hanged on the morrow : comes no hammering from the *Rabenstein* ?—their gallows must even now be a-building. Upwards of five hundred thousand two-legged animals without feathers lie around us, in horizontal position, their heads all in night-caps and full of the foolishlest dreams.

Riot cries aloud, and staggers and swaggers in his rank dens of shame ; and the Mother, with streaming hair, kneels over her pallid dying infant, whose cracked lips only her tears now moisten. All these heaped and huddled together, with nothing but a little carpentry and masonry between them—crammed in, like salted fish, in their barrel—or weltering, shall I say, like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed Vipers, each struggling to get his head above the others : such work goes on under that smoke-counterpane !

Well, well, well. But most fortunately, as we have seen, Humour, though only once apparently did it escape through his lips, trembled incessantly round the diaphragm of the Herr ; with this for its product :

“Often in my atrabiliar moods——” *Nein, nein, mein Herr !* not this time, by your leave, were you atrabiliar ! but proceed :

—when I read of pompous ceremonials, Frankfort Coronations, Royal Drawing-rooms, Levees, Couchees ; and how the ushers and macers and pursuivants are all in waiting ; how Duke this is presented by Archduke that, and Colonel A by General B, and innumerable Bishops, Admirals, and miscellaneous Functionaries, are advancing gallantly to the Anointed Presence ; and I strive in my remote privacy to form a clear picture of that solemnity—on a sudden, as by some enchanter's wand, the—shall I speak it ?—the Clothes fly off the whole dramatic Corps ; and Dukes, Grandees, Bishops, Generals, Anointed Presence itself, every mother's son of them, stand straddling there, not a shirt on them ; and I know not whether to laugh or weep. This physical or psychical infirmity, in which perhaps I am not singular, I have, after hesitation, thought right to publish, for the solace of those afflicted with the like.

Then Carlyle comments, and, as they say in the debating societies, he voices the opinions of us all : “ Would to Heaven, say we, thou hadst thought right to keep it secret ! Who is there now that can read the five columns of Presentations in his morning newspaper without a shudder ? ”

Certainly not I. Since reading that gorgeous passage, I, for one, have never been able to scan the lists of *Débutantes* in the *Morning Post*. . . . However, it were well if we hurried back to the point.

Teufelsdröckh. because he had this fine tilth of

laughter in him, could raise a vision and a faith there, till they flowered high above his atrabiliar plants. "To the eye of vulgar Logic," says he, "What is man? An omnivorous Biped that wears Breeches. To the eye of Pure Reason, what is he? A Soul, a Spirit, and Divine Apparition. Round his mysterious *Me*, there lies, under all those wool-rags, a Garment of Flesh, contextured in the Loom of Heaven; whereby he is revealed to his like, and dwells with them in *Union and Division*. . . ."

Deep hidden is he under that strange Garment; amid Sounds and Colours and Forms, as it were, swathed in, inextricably shrouded: yet is it sky-woven, and worthy of a God. Stands he not thereby in the centre of Immensities, in the conflux of Eternities? He feels; power has been given him to Know, to Believe; nay, does not the spirit of Love, free in its celestial primeval brightness, even here, though but for moments, look through? Well, said Saint Chrysostom, with his lips of gold, "the true *Shechinah* is Man; where else is *God's Presence* manifested, not to our eyes only, but to our hearts, as in our fellow-man?"

3

The mighty laugh of Herr Teufelsdröckh broke across our argument ; not to refute it, however, but to endorse it ; and the argument was this—that when the joyous overplus of life that surges in each of us is given its play in hard physical exertion, then the body cries to us in triumphant simplicity the truth, “ Life is good and matter for worship ”—that great, fundamental truth which our cloudy minds, “ sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,” have such a quick tendency to deny. It may be, I suggest, that a boy, going down hill on a bicycle, is in nearer touch with Reality than Hamlet was, when he lifted poor Yorick’s skull from its grave :

With lifted feet, hands still,
I am poised, and down the hill
Dart, with heedful mind ;
The air goes by in a wind.

Swifter and yet more swift
Till the heart, with a mighty lift,
Makes the lungs laugh, the throat cry :
“ O bird, see ; see, bird I fly.

Is this, is this your joy,
O bird, then I, though a boy,
For a golden moment share
Your feathery life in air ! ”

Say, heart, is there aught like this
In a world that is full of bliss ? . . .

