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POINTS OF VIEW

By STUART P. SHERMAN

POINTS OF VIEW

THE GENIUS OF AMERICA
Studies in Behalf of the Young Generation

AMERICANS

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

POINTS OF VIEW

BY

STUART P. SHERMAN

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PREFACE

Our reason, according to certain of the cynical philosophers, is given to us less to direct our conduct than to enable us to justify it when it appears to be lacking in direction. When I ask myself how I can justify the variety of moods in this book and the mixture of pieces as elaborate as I cared to make them with skits and notes of obviously challengeable value, my reason points promptly to the conditions under which most writing of this sort is at present produced.

Our literary criticism is like the dove which emerged from the ark and, presently, with the olive leaf in her beak, returned to the ark, having found outside it no place to abide. The ark may here be taken as a symbol for a professorial chair or a desk in a publishing house or in an advertising agency or in some organization for the production of "valuable commodities." Criticism is tolerated in many quarters, encouraged in a few, but paid a "living wage" in none. Many professors, journalists, and the like practise it as an avocation or as a recreation. Nobody, almost nobody, follows it as a profession.

Having, like others of the fraternity of amateurs, taken it upon myself to think aloud, here and there, as opportunity offered, about men and books and ideas, I seem to discover a certain general tendency

and loose concatenation among these scattered discourses, which perhaps I overemphasize in speaking of it at all. But I seem to discover also that I have a little audience which is willing to listen, with the single proviso that it shall be informed where the speaking is going on. It appears therefore almost a duty of courtesy towards that part of the public for which one feels a particular kindness, to collect one's self from time to time into an accessible form.

The first essay is here published for the first time. For the rest, I owe acknowledgments as follows: to *McNaught's Magazine* for "Forty and Upwards," "On Falling in Hate," and "On Falling in Love"; to the *Atlantic Monthly* for "Unprintable"; to Charles Scribner's Sons for the two pieces from the introduction to Brownell's *American Prose Masters*, "For the Higher Study of American Literature" and "W. C. Brownell"; to the *Bookman* for "American Style" and "The Disraelian Irony"; to the New York *Times* for "The Apology for Essayists of the Press" and "Brander Matthews and the Mohawks"; to Harcourt, Brace and Co. for "The Significance of Sinclair Lewis"; to the *Literary Review* for "Where There Are No Rotarians," "Mr. Tarkington on the Midland Personality," and "A Note on Gertrude Stein"; to the New York *Tribune* for "Oscar S. Straus"; to the New York *Evening Post* for "Samuel Butler"; and to Boni and Liveright for the "George Sand and Gustave Flaubert," from Mrs. Mackenzie's translation of the Sand-Flaubert correspondence.

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I

TOWARDS AN AMERICAN TYPE

I

TOWARDS AN AMERICAN TYPE

When I was in college, I used to poke around in the library a good deal looking for books which would take me out of the shallow water of college life into the deep channel of experience, into the serious life of the world. And naturally enough the works of Tolstoy came into my hands. Now one knows what a typical Tolstoy novel is. The hero is a young man of rank and wealth and social position. He is at the outset a gay pleasure-loving fellow who enters heartily into the occupations and recreations and dissipations of his class. But somewhere midway in his career, while he is returning from a dance or from a fox-hunt, or perhaps while he is stationed at some lonely army post in the mountains, at midnight under the wintry stars, a great coolness and stillness invade his mind; and in the midst of the stillness he hears a voice which seems to come out of the depths of his own heart, crying: "Young man, what are you about in the universe?"—And then, for the first time in his life, he begins to think. His thinking troubles him. He begins to be worried about the reason and justification for his own existence. He begins to question the use of his wealth and his

strength and his talent. His world begins to come tumbling about his ears. He plunges into philosophy; and he comes up gasping; and he asks himself whether life is worth living, and, if so, for what purpose.

Under the influence of Tolstoy and such writers, I used while still in college to go about among my class-mates and puzzle them somewhat and amuse them a good deal by asking them whether life was worth living. The question had never occurred to them. When I presented it, they mostly replied that they took it for granted that it was. And there they dropped the matter. They didn't care to discuss it. Well, I myself have long since dropped that question, too. I take it for granted that life is worth living, because practically every one acts upon the assumption that it is. But the settlement of that question gave birth to another question which I have been putting to my friends and acquaintances ever since. It, too, is a kind of Tolstoyan question. That is to say, it probes inquisitively into the foundation and underpinning of our daily conduct. It is this: "Assuming that life is worth living, what are its durable satisfactions?"

I think that is a useful question and quite in line with our modern ideas of efficiency. Before you can make any sort of intelligent working plan for your life, you must answer it. If you don't face it and answer it, you soon discover that you are not living economically. You find that you are wasting your

energies on objects which make no adequate returns. You find that a bare twenty-five per cent of your activities are yielding you durable satisfactions, while seventy-five per cent of them are yielding only fatigue and regret. Or you find that you are mainly occupied with things which divert and amuse you today, but don't last. Tomorrow they are gone; there is nothing there; you aren't accumulating anything. You aren't growing richer with the years, as you feel that you ought to grow, but are as poor as ever. But if you know clearly what the durable satisfactions of your life are, you know how to revise your business and your pleasure. You know what to keep and what to cut away. You have something definite to aim at. Your activities take a common direction. You feel all your powers, like a well-trained team, pulling together towards a known destination, pulling you home, home to the object of your heart's inmost desire. And so I think that, for both young people and old people, one of the most profitable questions is this: "What are the durable satisfactions of life?"

I used not to get much response to that question either. People used not to be very curious about it. They took it for granted that life has some durable satisfactions; but they hadn't considered the subject; and they thought me rather queer to pry into anything so intimate and so unexplored. Since the late war, however, there has been a great change in that respect. Nowadays, everyone is asking my question. The great war and its consequences have

introduced into thousands of minds hitherto untroubled by such thoughts profound doubts regarding the tendencies and the quality and the satisfactions of our modern civilization—pointed questions regarding the amount of happiness that modern civilization pays to the private life. Skepticism, cynicism, and satire are the prevailing moods of contemporary enquiry. Here in America, since the war, our current literature has been filled with a kind of Tolstoyan unrest of which the most obvious symptom is a series of derisive pictures of objects to which we used formerly to "point with pride"; derisive pictures of our politicians; derisive pictures of the church; derisive pictures of the universities; derisive pictures of our great bulwark, the middle class; derisive pictures of the American business man; derisive pictures of the average American man and the average American woman.

I firmly believe that this satirical and soul-searching mood through which the country is passing at present is tremendously good for it, is going to be a step towards its "salvation"; but its effects, like those of certain powerful medicines, are rather distressing while they last. Not long ago I spent several hours talking with three interesting men of wide experience and great energy of mind—an editor, a politician, and a man connected with one of our great educational foundations. They were all avowedly out hunting, hunting from New York to San Francisco. There were brains and money

and power behind them; and they were hunting for adequate objects on which to expend them. They had not been very successful, nor much cheered by their contact with our fellow countrymen. They came back from their explorations of the democracy with such an account of the political and social and moral corruption and disintegration rampant in our great cities and in our small country towns, that I myself returned to the relative peace and order and sobriety of my own university community full of a kind of private and selfish thanksgiving that I lived there and not somewhere else. I came back full of a very genuine gratitude that my community consisted mainly of several thousand young men and women united in an inspiring enterprise, united in the quest of wisdom, and truth, and beauty. It seemed to me, for the moment, that, comparatively speaking, a university community had an interesting and adequate object for living.

"In the outside world," I said to myself, "there seem to be, if one may trust the reports, scattered individuals of energy and virtue and upward purpose; but the general force of society is against them; the general pull of society is down, not up. They can maintain their energy and virtue only by constantly resisting the social pressure towards slackness and vice and inefficiency. But here in the university community," I said, "the conditions are reversed. As individuals, many of us, perhaps most of us, have our weak moods and our slack and inefficient moods and our downward tendencies; but

the force of our society is against the weak and inefficient moods; the total pressure of our community makes powerfully for energy, virtue, and upward purpose. In the outside world," I said, "one rises alone; one sinks with the community. In the university world one who sinks, sinks alone; one who rises, rises with the community."

I tried to communicate my gratitude and enthusiasm about this idea to one of my more thoughtful colleagues. I regret to say that he did not catch fire. He did not feel my enthusiasm about the superiority of the university community. He met me with profound doubts and skepticism. He said, "No; you talk as if the University, as distinguished from your three men out hunting, had actually found an object. I doubt it. I should like to ask you," he said, "if you know what we are here for. Do you really know what we wish to teach our students? Do you know what kind of men and women are being formed by the pressure of this community? If we have an adequate educational mold, where is the educational product of the mold? What is the distinctive type of American character formed by the educational machinery of this generation? Is it a type that you are proud of? Has the type any marks by which it can be distinguished from the crowd who have not been subjected to the mold? Can you tell a college man from a man who hasn't been to college? We aren't getting anywhere with our education,

because we don't know where we want to go. We don't know what we want.

"Just contrast," he continued, "the situation in the older English universities. Consider, for example, the Oxford don early in the nineteenth century. He knew what he was there for. He had in his mind's eye a perfectly definite type of English character. He knew that it was his business to produce a Christian, a scholar, and a gentleman. He had a perfectly clear notion of how this task was to be accomplished. He knew that all he had to do was to apply to the boy in his charge three great pressures: the pressure of the English church; the pressure of classical culture; and the pressure of a society of gentlemen. When John Henry Newman became a Roman Catholic and wrote his beautiful treatise on the education of Catholics, he employed, with one change, the same mold: he applied the pressure of classical culture, the pressure of a society of gentlemen, and the pressure of the Roman Catholic Church. The product, however dull he might be, was of a recognizably fine type: a Christian, a scholar, and a gentleman. No finished product has been made in modern times without the use of these three molds; and we Americans have discarded them one by one, most completely in the west, and in the typical educational institutions of the west, the State Universities.

"In the older institutions of America we tried to imitate and repeat the English process; and so long as we preserved some parts of the English mold

we had some success. America has seen the development of two great types of character: the New England Puritan and the southern Cavalier, the gentleman of the Old South. These two types were produced mainly under two great formative forces: the formative force of religion and the formative force of an aristocratic society. The idea of God was the dominant molding force in the one case; the idea of the honor of a gentleman was the dominant molding force in the other. While the New England Puritan and the Southern Cavalier remained in the mind's eye of our educators they knew their object. But these two great types are gone. When John Quincy Adams was beaten at the polls by Andrew Jackson, the doom of the Puritan was sounded. When Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, the doom of the Cavalier was sounded. The triumph of the western rabble began. (My friend knows that I belong to the western rabble by birth and residence; but he has lived so long among us that he has acquired our western habit of calling a spade a spade.)

"Today," he continued, "we have no models and no molds for creating an American type. We have discarded classical culture, and are teaching salesmanship in its place. That mold is broken. We don't dare apply Christian discipline; we are educating Jews, Hindus, Japanese, Buddhists, Confucians, and thousands of scientific free-thinkers. We don't dare to apply the Christian mold. We

don't accept the code of the society of gentlemen. We don't know what it is. We haven't the means to keep it up; we work with our hands; we pay our way; we struggle for existence; men and women together in a hard fight, where courtesy and chivalry are impediments to survival, and the behavior of a lady is regarded as an affectation and the honor of a gentleman as an old-fashioned piece of snobbishness. We have broken the old molds. We have found no effective new ones; and the only truly typical products of our educational chaos are the flapper, the roughneck, the materialist and the ignoramus."

I thought that my colleague was painting our scene pretty black; but from one end of the country to the other you hear nowadays very much the same story, namely, that our democracy is not justifying itself, that the molds which make character are broken or out of commission, that our society is beginning to show signs of essential disintegration in lawlessness, immorality, and anarchy. One doesn't need to dwell on the symptoms. I will remind you of a recent editorial in a western metropolitan paper, apparently written for the purpose of encouraging every man to do as he pleases about obeying a constitutional law of the United States. I will remind you of an article in an eastern metropolitan paper, professing to present the present state of sexual morality, and apparently written for the purpose of urging every man to do as he pleases in this field. In a certain university community of my

acquaintance, when a young man met tragic disaster in resisting arrest for a violation of elementary law, instantly an attempt was made to mobilize sentiment against the officer of the law. In every one of these cases the spirit exhibited was essentially anarchical. I will remind you finally of the general picture of American society, today presented by scores of our realistic novelists, stationed at various points of observation between the two seas; and you will recall readily enough the basis for the common charge that our national culture is not producing an admirable, or even a defensible, national type.

What the nation needs, to pull it together, many critics tell us, is a rewakening of the religious sense. Religion, they say, is the only power that can stop the movement of disintegration and initiate a movement of integration. During the administration of President Harding there began, as every one knows, a counter-revolution in politics, in morals, in religion. Hitherto, I don't think that counter-revolution has been very well managed. It has been allowed to take the form of an obscurantist reaction. The attempt to tighten up has been too much left in the hands of stony-eyed standpatters in politics and the small prehistoric element among the clergy. The recent labors, for example, of William Jennings Bryan in this field, have been those of a prehistoric clergyman. Mr. Bryan honestly sees the need of a strong binder for a nation that is falling to pieces. He honestly believes that religion is the necessary binder. He wants to put religion on its feet. How

does he propose to do it? By calling for the legislative suppression of the most fruitful scientific theory of modern times; and the answer to that call takes the shape of mass-meetings of 60,000 benighted Bible students passing resolutions against the doctrine of evolution. Whoever in this country attempts to mold character by suppressing knowledge, or by clamping a lid on the honest discussion of knowledge and opinions, destroys the molds of character. A church, or a university, if there is any such, which attempts to suppress truth by a majority vote is not molding characters but nursing hypocrites and imbeciles. A religious movement of that sort multiplies the evils which it is intended to cure. It does nothing towards national integration. On the contrary it makes a new division in the nation with the prehistoric minds on one side, and the rest of mankind on the other.

Mr. Bryan is right: we need religion. But Mr. Bryan is wrong: we don't need his brand of religion. The objection to his brand of religion as a binder of our characters is simply this: we don't believe in it. That objection is final. There is no use in trying to bind us with what doesn't hold us. What is religion? Religion is that which binds us and holds us. Religion is that which at heart we do earnestly believe in, whatever it is.

You can't appeal to people effectively, except by reference to what they actually believe in. That is an elementary principle of religious tactics which any book agent could explain to Mr. Bryan. The

book agent comes to the door with a book which he intends to sell to the busy housewife for ten dollars. The busy housewife opens the door three inches and peers suspiciously through the crevice. Does the book agent say: "Good morning! Would you like to buy a book this morning?" Not at all. He knows perfectly well that the busy housewife doesn't believe in books. He keeps his book behind his back, and lifts his hat, and says: "Good Morning! Are there any children in the house?" He knows that the busy housewife believes in children. The door opens another three inches. Through the widening aperture, he asks her whether she is interested in her children, and whether she would deny them anything essential to their welfare. In two minutes he is sitting in the parlor, explaining that for ten dollars she can provide her child with the sum and substance of a university education.

The book agent may be a humbug; but his method is psychologically sound. Mr. Bryan may not be a humbug; but his method is psychologically unsound. The first step towards the awakening and development of a religious sense that will bind up and give unity of purpose to a generation which seems all at loose ends is like the first step of the book agent: it is an appeal to what this generation believes in. The effective first step for the religious leader is not to revive and vamp up the discredited basis of an old religion. Neither, on the other hand, is it to invent and attempt to promulgate a new religion. The important, the effective, thing to do,

is to discover, to uncover, the existing religion, and bring it to the surface and magnify it, recognizing it as the available binding and unifying power of the present generation. By discovering the existing religion, I mean discovering those principles and those objects which men work for, and spend their money for, and appear to find solid and permanent satisfaction in. Whatever these principles and objects may be, these are the molds upon which we must principally rely to shape our national type.

When I attempt to formulate reasons for national gratitude, I say to myself: "Come, let us consider what people actually believe in. Let us be concrete and realistic. Let us not be afraid to begin small, nor to speak of apparently ignoble things, provided only that these things are believed in by the great mass of our people, and therefore serve to bind them together in a unity of desire. What are our people today cheerfully spending their money for?" That is a good opening question; for the spending of money is a primary and tangible act of faith.

Well, all our people live in houses of one sort or another; and the cost of living in houses has risen tremendously since the time of the old oaken bucket, the Franklin stove, and the Saturday night tub. I asked an architect what part of the additional cost of living in houses was due to modern plumbing. He replied: "20%." I ask you: What is the significance of plumbing with reference to religion? Why, it is a great common bond of our civilization. It signifies that every civilized man,

woman and child in the United States believes in being clean, and in what is compatible with that, and disbelieves in being dirty, and in what conduces to being dirty. It is a little point, but it is something that we agree on. The whole pressure of the American community is towards being physically clean. It is a mark of the national type that we intend to produce. A man who is dirty is dirty alone: a man who is clean is clean with the community. It is a little point, perhaps, but I notice that Mr. Kipling, in his latest book, declares that he has not met one man who wore the Victoria Cross "who had not strict notions about washing and shaving and keeping himself decent on his way through the civilized world, whatever he may have done outside it." "Somehow," he adds, "the clean and considerate man mostly seems to take hold of circumstances at the right end." Well, there is something definite that we all believe in; and are thankful for.

I turned in another direction. I inspected the cost of doctor and dentist in the family budget. I noticed the movement of medical inspection and corrective gymnastics in the schools. I observed the wide advertising of institutions to insure health, to prevent middle-aged men and women from getting fat, to restore old men to their youth, and to enable people to live for a hundred years. I asked what the benevolent millionaires were expending their millions for; and I found that they were pouring their millions into research for the extinction

of pestilence, for the wiping out of hook-worm, and yellow fever, and tuberculosis, and cancer, and all forms of communicable disease. And it appeared to me obvious that the American people believe in health and youth, and are anxious and happy to invest heavily in them; and that they disbelieve in whatever is incompatible with health and the preservation of youth. There is another definite point for belief and religious gratitude.