Alas, that the longest hill
Must end in a vale ; but still,
Who climbs with toil, wheresoe'er,
Shall find wings waiting there.

. So sang Beeching ; and I know not if by his last couplet, " Who climbs with toil, wheresoe'er, Shall find wings waiting there," he meant all that I mean now ; but it is a good rule to believe that a poet meant by his words not a pennyworth less than you can read into them.

And for me, the wings that come to us when we rest after the glorious toil of climbing are mystical wings : we do not suspect this, of course, for there is but little subtlety in us, as we bend our backs to the mountain side and set the seal-skin beneath our *skis* biting into the snow ; and there are no spiritual thoughts in us, as we slide back and tumble and richly blaspheme ; and we do not suppose ourselves nearer to God, when, after hours and hours of mounting, we pause for breath and curse the skyline for coming no nearer ; and even when we are at the summit, and the glow is free to tingle in our veins, and the rest and the refreshing cold are like water in the desert, we only ask ourselves, " Why, in the name of wonder, do men climb ? " We opine

that it is for the sake of standing as high up as we can, or for the sake of the view, or for the sake of the air, or that we may boast hereafter : not for a moment does it break on us that all men, even the crudest and blindest, even your most muscle-bound, earth-bound athletes whose Gods are their Games, climb, in their blindness, for just the same reason as the Dervishes danced, and the Yogis practised their exercises, and the anchorites fasted, and the Athos Monks stared for days at their navels, that they might see "the true Apocalypse of Nature, and Heaven Unveiled."

Perhaps one of them is a poet and peers inward, rather than outward ; but he holds his peace, having no mind to be laughed to scorn. When he gets home he writes about it. There is a vast literature that speaks of these wings of wisdom and worship that can be found on a mountain's summit ; two passages will meet our needs here :

I got up the mountain edge (writes Maurice Hewlett in "Pan and the Young Shepherd"), and from the top saw the world stretched out—cornlands and forest, the river winding among meadow-flats, and right off, like a hem of the sky, the moving sea, with snatches of foam, and large ships moving forward outbound. *And then I thought no more, but my heart leapt to meet the wind, and I ran, and I ran.* I felt my legs under me, I

felt the wind buffet me, hit me on the cheek ; the sun shone, the bees swept past me singing ; and I too sang, shouted, World, World, I am coming !

And in "The Story of My Heart" Richard Jefferies attempts the impossible task, to find words for the song that the blood of the climber sings :

Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling ; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the time I had reached the summit *I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. . . .* I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up ; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty ; the air touched me and gave me something of itself.

I spoke to the sea ; though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean ; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory. . . . I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, for pure colour

is rest of heart. By all these I prayed ; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition. . . . I prayed that I might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity.

“ I had entirely forgotten the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself.” Oh, why is it that in moments like these, when one feels that one is oneself, one’s naked self, stript of all falsity and all the world’s assoilings, one knows nothing less than this—that one’s real and innermost self is good ? A murrain on all those penny-a-lining journalists, especially in America, who with their “ Words of Comfort for the Million ” have made the word “ Uplift ” an offence to all honourable men ! For here am I, deeply misdoubting lest you write me a purveyor of “ uplift,” when I am but trying to say, in the simplest and sincerest words I can find, something that I believe, I *know* to be profoundly true, profoundly significant. All the words that I would use seem to me to have been inflated and cheapened, till, like the marks and roubles which were worth something once, they are now waste-paper on the market.

But take them at the value they once had. Have you not often felt, I say, the truth of your essential goodness, and that your hard-set evil parts are an encrustation acquired from without and not grown from within ? Perhaps you have felt it on some rare day in early summer, when you have

been alone in a wood on a blue-bell carpet, and your eyes, wandering to the hedge-wall, have seen it white with may; all around you there has been a silence—a silence that strikes like a blow; and suddenly it ceases to be silence for the birds are singing, and you wonder how long that music has been there without your noticing it. You are right away from the world, and from such things as covetousness and jealousy and hatred; and, tell me honestly, can you then feel anything but good? Is it only a pleasant feeling, lent to you for a moment by Nature's peace? Is it only a sympathetic answer to the calm around? Perhaps: but I believe it to be more; I believe it to be a glimmering of the truth that the quietists know.