I asked what was the most significant and far-reaching enterprise upon which the states of the Union had expended large sums of money during the last thirty years. Obviously, I said, upon the public schools and the state universities, the most inspiring and hopeful phenomenon in America in our time. I don't need to dwell at all upon this. You all know what it means. It means that the American people believe in becoming intelligent just as fast as they can, and that they disbelieve in whatever is incompatible with that. And we may add, that somehow the intelligent man mostly seems to take hold of circumstances at the right end.

I turned in another direction. I asked what large new expenditure the business men have been going in for, from one end of the country to the other. The reply was: They are going in heavily for advertising, for publicity. They believe in publicity. Every enterprising business man wishes to be known to as many as possible of his hundred million countrymen. He wishes his product to be under the national limelight. He wishes as a business man

and a producer to be able to stand the critical scrutiny of a hundred-million pairs of eyes. He believes in everything that is compatible with that, and eventually he is going to believe in nothing that is incompatible with that. The pressure of a hundred million pairs of critical eyes is a tremendous molding pressure. The entire pressure of the American community is towards preparing a man to stand inspection, and whatever is compatible with that. Somehow, we may say, the man who is ready to stand inspection mostly seems to take hold of circumstances at the right end. The ethical implications of being able to stand inspection are immense.

While I was looking for national characteristics, indicated by what our people spend their money for, I was reminded that there are fifteen million automobiles in the United States, and that all the enterprising states are building millions of dollars' worth of roads to run them on; and that at least every tenth man, woman and child in the United States drives an automobile. Then I said to myself, the people of the United States believe in automobiles and what is compatible with them, and they disbelieve in what is incompatible with automobiles. They believe in, they rejoice in, swift mobility. They believe in being private engineers. Their delight is in driving a forty- or seventy-horse-power machine from place to place at a speed of from twenty to sixty miles an hour; and they believe in whatever is compatible with that. The ethical implications

of being a private engineer are immense; but we have hardly begun to recognize what they are.

For example: those who protest against the enforcement of prohibition declare that drinking is a matter of private morals within the field of personal liberty; and they assert that opposition to drinking rests upon Puritan principles which they do not accept—which have never been a part of their beliefs. Very well. Let us drop "Puritanism," whatever its injunctions may be in this connection. Let us merely ask the liquor champions whether they believe in automobiles and in automobiling. Let us ask them whether they know that we killed some twenty thousand of our fellow-citizens last year in automobile accidents, a considerable number of them due to drunken drivers.

The indicated approach for the reformer is to show the essential incompatibility of either licensed saloons or bootlegging joints with an automobiling civilization. If we really believe in crowding the roads of the country with private engineers running private cars at twenty to sixty miles an hour, the whole question of drinking ceases to be a question of personal liberty. To protect our lives, we shall be obliged to prevent our ten million private engineers from getting drunk. We have got to make the same exaction of private engineers that we long ago made of public engineers.

I will present one more characteristic of our national type. I drove last summer five hundred miles through Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, and I

noticed with a good deal of pleasure the amount of money that little country towns everywhere are putting into golf links and country clubs. Occasionally, also, I look at the sporting pages of the newspapers and read of the enormous expenditure that the American people are putting into baseball. Then I walk out and look at our crowded tennis courts, and at our athletic field, and at our two million dollar stadium; and I think of the great stadiums that have been erected in the last ten or fifteen years all the way across the country from the Yale Bowl to Leland Stanford University. I don't think of any more significant architectural phenomenon since the cathedral building of the Middle Ages. For these objects any amount of money is to be had, because people believe in them. Money flows into them as a great act of faith. Our young people everywhere believe in the athletic life and in our out of door sports and athletic games; and in what is compatible with them, and they tend to disbelieve in what is incompatible with them.

Now, I must ask you to consider for a moment what is compatible with an athletic game—with, for example, a good game of tennis. In order to play tennis with satisfaction to yourself and your opponents, you must bring into the game health, high spirits, endurance, energy, quickness, force, accuracy, honesty, generosity and perfect obedience to rules—to rules which are arbitrary, elaborate, but inflexible conventions. You must have all these virtues to play well at any athletic game; and to play

any game whatever you must submit to the rules. In the game of tennis, you are of course personally and physically free and at liberty to walk up to the net and drop the ball over, instead of serving it; you are physically free to put the ball into a gun and shoot it over the net; or you might hire a boy to carry it around the net; or you might bawl out in the middle of the game that you were going to change the rules and take three shots instead of two. You are physically free to do all these things. But you are not mentally or morally free to do any of them. You are religiously bound not to do any of them. If you did any of them, everybody would laugh at you, you would be put out of the game, no one would play with you. All good players respect the rules of the game, because they know that the rules make the game, and they believe in the game.

The ethical implications of athletic games are immense. Democracy itself is a complex athletic game. Its existence depends, more than upon anything else, upon our hearty willingness, for the sake of the game, to refrain from doing what we are physically perfectly free and able to do. If we don't do that, we lack the first elements of sportsmanship.

My survey of the things our people believe in is far from exhaustive; but let us stop here and consider what we have got as a concrete, realistic basis of belief, remembering always that we have not occupied ourselves with reviving or with inventing objects of belief but simply with discovering and

bringing them together. I have enumerated six things that our people agree upon; six things that they spontaneously and gladly support and invest heavily in: cleanness, health, becoming intelligent, swift mobility, athletic games, and publicity or standing inspection. Now that we have brought them together, I observe that they belong together, and are more or less closely interdependent; in order to stand inspection, in order to play the game well, in order safely to enjoy swift mobility, one must be healthy, and in order to be healthy one must be clean, and in order to be clean and healthy one must be intelligent.

I observe also that the six things which are incompatible with our objects of belief also belong together: dirt, disease, ignorance, stagnation, inability to play the game and obey rules, furtiveness and unwillingness to stand inspection. If you accept the set of six objects of desire, the logical implication is that you reject the corresponding six objects of aversion. The American people are as yet but little accustomed to logical implications. They are illogical and sentimental. The American people are by temperament and lack of rigorous training a little inclined to be muddleheaded and soft and oversympathetic—a little too sympathetic with dirt and disease and ignorance and stagnation and inability to play the game and inability to stand inspection—too sympathetic with these things to say decisively that they wish to reject them.

Our young man and young woman in college, for

example, know well enough what is expected of them, and they know well enough what they themselves hope to be. They hope to be the flower of the younger generation, the human embodiment of the *kalonkagathon,* the good and the beautiful, in the society of their own times. And they have some notion of the necessity that is on them for being clean, healthy, intelligent, and able to stand inspection. Where they fall short, is in working out the necessary implications of their heart's desire. They are quite willing, they are eager, to be known as the flower of their generation, the finest young men and women of their time, improved successors in a modern democracy of the old-fashioned New England Puritan and the old-fashioned lady and gentleman of the Old South. But they haven't fully worked out the implication of this ambition. They haven't clearly recognized that the attainment of their ambition is incompatible, for example, with their soft and muddleheaded tolerance of loafing in their fraternities, cheating in their classrooms, and thieving in the gymnasiums and cloakrooms, passing bad checks at the banks, and sundry other practices by which they make no improvement upon the extinct types of the New England Puritan and the gentleman of the Old South. Their beliefs lie loosely around them, scattered and unvalued, like lumps of pig iron, which need to be gathered up, and melted, and forged and tempered and sharpened like a sword and girded to their sides, and used to cut their way out of the obscure jungle of their conflicting ideas.

For examples: with a tempered and practised sword of belief they would cut through this big bullying idea of Liberty, crying: "Only one half of liberty is good for anything; liberty to stagnate and rot is good for nothing; liberty to go to the devil is good for nothing."

They would cut through this roughneck idea of fraternity, crying: "Only one half of fraternity is good for anything. Fraternizing with rascals is good for nothing. A fraternity of thieves and vagabonds is good for nothing."

They would cut through this ignoramus idea of equality, crying, "Only one half of equality is good for anything. Equality in indolence and inefficiency is good for nothing. Equality in obscenity is good for nothing."

The moment that you see the logical implications of your own beliefs you have in your heart the immense virtue of hate for what you disbelieve in, without which you are incapable of any important love whatever. You have at your side the sharp sword of decisive choice, without which you can never cut a thoroughfare through the jungle of your conflicting ideas. You have in your hands the formative power of a religious purpose, without which you cannot hope, in an atheistical democracy, to mold a distinctive national type, to be compared with the product of Oxford, or New England, or the Old South.

We haven't worked out the full implication of our beliefs; but we know already what our beliefs

are well enough to consider where they point. What, I ask, should be, must be, the characteristic type of a younger generation which believes in cleanness, health, intelligence, swift mobility, playing the game, and readiness to stand inspection? When the younger generation disengages the object of its heart's desire from the rubbish with which it is now involved, when the younger generation has worked out the implications of its belief, what sort of national type shall we see? Well, every one of these indicators points towards a type resembling that which the Greek sculptors of the great period perpetuated in marble for the admiration of all times. The whole upward movement of our later American culture indicates a type of athletic asceticism as the necessary and inevitable corollary of our civilization. We can't have the sort of civilization that we want, unless we can produce in abundance characters of this type—the type of athletic asceticism.

I choose the word asceticism because it will be noticed and challenged, under the impression that asceticism means something sour, crabbed, thin, and starved. But asceticism, etymologically, does not mean that. Asceticism is a Greek word which means gymnastic. It means the rule and discipline of the athlete. It is not the self-denial and mortification of a morbid mind. It is the self-control and the self-development of a healthy mind. It is not a determination to suppress the life of the body; it is a determination to express the life of the body

in forms of accomplished grace and perfected strength. It is the voluntary choice of a man who is in training for power, in training for joy—the joy of contending in the Olympic dust for the crown of wild olive and for the applause of all Greece. Athletic asceticism is nothing but the intelligent application of logic to conduct. Asceticism is the discipline of a man who knows what he wants, and takes all the means to get it, and rejects all that interferes with his getting it. It makes him choose the means to be clean and fit and clear-eyed and swift. It makes him reject what leads to fat on his muscles, and mist in his eyes, languor in his blood, and dullness in his brain. He makes a religion out of the things that his heart desires, and he cheerfully consigns the other things to hell. And he feels the desirability of his object so powerfully that he lifts up his hands to the gods—the young Greek athlete lifts up his hands to the gods, and prays for victory in his race.

"Prayer for worldly goods is worse than fruitless," said George Meredith in a beautiful letter to his son, "but prayer for strength of soul is that passion of the soul which catches the gift it seeks."

I don't know whether the young Greek athlete won the race that he prayed for. But I think that after the prayer in which he put all things that he loved best under the protection of the gods, it was easy for him to understand the proverbial wisdom of his race, which declares that the half is greater than the whole. It was easy for him to avoid our

modern error of craving the undigested whole of experience. It was easy for him not to be drunken, dissolute, slothful, gluttonous. It was easy for him not to be insolent, ribald, and profane. Why was it easy?

Because he felt himself religiously bound.

Because he felt himself gloriously not free to waste and destroy the gifts of the heavenly powers.

Because he felt himself proudly bound by the golden fetters of his religion, by his athletic asceticism, to offer to the Shining Ones the integrity of his strength, the unspoiled flower of his youth.

Because he stood tiptoe with exaltation, joyously conscious that the object of his own heart's desire was also in the eye and affectionate solicitude of the gods.

Two thousand years ago an educated Jew who had received fire in his heart from heaven crossed the Mediterranean Sea and laid the fire from his heart upon the altar to the Unknown God in the midst of Mars Hill in Athens. Its flame leaped up; and in its flame, Jewish Christianity united with Athenian philosophy to form the most powerful mold of character the world has ever seen. The success of Paul was due to the fact that he laid the fire where the altar was. We shall not get much beyond Paul as religious tacticians. If we wish some measure of his success, we must worry less about our old shrines and churches. We must carry our vessels of fire to the place where the thronged altar is. We must build our churches

over the things that people believe in as the durable satisfactions of life. We must help the younger generation to work out the full implications of the athletic asceticism which is the ethical corollary of the civilization for which they have already manifested their desire.

II

FORTY AND UPWARDS

II

FORTY AND UPWARDS

There is an interesting and true passage in the letters of Matthew Arnold which spirited young fellows encounter with a chill. It is this: "The aimless and unsettled, but also open and liberal, state of our youth we *must* perhaps all leave and take refuge in our morality and character; but with most of us it is a melancholy passage from which we emerge shorn of so many beams that we are almost tempted to quarrel with the law of nature which imposes it on us."

The revolt of youth, the cries of which are now so audible in our literature, is an attempt to resist as long as possible the imposition of the traditional morality and the traditional character upon the fluent welter of youth's desires and possibilities. The revolt derives its bright enthusiasm from the belief of the insurgents that as the yoke of custom is something wilfully imposed by tyrannical elders, it may, by a superior wilfulness of the young, be thrown off. The wise young Arnold dashes cold water on that belief by referring to the imposing power as a "law of nature."

What is that law of nature to which, in the end,

the rebel necks must bow? What power is it that drives young spirits, trailing clouds of glory, into the austere refuge of morality and character? Suppose, to begin with, we call it the law of self-preservation, individual and racial. That has a formidable sound. And, indeed, it is a formidable power. When we feel its wolfish breath at our back, we lighten our impedimenta; we stiffen our sinews; we lengthen our stride; we fix our gaze on the patch of light beyond the woods; and we become careless of wayside flowers.

Some of us, to be sure, seek for a time, to ignore or evade it. An occasional college boy, stimulated to believe that he is the maker of his own destiny, listens with wonder and eager curiosity to a lecturer commending the "cultural ideal" of Goethe—the seductive notion of the continuous growth and free unfolding of a many-sided personality, developed at all points. He may even, through his undergraduate years, revel a little in his own versatility and caress his multifarious unformed tastes and talents. By extending the years of schooling and popularizing higher education, by bobbing our hair and keeping our faces clean shaven, and by reading the novels of undergraduate authors and taking counsel of their tailors, a few of us manage to extend the plastic age and the experimental and uncertain appearance and opinions of adolescence well into our third decade.

But to pass for a youth beyond that point, requires far more money, leisure, and freedom from

the cares of this world than are ordinarily to be had upon the economic tableland of democracy. In a society where the most that the average person can expect is to start without a handicap, the occupations of the first four decades are essentially predetermined. Our average man has his work cut out for him if he keeps abreast of normal expectations; and to keep abreast, he is impelled by the strongest instincts in him.

There is nothing forbidding or externally formidable in the deputy powers that take him captive, and abduct him out of the irresponsible company of youth. Quite the contrary. He sees the invitation and the promise of life in a pair of grey eyes and white hands, and he runs to meet them, and while he is explaining in a moment of youthful intoxication, how sweet earth would be if Maytime would last forever and gipsying were in fashion, he is bound hand and foot, and delivered to a power which effectively terminates his roving in the Romany Rye. The law of self-preservation has him in thrall. Or to put the matter in plain terms, he must educate himself and pay for his education; he must find a profession; he must marry and pay for his wife; he must start a family and pay for his family; he must buy a lot and build a house; he must pay for his life insurance and start a fund for his old age; he must begin the education of his children. In this homespun garb the awful "law of nature" enforces itself before he knows what has got hold of him.

He enters upon these tasks with the unreflective gusto of youth—a fluent, unformed, unchanneled energy. All the "boys" are doing likewise. All the prizes are attached to doing likewise. As the heat of the contest heightens, he strips himself one by one of the recreations and accomplishments through which in his vernal days the mounting diffusive sap of his youth burst briefly into flower: dancing, acting, singing, mandolin-playing, drawing, verse-writing, tramping, shooting, camping, tennis, and the rest. He pulls himself together. He concentrates. He specializes. "Three meals a day," he says, "my work, my pipe, and no interruptions!" He is nothing but a driving energy. He drives so hard that the bloom of life is brushed off in his passage. Yet for a long time he does not cease to think of himself as one of the "young fellows." The very intensity and singleness of his effort is due, in fact, to a youthful pride and doggedness developed under a sense that the Old Men are watching the youngster critically.

But by and by comes a season when a lot of things, unimpressive singly, happen together and become impressive. His wife gaily discovers three grey hairs, one above his left ear, two above his right. "Yes," says his daughter, kissing a spot on the back of his head, "but Dad will never be grey!" At about the same time he discovers that he needs a stronger pair of glasses. His dentist, who has hitherto passed him easily through the semi-annual inspection, now suggests an extensive plan of bridge

construction. He still feels quite fit; but on the way home he mutters to himself with a playful grimness: "A-ha! Baldness, Blindness, and Toothlessness are scouting out a position before the main army of Death." Then he notices with a realizing eye how tall his sons are growing, and how independent, and how—well, he would call it saucy, if they were not so tall. He has to contradict them firmly because —well, they have no business at their age to know so much more about the point than their father. But he fails to feel impressive in the assertion of his authority, for even when they seem to assent, he has a subtle uneasy sense that they are merely humoring him, with an indulgent filial smile in their sleeves. Presently he overhears one of them referring to him as The Old Man.

"The Old Man! Good Heavens!" he exclaims, "How old am I? Forty?—Forty is nothing, nowadays. President Eliot went bicycling before breakfast, at seventy-five. Lounsbury played the New England tennis champion at seventy-five. At eighty-five or ninety Uncle Joe Cannon and Chauncey Depew had just got started. At forty, a man is a mere fledgling." So he soothes and flatters himself. But, in this season of disillusion, another fact gradually establishes itself in his awakened consciousness—a fact full of pathos and mystery: he discovers that the unchallengeably young people really prefer their own society to his, while he himself prefers their society to that of the men of forty. There is nothing like that to plunge a sword

into a man's viscera and twist it about in the wound. He tries to conceal his hurt. He rallies his gaiety and makes a desperate effort to retrace his steps and rejoin the merrymakers who are going a-Maying. But even when he presents himself in scenes dewy with sentiment, sparkling with young desires, and rich with dreams, somehow he does not seem to "enter in." He feels—he confides it soberly and in the utmost confidence to his own heart—he feels like Leonard Merrick's hero in quest of his youth, who fell asleep, and snored softly—didn't he?—while his old sweetheart bent over him, bitterly, in the trysting hour.

He feels "the fierce necessity to feel" but lacks the power. What is the trouble with him? He knows. He knows. He faces a tragedy. It isn't that he is forty. Other men have been forty. 'Tis common, Madam! His tragedy is that he possesses a character. No: his character possesses him. He is imprisoned in his morality and his character. He overhears the respectful rumor of his contemporaries: "Yes, Brown has achieved a character. We can count on Brown. We know where he stands."

The object of this applause inwardly squirms. He squirms on the pointed truth in what they say. He himself knows where he stands: he is a man of property, he is a professional man, he is a voter and taxpayer, he is the husband of one of the caryatides of society, he is the father of four children, he is one of four men with plates who

walk up the aisles of the church in frock coats on Sunday morning.

He acts from those positions. He acts only from them. His feeling is adequate to those positions. But he feels nothing more. So this is what is called "achieving a character." He has "achieved" nothing of the sort. This prison-house is not the edifice of his will; it was built about him by his destiny. It is nothing but his circumstances catching him in a trap. This character is a highwayman. It came up behind him, like a thief in the night. It cried "Halt! Stick 'em up!" And there he stopped; and delivered up his youth; and went no further. And that is why men know where he stands, and can count on him.

Yes: they can count on him—and so they don't count him any longer. If he speaks in public, his friends don't come out: they know well enough what he will say. If he publishes a book, no one buys it; they have the book that he wrote ten years ago. If he is absent from a committee, no one misses his counsel: any one of the members can easily present his "views." If a subscription list is circulating, they put him down for ten dollars without consulting him: he always gives ten dollars. If his own children conceive any enterprise, tainted with novelty, scandal, or promise of vivid interest, they first conspire with their mother to placate him, knowing for certain that "Dad will oppose it." Yes: he can be counted on. He is no longer an incalculable force. He is an *homme rangé*. He is a char-

acter. He is fixed at forty—like a monument, like a gravestone, with one blank line waiting to mark the formal decease and burial of his body.

Isn't it true that when one begins to stop growing one begins to die? When did he begin to die? He looks backward to discover the point at which his vital force began to draw in from the branches to the trunk and gradually retire towards the earth. He looks backward thirty years—thirty-five years. There was a time, back there, very early in his life—say between his fifth and his tenth years—when every morning multiplied his budding interests, and the green young shoots of his curiosity pushed eagerly into "the blooming buzzing confusion" of the universe.

Between five and ten he was a Roosevelt for versatility—yet in that respect he was exactly like every normal child! There was not a dull page from table of contents to index in the whole of life's sweet scented manuscript. All arts, all sciences, all religions, all philosophies, all histories, all customs of life "intrigued" him.

He modeled in clay, he painted in water colors, he composed unrecorded melodies, he participated in the folk dancing called "London Bridge Is Falling Down"; he was an "out-of-door naturalist" and explorer of rivers, caves, and valleys; he was a collector and classifier of stamps, minerals, coins, curiosities from the Holy Land, insects, flowers, birds' eggs; he shuddered under the knife of Aztec sacrifice; he learned from the Koran that Paradise

is under the shadow of the sword; he wrote to his grandfather for a copy of the Hebrew alphabet that he might study the Decalogue in God's own tongue; he dipped into "The Light of Asia"; he studied idolatry in the old Chinese quarter; he was interested in Jesus; he was knocked down by experimenting with the current in a trolley wire; he manufactured gunpowder, and cannon from brass shotgun shells; he molded bullets; he tanned squirrel skins; he attempted to stuff birds; he made maps of pulped brown butcher's paper; he prepared medicines from herbs; he distilled liquor and attempted to petrify wood; he built houses and trapezes and dams and attempted to build a lake; he raised pigeons, chickens, rabbits, and snakes; he drilled for oil; he examined openings in the fruit industry, lawnmowing, pickling, floriculture, printing, and the newspaper business; but most of all his heart was set on goldmining, exploring Indian graves, and swinging a rawhide lariat from a saddle of Spanish leather while spurring a lean broncho after the mavericks scurrying through the sagebrush of a western mesa.

Suppressed desires? Not at all! He found time and means and energy for all this rich and various life by the time he was thirteen. He has squeezed all the juice from those oranges. But what has he done since? Soon after thirteen, a drouth descended upon the tropical exuberance of his experience. The lighter foliage of his life withered up. Education fell upon him like a blight, and the luxuriant quick blossoms of childhood were

scattered. His sensuous contacts with the world diminished with amazing rapidity. He began to be concerned with words rather than with things; and things shrivelled and died and disappeared under the labels that he was taught to attach to them. His education, he perceives, operated like the old-fashioned dentistry, by killing off and extracting the nerves, so that a man in middle life should find himself with a set of dead and, theoretically, untroublesome bones in his mouth. (Only, it seems, these dead things festered.) His education was designed to make out of a piece of living matter a substantial economic block, useful for home-building, useful in the fundamental structure of society. He had been taken, so to speak, out of his own hands by the race, and had been thrust, half alive, into a chink of the wall, and on him an inscription had been carved: "Here lies a solid character. *Requiescat in pace.*"

At just about this point one may predict with considerable assurance either that nothing at all will happen, or that something like a miracle will happen. Either Brown will quietly resign himself to being Brown for the rest of his days; or Brown will become that most dangerous type of rebel, a middle-aged rebel, and attempt to become something new and strange.

Let us assume first that at forty there is little rebellion left in this solid character. After a brief period of wistfulness, he surrenders to the indolence which men flatter with the name of destiny. He

settles firmly down at the point of view to which his circumstances have driven him. In that case, there is a fair likelihood that in his leisure hours he will become a tedious utilitarian critic of his own upbringing. He will complain of the liberal education which unsettles youth and fills it with insatiable hungers by attempting to develop a general human personality instead of a sharp vocational instrument. He will turn around upon his Alma Mater and condemn her harshly for not having cut away, at an earlier age, all the young unprofitable shoots of his general human curiosity. He may declare that the fault of his education was its failure to make him an even keener, harder, sharper vocational instrument than he is.

"What good," he will say, "have history and literature and philosophy ever done to me? You teachers pumped me full of culture. You filled me up with stuff about the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and the Reformation and the Puritan Revolution. You wasted my youth in talk about the real and the ideal and the good and the beautiful. You lured me into listening to symphonies and looking at pictures and vibrating to the pity and terror of tragic drama. You peopled the greenwood of my imagination with poetic figures of knights and ladies on great adventures and romantic quests. And then I married a fairly good cook and you sent me into the world to serve as a chemist in a dye works or to write advertising for toothpowder and laundry soap. My education was not

practical. It didn't prepare me for life. It was no good. I have no use for it."

To this complaint, it should be remarked in passing, there is a retort which all "liberal" educators should learn to make. It runs something like this: "You say that your education is 'no good.' We reply, O solid businesslike character, that your life is 'no good.' Your life is not good because you built it too small to hold the best of your possessions. The trouble with you is that you wasted the wealth that we gave you; you let it rust and mildew in cellar and attic. You lacked ingenuity to use your capital. You have not learned how to employ your culture in your life. You have made no outlets for your education. Don't blame us if you can't draw Niagara through a brass faucet into the kitchen sink. As occasion serves, we shall continue to 'pump' culture into you. Perhaps bye and bye you will burst. We rather hope that you will. Then possibly something more exhilarating than a solid businesslike character can be made of the ruins and fragments of you. Perhaps a personality can be made of the pieces. At any rate there will be no great loss if you burst. On the whole, go ahead and burst. You really aren't worth saving."

But now let us assume the more enlivening of the possibilities: let us assume that a miracle happens. As Brown looks dismally out from the barred small window of his character upon his life, and sees that it is finished, suddenly his past breaks away from him, as Sicily broke away from Italy,

and a gulf yawns between. There is evidence that this thing does happen. His past is no longer his; it has become a part of human history. It has become a dramatic spectacle; sitting in the box of his character he regards it as it were across footlights, with spectatorial detachment. He can re-examine it now without shame or vanity or repentance. It interests him no longer as conduct waiting for the Judgment Day but as food for intellectual and aesthetic curiosity. He now finds a use for his culture in understanding, not judging, the whole of the human spectacle. He wheels a speculative eye upon his coevals—those dreary "substantial characters" who now for so many years have been giving one another, as Thoreau complained, the same old bite of the same musty old cheese that they are. They, too, have become dramatic spectacles, each one with its own individual savour! And his wife and the four children? The moment that he stops worrying about that abstract line which is the shortest distance between two points, he perceives at last the full colour and fragrance and taste of his relation to them.

What does all this mean? It means that at forty, when a man seems hermetically enclosed in his character, an angel may just possibly unbar the door, and, leaving his possessive, aggressive body sleeping there, let his spirit out for the recognition and appreciation of a new life. So long as he wished to possess and direct the world, the world erected barriers against him, and progressively shut him in.

As soon as he exacts nothing of it, it gives him all—all its qualities for his discrimination and delectation. There is no way to return to his youth by retracing the caterpillar progress of the senses or by the renovation of cells that have become clogged with the hard deposit of years. But all those old interests which he had thought dead are now reborn with wings. He can return to his past, he can flit into his future, with the swift flight of a butterfly. While he seems to sleep in the barred prison-house of his character, and his old sweetheart weeps over the baldheaded, roundwaisted man of property gently snoring there, he perchance has discovered that she can't be met at the old trysting place any more, and has pushed on up the highroad to the detour of pure poetic contemplation where all her fair qualities, her joy and blitheness and beauty, are recollected in tranquillity. Out of the death of the possessive passion, a rebirth of the mind and imagination!

If this miracle has happened, he feels, at forty, the possibility not merely of a new life but of a new kind of life opening before him. He sees the necessity of revising the "theory of education." At forty, instead of killing off the nerves, one should be occupied in reviving the spirits. Instead of closing old doors, one should be cutting new windows. Instead of sitting down and going to sleep at his own point of view, he should hunt for new ones, if he has to go to China or Alaska or Tierra del Fuego to find them. What a man of forty

needs to do is to re-examine his metaphors. Let us try our hammer on this "solid character."

We spend our lives in a quarry of words. We immure ourselves behind a wall of images. We talk of characters; immediately the mallet and chisel are in our hands. We are sculptors, and our subjects are unhewn blocks of marble, and the form we seek is imposed from without. The chips fly. Chips of what? Is the imposition of marble qualities upon flesh and blood responsible for that grim and weary and hopeless look of the Old Man of the Mountain, which establishes itself at middle age upon faces once mobile and rosy? Has this entire theory of human sculpture a bearing upon the prevalence of ennui, rigor mortis, premature death, and petrification at forty? Is there a gleam of hope in a change of images?

"He built his house on a rock." Is that the best place for a house? Not if one cares for gardening. At forty, one is justified at least in enquiring whether what looked like a white rock was only a ribbon of foam. There is current an alternative set of images, which takes us out of the stone-quarry and the graveyard and away from the tedious refrain, *Requiescat in pace.*

Our lives are a bright-flowing mist of days and nights. Our blood is a swift-winding river. Our flesh is a changing flower. There is a season of buds and a season of fruit and a season of wine and perfume. And after the vintage, there are memories and dreams.

Is there no kinetic and flowing character—no form imposable upon wind and water: such form as the cloud takes in the West, such color; such shapes as life transiently rests in, rising from seed to blossom?

Come, let us make a new set of maxims, not for youths in their twenties with houses to build and children to educate, but for men of forty and upwards who are growing tired of one another and yet are not quite ready to die:

Unfold, leaf by leaf.

Become more and more intimate with life.

Ask no cold question of any joyous thing.

Go to all living things gently, listening for the wonder of the breath and the heartbeat.

Ask all successful and happy creatures for a clue.

Study all lovely things, with docility seeking their principle of beauty.

Consider whether it is better to change and be living than to be unchanged and dead.

Eschew pedantry and make much of fine art: it possesses a secret of eternal life.

Be your residence urban or rural, there is no provincialism so narrow as that developed by the inveterate maintenance of your own *point of view.*

Push on into untrodden forests, up unexplored valleys, seeking new springs of refreshment, crying at the foot of every mountain ridge, "Let us see what is on the other side."

III

UNPRINTABLE

III

UNPRINTABLE

A few of our great thinkers have gone out, out —out beyond good and evil. When it comes to definitions and specific cases, the rest of us may differ sharply. But with reference to the abstract principle we are still within shouting distance of one another. We have preserved our 'illusions.' We have not yet learned to look upon words as merely patterns made in a child's game of letters. We believe that there are important values represented by such symbols as 'good taste' and 'decency.' We may quarrel about standards of decency; but we agree—I hope that I do not generalize from insufficient data—we agree that persons who have 'lost all sense of decency' are undesirable, unfragrant, and perhaps imbecile and unsafe to be abroad in the community.

Our common sense accordingly takes measures to provide against destruction of the sense of decency by perverts who subsist on the propagation of vice, or who, as mere amateurs of depravity, find their delight in corrupting the minds of the young. Our common sense does not attempt to legislate with reference to highly disputable points of taste, but

only with reference to the elements of common decency. For this reason our regulations are not devised by æsthetic experts or professors of ethics or Galahads, but by fairly worldly all-around men, equally competent with respect to railroads, boxing, and tariffs. These representatives whom we have elected to care for our public welfare have declared by law that a certain class of literature is unprintable. In this class fall, according to various Federal and State enactments, every book and picture which is 'obscene,' 'lewd,' 'lascivious,' 'filthy,' 'indecent,' or 'disgusting.'

Under authority of these acts, the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice and similar agencies have confiscated, destroyed, and excluded from the mails a great mass of 'demoralizing' matter concerning which our common sense is not in doubt—matter which comes to respectable noses only when some brief newspaper paragraph reminds us that there are monsters among us engaged in the business intimated with shuddering horror in Henry James's 'Turn of the Screw.'

But these moral agencies have also obtained in recent years the temporary suppression of several novels, which 'everyone' has read, written by English and American authors whose other works are 'in every library.' In the circumstances, common sense naturally raises the question whether there has not been a failure of justice. I doubt whether any man versed in letters can read the records of a celebrated literary trial without coming

to the conclusion that judges and lawyers are, so far as their professional training is concerned, unequipped for the task undertaken and really as much at sea as they have frequently shown themselves when they have employed their grave wisdoms in settling the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. Their self-confidence in such affairs is supported by their certified expertness in handling evidence—of a sort. They think that they understand the law. They have explained it to the jury in just about this fashion and in nearly these words:

'The question before you, gentlemen, is very simple.' (That is their first error: the question before the gentlemen is one of abysmal complexities. But let us not interrupt the Court.) 'The question is not to say how this book affects you, or persons of your seasoned experience and virtue. The question is whether this book tends to deprave the minds of those open to such influences, and into whose hands a publication of this character might come. It is within the law if it would suggest impure and libidinous thoughts in the young and inexperienced. A book to be obscene, need not be obscene throughout the whole of the contents; but if the book is obscene in part, it is an obscene book.'

A schoolboy far below Macaulay's conception of the type can perceive at a glance that any jury which honestly obeyed these instructions could bar from the mails the Bible, Shakespeare, or even an unabridged English Dictionary, which, as there is testimony to prove, is quite capable of suggesting

impure and libidinous thoughts in minds 'open to such influences.' In the celebrated, but now remote, case of *Madame Bovary,* the prosecution, indeed, like a prurient schoolboy, selected from that grim and repellent history of illicit relations all the passages descriptive of sensual passion, wove them into a suggestive little narrative of its own, and thus presented its case to the jury. The defense, on the other hand, argued with a good deal of piquancy and cogency that Flaubert had dealt with sensual passion in the temper of Bossuet, with excerpts from whom the notebooks of the novelist were full; and that to judge a serious work of art without reference to its total intention and effect is not merely unjust but grossly absurd.

II

Each attempt to apply the law in such cases results inevitably in an extension of the legal prosecution and defense into an acrimonious, yet not uninstructive and often diverting, public debate between authors in general and the officers and friends of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Whatever the result of the legal proceedings may be, the cause of 'outraged virtue' is lost the moment that it is carried into the newspapers, where, as Mark Twain might have said, it is as much out of place 'as a Presbyterian in hell-fire.' The cause is lost through the manifested ineptitude, ignorance, and incompetency of those who espouse it. In these cases—

if I may be pardoned for employing a vulgar and violent expression—in these cases, a good man, whenever he opens his mouth, puts his foot into it. A country clergyman writes in that he has not read the book in question, but he knows that our modern authors are a 'bad lot,' and he wishes the prosecutor 'more power to his elbow.' An irate judge declares that he and his daughter *have* read the book, and he only wishes that he could 'get it before the public'! An Outraged Parent says that he would like to read it; and in this wish he is joined by the association of Y. M. C. A. secretaries, the Associated Mothers' Clubs, the Boy Scouts, and the Camp Fire Girls. Members of any or all of these associations are prepared to affirm, after a careful perusal of the objectionable book, that it is not fit for them to read.

By this time, what began as a serious matter of public morals would degenerate into farce, and the case would be lost in the court of common sense, even if the defense did not utter a word. But the defense never lets the prosecution off so easily. The defense is endowed with tongues which it knows how to use effectively, if not always scrupulously. The persuasively articulate part of the public, all the wits of the press, editors and authors of every shade of merit and respectability, habitually unite in condemnation of the law and in derision of those who have attempted to enforce it. It is to be noted that they also, for the most part, think it unnecessary to have read the book in order to protest

against the prosecution of its author. They protest 'on general principles'—on a considerable variety of general principles, which I shall summarize.

They protest from a general belief in the 'freedom of the press,' and from a feeling that a free press is on the whole more vital to the public than any law curbing it can be. They protest from a general belief in the 'freedom of art.' A few of them argue that art should be free because all true art is moral. More of them argue that art should be free because it is neither moral nor immoral but unmoral, and its influence æsthetic and, therefore, no concern of the legislator or moralist. They contend that the suppressive statutes were framed against pornography, not against art; and they assert that it is easy to distinguish art from pornography. In conclusion, they characterize the prosecution as illiterate, blackmailing, filthy-minded, impertinent and meddlesome.