Dancing, riding, running, climbing, you still the mind from its doubts and questionings, and stir up the elemental life in you to say what it is. And always it speaks the same thing. Or the calm of nature may still the mind for you, and again the life in you speaks the same word. It speaks—I have chosen my language deliberately, and it is not too large—of ecstasy and worship. It speaks of your unity with everything, and that everything at its source is good.

4

“The days that make us happy make us wise.” On the flyleaf of my copy of John Masfield’s “Collected Poems,” Mr. Masfield has in his own hand written that sentence. I take it, then, that he thinks of this line, and selects it from all the ten thousand others he has shaped, as the line that best holds the quintessence of his philosophy. Whether that be so or not, it certainly expresses the substance of our last few talks together, you and I. Dancing, riding, running, climbing, talking, working—the days that make us happy make us wise. At the first blush it sounds a sentimental sentence, savouring a little of that dreaded “uplift.” But I dare to hope that now, after our long talk, you will see it as a sentence not facile, but profound. And let Mr. Masfield, whose sentence it is, be the one to strike home.

It closes his fine but unequal poem “Biography”:

Best trust the happy moments. What they gave
Makes man less fearful of the certain grave
And gives his work compassion and new eyes,
The days that make us happy make us wise.

In “Biography” he tells of the “golden instants” of his life which no biographer will

ever record, for those who write the story of dead men's lives deal with dates and facts, with superficial events easily got at, with obvious crises and causes, and with the final results that lie before all the world for its measuring; they do not know—they cannot know—often not even the hero of the biography himself can know—the hidden, uncapturable moments that really mattered, when in truth the seeds were sown and a sovereign part was played in making the final man. But it is given to a poet to know, or to suspect, which were the days on which the golden beam rested; and Mr. Masfield chants them in high rhapsody. The days that made him, he would have us believe, were days when, at the sight of Nature's handiwork or Man's, the glow of wonder and delight filled his mind, or when, after strenuous sport or hard endeavour, the glow of well-being and exultation tingled in his body. First of them, as we might expect from this poet, he places the days with ships:

The glittering day when all the waves wore flags.
And the ship Wanderer came with sails in rags . . .
The dawn when, with a brace-block's creaking cry,
Out of the mist a little barque slipped by . . .
The night alone near water when I heard
All the sea's spirit spoken by a bird;
The English dusk when I beheld once more

(With eyes so changed) the ship, the citted shore,
The lines of masts, the streets so cheerily trod
(In happier seasons), and gave thanks to God.

These are the moments that he unpacks from memory, and, after measuring their worth, declares them "such as no man's bounty could have bettered much."

Yet when I am dust my penman may not know
Those water trampling ships that made me glow
But think my wonder mad and fail to find
Their glory, even dimly, from my mind,
And yet they made me. Not alone the ships,
But men hard-palmed from tallying on to whips,
The two close friends of nearly twenty years,
Sea-followers both, sea-wrestlers and sea-peers,
Whose feet with mine wore many a bolthead bright,
Treading the decks beneath the riding light.

And after the days with the ships come what ?
What are some of the days richest in the creation
of all of us, whether we be poets or plain men ;
what are the hours that toss sparks into our
natures and ignite the fires that shall hereafter
drive our destinies ? Why, hours of happy
discourse with friends, in rooms that are fogging
with smoke, when we " tire the sun with talking
and send him down the sky " ; when midnight
comes and, finding the argument so loud and high,

withdraws from interruption and refuses to announce itself; when from the starting-point of our talk, which concerned, maybe, the store that mixed a good tobacco, or the fate of some old pipe that coloured and broke, we have advanced to the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God, or to Marcel Proust and his influence on the Literature of To-morrow, or to Jules de Gaultier and his Bovarism, or to Vaihinger and his "Die Philosophie des Als Ob."

Ah, these be creative hours, if any; and it is because I have believed so firmly that, next to moments of solitude when strange gleams of vision visit us, these hours of adventurous, ambitious, wild (perhaps), often mistaken, but always delighted talk, are hours when the semens fly and generous ingrafting is done, and hot-housing germination is at work, that I have striven to sound in this discourse of ours some echo of their friendly chorus. Hear what Mr. Masfield says:

So if the penman sums my London days,
Let him but say that there were holy ways,
Dull Bloomsbury streets of dull brick mansions old,
With stinking doors where women stood to scold,
And drunken waits at Christmas with their horn
Droning the news, in snow, that Christ was born; . . .
And that old room (above the noisy slum),
Where there was wine and fire and talk with some . . .