After such an encounter, Militant Morality retires from the scene like a badly punished game cock, with all the young cockerels of the press bursting forth into derisive crowing. If the legal prosecution also has failed, the book receives an almost official certificate of innocence; and it may be cried up as a pure, decent, beautiful, and significant work of art. If the prosecution has been successful, the book may be suppressed till every schoolboy's curiosity has been whetted to know why; then it may be released and devoured by thousands of readers enlisted mainly by the publicity work of the Society for the

Suppression of Vice. The law as applied to books issued by regular publishers through the regular channels is, I think, futile and mischievous.

III

In spite of this belief, the case against the law and against the Society is usually presented so unfairly and with such malice and with such defective arguments that there is little satisfaction in joining the popular demonstration against them. I remember hearing not long ago a conservative Russian nobleman lecturing on the present situation in his native country with a sobriety of speech and a balance of judgment to which, in this matter, our American newspapers have not accustomed us. At the outset of his discussion of the Bolshevist régime, he told us that, in his study of public affairs, he invariably proceeded upon the principle that every movement which commands the enthusiastic adhesion of great numbers of people must have something in it which deserves respectful attention.

If this principle appeals to us, we shall not join the wits of the press in dismissing with derisive laughter the Outraged Parents, the Associated Mothers' Clubs, the Y. M. C. A., the Catholic Club, the bishops and lesser clergymen, the Lord's Day Alliance, the Boy Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, and the various religious organizations which have rallied behind the execrated banner of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. We shall strenuously

object to the characterization of a cause which such organizations espouse as a blackmailing and filthy-minded enterprise. We shall even admit the possibility that they have a genuine grievance. And, having made that admission, we shall be less concerned to minimize it than to suggest a wiser method of getting it redressed. If we approach the subject in this temper, without recrimination and indiscriminate mud-slinging, we may conceivably persuade them, as well as our own side.

I, for one, believe that they have a grievance. But like most enthusiastic crusading masses, the reformers injure their cause and expose themselves to bitter disappointment and to retarding reactionary movements by asking and expecting too much—by asking and expecting the impossible. They have created the impression that they are actuated by a desire 'to make the world safe for children and adolescents.' It can't be done. It is what an enthusiastic reformer would call a beautiful and inspiring thought; and there is something attractive to the best that is in us even in the most extravagant aspirations toward an ideal good. Yet it is as hopeless to make a morally safe world by wiping out all the germs of moral infection as it is to make a physically safe world by wiping out all the germs of smallpox, typhoid, and influenza.

Since it can't be done, the hope of doing it is, to sober consideration, not really beautiful and truly inspiring, but fantastic and dangerous. It deflects and absorbs to no purpose attention which

might and should be directed toward that which can be done. We may stamp out centres of infection here and there; but operating on the world with a view to making it safe is a task beyond human instrumentalities (and the Dean of St. Paul's believes that God himself has given it up). The world is an old rake, a hoary incurable, and will always be breaking out in one place or another. That which experience proves can be done with some effect toward protecting the young from moral as well as physical diseases is to vaccinate against them—to put inside children and adolescents something capable of resisting and combating the morbid elements which, though the influence of the 'world' be avoided and excluded, still malignly germinate in the cloister, in the cell, in the dusky isolation of the heart.

The law which the reformers seek to enforce against authors is an attempt to make the world safe by exterminating one out of billions of possible sources of infection. If it could be enforced, it would be as effective as 'swatting' a fly in an African jungle, except that a well-swatted fly does 'stay dead.' Those who defend it, I suspect, conceive that this law is the same sort of law as the Volstead Act; and *that,* they are convinced, is going to be in the interest of public welfare. Those who oppose the law designed to suppress indecent literature are also, I think, generally under the impression that it is the same sort of law as the Volstead Act, and that it should, for essentially the same rea-

son, be abolished. In a vital respect it is not of the same sort. It differs from the Volstead Act in a fashion which may permit a man of sense to applaud the one and yet to condemn the other.

The point is this: the legal definition of 'intoxicating liquor' is, though perhaps unscientific and absurd, perfectly fixed and objective. Whether a variety of liquor is intoxicating under the law can be accurately determined by scientific methods. Since this is true, there is nothing essentially impracticable in the task given to officers when they are ordered to confiscate and destroy 'intoxicating liquor.' But the legal definition of indecent literature is not fixed and objective; it is fluent and highly subjective. It differs from decade to decade, from year to year, from nation to nation, from town to town, from class to class, from age to age, from one person to the next. And there is this salient difference in the application of the two definitions: the presence of alcohol is sought in the liquor, but the presence of indecency is not sought in the book. It is sought in the mind of the reader of the book.

That is, indeed, the ultimate place in which to seek it, for there is nothing decent or indecent but thinking makes it so. It is notorious that even a renowned piece of sculptured marble which produces in one person a kind of religious tranquillity and philosophic contemplation, with a sense of the eternity of form and the transience of passion, may at the same instant excite in another beholder such shamefastness that he will cry out for fig leaves,

or such unruly emotions as, unchecked, may disrupt society.

Or, to take another case: I myself recently pictured, with what I thought were chaste strokes and in what I thought was a pure æsthetic mood, our *jeune fille*. But I could not conjecture the effect that it was destined to produce in the minds of the young, the innocent, the inexperienced: I find that Mr. H. L. Mencken speaks of this picture as 'lascivious.' What responsibility such facts impose upon the artist!

It is, furthermore, a puzzling paradox in the moral world that, as one progresses toward decency, one discovers that the number of objects which the sense of decency has to operate upon diminishes rather than multiplies, while to a person who has lost his sense of decency the universe bristles with indecent suggestion.

In recognition of these facts, jurymen who are to determine the quality of a disputable book are instructed in no scientific method, not even in a rule of thumb. No: they are instructed to conjecture whether a book is indecent by first conjecturing how it will affect young minds which are, conjecturally, open to the conjecturable influences of such a book. But jurymen and officers of the law, bold and enterprising as some of the latter are, cannot penetrate into minds to collect the evidence requisite for conviction under the law; and it is merely absurd to send them there.

IV

Yet it is entirely possible to condemn the law in its application to authors without for a moment denying the reality of the problem with which it is intended to cope. It is also quite possible to condemn the law without accepting more than a fraction of the case which the guild of authors have attempted to establish in their own behalf. In my opinion, the authors have taken up positions quite as untenable as those occupied by the reformers—positions from which, in the interest both of literature and of public morals, it is important that they should be dislodged.

It has perhaps never been true in Europe, it is no longer true in America, that it is 'easy to distinguish art from pornography.' It was true in America as long as our literature was mainly written by scholars and gentlemen with an adequate sense of the powers of their profession and of their responsibility to society for the exercise of it. It was true in America as long as our literature was written by members of a class to whom the life of the senses was an interest quite inferior and subordinate to the life of the mind and the imagination. It was true as long as artists did not concern themselves with pornography. And till this present generation, pornographic writing would have appeared to our chief American authors, with hardly an exception, as an interest perhaps of other lands, other times, other types of culture, but as an interest from them

and their land and their type of culture inconceivably remote.

Pornography is defined as a 'treatise on prostitutes,' or as 'obscene or licentious writing.'

When our literature passed from the hands of scholars and gentlemen into the hands of our barbarian artists of what Emerson called the 'Jacksonian rabble,' it lost much of the high seriousness, the decorum, and the impeccable decency characteristic of the New England school. It eventually enlisted the pens of numerous writers who repudiate responsibility to society, and who are far more interested in the life of the senses than in the life of the mind and the imagination. Among these have appeared several authors to whom the sexual life is the all-absorbing centre of interest, and who have devoted no inconsiderable skill to familiarizing us with the life of the prostitute, and to domesticating her, with her amateur sisters, in our literature.

Now, the life of these interesting creatures, who are beginning, as it were, to swarm about our firesides and to 'homestead' the vacant territory of our imaginations, may or may not be written in an obscene or licentious fashion. If these words are ever applicable to literature, they are plainly, in my opinion, applicable to some of the most praised and prosecuted books of recent years. But the question whether they are applicable does not depend in the least upon the artistic skill with which the books are written. It depends upon the effect which they are designed to produce. Art, strictly speaking, is

nothing but the means employed to produce a desired effect, and is not to be confused with beauty, which is the effect upon fine minds of fine art employed by fine artists. The difference between a filthy story told by a coal-heaver and a filthy story told by an artist is only the difference between expert pornography and inexpert pornography, when, as is often the case, the effect sought is the same. There is undeniably a streak of salacity in human nature, and some very eminent men of letters have from time to time, in the intervals of more noble occupation, permitted themselves to express it.

Certain critics and authors who are quite willing to have the coal-heaver's filthy story debarred from the mails, because it can be understood by coal-heavers, protest against debarring the filthy story of the artist, because only the highly sophisticated can understand it. I object to the discrimination, on democratic principles! I avow that it affects me, an 'equalitarian' of a sort, like a proposal to forbid the coal-heaver beer, because he can get drunk on it, but to allow the comfortable bond-holder champagne—not because he cannot get drunk on it, but because the coal-heaver cannot afford to get drunk on it. The 'morality' implicit in the discrimination reminds one of Falstaff's penitent resolution never to get drunk again except among gentlemen and such as fear God, and not among drunken knaves. In the presence of such moral subtleties, I become an old-fashioned angry upholder of the 'rights of man.' I declare that, if the sophisticated possess

a right to have their delight in the salacious gratified by a piece of expert pornography, then my poor coal-heaver has a right to have his delight in the salacious gratified by a piece of inexpert pornography.

But the warier critics avoid this ticklish position. They prefer a quicksand of a more plausible surface. Those who argue for the 'freedom of art' on high æsthetic grounds contend that the moral influence of works of art is vastly exaggerated. The influence of works of art, they declare, is artistic. Æsthetic experience, they assert, is unique in kind.

When one discusses the matter in this fashion, one is soon lost in a metaphysical mist; so let us return to our coal-heaver. What they contend is, that the effect of the coal-heaver's inartistic filthy story may be degrading, because it operates in the moral consciousness and may have practical consequences; but that the effect of the author's artistic filthy story may be disregarded, because it operates in the æsthetic consciousness and has no practical consequences.

Has anyone remarked how at variance this æsthetic theory is with the theory upon which a great part of the French, Russian, and English fiction of the last seventy-five years has been constructed? 'What is man?' ask the novelists from Flaubert and Zola and Bourget to Thomas Hardy and Gissing and George Moore. 'A hoop rolled by a whimsical boy,' 'clay on the potter's wheel,' 'a figure of wax under the modeler's thumb.' With

such images, they have expressed their constant sense that he is the 'victim of circumstances,' the 'product of environment'; and more than one of them—for examples, Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* and Bourget in *Le Disciple*—have tellingly expressed their belief that literature is a decisive element of the environment, a potent factor in the circumstances.

The distinction between the moral and the æsthetic consciousness, so vehemently insisted upon by many contemporary critics,—with a suspicion that the 'freedom of art' depends upon maintaining it,—has, so far as I can discover, but slender support from modern psychology, and it is constantly belied by common experience. We find no independent bureaus in man for dealing separately with moral and æsthetic facts. The entire psychophysical organism receives them as a unit. Every image presented to the mind makes its record in the brain, and tends to produce an appropriate 'motor response.'

We are all by inheritance mimetic monkeys; we tend, like the untutored members of the A. E. F. in France, to imitate everything that we see and hear. There is tension of the vocal organs, even in silent reading; and our chests vibrate to the sounds of a symphony. The face of an impressionable coach involuntarily mirrors the actor speaking his lines at a rehearsal. Children, after reading the Gospels, play at crucifying their playmates.

As we grow older, we learn to check the overt

expression of these spontaneous responses of the nervous organism; but what we call an 'æsthetic response' appears to be only a practical response checked at a certain, or rather at a quite uncertain, point. The spontaneous response is still frequently recorded in dreams. A man to whom every kind of cruelty is abhorrent, having speculated in a waking hour with a kind of curious horror upon the kind of person who could have obeyed that injunction: 'Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone,' dreams in the following night that he and another are engaged in casting stones upon some person in a pit; and wakes himself by the intensity of his aversion from the spontaneous and merely mimetic cruelty of his imagination.

In our waking hours, the check on the imagination, which prevents it from stimulating the nerves to a visible 'motor response,' is sometimes in this form: 'This is not real—I am in a theatre.' Often it takes the form of a moral consideration: 'I shall make a fool of myself.' 'What would people think of me?' The indeterminate moving line between practical conduct and so-called æsthetic experience depends upon moral and kindred 'inhibitions'; so that we may almost assert that our æsthetic experience is determined and, in a sense, created by our moral discipline.

But common experience proves that, in impressionable persons, the activity of nerves and imagination stimulated by works of art has the possessive and unopposable force of a dream, and controls the

physical organism, sometimes with quite inæsthetic consequences. Samuel Pepys records that the ravishing music, at a performance of 'The Virgin Martyr,' 'did wrap up my soul,' in pure æsthetic delight, *and* 'made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife.' The following passage from Wordsworth's *Excursion* is pure enough art, and should therefore be 'without consequences,' as the Croceans would say, 'in the practical sphere':—

Jehovah,—with his thunder and the choir
Of shouting angels, and the empyreal thrones,
I pass them unalarmed.

But Crabb Robinson tells us that reading this passage brought on a fit of illness in William Blake —a 'stomach complaint which nearly killed him.' Wordsworth was a contemporary of Blake's; and I myself have been similarly affected by the works of some of my own contemporaries. One of the works of art which have most excited the suppressive agents puts me to sleep; but all the others which have come to my notice affect me somewhat like a glass of warm water and mustard. These violent effects may, however, also be produced by pieces of 'fossil literature' taken out of what Mr. Untermeyer calls 'the lifeless and literary storehouse' of the past. I have seen a sufficiently unemotional man, of fifty and upwards, driven from the theatre in blinding tears by the presentation of a dramatic work nearly twenty-five hundred years old—*The*

Trojan Women. And Professor Hatfield has recently argued, in the Publications of the Modern Language Association, that Scott's novel, *Anne of Geierstein,* had practical consequences in certain features of that very practical body, the Ku Klux Klan.

The Greek dramatists let their audience know that much rough and lustful business goes on in this world. The reason why they did not actually present on the stage Clytemnestra with her axe braining Agamemnon in his bath was, I suppose, that with their customary clearness of insight into human nature they perceived that æsthetic experience is seldom or never pure. The effect of that violent stimulus to the nerves and imagination would be incalculable. Some spectator with the image working in his brain might mimic that dreadful action in a waking dream. There is little reason for assuming that the moral check which prevents æsthetic experience from overflowing into practical conduct is more highly developed in us than it was in the Athenians. Our reading public is not so free from Barbarians and Helots that we can afford wholly to disregard the psychological facts which appear to have convinced the most 'æsthetic' of peoples that the publishers of works of art are among the chief makers of public morals.

On the contrary, we have still, and are likely to have for a long time to come, an immense reading public of extraordinary naïveté. I think it is a fact at the present time that the average American of considerable general intelligence and edu-

cation still, in the simplicity of his heart, looks upon authors as a superior class, with a quasi-priestly function and responsibility. By the average man I mean, in this connection, the man or woman who habitually reads the 'best sellers' and the periodicals with a circulation of a million or so.

Incredible as it may seem to the 'blasé literati,' this average man ordinarily reads a book or magazine with the idea that it will shed some light on the problems of his inner or outer life, that it will instruct his emotions, and show him what to approve, and how to act. If the author's apparent likes and dislikes with reference to things in general harmonize pretty well with his own, he feels fortified and encouraged, and declares that it is a 'good book.'

He makes little distinction between an expository article and a work of fiction. He is so direct and simple in his responses that, if he praises a novel, he usually means that he likes the sort of people and the sort of society that the author has pictured. Ironical and satirical implications, unless they are terribly obvious, escape him. When, not long ago, I mentioned in print 'Mr. Hergesheimer's admirable *Cytherea,*'—thinking of the mordant expression he had given to the feverish boredom which now affects a certain stratum of our 'citizenry,'—a really very well-read lady, nourished on 'good old English fiction,' flew at me in wrath, exclaiming: 'How dared you call that sort of society "admirable"?' It is astonishing how general such reactions are. On

another occasion, when I permitted myself in public to praise Mr. Bennett's picture of The Five Towns, it was one of our distinguished women writers of fiction who, wishing to destroy me, asked the public to consider what my judgment was worth after praise of such disgusting towns.

V

In these circumstances,—and these are the circumstances of American authorship,—literature is a part and a tremendously impressive part of the environment of the mind. Its influence, though incalculable, is not in the slightest danger of being exaggerated. Its influence is immense. It is daily increasing. It is rapidly becoming 'the effective voice of the social government.' Just in proportion to its effectiveness as art, it takes possession of the emotions and the imagination of men, and thus controls the dynamic part of the public mind.

Now, to modify the controllable part of environment in the interest of public welfare is one of the noblest enterprises of statecraft. To attempt it is not an 'impertinence,' when it is attempted by men who understand the materials they are working with: it is a duty. Speculative writers, from Plato to Tolstoy, clearly perceiving the intimate connection between literature and public welfare, have, in jest or in earnest, proposed it as the duty of statecraft to control, with a rigor far beyond the wildest

dreams of the late Mr. Comstock, the publication and circulation of books.

I have argued that they and our own Platos and Tolstoys, propose the impossible when they propose the control of imaginative literature by legislative enactment. They have resorted to an improper and an ineffective instrument.

Must we then wholly abandon the attempt to modify this potent element of our environment, as quite uncontrollable? Other instruments of control have been suggested. Mr. Bennett thinks that if suppressive societies were suppressed, and if prosecutions were left to the police, then—*authors* would be reasonably safe! But what about the Public? A revival of the informal censorship once managed by publishers themselves might be proposed; possibly that informal censorship is still faintly in operation; yet the old-style publishers are giving way before authors of the new style; in the last analysis, few publishers are 'in business for the fun of it'; and the supreme question asked of the average submitted manuscript must be: 'Will it sell?' A body which exists for 'the furtherance of literature and the Fine Arts,' the American Academy, might be asked to designate a committee of men of letters to pass official judgment upon questionable books; and if that body desired to diminish its popularity, this would perhaps be an effective step in that direction.

I am sure that I shall be charged with coming to

a very feeble conclusion, perhaps to an impotent and hopeless conclusion, when I express my belief that the only proper instrument for undertaking the modification of the temper and character of our literature is an independent and dispassionate criticism. But if anyone declares that this instrument is more inadequate than the law, I shall retort, as Mr. Chesterton retorts to those who declare that Christianity has failed: 'It has never been tried.' Of course, the statement is not quite true, yet it is true enough to bear consideration. It is true that independent and dispassionate criticism of the so-called 'unprintable' books, criticism in the common interest of publishers, authors, and readers is now almost non-existent. Instead, we have violent partisan combats between champions of literature who express their contempt for public morals, and champions of public morals who express their contempt for literature.

The confusion of these conflicts, in which no principle is established, will never end until a conception of public welfare that includes the interests of both literature and morality is restored and reintroduced as a mediative and conciliatory agency between the contending parties. Criticism's need of fixing that conception is as elementary as navigation's need of the North Star.

The next elementary step is to establish on firm grounds the intricate inter-relationship of so-called æsthetic and so-called moral experience—to estab-

lish what one is tempted to call the essential unity of experience in the psycophysical organism. This is not a task for the police. It is not a task for suppressive societies.

After that difficulty has been disposed of, criticism, thinking of public morals, may propose to itself some such questions as these: Granting that literature has a profound influence upon conduct, are you prepared to say, with reference to any considerable number of definite cases, precisely what the nature of that influence is? Have you made, for example, any accurate discrimination between the effects produced in the psychophysical organism by the various sorts of literature in which the sex life and sexual emotion are more or less freely displayed? Are you sure that 'shocking' books are always harmful to public morals, or do public morals occasionally require to be shocked? Is it conceivable that candor, so 'brutal' that it employs words which are 'obscene,' and relates facts which are 'disgusting,' may be prophylactic—may provide, indeed, that vaccine against moral infection which reformers are seeking? Is it clear, for example, that it is less evilly inciting to young minds to refer to a prostitute as a 'daughter of joy,' as delicate euphemists refer to her, than to speak of her as a 'whore,' as Shakespeare speaks of her?

After endeavoring for a time in these matters to see 'the thing as in itself it really is,' criticism,

thinking directly of the interests of literature, and only indirectly of public morals, may propose to itself some such questions as these: Assuming that the exhibition of sex and the treatment of illicit passion are innocuous to public morals, is it in the interest of literature for authors to enter into rivalry with one another for honors in the field of pornographic art? Is it wise to create a situation in which no novel will sell which does not pungently depict illicit passion? Is there not a danger that American authors who now specialize in this subject will, as they grow older, find themselves obliged, like certain of their European colleagues, to present a 'salacious' scene at the end of every chapter, in order to hold the attention of over-stimulated and jaded readers? Is it not true that, if you turn too high a light upon passages of this sort, you kill the interest of everything else in your book, so that readers will pass over your beautiful writing with such blurred and dull vision as men turn on the loveliest landscape, after staring with naked eyes at the sun? If you habitually present what you call 'sex' as sensual passion or as disgusting animalism, are you not imprisoning yourself in an hallucination and speaking infamously of that power, which Spenser, contemplating it from another point of view, spoke of as

> lord of truth and loyalty,
> Lifting himself out of the lowly dust
> On golden plumes up to the purest sky.

All these questions, I suspect, are a little over the head of the New York policeman. They are problems for an independent and dispassionate criticism. Unless we are prepared to answer them, we are not yet properly prepared to say what books are 'unprintable.'

IV

FOR THE HIGHER STUDY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

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IV

FOR THE HIGHER STUDY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Though the table of contents in Mr. Brownell's *American Prose Masters* indicates that the book contains but six masters, a reflective reader soon perceives that it contains a seventh, to whom the rest are indebted for no small part of the interest which they seem to possess in their own right. It is the fate of most celebrities, soon after their vogue is over, to be ushered respectfully into an honorable but dusky chamber which has more the air of a museum than of a living room. The warm appreciation of a living classic cools swiftly, in the presence of his marble effigy, to cold commemoration. Teachers and young pupils stroll listlessly through the dusky hall of fame, and, pausing for a moment before some "pallid bust," remark with perfunctory reverence, "This is Cooper," or "That is Emerson." Then they pass on—without stirring the accumulating dust of oblivion. But now and then a master, visiting the "museum," pauses before the same figures and begins to speak understandingly, with special knowledge, with acute discrimination of innumerable neglected values. It is as

if the place were suddenly flooded with light. The shadowy shapes regain their sharpness of contour and recover their jutting boldness of feature and their animated expression. They seem once more to have something to say to us; and we gather responsively around, rejoicing to feel the power of great writers, and rejoicing, too, perhaps, in an illusory sense of our own perceptiveness.

"Oh, yes," we exclaim, "Cooper is clearly one of our distinguished assets—we mustn't forget Cooper. Prolix, to be sure; but then diffuseness is an element in his illusion. He hadn't Scott's rich background, but the alliance of romance with reality in his tales, his general and personal interest in the life he depicted, make his account of it solider art, give his romance even more substance and meaning than Scott's historiography. And then consider his actual 'contributions.' His Indians were unprecedented, and they remain unsurpassed for vigor and fidelity. Balzac praised his painting of woods and sea to the skies. Thackeray picked half a dozen of his characters as the equals of Scott's men, and he called *La Longue Carabine* 'one of the great prize men of fiction.' Add to all this his solid merits as publicist and patriotic critic. Between 1825 and 1850, you remember, New England, always the apex, had become also the incubus of our civilization, and called loudly for the note-taking of a chiel from beyond its borders. Cooper performed that service. To him we owe it that not only American authorship but American literature

has been from his day of national rather than sectional character."

As is obvious, I have just reread Mr. Brownell's "Cooper," with a note-book in hand; and I am astonished to discover how many points he has given me to reflect upon, how many paths he has suggested for excursions. I am grateful to him now for revealing the relation between prolixity and illusion; in a world where prolixity is a predominant quality, that revelation alone is worth an essay. I am tormented with a desire to reread not merely the Leatherstocking Tales, but also the Waverley Novels, and to compare my middle-aged with my juvenile impressions of Scott's men and Cooper's men. I should like to go thoroughly into that interesting matter of Cooper's early and long vogue in France and his influence upon Balzac. I wish a complete account of the Indian in American fiction and a similar survey of American tales of the sea. I have a lively desire to investigate the origin and development of the anti-New England conscience before 1850. But—to make a conclusion rather than an end to the desires wakened by Mr. Brownell's method of dealing with American classics, I have never read in this book without saying to myself rather sternly: "It is high time that young Americans should begin the serious study of their own literature; and here is a guide who shows us how the task should be undertaken."

Since the English language became for the ma-

jority of English-speaking people the main avenue to the culture of the world, the literature of England has received the attention that it deserves. From childhood to old age we read English books. Furthermore, from the primary grades through the graduate school students examine English texts grammatically, historically, and critically—with some part of the seriousness which the ancient classics once commanded. American "classical" literature, however, remains for most of us a mere recreation when it does not become a fading recollection of our youth. In childhood we memorize bits of Longfellow and Lowell; we read Cooper and Poe and Hawthorne at the age when we are playing Indians. Perhaps in early adolescence we are helped by some aspiring high-school teacher through an essay of Emerson. But when we go to college, we put away our American classics as we put away our algebra and our Cæsar. Whatever taste and judgment in literary matters we attain are formed by English rather than American masters. We may carry into later life a certain affection for the native books that pleased our nonage; but we seldom subject them to critical scrutiny or test them with our disciplined powers of appreciation.

There was, of course, a period within the memory of our grandfathers when it was possible to exhaust the resources of an American library; and there are among our countrymen to-day persons of considerable cultivation who fancy that all the native books which are worthy of their atten-

tion could still be put on a five-foot shelf. This notion is becoming a little archaic. In the course of the last hundred years our literature has outgrown its youth and poverty. It is abundant, and it is becoming mature to the verge of sophistication. It has acquired a history, it has developed critical tendencies, it has participated in successive movements, it has produced schools and has evolved styles, it has discovered wide ranges of new material, it has made significant innovations in form, it has even put forth dialectal branches from a sturdily rooted vernacular stock. It has been subject to many influences, but it has also been widely influential. It exhibits all the resources and powers of a national literature. At no very distant period in the future its bulk and diversity will be so immense that Americans will either be obliged to give it the central place in their programme of reading or they will be obliged to remain ignorant of their own national culture and its chief instrument. At the present time it is a conservative estimate to say that nine-tenths of our university teachers are more competent to discuss the literature of England than the literature of America; and the actual quantity—not to speak of the quality—of instruction provided in the higher study of our own literature is relatively insignificant.

This is obviously not a happy state of affairs for native letters; yet this condition is the natural consequence of careless acquiescence in the contention that American must always be a part of English

literature. It is perhaps wiser to accept this contention than to listen to those revolutionaries who wish to cut themselves off without a shilling of their inheritance, and who sternly bid our English ancestors never darken our doors again. But our national literature will never hold its due place nor perform its proper work in our consciousness till we reverse the orthodox contention and declare instead that the older English literature must forever be *a part of American literature*. It will always be too soon to substitute our own authors for Chaucer or Spenser or Shakespeare or Milton. *They* belong to the common past of all the great branches of the English-speaking peoples. They are an essential and glorious part of our common literary history, just as ante-Reformation theologians are a part of both Roman and Anglican ecclesiastical history.

Shakespeare and Milton are as important to us as they are to Englishmen. Yet as between Jeremy Taylor and Cotton Mather, for example, it begins to be clear that one is of high importance to the English and of relatively little importance to us. As we advance into the eighteenth century, the shifting of values becomes even more noticeable. We need not discriminate between *Gulliver's Travels* and Franklin's *Autobiography,* for both are classics of the world's literature, and we cannot afford to neglect either of them. But it is not too soon to declare that the collected writings of Franklin belong to the culture of an educated American, while the collected writings of Swift have pretty certainly

a less valid claim on his attention than the collected writings of Voltaire. It is not too soon to declare that, if a choice must be made, the American student should choose to be familiar with the Federalist rather than the Letters of Junius, with Irving rather than Leigh Hunt, with Emerson rather than Carlyle, with Thoreau rather than Richard Jefferies, with Whitman rather than William Morris, with Mark Twain rather than Oscar Wilde, with Henry James rather than George Moore, and with Theodore Roosevelt rather than Queen Victoria.

In every case that I have mentioned the preference of a native writer would also, I believe, be the preference of a greater personality; and, in such cases, the arguments in favor of an American choice are conclusive. It is only by using our native literature, by keeping it current, by making it saturate the national consciousness—it is only so that we can make our lengthening history serve and enrich and inform us, and give to our culture the momentum of a vital tradition. But suppose the choice to be between an English author of the first rank in his kind and an American author of the second or third rank in the same kind. Is it not an unsound "cultural" policy to select for study the inferior author? Most eminent American teachers appear to think so. Believers in intellectual free trade, they have long ridiculed the notion of "protected industries" in the field of letters, and have united with English critics in deriding "Cooper, the American Scott,"

"Bryant, the American Wordsworth," "Miller, the American Byron." Insensibly they have slipped into the assumption that for every American author there must necessarily be a superior English counterpart. In their determination to show no soft indulgence to native writers, to avoid all chauvinistic infatuations, they have "leaned over backwards"—till at the present time our own authors are complaining, not without grounds, that, in the educational field at least, the English has become the "protected" branch of authorship among us.

But to return to our question:—Is it not an unsound policy to select for study an inferior author, merely because he is American? A Yankee answer to this question would be: Is it not an unsound policy to assume that an author, merely because he is American, must be inferior? And now for an answer which I have tried to make straightforward. I cannot make it entirely simple and at the same time adequate, for it requires careful qualification. It is generally an unsound policy to select for uncritical assimilation an American author who is the inferior of an available and equivalent author, whether he be English, Italian, or Greek, or beside whatever national banner he may stand beneath the flag of the republic of letters. If the best authors were always available, and if they always supplied our needs, there would be small reason for reading any other than the best. But as a matter of fact, the best Greek and Italian authors, say, are, to most American students, only imperfectly available; and foreign

authors, even the best modern authors of England—accessible though these are and closely related—are imperfect equivalents for the native authors that we need, to express for us the individual adventures and the social sense of men and women who live under our own national conditions. "Best," after all, even in the field of art, is a term which cannot be defined without some reference to what art is so fond of denying to itself—its purpose. When an American reader wishes an intimate picture of American society there can be no best book but an American book. There is always this strong special reason for knowing the literary expression of our national life, even though it be immature, unsatisfactory, and inferior of that of other nations.

The danger involved in assigning to American literature a much larger place in our culture than it now holds is obviously that in seeking to know ourselves and our own place in the world we may grotesquely overvalue our own things. This is a danger which is to be encountered, I believe, not carelessly yet unhesitatingly. It may be safely encountered only if it is met with an adequately equipped open-eyed criticism. Hence the grave importance of criticism at the present juncture in America. To embrace our native literature for better or for worse implies knowing it and valuing it for its virtues, whatever they are; but it need not in the least require us to shut our eyes to its shortcomings. On the contrary, we shall find, as our addiction to American letters increases, that we

shall grow more and more exacting; we shall "discover," as Mr. Brownell says, "new requirements in the ideal"—to which I would add: *if we have an ideal.* There are, indeed, at the present time many indications that our proverbial American hypersensitiveness to adverse comment on our institutions, our society, and our literature is at length beginning to yield ground before a new spirit of somewhat drastic self-examination and self-censure. In its popular manifestations this new spirit is as yet mainly iconoclastic, uncertain of its standards, and chiefly admirable, perhaps, in its readiness to give and receive hard knocks in the contest for solid footing. It is not in any sense an ancestor-worshiping spirit. Its temper is so depreciatory and its general attitude toward the past so contemptuously irreverent that all danger of overvaluing our hereditary possessions seems for the time being quite to have disappeared. It is a spirit of potentiality which may under wise guidance become a spirit of power.

V

W. C. BROWNELL

V

W. C. BROWNELL

In the critical movement which seeks to perfect American literature and make it an adequate expression and mold of American character, there are two curiously antagonistic parties, one of which flies the banner of culture and the other the banner of nature. One party holds that we shall never achieve adequate national expression until we have received the inspiration and mastered the technic of traditional art. The other party holds that we shall never achieve any national expression unless we follow our instincts and fearlessly utilize our fresh experience. Both are right, but each tends to stand apart belligerently upon its own rightness. The leaders of one party sulk, like Achilles, in the universities; the leaders of the other party rail, like Thersites, in the newspapers. "Academics!" cry the journalists. "Barbarians!" cry the professors. The antagonism is acute, and the consequences of this division are a tendency toward sterility in the Party of Culture, and a tendency toward ignorance and rawness in the Party of Nature.

What the situation calls for is a mediator who understands and values that which both parties

desire, and who can unite their complimentary virtues in a common purpose. Mr. Brownell has every important qualification for this imperative task of American criticism—except one. In spite of the fact that he is not a professor but was once a journalist—which should disarm the suspicions of every barbaric heart; and in spite of the fact that he has been a lifelong friend and professional counsellor of authors and artists, he appears to lack the confidence of the Party of Nature. This, I think it can be demonstrated, he deserves no less than the confidence of the Party of Culture, which he has long enjoyed. The evidence may be examined in detail in the six distinguished volumes which he has contributed to American critical literature, as follows: *French Traits,* 1889; *French Art,* 1892; *Victorian Prose Masters,* 1901; *American Prose Masters,* 1909; *Criticism,* 1914; *and Standards,* 1917.

We have other literary critics who have written as learnedly, more voluminously, and perhaps on a wider range of topics; and we have other critics who have brought their personalities to play upon their public with more of what is often accepted without scrutiny as "inspirational power." But I doubt whether any other is more abundantly supplied with those general ideas in which the permanent value of critical writing largely resides; and I am not acquainted with any other who has quite so pertinently, intelligently, and intelligibly applied his general ideas to the real cultural problems of our time—I mean the definition of culture's own

standards, the creation of a cultural ideal, the description of culture's business in a modern democracy. In these six books, if anywhere, American criticism is ripe. Here one finds extensive and varied learning, unintermitting intelligence, fastidious taste, an exacting artistic conscience, and high technical expertness, engaged in the service of reality and modernity. If I were asked where in American letters a student can obtain, with least admixture of the irrelevant, that discipline of taste and that general sense of initiation which an earlier generation sought in the works of Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater, I should say in the works of Mr. Brownell.

Our first great apostle of modern culture was Emerson. He performed for our grandfathers in America the service which Goethe performed for Germany, Mme. de Staël for France, Coleridge and Carlyle in their fashion for England, till they were "gathered to the bosom of political and social reaction." He initiated them into the modern spirit. He liberated their minds from conventional and shackling forms of thought. He set their original powers to work upon a native and national culture. In many respects he remains our greatest critic, our most fecundating and creative mind in the field of letters. But Emerson established his point of view and developed his methods before the main results of intellectual effort in the nineteenth century were fully accessible. He has suffered a decline in influence attributable to the presence in his work of the

disjecta membra of an old-fashioned metaphysical philosophy and attributable still more to his want of a modern critical method and matter to work upon. In 1870 Charles Eliot Norton, an American dedicated to "the study of perfection" who had enjoyed intimate relations with the leaders of culture in England and in Europe, lamented that Emerson was losing his grip and that no one was rising to take his place. "No best man with us," he declared, "has done more to influence the nation than Emerson—but the country has in a sense outgrown him. He was the friend and helper of its youth; but for the difficulties and struggles of its manhood *we need the wisdom of the reflective and rational understanding,* not that of the intuitions." (My italics.)