O Time, bring back those midnights and those friends,
Those glittering moments that a spirit lends,
That all may be imagined from the flash,
The cloud-hid god-game through the lightning gash,
Those hours of stricken sparks from which men took
Light to send out to men in song and book.
Those friends who heard St. Pancras bells strike two,
Yet stayed until the barber's cockerel crew,
Talking of noble styles, the Frenchman's best,
The thought beyond great poets not expressed,
The glory of mood where human frailty failed,
The forts of human light not yet assailed,
Till the dim room had mind, and seemed to brood,
Binding our wills to mental brotherhood,
Till we became a college, and each night
Was discipline and manhood and delight. . . .

And after the glowing hours of the mind, the
glowing message of the body. Days of swimming
and surf-riding, and that day of the cutters'
race :

The day they led my cutter at the turn
Yet could not keep the lead and dropped astern,
The moment in the spurt when both boats' oars
Dipped in each other's wash and throats grew hoarse
And teeth ground into teeth and both strokes quickened
Lashing the sea, and gasps came, and hearts sickened. . . .

And days of labour, heaving and hauling at
winch or capstan, when health gives us high

thoughts of life, for we stand on its peak and fill with "all a glad man's comments on life's story."

These are the moments to trust, he says ; these moments that are like bursting founts, sparkling our dusty hearts with living springs. Gates seem to open then, and we glimpse a white perfection. And if the biographer obscures them, or gives them less than their full value, as he often will, since they escape from memory and elude our audit, he tells a tale that is inadequate and impure.

We are all biographers, every time we survey the course of our own lives, and pronounce them good or ill.

5

So serious have we become with our "days that make us wise," and our "truth that the quietists know," and our "Apocalypse of Nature and Heaven Unveiled"! I have a sense—no pleasant one—that instead of the easy upholstering of fireside chairs from which you have been listening and (I hope) talking, the hard wood of ecclesiastical pews has formed itself beneath you, to your doubtful comfort ; and that I, instead of holding forth with my heels on the fender,

have discovered my feet on a pulpit bottom. But really, for some moments past, a disturbing thought, alarming in the cascade from the sublime to the ridiculous which it demands, has been most rebelliously stirring somewhere in my body, and rising and rising till shatter it must this fine mien of seriousness. And let me say at once that my following words are for adult and well-balanced minds alone ; none but strong men could read them without grave demoralization, and only very sensible children must be admitted here.

The so-disturbing thought is this : that this sense of physical well-being and irrational mental exhilaration, and strange spiritual exaltation, in which a vision of ultimate truth is glimpsed and the riddle of the universe read, can be induced not only by hard physical exercises, or by long systems of yoga, or by the prayer and fasting of an anchorite, but also, and much more quickly and cheaply, by beer. Or shall we say, by wine ; for with that noble word our fall seems less. And, believe me, the more I think of it, the more I fancy that I have just uttered no ribald jest, but a truth. There *is* somewhere along that road we tread, from Care and Depression to the Lethean waters of Intoxication and Oblivion, a serene and lovely stage whereat all doubt drops from us, all self-distrust is forgotten, and the cosmos like a kaleidoscope is one supreme harmony and one perfect pattern, and Time is

at an End, and Eternity is ours, and Love is King—at least, so men report to me, who have trodden that road. As one puts it, “You feel the god-bless-you in all your system, and the god-bless-you is indistinguishable from the god-bless-everybody.” Or another, to the dear lady who expressed her wonder that he should ever set forth on such a journey: “Oh, but Madam, it is the getting-there that is so wonderful.” I pray you, keep your heads, for there is a vertigo near, when firmly and frankly I state my belief that, poor and ignoble though the route may be, the drunkard on his darkening road *does* cross a shaft of light.

All this, by way of introduction to a few words on the magnificent Literature of Drinking, to which we English—let us bow our heads—have made quite the handsomest contribution. In eight lines Professor A. E. Housman says perfectly—he cannot do otherwise—exactly what I have striven to say above:

Why, if 'tis dancing you would be,
There's brisker pipes than Poetry.
Say, for what were hop-yards meant,
Or why was Burton built on Trent?

Oh, many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And 'malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's way to man.