It is clear to any reader of Norton's *Letters* that he would have liked to see Lowell succeed Emerson as leader of the American intelligentsia; but it is also clear, I think, that Lowell in some respects disappointed him. Even when on the occasion of Lowell's death Norton strives to give the fullest possible emphasis to the nation's loss, there is a latent note of dissatisfaction in his tribute: "He has done more than any man of our generation to maintain the level of good sense and right feeling in public affairs." One expects an intellectual leader of the first rank to do more than merely maintain "the level of good sense and right feeling in public affairs." The suggestion is that Lowell failed to rise above an admirable mediocrity; that, industrious reader though he was, he lacked the energy, the

courage, and even the sincerity of mind requisite for an elevation of the level. What did he do for the level of *private* thinking? Even poor Clough, according to Norton, had an intellectual integrity which Lowell lacked. "He was too intellectually sincere to hold the old beliefs in spite of himself, *as Lowell tries to do.*" A docile man of the world himself, Norton remarks that when Lowell appeared in Paris he "managed to make the Quais and the Rue de Rivoli mere continuations of Brattle Street. I wish he had come abroad ten years ago." A genial and lovable man Lowell was and a fine example of American manhood; yet in the eyes of one of the friends who loved him best he was something too much of the flattered don, of the self-indulgent antiquarian, and of the plausible after-dinner speaker ever to feel the necessity of bringing himself and his culture thoroughly abreast of the modern world. This verdict, reluctantly arrived at, and collectible from Norton's letters, was publicly reaffirmed by Mr. Greenslet in his *Life of Lowell,* 1905, and again in a brilliantly authoritative fashion by Mr. Brownell himself in *American Prose Masters.*

The place in the history of American culture formerly occupied by Emerson might have been taken in succession by Lowell, had he ever brought his fine talents, as Mr. Hoover would say, "up to the emery-wheel of competition," had he strenuously kept himself in touch with "the best knowledge, the best ideas of his time." As a matter of

fact, Norton, with little of his friend's popularizing power, was a more progressive link between Emerson's time and ours than was Lowell, because his culture was less musty and his intellectual integrity was more earnest. When his mind had gripped what it took for truth, it did not let go out of what it took for good nature. Those whom he could reach in personal contact or by his amazingly faithful and sympathetic correspondence Norton sustained.

But in general, with the decline of Emerson, American seekers for light were obliged to find their account in Arnold, Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Ruskin, and Pater. They had to go abroad. Lowell, to be sure, had praised old books and nature and patriotism with delightful cleverness and charm. "He liked whatever was sure and wholesome," says Mr. Brownell with a touch of malice, "and eulogized it on all occasions with the zest of a discoverer." But for our conceptions of the historical method; for applications of evolutionary theory to the study of belles-lettres; for the doctrine of the "milieu" and the "Zeitgeist"; for our notions of the importance in culture of painting and the plastic arts; for those quickening watchwords—"conscience in intellectual matters," "study of perfection," "urbanity," "amenity," "sweet reasonableness," "grand style," "Hellenism," "curiosity," "free play of mind," and the rest; and for copious illustration of criticism considered as, in itself, a fine art, we turned, we were obliged to turn, to England and to France.

Since the appearance of Mr. Brownell's books, it is no longer necessary to turn to England and France for initiation into modern criticism. He does not begin where Lowell left off; his first book, *French Traits,* published in the year following Arnold's death, begins where Arnold left off. It probably never occurred to him, as it has occurred to some of the leaders of the Party of Nature, that a certain novelty of position might be achieved by denying all the axioms on which the criticism of the nineteenth century is founded. He took it for granted that the only novelty worth striving for would lie in the path of a critic who came fully abreast of his great predecessors, and then went forward in the general direction which they had indicated. Sporadic reversion to the primitive, romantic truancies to barbarism, never allured him. He took it for granted that the "humanization of man in society" is the established grand social object of the arts and letters, just as modern men of science take for granted evolution and gravitation. "The business of intelligent criticism," says Mr. Brownell, "is to be in touch with everything."

Accordingly, one finds his books saturated with everything relevant that preceded them. "I emphasize "everything relevant"; for the extensive and accurate scholarship which he has at his command he never employs like a pedant or like an antiquarian, but always like an artist. He loathes the irrelevant. He has Greek poetry and criticism at his service; English, French, and Italian history;

the evolution of painting and plastic art; European social life and manners, and an acquaintance with American, English, and French literatures adequate, I should say, to qualify him for a professorial chair in any one of the three literatures. Yet his wide and various learning is always actually in service; it illuminates his "special field," the special field of all vital criticism, namely, the contemporary scene; it comes to a focus, as all sound and enduring art must, and perpetually does—no matter what the date of its origin—in the present hour.

II

Let us take for illustration *French Traits, An Essay in Comparative Criticism.* Mr. Brownell knows everything that foreigners have said about France. He also knows France. He has not studied it like Emerson, who said that Americans go to Europe to be Americanized; nor like Lowell, who made the Quais and the Rue de Rivoli "mere continuations of Brattle Street." He went to France, as Arnold went, as "a merchant of light," to discover its characteristic virtues and powers and superiorities and, so far as possible, to bring them home for the use of his own countrymen. Arnold's exploration of French culture was, however, mainly literary and educational, and his stimulating recommendation of French virtues was, except in the educational field, fragmentary. Mr. Brownell, after long and profound immersion in

his subject, arrives at a central conception of the French national genius which in his introductory pages he presents in the form of a thesis as follows:

The times change, and the most acutely alive change most in them. Since the days of Louis le Gros, when the national unity began, France has most conspicuously of all nations changed with the epoch; in those successive readjustments which we call progress she has almost invariably been in the lead. She was the star of the ages of faith as she is the light of the ages of fellowship. The contrast between her actual self and her monuments is, therefore, most striking; but at the same time it is superficial only and perfectly explicable. And its explanation gives the key to French character; for there is one instinct of human nature, one aspiration of the mind, which France has incarnated with unbroken continuity from the first—since there was a France at all France has embodied the *social instinct*. It was this instinct which finally triumphed over the barbaric Frankish personality; which during the panic and individualism of the Middle Ages took refuge in the only haven sympathetically disposed to harbor it and produced the finest monuments of Europe by the force of spiritual solidarity; which, so soon as the time was ripe, extended itself temporarily and created a civil organism that rescued the human spirit from servitude, and which, finally, in the great transformation of the Revolution, obtained the noblest victory over the forces of anarchy and unreason that history records.

The thesis thus announced Mr. Brownell sustains in a succession of extraordinarily penetrating chap-

ters on Morality, Intelligence, Sense and Sentiment, Manners, Women, The Art Instinct, The Provincial Spirit, and Democracy. One sees the cathedrals as the "grandiose links in the chain which unites the Revolution to the twelfth-century communal movement for equality." One follows the path that leads from Notre Dame de Paris to the Nouvel Opéra. One perceives the essential continuity of national effort from the Merovingian epoch to "the gayety, the *bonhomie,* the bright graciousness of a Parisian or provincial crowd." The book is consummately composed. One knows from point to point where one is and whither one is going. Perfect lucidity and firmness of design are united with great richness of detail; for the detail is always subordinated to the total intended effect.

If Mr. Brownell had limited his purpose strictly to displaying the relation between the traditional "instinct" of the French people and their characteristic qualities and defects, he would still have given us the most valuable American book about France that I know anything about—the book, that is which tells us most of that which is best worth knowing. But *French Traits* is also an "essay in comparative criticism." There are illuminating side flashes upon France from Germany, England, Italy, and Spain, but the national traits which are steadily present in Mr. Brownell's mind for comparison are the American traits. The parallel thesis which he develops by implication is, that America embodies

the *individualistic instinct,* and that the characteristic qualities and defects of her art and letters and morals and manners are consequences of the individualistic instinct. The book comes to its burning focus in the penultimate chapter on "Democracy" and in the final chapter on "New York after Paris," in which he deals with the defects of our civilization with a cutting candor which some of our young people imagine was unknown before 1920. Let us take, for example, this paragraph on our Babbittian activities:

> Certainly in New York we are too vain of our bustle to realize how mannerless and motiveless it is. The essence of life is movement, but so is the essence of epilepsy. Moreover, the life of the New Yorker who chases street-cars, eats at a lunch-counter, drinks what will "take hold" quickly at a bar he can quit instantly, reads only the head-lines of his newspaper, keeps abreast of the intellectual movement by inspecting the display of the Elevated Railway newsstands while he fumes at having to wait two minutes for his train, hastily buys his tardy ticket of sidewalk speculators, and leaves the theater as if it were on fire—the life of such a man is, notwithstanding all its futile activity, varied by long spaces of absolute mental stagnation, of moral coma. . . . Owing to this lack of a real, a rational activity, our individual civilization, which seems when successful a scramble, and when unlucky a *sauve qui peut,* is morally as well as spectacularly, not ill described in so far as its external aspect is concerned by the epithet *flat.* Enervation seems to menace those whom hyperæsthesia spares.

With this picture of bustling American *ennui,* which the fiction of recent years has now made so familiar to us, Mr. Brownell's picture of French gayety of heart and intellectual vivacity is in rather painful contrast. Many of our contemporary social doctors diagnose our malady as "too much democracy," and prescribe with various sugarings of the pill an aristocratic reaction, an injection of the superman philosophy, or a revival of the Arnoldian doctrine of "the saving remnant." Now the "saving remnant" is the one Arnoldine doctrine which, in its social and political applications, Mr. Brownell rejects. "We have a 'remnant' of our own," he declares in his essay on Arnold, "whose activities instead of exalting our esteem of 'remnants' tends to make us suspicious of them." "The attractiveness of the doctrine," he remarks with malign acuteness in *Standards,* "must be measured by the character of the remnant itself—in our case certainly hardly worth the sacrifice of the rest of the nation to achieve." In both these passages there is more than a tincture of irony; for Mr. Brownell is himself a philosophical democrat, and his own measure of national success is simply presented in this sentence from the chapter on "Democracy" in *French Traits:* "There is by general admission more happiness enjoyed by more people in France than in any other European country."

The happiness enjoyed by the mass of the French people Mr. Brownell attributes to the genuineness of their democracy. The real substance of well-being

he finds more evenly distributed among them than among us. "The people, from top to bottom, are far more perfectly humanized than elsewhere. Equality has been such a practical education for them that even the ignorant have attained that intelligence which is the end of formal education in greater measure than the corresponding classes of the most highly educated portions of Prussia itself."

The correction, for us, which this state of affairs suggests to Mr. Brownell is a return to our own religion and philosophy of democracy and a fresh effort to fulfil its promises. "It is perfectly certain," he declares, "that but for Jefferson's French philosophy, called then as now demagogic Quixotism, we should have had as short-lived a democratic republic as Hamilton prophesied and endeavored to compass. Our next epoch made a nation of us, and crystallized the spirit of nationality in democratic forms. But nothing is more significant of the discredit into which democracy as our ideal has fallen among us than the way in which this formative period of the nation's growth has been obscured by the struggle with slavery which immediately followed it. . . . Democratic philosophy nearly perished. It ceased to be propagated among 'the best people,' as they are called. It lost its hold on the mass of intelligence, on the newspapers, on the college graduates, on all those who had not an especial capacity for keeping their heads."

Let the curious person take this chapter on

"Democracy," add to it the incidental discussion of the subject in the essay on "Emerson," and then compare the stimulus to thought that he receives from it with the stimulus that he finds in Lowell's "Democracy" or in Arnold's "Democracy," and he will feel for himself, I believe, the decisive superiority of Mr. Brownell's treatment. How little "academic" this chapter is, or indeed for that matter, how little "academic" is the spirit of the entire book—how steadily and with a central sweep of its wisdom it drives at practice, I can best suggest, perhaps, by a final quotation:

"There are no questions," said Gambetta, superbly, "but social questions." The apothegm formulates the spiritual instinct of France since the days of the national beginnings. It formulates also, I think, the instinct of the future. That is why France is so inexhaustibly interesting—because in one way or another she, far more than any other *nation,* has always represented the aspirations of civilization, because she has always sought development in common, and because in this respect the ideal she has always followed is the ideal of the future. It is, at any rate, inseparable from the visions which a material age permits to the few idealists of to-day.

III

Mr. Brownell's second book, *French Art,* 1892, may be regarded, like *French Traits,* as establishing a new and difficult standard for the American critic. Its significance for us may perhaps be in-

creased if one recalls the fact that the first chair of the history of art in America was established for Charles Eliot Norton in 1875 (seven years after Ruskin's election to the newly founded Slade professorship at Oxford), previous to which time the study of the arts had, in Norton's words, "been relegated to professional artists or to mere dilettanti, and the idea that a complete and satisfactory education could not be obtained without some knowledge of their character and history, and without such culture of the æsthetic faculties as the study of them might afford, appeared strange and inacceptable to many even of the most enlightened thinkers on the subject of the education of youth." The number of American literary critics capable of writing a critical, historical survey of French or English or American art is not yet excessively numerous. But in France to-day, Mr. Brownell tells us in *Criticism,* 1914, "no literary critic with a tithe of Sainte-Beuve's authority would be likely to incur the genuine compassion expressed for Sainte-Beuve, when he ventured to talk about art, by the Goncourts in their candid Diary."

French Art traces the evolution of French painting from Claude and Poussin to Degas; and in similar fashion the evolution of French sculpture from Claux Sluters to Rodin—to whom, significantly, the book is dedicated. Neither intimate acquaintance with the galleries of Europe nor technical expertness is prerequisite to the intelligent and appreciative reading of this book. Art, as Mr.

Brownell presents it, is only one of the languages or modes of expression at the disposal of the cultivated spirit which animates the various epochs of history. One who has penetrated to this general spirit through one language readily learns to "translate."

In a sense *French Art* reaffirms the thesis of *French Traits*—systematically elaborating the earlier chapter on "The Art Instinct." "More than that of any other modern people," begins the argument, "French art is a national expression"; and the rest of the book is the demonstration of that initial propositon. Incidentally or concurrently it is one of the most illuminating discussions ever written of the powers and virtues of a great tradition. Finally, it is a beautiful illustration throughout of intelligence energetically and scrupulously, and I think successfully, applied to understanding and judging a great variety of works to which frequently the critic feels but slight emotional response.

Of French art in general Mr. Brownell is very far from being an unqualified admirer. In the æsthetic field, the French appear to him to be characterized by disciplined taste and high technical competence, rather than by high imaginative inspiration. "We may say, from Poussin to Puvis de Chavannes, from Clouet to Meissonier, *taste*—a refined and cultivated sense of what is sound, estimable, competent, reserved, satisfactory, up to the mark, and above all, elegant and distinguished—has

been at once the arbiter and the stimulus of excellence in French painting."

Among our younger critics at the present time it is little the custom to expend any effort on understanding what one does not admire. The current fashion is to ignore what fails immediately to please or else to mispresent it—with malice or ignorance or with both malice and ignorance. A critic who departs from this fashion and does candid justice to an adversary is at once under suspicion of having espoused his adversary's cause. Discrimination is become the Unpardonable Sin. Mr. Brownell's justice has accordingly confused many people with regard to his own position. He is, for example, nowadays commonly spoken of as a "classicist" or as "mere traditionalist," an upholder of "the academic"—of course in the bad sense. What is the evidence? Nothing but this: he has written with unquestionable insight of classical art and the disciplinary power of tradition. Hear him on the value of tradition and acquaintance with antecedent artists:

> They tend to exalt the salutary, the serene, and the important principle of perfection, to keep its worship alive, to pass on its torch to the next hand. They tend to curb the violent, to restrain the exaggerated, to elevate the ignoble. In brief, the office of culture is the same in the province of art as it is elsewhere, the cultivation of the sense of perfection, the sense which nature with its incompleteness and its immense inorganic content of infinite suggestion cannot supply.

"Away with him!" exclaim our hasty leaders of the Party of Nature. "How can any one who pretends to see such virtues in tradition be anything but a traditionalist?" A question, to which the answer is: No one can—unless he possess critical poise. If he does possess critical poise, however, he is capable of observing with Mr. Brownell: "The peril of the pursuit of perfection is inanity, the peril of nature-worship is eccentricity. Opposite temperaments will always differ as to the comparative value of the two." As for tradition, furthermore: "Everything depends upon the way in which one makes use of his patrimony. There is an eternal opposition between using it in a routine and mechanical way, drawing the interest on it, so to speak, from time to time on the one hand, and on the other reinvesting it according to the dictates of one's own feeling and faculty. This latter is what every great artist has done. . . . It is what Rodin has done with what the forerunners of Greece and Italy devised him. It is exactly what the Institute sculpture does *not* do." A mere academician would scent something like heresy here.

Among the *obiter dicta* on the critic's duty scattered throughout this book none is more devoutly to be commended to contemporary attention than this: "It is a sure mark of narrowness and defective powers of perception to fail to discover the point of view of what one disesteems."

As a matter of fact, the so-called classical art of the French impresses Mr. Brownell as splendidly

null; it leaves him cold; it affects him as inane. He does not relish, though he recognizes, the virtues of the classical period till he discovers them transformed, disguised, but still a controlling force for form and measure, beneath the passion and color and romantic "suggestiveness" of Géricault, Delacroix, and Millet. But he is no sworn romanticist either. The temper of his mind is intensely modern, and modern, I venture to say, with a kind of passionate loyalty, which, for its own part, has done with dispellable illusions, which craves only reality. "The entire energy of the era is concentrated," he declares, "upon what is to be discerned in, argued from, and inspired by the tangible, the real, the substantial"; and in that realistic striving of the era he has desired to be a part. He dedicates his book to Rodin, surely not because he loves the smooth academic perfection symbolized, for example, in Mr. Kenyon Cox's "Tradition," but because he responds to "life, personality, originality, vigor, intensity, variety—the best in modern art." It is the false, as he says somewhere, and not the real which is antithetical to the ideal; and his own ideal in art is, I believe, clearly an imaginative realism.