Had he but stopped there, he would have sung my meaning for me, but four lines later, alas, he shows that really he holds an opposite view :

Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
For fellows whom it hurts to think :
Look into the pewter pot
To see the world as the world's not.

"As the world *is*," I dare whisper ; but to him, that which to me is the drunkard's light is the drunkard's darkness.

I cannot speak of all the drinking songs and junketing scenes of our language ; time would fail me to tell of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," and of John Still, the Bishop of Bath and Wells with his immortal "Back and side, go bare, go bare. Both foot and hand go cold ; but, belly, God send thee good ale enough, Whether it be new or old"—fie ! my lord—; and of Fielding and Smollett, and of Peacock and his "Prince Seithenyn," and of W. E. Henley's "The Spirit of Wine," and of Meredith's topmost chapter in "The Egoist," "A Great and Noble Wine," and his roystering squires in "Harry Richmond"; and of Chesterton, with his glorious "Song of Noah" : "It matters not where the water goes, So long as it doesn't get into the wine." It

were best that I select but one of these convivial songsters, and him, to my thinking, the noblest Roman of them all.

Surely, surely in a century's time there will loll on all shelves by the side of "The Compleat Angler" Hilaire Belloc's "The Four Men." Here prose is song; and here nonsense has a beauty seldom achieved by sense; and here those two divine gifts to men, Hog and Ale, have been triumphed as nowhere else. Take the pages "The Glory of the Crabtree Inn" and "The Drinking Song of Pelagius."

"You were saying" (says the Sailor to his three companions), "that a man could only sing to-day in certain lonely places, such as all down that trim hedgerow . . . and when Grizzlebeard here asked whether a man might sing outside the Crabtree, you said no. But I will make the experiment; and by way of compromise, so that no one may be shocked, my song shall be of a religious sort, dealing with the great truths. . . . This song that I am proposing to sing is of a good loud roaring sort, but none the less it deals with the ultimate things. . . . Now it cannot properly be sung unless the semi-chorus is sung loudly by all of you together, nor unless the chorus is bellowed by the lot of you for dear life's sake, until the windows rattle and the populace rise. Such is the nature of the song."

With this introduction the Sailor, sitting on the

benches outside the Crabtree Inn, and leaning back, began to sing :

Pelagius lived in Kardanoel
And taught a doctrine there,
How whether you went to Heaven or Hell,
It was your own affair.
How whether you found eternal joy
Or sank for ever to burn,
It had nothing to do with the Church, my boy,
But was your own concern.

(*Semi-chorus*) :

Oh, he didn't believe
In Adam and Eve,
He put no faith therein !
His doubts began
With the fall of man,
And he laughed at original sin.

All of which is perfectly true ecclesiastical history, and an excellent *précis* of a famous theological dispute. Follows a second delightful verse telling how St. Germanus of Auxerre overthrew the heretic, and then comes the uproarious *finale* :

Now the Faith is old and the Devil is bold,
Exceedingly bold, indeed ;
And the masses of doubt that are floating about
Would smother a mortal creed.

But we that sit in a sturdy youth,
And still can drink strong ale,
Oh—let us put it away to infallible truth,
Which always shall prevail !
And thank the Lord
For the temporal sword,
And howling heretics, too ;
And whatever good things
Our Christendom brings,
But especially barley brew !

Said I not that he was the noblest Roman of them all ?

Or take the chapter, “ A Fugue on the Inns of the World.”

Is there not the Bridge Inn of Amberley, and the White Hart of Storrington, the Spread Eagle of Midhurst, that oldest and most revered of all the prime inns of this world, and the White Hart of Steyning and the White Horse of Storrington and the Swan of Petworth, all of which it may be our business to see ?

They were mortal inns, human inns, full of a common and a reasonable good ; but round the inn at Bramber, my companions, there hangs a very different air. Memory bathes it and the drift of time, and the perpetual obsession of youth. So let us leave it there. I will put up the picture of an early love ; I will hear with mixed sorrow and delight the songs that filled my childhood ; but I will not deliberately view that which by a process of sanctification has come to be hardly of this

world. I will not go sleep in the inn at Bramber—the gods forbid me.

Nay, apart from all of this which you three perhaps (and especially the Poet) are not of a stuff to comprehend, apart from these rare and mysterious considerations, I say, there is an evident and an easy reason for not stirring the leaves of memory. Who knows that we should find it the same? Who knows that the same voices would be heard in that garden, or that the green paint on the tables would still be dusty, blistered and old? That the chairs would still be rickety, and that cucumber would still be the principal ornament of the feast. . . . I will not play with passions that are too strong for men; I will not go sleep to-night at the inn of Bramber. . . . Is not the world full of other inns wherein a man can sleep deeply and wake as it were into a new world? Has not Heaven set for us, like stars in the sky, these points of isolation and repose all up and down the fields of Christendom? . . . there are inns coquettish, inns brutal, inns obvious, inns kindly, and inns strong—each is for a mood. But as in every life there is one emotion which may not be touched and to which the common day is not sufficient, so with inns. For me one is thus sacred, which is that inn at Bramber. Thither, therefore, as I think I have said before, I will not go.

And then, in the pages headed “The Swipes They Take in the Washington Inn is the Very Best Beer I Know,” he says for me that which Professor Housman declined to say: as thus—

The Poet. "For what, then, is the inn of Washington famous?"

The Sailor. "Not for a song, but for the breeder of songs. You shall soon learn."

And when he had said that we all went in together, and, in the inn of Washington, we put it to the test whether what so many men had sung of that ale were true or no. But hardly had the Sailor put his tankard down, when he cried out in a loud voice:

"It is true, and I believe!"

Then he went on further: "Without any doubt whatsoever this nectar was brewed in the waxing of the moon, and of that barley which Brutus brought hither in the first founding of this land! And the water wherein that barley-corn was brewed was May Day dew, the dew upon the grass before sunrise of a May Day morning. For it has all the seven qualities of ale, which are:—

Aleph=Clarity,
 Beth=Savour,
 Gimel=A lively hue,
 Daleth=Lightness,
 He=Profundity,
 Vau=Strength retained,

and lastly, Zayin, which is Perfection and The End.

"It was seeking this ale, I think, that Alexander fought his way to Indus, but perished miserably of the colic in the flower of his age because he did not find it. Seeking this ale, I think it was, that moved Charlemagne to ride both North and South, and East and West, all his life

long. . . . And yet he would not abandon the quest for Michell's Ale which they sell at Washington ; but he could not find it, and so died at last of chagrin. . . .

" Shall I make mention of Gastos and of Clemens ? Of Artaxerxes, of Paulos or Ramon, who all expected and desired this thing in vain ? Or recall Praxiteles or Zeno his cousin, Periscopolos the Pirate, Basil of Cyrene, or Milo. They all wasted themselves upon that same endeavour. But to me who am nobler than them all, it has been granted to drink it, and now I know that it resolves all doubts, and I shall go to my great death smiling. It is the satisfaction of all yearnings, and the true end of all philosophies. Of the Epicurean, for it is a final happiness. Of the Stoic, for it leaves me indifferent to every earthly thing. Of the Hegelian, for it is *It*."

6

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The overplus of life that surges in us all—this ebullient excess of life over the needs of living—is, nine-and-ninety times out of a hundred, a joyous thing, be we conscious of its joy or not ; and literature not only adds to this excess a brim-charging measure, but also refines and rarefies and spiritualizes the whole content,

lifting it from life in the third or thirtieth degree to life in the first degree ; and since in this exalting process it gives to it a consciousness of itself, it puts us into real possession of our own inherent happiness, and establishes, or should establish (if my thinking run aright), our serene and grateful confidence in the overwhelming credit-balance that will be revealed when the hour comes to prove our estate and audit the long account. It gives direction to this excess, and trues its road ; sending it to the four great worthwhile marts, the four places where the trade is in delight ; and they are Making, Giving, Intimacy, and Romance.

All the philosophers of all the ages have disputed as to what is the *summum bonum* of life—Socrates and Aristotle and Plato and Aristippus of Cyrene, Zeno and Epicurus and Christ—whether it be Goodness or Wisdom or Self-sufficiency or Self-surrender or Pleasure or Experience—and the dispute is still unsettled. I soar not into their high altitudes. On the ground-level of concrete thought and practical aims it seems to me that these four words—Making, Giving, Intimacy, and Romance—enclose much, and possibly all, of the best of life.