IV

A critic who works with any seriousness and consistency inevitably provides us with the materials for constructing his own ideal artist, his ideal man of letters. In the two books which we have exam-

ined we have seen Mr. Brownell bringing the history of French society to a focus in modern democracy and the history of French art to a focus in modern realism. Turning now to his more strictly literary studies, we find him bringing them sharply to bear upon the age in which he has lived. Though an index to his works might serve as a directory to "the best that has been thought and said in the world," he has collected the light from all the luminaries of his intellectual heavens and centered it upon the authors included in his two companion volumes, *Victorian Prose Masters* and *American Prose Masters;* and these authors were all of the nineteenth century. They are not, of course, all the men and women of the age who have touched us deeply; but they afford, on the whole, an adequate *representation* of the literary forces in England and America which have made us what we are. They are sufficient, at any rate, to enable us to indicate clearly the principal features of Mr. Brownell's ideal man of letters. Alike from his reasoned commendations and his reasoned condemnations, one perceives that his ideal man of letters is distinguished by the following traits: truth of substance, intelligent and frequent use of his reason, breadth of culture, the spiritual refinement of his democracy, a high and imaginative seriousness, a sense for form, and a style urbane and adequate to its purposes.

When Mr. Brownell finds a majority of these features present in a single author, as in Thack-

eray and Arnold in England and Emerson in America, his presentation of the character is finely appreciative and attains a communicable glow of admiration. But one observes that he applies pretty consistently all his tests to all the cases that appear in his court; and the ordeal is a severe one. If the candidate for glory fails on two or three of the cardinal points, as Henry James and George Meredith do, he receives a sharply discriminating verdict. But if he fails on a majority of them, as Poe does, no seductions of style nor brilliance of ratiocinative power can save him; he leaves the court with only the rags of his honors. It would be profitable to examine closely the structure and the detail of these essays; for the structure stands examination, and inspection of the detail can only discover the scrupulosity of its finish. We must content ourselves with a few crucial instances.

Of all the writers of prose fiction Thackeray is manifestly the favorite. The essential soundness and sweetness of his character counts for him. The "effortless ease and simplicity" of his style counts for him. But what counts most decisively for him is this:

He was above all else a lover of truth. The love of truth was with him, indeed, less a sentiment than a passion. It absorbed his mind and inspired its activity. To the moral temperament thus attested falsehood of all kinds seemed the one thing in the universe worth the evocation of militant energy. The exposure of sham enlisted all his artistic faculty.

He pursued it with the most searching subtlety ever devoted to a definite aim in all his books. The villain of all his stories is the hypocrite.

I suppose a critic of the strict æsthetic camp would say that Thackeray loved truth because he was an artist. Mr. Brownell, for whom there is neither beauty nor goodness without truth, appears to say that he was an artist because he loved truth and had a fresh vision of it; and that seems to my own sense less like standing the facts on their heads. Keeping the facts right side up does not hinder Mr. Brownell from perceiving the mere æsthetic usefulness of truth as "artistic material":

It need hardly be pointed out that hypocrisy constitutes one of the most effective elements which the novelist can use in portraying human life on a large scale and under civilized conditions. Imposture of one kind or another almost monopolizes the seamy side of any society's existence. In the material of the novelist of manners it has the same place as crime in that of the romance of adventure. . . . Almost inevitably the novelist, who both by predisposition and by practice handles it well, presents a picture of sound and vital verisimilitude, and of profounder and more universal significance than a study of most other social forces.

If one bears in mind Mr. Brownell's almost unqualified admiration for Thackeray's truth of substance and for his effortless ease and simplicity of style, and if one also recalls the other features of his ideal man of letters, it will be evident that his

verdicts on the other writers of prose fiction are notably consistent and in accordance with reason. George Eliot receives her qualified diploma with special mention for truth and high seriousness: "No other novelist gives one such a poignant, sometimes such an insupportable sense that life is immensely serious, and no other, in consequence, is surer of being read, and read indefinitely, by serious readers." Cooper, as we have seen, receives a certificate for "truth of substance." Hawthorne, on the other hand, is drastically, and, I think, a bit harshly, reduced as a classic of American letters on the ground of his romantic insubstantiality and his fatalistic confidence in an indolent "genius," resulting in an inadequate culture. Poe is likewise reduced on the same charge and with the additional charge of moral vacuity.

The two novelists whose gravely dubious awards best attest Mr. Brownell's critical integrity are George Meredith and Henry James—both dedicated to truth, as it was given them to see the truth; both highly active intelligences; both distinguished representatives of the Party of Culture, and both eminently refined and adequately serious. Mr. Brownell himself has so many qualities in common with them, he impresses me as so much of a Jamesian and Meredithian character that I could well have understood and indeed have condoned a little more leniency toward them. I explain the ultimate hardening of his heart in their regard primarily by the fact that he is by conviction, if not by instinct, a Thackerayan,

and that when he called into mind the effortless ease and simplicity of Thackeray, he took compassion on the younger generation, and prayed that they might be delivered from any further developments of the Meredithian or the later Jacobean manner.

Among the critics and apostles of culture, Arnold is easily the first in his estimation—the most frequently quoted, and the most pervasively present as an invisible influence. The completeness, the roundness, and the essential rightness of his entire conception of the "good life" count for Mr. Brownell, as they count for the rest of us. We do not get far away from him in respect to fundamentals without finding ourselves going wrong. But, significantly, that which in Mr. Brownell's eyes "singularizes Arnold, personally, among the writers of his time and for his public is that, in a more marked and definite way than is to be said of any of them he developed his nature as well as directed his work in accordance with the definite ideal of reason." The high value which he attaches to the exercise of the intellectual faculty appears also in his judgment of Emerson, whose "ideal of reason" was perhaps somewhat less "definite" than Arnold's. Says Mr. Brownell, "Emerson's moral greatness—most conspicuous of all facts about him, as I think it is—receives its essentially individual stamp, aside from its perfection, from its indissoluble marriage with intellect."

For American students of culture the most in-

teresting trait in Mr. Brownell's ideal man of letters is what I have called the spiritual refinement of his democracy. This conception may be studied profitably in the two complementary essays on Emerson and Carlyle. Carlyle was a great artist *malgré lui,* but by his paucity of ideas, his violence of temper, his prejudices, his eccentricity of style, his indifference to all the shades of truth—constituting virtually an indifference to truth, and by his reactionary rage against reason, science, and democracy—by all these traits Carlyle represents pretty nearly the antithesis of Mr. Brownell's ideal modern man of letters. Carlyle detested that return of the eighteenth century to reason and nature and that genuine intellectual radicalism which in England, France, and America laid the foundations of our political and social philosophy and liberated the most enlightened spirit of contemporary letters:

> Its humanitarianism meant nothing to him. Its great discovery of the dignity of man, he flouted. In its substitution of the heart for the soul, its rationalization of the affections, its ideals of freedom of spirit and faculty, of equality of rights and duties, of fraternity of interest and feelings to the end of mutual advantage and coöperative advance, he saw only a chaotic scramble after the *ignis fatuus* of happiness.

Of hero-worship at the expense of respect for institutions, which all the "strong men" and their advocates, from Frederick and Carlyle to Roosevelt and his biographers, tend to foster and inculcate,

Mr. Brownell feels a civilized and, I believe, a profoundly sagacious apprehension:

The same plebeian antagonism to democratic feeling [my italics] that leads him to consider the spirit of the time as negligible except as incarnated in the hero, leads him inevitably to magnify the hero in his purely personal and particular character. Thus, for example, his admiration of Johnson is based on his worshipping according to the old formulas in St. Clement Danes every Sunday in the age of Voltaire; though for his attempt to rationalize the same old formulas he has nothing but ridicule for Coleridge.

So much for the main grounds on which Carlyle is decisively condemned. Now hear Mr. Brownell on Emerson:

Specifically, one of his greatest services both to us and to mankind . . . . is what might be called the rationalization of democracy through the ideal development of the individual. . . . Too fastidious to respond to the elementary appeal of philanthropy, he was yet bold enough and detached enough to recognize the injustice of privilege, and the claims of every human potentiality for development into power. . . . The very fact that he was no respecter of persons protected him from illusions as to classes, and the finality of feudalism was alone enough to lead his revolutionary and independent spirit to see it as an arrest of development and not an ideal. . . . If his emotional nature lacked warmth, what eminently it possessed was an exquisite refinement, and a constituent of his refinement was an instinctive antipathy to ideas of dominance, dictation, patronage, caste and material superiority whose

essential grossness repelled him and whose ultimate origin in contemptuousness—probably the one moral state except cravenness that chiefly he deemed contemptible—was plain enough to his penetration.

If Mr Brownell had struck out no other bold phrase than "plebeian antagonism to democratic feeling," he would deserve to be remembered. If he had developed no other thesis than this, that an instinct for equality is "a constituent of refinement" and sensitiveness a mark of true democracy, he would still be an important contributor to American culture. To stigmatize as vulgarity what often masks as aristocratic superiority, and to name as the grace of a beautiful spirit what is often spoken of as the slatternly sentiment of the mob is, in a person of unquestionably distinguished refinement, to perform the service which the prince rendered to Cinderella and her proud stepsisters. To speak less "tropically," it is to begin that elevation of the level of one's private thinking upon which the level of public thought and the increase of charm in our society and in our letters ultimately depend.

V

One aspect of our subject remaining for consideration is suggested by *Criticism* and *Standards:* Mr. Brownell's keen interest in improving the theory and raising the standards of his own art. Various scholars in the universities write at length nowadays on the history and principles of criticism—for

scholars. But few are the practising critics who have thought so hard or written so much on the technic and art of criticism that is expert, helpful and stimulating to other practitioners. At exactly what time he dedicated himself to mastering its materials and methods I cannot say, but, as I conjecture, at a fairly early period; for no characteristic of his short row of masterpieces is more marked than their coherent, adequate, yet economical fulfilment of a preconceived design. He must have done these things, I say, for the abstract precepts of *Criticism,* produced in 1914, are illustrated with precision by his own practice since 1889.

The critic's business, according to this little manual, is to discern and characterize the abstract qualities of the personality which informs every important piece of literature, as every important work of plastic art. His equipment should include, in addition to extensive and intensive acquaintance with *belles-lettres,* a liberal knowledge of history, acquaintance with the fine arts, a tincture of philosophic training, and a personal "philosophy of life" —the last indispensable if one's work is to have outline and coherence. In his essay on Henry James, I cannot feel that Mr. Brownell has quite justly denied the novelist's possession of a philosophy of life; but in the essay on James he has stated succinctly what the indispensable elements of an artist's "philosophy" are:

It is simply to be profoundly impressed by certain truths. These truths need not be recondite, but they

must be deeply felt. They need be in no degree original. The writer's originality will have abundant scope in their expression.

Since the critic's aim is conviction, he must appeal to some accepted standard. He cannot rely upon impressionistic whim nor upon academic authority. He must appeal to the one standard which is generally accepted in a rationalistic age; he must appeal to reason. At this point, Mr. Brownell's precept is less persuasive and less easy to follow than his practice. As I have endeavored to show, in practice his standard is the ideal man of letters, as formulated by a critic of a certain stipulated culture. Reason is merely or mainly the instrument for instructively comparing the personality discoverable in a new work of art with this ideal. By formulating and diligently applying this ideal, by making it very exacting and yet on the whole, I think, very clear, very tangible, very practicable, and very persuasive, Mr. Brownell has shown himself a "creative" critic. It is one of his main contributions.

It may at this point be remarked that his ideal man of letters bears a strong resemblance to his ideal critic. The main features of both are alike, and most of these features are recognizable and definable by purely intellectual processes. The profile of neither his critic nor his man of letters looks to the eye of imagination like that of a lyric poet. If I were to apply to Mr. Brownell his own method, I should say that the characteristic merits and the characteristic defects of his criticism are both attrib-

utable to the extraordinary predominance of his intelligence.

"To produce vital and useful criticism," he declares in his "Lowell," where he perhaps treats the subject more effectively because less abstractly—"to produce vital and useful criticism it is necessary to think, think, think, and then, when tired of thinking, to think more." This is doubtless quite true; and it explains the unpopularity of criticism among us, and its rareness. It also explains such unpopularity as Mr. Brownell has enjoyed with the Party of Nature. People do not like to think. People will do almost anything, within the law, to avoid thinking—such things, for example, as making card-indexes and compiling bibliographies and genealogies. But what people really like to do is to feel, to dream, to thrill with delight, or to be diverted with change. Mr. Brownell, nevertheless, relentlessly insists upon thinking. He thinks before he begins to write; each essay opens with a thought, another follows in the succeeding sentence, and so on incessantly to the end. There are no places to rest:—no biographical passages, no merely historical paragraphs, no gossip, scanty anecdotes, no personal digressions, few illustrative extracts from the authors under discussion. No; except one great exhilaration of which I shall speak in a moment, nothing but the steady, remorseless, brilliant business of critical characterization. It is a strain, like reading Meredith and Henry James, which people will not readily

undergo unless they are preassured of an unusual reward.

With profound deference, I venture to doubt whether criticism is wisely restricted quite so exclusively to the field of pure knowledge and understanding. I doubt whether the art of criticism can, in the present state of our public, be most effectively practised within the strict limits of this field. His own resolution to admit no taste which he cannot "rationalize," to speak of no elation which he has not a rational "right" to feel, limits his power of communicating some of the undeniable effects which one receives from the immediate presence of unquestionably great personalities and great works of art. In his schedule of values he has, to be sure, made a place for sentiment, the throb of passion, the surge and beating of desire; but he appreciates ecstasy a shade languidly, and one cannot but associate his comparatively incidental treatment of poetry and something like indifference to the remarkable rhythmical qualities of his prose masters to the fact that there is little or nothing thoroughly "rational" to be said about what passion and poetry and rhythm do to "this quintessence of dust" which we are.

But I have said more than enough of the defects attributable to an extraordinarily predominant intelligence. In the main, I think the type of criticism produced by this intelligence is, at the present time, of especial and conspicuous service. In the present state of our letters, I agree with Mr. Brownell, in

spite of Pope, that "a little learning is a useful thing," and that a little intelligence is even to be encouraged. For a hundred critical "salesmen" who will cheerfully undertake to communicate the emotion of great works of art, there are one or two who will attempt, beyond the most threadbare platitudes, to utter anything in the similitude of a thought; there are only one or two in a hundred who will jeopardize the favor of their audience or sacrifice their own mental ease to seek a reason for being "bored to extinction" by *Pendennis,* or for bursting into pæans of enthusiasm and rage over the latest bit of pornography suppressed by the censor. There is, after all, a certain very human craving which finds its satisfaction in knowing the causes and reasons of things, and no one has discovered a method of satisfying this craving without effort. A criticism which practises discrimination and high differentiation, and which therefore demands and rewards close attention, a criticism which avowedly emphasizes rather the discipline than the delights of culture, is, as the physicians say, "indicated," and this, beyond all our other practitioners of the art, Mr. Brownell provides.

And, though he gives us charily the first fine careless rapture of the emotional response to letters, he does constantly mingle the pleasant with the useful in the delectable form which intelligence takes in its moments of surplus power—in the form, I mean, of wit. The superiority of Mr. Brownell's intelligence has enabled him to enjoy more of these

moments of surplus power than any other of our critics. His latest book, *Standards,* a work of strictly contemporaneous satirical inspiration, scintillates with wit from the first page to the last. It is the most continuous and silvery peal of "thoughtful laughter" that ever burst from our American Academy of Arts and Letters to float in hovering echoes over the unheeding heads of our New Barbarians. But wit and epigrammatic force are constant attendants upon Mr. Brownell's most serious analytic processes; they are incidents of his penetration, like the flash of a finely edged instrument. In the "Hawthorne," for example, this rare power of the intelligence is in continuously brilliant play. In this case, indeed, I suspect that it is a little excessively sharpened by a Knickerbocker's anti-New England malice—a malice, one admits, not without provocation in the slightly excessive awe which the old New England group felt toward themselves, and still more in the distinctively Frog-Pondian reverence with which certain wives of our Boston and Cambridge worthies habitually referred to "the awful majesty" of their own husbands. A realist, even an idealistic realist like Mr. Brownell, finds it difficult to swallow all that without a drop of irony in the glass.

But *je suis de ceux qui citent*—why stand prating before the curtain, with Cyrano behind it?

Of Hawthorne, Mr. Brownell remarks: "He unquestionably dwelt apart, and partly, perhaps, for this reason his soul was generally believed to be like

a star." "A recluse in life, he overflows to the readers. He does not tell very much, but apparently he tells everything." "Instead of reading he reflected —'brooded' perhaps, in his pythian character. But he had very little to brood over. Hence the unsubstantial character of his fanciful progeny." Of Emerson: "Communication was manifestly the last concern of the lecturer." "When he left his church he took his pulpit with him." "He was not so much a delegate of the divine as a part of it." Concerning Poe's Tales this question: "Finally of what value after all is goose-flesh as a guide to correct estimates of art?" Of Lowell: "He had a 'genius' for being perfunctory and genuine at the same time." "He beamed and expanded in a confidence free from the fear of confutation or even contradiction." A consolatory thought in *Criticism:* "It seems unlikely that the unreal will ever regain the empire it once possessed. *Its loss, at all events, is not ours, since it leaves us the universe."* I have italicized: the wit in the original context depends upon the fact that this really stupendous consolation steals in like a mouse. Revival of animal worship, with denominational cleavage, noted in *Standards:* "Two distinct and interhostile sects of secular schismatics, one adoring the golden calf and the other incensing the under dog." A suggestion to the New Barbarians, who constitute the left wing of the Party of Nature: "In the realm of intelligence sincerity is but an elementary virtue. It is often the hardest thing to

forgive, as when, for example, it is vaunted as a superior substitute for intelligence itself."

In illustrating the vivacities of Mr. Brownell's manner, I have done what he never does: I have, as he would say, "caressed my predilections"; I have indulged myself in what he would stigmatize as "a Capuan dalliance with detail." But I return now to what I regard as the most distinguished feature of his ideal critic, namely, his method; and to the result of that method, namely, an impressive organic form in the critical essay. The method, as we have seen, begins with thinking, and the principal divisions of the work are as follows. First, the critic is to discover, by analysis or by intuition, in the subject before him, a theme. Toward this theme he is then sharply to define his own total feeling and attitude: thus this theme becomes his thesis. Next, he is to justify and correct his thesis by analysis of the constituting elements of his subject. This accomplished, he proceeds to the disposition of the various members of his discourse for the detailed examination of the "constituting elements." When the members have been rightly ordered and proportions duly kept, the essay appears to be produced from the theme as the fingers are produced from the wrist—with other implications of the image. As the successive members of the discourse are extended, like the gradually opening fingers of a hand, they first entirely disclose, and then, in a conclusive or "synthetic" grip, entirely enclose—what they hold. That which they hold, if the process has been

successful, is a personality. As personality is the soul of art, to state it—that is, to produce its characteristics in critical terms—is, as Mr. Brownell declares, "the crown of critical achievement."