That we are happy when we are making something—that we are very near to complete bliss when we are in the throes of creation—is shown to us by a baby making a mud-pie in the garden, a

schoolboy bowed over his fretwork tools, or Gibbon writing the last words of his "History." But not until the great spirits of the world, through the world's literature, have trued our values and purged our creation of selfish ends, so that we build more for the sake of the thing itself than for applause and profit, do we enter upon the innermost happiness of creation, whose name is less bliss than blessedness. If praise and pay be given us, well and good ; let us enjoy them, for we are human, and it would be windy nonsense to deny that these are delightful gifts ; but if they be withheld from us, well and good, too ; then shall we say, as Kipling in "The Proconsuls" :

For so the Ark be borne to Zion, who

Heeds how they perished or were paid that bore it ?

For so the Shrine abide, what blame, what pride,

If we, the priests were crowned or bound before it ?

or as Shaw in his Epistle Dedicatory to "Man and Superman" : "This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one ; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap-heap ; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy" ; or even as the Cobbler

in "Chu Chin Chow," who sang one lovely word over his last :

The better I work, the less I earn,
For the soles won't crack, nor the uppers turn,
The better my work, the less my pay,
But work can only be done one way.

And Giving. At the risk of standing on the pulpit stairs again I must proclaim my certainty that we are never quite so happy as when we are giving something to somebody. I like much the story of the London beggar, to whom an old lady approached and handed a penny, with the charming words: "I won't give you this, my good man, because I think you deserve it; I don't give it to you because I think it will do you any good; I just give it to you because it makes me very happy to give it to you." And the beggar replied, "Oh, make it a tanner, mum, and thoroughly enjoy yourself." A fine sermon preached the beggar then, notwithstanding he preached it—as, alas! other sermons have been preached—for a good fee, for he told us that if only we would produce to the utmost, so that it fills our lives, the happiness that comes when we give a little present to somebody, we should indeed enjoy ourselves thoroughly from the cradle to the grave! How far his doctrine carries us I will not point to now; I rise not above the

lowest of the pulpit stairs ; Another has mounted them for you. But that the final product of our commerce with the lofty minds of the world is that we are moulded into true humanists who "think nothing that is human alien to ourselves," and therefore cannot but give of our best to a needy brotherhood, and have now—thanks to our teachers—a capital of good matter to give—this is the residuum of these chapters, and if it be not clear they have been in vain.

The third word was Intimacy. I suppose we are all agreed on this : that we have missed life and must always remain hungry and unsatisfied, if we have failed to achieve a perfect intimacy with one or two human beings. And can it be held that Literature will play a part in helping us towards such intimacies ? I believe it ; for the indisputable truth is that we are shackled from achieving intimacy while two dead weights still depend from our limbs ; which weights are self-centredness and unimaginative intolerance. The reasons are daylight-clear. Self-centred, we cannot listen to other people's troubles ; unimaginative, we cannot put ourselves in their places nor really suffer with them ; intolerant, we cannot love them, for they irk us, and there is no route to an enduring love except through forgiveness and acceptance ; and so we miss contact, and are alone and drifting and miserable. Literature releases us from self-centredness, fills

us with imagination, and lifts us at the last to an infinite tolerancelike the tolerance of a Shakespeare or a Goethe.

And Romance. On this we have said our say. We have said that we miss the fulness of life unless we develop a power to respond like a harp to every breeze of thought that blows, and grows eyes that can catch the romance, the *interestingness* of every single thing in the world ; and that we can only get this power and these eyes by reading and understanding the great writers of the world whose vision has pierced, not alone through the things that are manifestly lovely, but through the tiniest and ugliest things to the beautiful significance and 'Ulimitable implications that lie behind.

Of all this the writing of this book has been to me a small illustration ; very small, of course, but *ex pede Herculem*. I know there has been considerable happiness in making it, a happiness perhaps all the more pungent and titillating because of that vision which must always trouble and exasperate us, you and me, when we have set our brush to a canvas—that haunting vision of a much larger pattern than any we are compassing. I know that, though to the more learned of you I can have had little to give except the fellowship of enthusiasm, it has been very pleasant to give that ; while, if the younger of you have received from my small store anything that was

not yours before, why, there is delight indeed ; I feel that between us, though unseen to one another, we have established something not unlike an intimacy ; and I believe that we have savoured together just a little of the wonderful romance, the zest, the glory and the interestingness of all life. I, for one, have enjoyed it all immensely, and I have a fancy that you, who are reading these words, have enjoyed it too. for you have endured to the end.