It is something to have formulated such a method. That he has applied it with brilliant success to revealing, in turn, the characteristics of the French people, of French painting and sculpture, of the literature of England, and finally of the literature of America, assures to Mr. Brownell, I do not doubt, a secure and distinguished place in the history of our criticism. But if my own analysis has been of any avail, I have disclosed a personality which requires only to be known to them in order to make a wider and wider appeal to all those members of the younger generation who feel any concern in the "study of perfection." There are other living American apostles of culture who profess the power of initiation into that liberty of the spirit which results from knowing and following the law of our own higher natures; but there is no other, as it seems to me, of anything like his eminence, who can give to our somewhat fiercely realistic young people so much which they are now prepared to receive.

No apostle of culture, no one but a king of the South Sea Islands, could conceivably give to the left wing of the Party of Nature all that it desires. But Mr. Brownell has occupied himself for fifty years with that crucial problem which has vexed the best minds of the world since the eighteenth century and which is still before us as the central

critical problem of the twentieth: how to return to nature and to reason at the same time! He has found a solution, and the one solution yet proposed which has any prospect of satisfaction in it. The only way, he holds, to bring our nature and our reason together—and the only "fun" which can adequately console us for what Henry James called "the long humiliation of life"—is to set our reason contriving ever more and more difficult human tasks for our nature to perform. This is the solution of a genuine, an intelligent and a cultivated intellectual radicalism as distinguished from an ignorant, an unintelligent, and a false intellectual radicalism: and in this genuine sense Mr. Brownell is an intellectual radical.

Neither an iconoclast nor a reactionary, he has been steadfastly and consistently a man of intensely contemporary sympathies and interests; he has stood unflinchingly for reason as our supreme instrument; eminent in culture, he has valued the past as it could be used in the present; a convinced democrat, he has criticized the brutality of our individualism and has commended the study of French equality and the French social instinct as the means to refine our own society and to make it more delectable; no lover of negation, the main tendency of his work is positive and affirmative; in every field of art he has turned from academic vacuity and romantic insubstantiality to welcome the modern passion for reality; as a critic of letters he has formulated and applied standards which are exacting but both in-

telligible and attainable; in his own writing he has striven with high seriousness to exemplify the virtues of an idealistic realism; he has declared that the highest service of criticism "is to secure that the true and the beautiful, and not the ugly and the false, may in wider and wider circles of appreciation be esteemed to be the good." If these are not the ideals of the younger generation, so much the worse for the younger generation. But I think they are—or that they will be as soon as the younger generation knows itself.

VI

ON FALLING IN HATE

VI

ON FALLING IN HATE

The vision of life attained by men of letters is ordinarily attended by one of two major emotions: the emotion of love, which attends a vision of the beautiful; or the emotion of hate, which attends a vision of the ugly. Both of these emotions sharpen the eyesight.

The ancient proverb which declares that love is blind is only a half truth: love is only blind of one eye. The expression "blind hate" also contains only a half truth: hate has one powerful eye. When either of these passions is present, it insatiably sets about discovering new objects to feast upon. The lover collects and broods upon the graces of his beloved from the rising of the lark to the going down of the evening star. The husband who thoroughly loses his temper with his wife at the breakfast table busies himself all day long recollecting and amassing all the grievances that he has felt against her during the last ten years; and he returns at night in a sullen rage and with an almost superhuman insight into the deficiencies of his helpmate. So men of letters set out with gusto and find a relish in every wayside berry; or they set out on the

satirical foot with a bad taste in their mouths, and for a whole generation occupy themselves with malicious caricatures of their mistress, Life.

We midwesterners, for whom the centre is Chicago, have now for a good many years been falling ever more and more deeply in hate. There has been some rivalry at other centres, but I think it may be said that we now excel all the rest of the country in the special vision which attends this passion. Whatever can be seen under the intense glare of animosity, we are revealing to the critical inspection of our countrymen.

Authors in our locality feed on lion's marrow. We are partial to a fierce and sanguinary symbolism. There is a real propriety in the general acceptance of the slaughterhouse as the chief symbol of our spiritual activities. As a midwesterner to whom Chicago has decisively said "thumbs down," I often think, for example, with what veracity and power Carl Sandburg has represented literary criticism in the city under the figure of a hunky sweeping blood from the floor of the shambles at a dollar and a half a day.

It is consistent with our special literary vision and temper that we are making peculiarly our own a new type of novel. There are three main stages in the fictional treatment of the "sex interest." In the first stage we have the novel of courtship, which ends at the altar, with soft candlelight falling on the rosily tinted altarpiece, "Marriage." In the second stage, we have the novel of conjugal adventure,

which begins at the altar and widens over the various labyrinth of family life and relationships. In the third stage, we have the novel of conjugal disaster, which begins with divorce and widens over the field of individual and social disintegration. This we are making our own.

The third type of novel, it should be observed, is not a love-story at all. It is a hate-story. There is customarily an elaborate pretense that the hero is seeking a felicitous "self-realization" through union with some new and more perfect affinity—some young milliner, some shop girl with silken ankles, whose spirit is more exquisitely attuned to his than that of the fading middle-aged woman who has borne his children. But any one who reads our midwestern fiction thoughtfully sees clearly enough that this is all bosh. The young milliner and the shop girl are only transient mirrors of our hero's megalomania. The real and vital theme of our typical midwestern novels is: "How I fell in hate with my first wife, how I snubbed her, how I showed her up, how I shipped her." It is a grand theme. It is a rich and rather new vein for American writers; and already we have worked it so industriously that we have produced important results. We are beginning to be recognized as masters of disillusion. Midwestern is beginning at last to have a definite connotation in national letters.

I will illustrate the point by a contrast.

In reading recently a lot of minor English poets I was much struck by the fact that whenever one

of them lacked a heart-ravishing trochaic epithet for anything—for April or a hedgerow or a tuft of violets—he called it "English," and let it go at that. He said: "an English April," or "an English hedgerow" or "English violets"; and he could count on his readers for the rest. Though they might hate the British government and be cold to the British Empire, when he said "English" their hearts would thrill to an immemorial loveliness. They would feel beauty descending like dew upon all these familiar objects from the hearts of English men and women who have loved them for a thousand years.

So in America, whenever a writer wishes to bring home to his readers in a single heavily charged epithet the quintessence of materialism, flatness, monotony, crassness, violence, revolt, disgust, he almost instinctively nowadays calls it "midwestern," and lets it go at that. He says "midwestern materialism," "midwestern monotony," "midwestern crassness," "midwestern violence," "midwestern disgust;" and his reader feels disillusion descending upon the prairie lands and the prairie cities from the hearts of midwestern writers who have hated their environment with an increasing hatred for the last thirty years.

Carlyle praised Byron for having had at least the good sense not to be happy in this most miserable of worlds. On the same principle, we should praise our own eloquent apostles of disillusion: Mr. Garland, Mr. Herrick, Mr. Dreiser, Mr. Sinclair Lewis, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Hecht, Mr. Bodenheim,

Mr. Halderman-Julius and the rest. They have had the good sense not to be supinely happy in this most defective world; and they have raised a wail to rival that of Philoctetes. By that wail they have forced the Midwest into the centre of the national literary consciousness.

They have almost, I think, persuaded the country that it is going to be, as Dogberry would say, damned into everlasting redemption by men from these parts.

I for one do not agree with the critical sages who hold that we midwesterners are destroying literature. Whatever you may say of Chicago as a literary centre, you can't say of it, as you can say of one of our older literary capitals, that it is dead. Our midwestern literature is crude, hot, egotistical, hateful; but it is quick, not dead; the pulse of life beats hard and fast in it. It is blind of one eye; by a kind of barbaric and brutal hate, it is blinded to most of the beauty and grace and promise now present in these midlands. But with its great illuminating passion of hate it has thrown a flood of new light upon the sort of man that the average American of our generation is. It has shown courage and talent in breaking through his superficial protective respectability and exhibiting the weltering chaos of his miscellaneous hungers and discontents. It has broken the long conspiracy of silence. This is a great service, which will be recognized by and by.

But this service of satire and iconoclasm, we midwesterners perform too exclusively in the spirit of

hatred and violence and journalistic sensationalism. Chicago tends to encourage "journalistic" sensationalism by recognizing and rewarding nothing else. Chicago authors—in this respect, to be sure, resembling Baltimore critics—feel obliged to yell in order to make themselves heard above the street cars and the newspapers. Now, a yell is often a necessary act. It is often an appropriate act. But a yell lacks one of the fine qualities of literature: it lacks charm. It seems to originate in fear or hatred, and it tends to provoke hatred and fear—unless it is promptly followed by notes of reassurance. Midwestern satire has not merely stripped the average man naked but has skinned him alive. He will remain a pitiful and abhorrent object till he gets a new skin. And the Chicago writers generally haven't the faintest notion where a new skin is to be had.

By those who profess knowledge of this recondite subject, I have been informed that the only way to get a woman to tell you anything of vivid interest about herself is to persuade her that you love her. Before you reach that point, she will give you gossip and scandal and even intellectual propositions of possibly some academic interest; but she will reveal none of the delightful things about her heart—none of the finer perfume and subtler fragrance of personality. I have often thought of this secret while vainly seeking year after year through the works of the midwestern novelists for anything that Henry James, for example, would recognize as the portrait of a lady. Presently I began to ask myself: "Has

none of our midwestern novelists ever made the acquaintance of a lady? Is the type extinct? Is its literary interest exhausted?" I abandoned that quest. Then I searched a long time for the portrait of a girl or of a woman who should reveal the delightful things about her heart—something of the finer fragrance of personality. I found plenty of women and girls who gossiped and intrigued and bored and tormented their lovers and forced their husbands to jump out of the window on the wedding night; but at the moment I can't recall a solitary midwestern heroine with charm enough to intoxicate a moderately critical schoolboy. That is a terrible indictment of a fictional movement which pretends to be realistic; for in the real world there are plenty of women and girls with charm enough to intoxicate even highly critical schoolboys.

If you follow this argument, you will not conclude that the women who are sitting for our novelist lack charm. You will conclude that they have not been persuaded to reveal their charm—which is a very different matter. The cynical, satirical, brutal, and barbaric mood of our midwestern "realism" excludes at present from midwestern fiction the possibility of meeting there a heroine to whom any particular person could think for an instant of losing his heart. And one fancies the midwestern women of these novels saying of their midwestern men: "They talk a lot of loving; but, Lord, what do they understand? They talk about falling in and out of love. Hitherto, they have only fallen

in and out of hate. Egotistical pigs—they have never loved anything but themselves. We will wait a bit before we cast our pearls."

I have fallen, like our Mr. Anderson and like our Mr. Hecht, into symbolism. What I have said about marriage may, of course, be taken as literally as one pleases. The new sport invented by our novelists, called Snubbing the First Wife, is as fashionable in fiction as Mah Jongg in society. But all this about falling in love and falling in hate is really symbolical. It represents the present relation of American literature to American life. I mean to insist that there is something profoundly feminine about the charm of a city or a province or a natural division of the country or a national culture. The essentially feminine element is this: that the city or the province or the national culture will never yield up its charm, will never impart its finer fragrance, except to true lovers—to those who come saying: "We do not fathom you; we love you." To philanderers and cavemen the city will remain a bedizened harlot and the country a buxom or bedraggled wench—with either of whom one may have adventures and fall in and out of hate and become tremendously learned in the psychology of aversion and the vocabulary of disgust. But the delightful things that sleep in the heart of the city, the fragrant things that sleep in the heart of the province, will wait—wait for true lovers.

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VII

ON FALLING IN LOVE

VII

ON FALLING IN LOVE

My quarrel with the Dreiser-Hecht school of monoptic novelists and with the Menckenian school of monoptic critics is not that they fail to see sharply but that they are stone blind of one eye, and that they tend to transmit this monoptic peculiarity to all their literary posterity. I have professed my admiration for the intensity of their limited vision. They see very well the turmoil of instinctive and passional life which seethes beneath the surface of civilized and moralized life. Their disclosures of the subconventional welter have the value for us of all explorations of dark continents. I accept many of their conclusions about the obscure territory which they have traversed. I think, for example, that they are probably right in representing the subconventional relationships of the mass of human beings as almost indescribably lustful and hateful.

It is only when they begin to reason about the value of the subconvenional life as compared with the civilized and moralized life that they appear to me to be afflicted with blindness. Having demonstrated, very ably demonstrated, that the subconventional life is lustful and hateful, they next proceed

to argue that it alone is "real." If there is a logical connection, I miss it. The argument affects me as fantastic: it is as if an arctic explorer, having proved that the cold of the polar regions is almost incredibly painful, should proceed to argue that Prince Patrick Island is the only fit place to live, and that London, Paris, and New York are phantasmagorial. My faith is weak: I have never been able to think of New York, or even of Chicago, as a dream-city.

Yet the moment the monoptic naturalists begin to discuss the moral world, they take just that line: they insist that the moral world is so unreal as to be virtually non-existent—at the same time howling at the thorns which it thrusts into them. The assumption of practically all the insurgents against custom, convention, and morality is that every man who takes a customary, conventional, or moral attitude is a hypocrite, and that every man who doesn't abandon such attitudes is a coward and essentially a moral phantom.

The now popular but profoundly erroneous notion underlying their mental processes is this: that no man can express himself hotly and sincerely through any form of action or through any form of words which has ever been employed before. It is an extension of the attack on the verbal *cliché* to the entire fabric of approved and applauded values which we call civilization. A Hebrew singer smites his harp and sings: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." That

is all right; probably he meant it. Some thousands of years later I write in my diary: *"De profundis clamavi."* That is a *cliché*. When I repeated that trite form, I meant nothing, I felt nothing. Jacob clove to Rachel. All right; probably he liked her. Jones cleaves to Mrs. Jones. All wrong; doubtless he hates her. Dumas created the three musketeers. All right; a bright idea. A Scotch writer describes the search for hidden treasure. All wrong; paste and scissors.

In some such fashion as this many a good man's reputation for being alive has been destroyed or seriously damaged. A very pretty case is that of R. L. Stevenson. I am one of the old fogies, past forty, who are not ashamed to acknowledge that they have preserved their "illusion" about Stevenson, in spite of everything that Henley and the surviving members of the Stevenson family and old Edinburgh gossips have done to smash his image. The illusion of my youth about Stevenson was this: that he was one of the most accomplished and versatile artists of the later nineteenth century—that he could play every instrument in the band, and most of them with a degree of skill beyond the reach of his detractors.

On Mr. Scribner's recent republication of his verse and his short stories in two comprehensive volumes, I tried him again where he is often said to be weakest, as a poet. I record here without shame that I can't get through the poems today without feeling once more some such emotional perturbation as

caused me many years ago, after standing for a few minutes before Saint-Gaudens' memorial on the wall of St. Giles in Edinburgh, to walk abruptly aside from my companions into a duskier aisle of the church. The lilt of the voice, the essence and sting, the authentic bite of the personality are there. The fiddling, dancing, preaching, flute-playing, play-acting, ever-various Stevensonian personality, the Scotch Presbyterian in his French velveteen jacket is there; and he is the man that we loved.

Now the grand business of monoptic naturalistic criticism is to prove that there never was any such personality as convulses my diaphragm. The creature whose memory, mixed with the music of the organ in St. Giles, leads me weeping up the Samoan mountain to the rock-hewn tomb under the southern skies never existed. The "real Stevenson," I am assured, was a wretched, pallid, rakehelly, tuberculous fellow, so shambling, disreputable, ill-kempt, and dirty that one would be rather ashamed to be seen on the street with him. Naturalistic criticism establishes that such was the "real" man. Next, naturalistic criticism searches for this tuberculous weevil in the prose and poetry of "R. L. S."; is obliged to report that, except for a rare blood spot or so, he is not there; regretfully—O, so regretfully—announces that Stevenson the writer was a "sham," a "poser." This naturalistic attack had begun even before his death, and the family made merry over it in Vailima: "To carry a brave front though your heart quaked was a pose; to live

up to your better nature was a pose; and Louis made us all laugh by saying earnestly, 'in short, everybody who tries to do right is a hypocrite'!"

To continue for a moment with our example: I do not contend that the picture of a pallid, rakehelly, tuberculous, shambling, disreputable Stevenson is false, so far as it goes. There is quite a bit of evidence and an abundance of gossip to the effect that there was such a Stevenson. What we old fogies contend is merely that this Stevenson was collected by a man with one eye. We contend also that there is nothing in the collection that seems more real or more valuable than what we discovered with an eye on the other side of our heads. The best-equipped heads have two eyes; but if some curious religious impulse urges the critic to pluck out one eye, we old fogies think it betrays a perverted judgment always to pluck out the right eye.

When only the left eye is preserved, criticism functions with the monotonous inevitability of predestination in some such fashion as this.

Hamlet exclaims in one place that man is a remarkable piece of work: "how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! . . . in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God." But on another occasion Hamlet says: "I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things it were better my mother had not borne me. . . . What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven, we are arrant knaves all; believe

none of us." The first speech is windy rhodomontade; in the second, we see the "real" Hamlet.

Tennyson wrote *Idylls of the King,* but in his off hours he smoked infinite tobacco and relieved his mind by relating Rabelaisian anecdote. The author of *Idylls of the King* was a Victorian hypocrite. The "real" Tennyson was a Rabelaisian.

Dr. Kennicott in *Main Street* says, "A fellow ought to go to church—keeps him in touch with the higher things!" but Dr. Kennicott slips down the street and spends the evening with Maud Dyer. The speaker was a hypocritical Puritan. The "real" man went down the street to Maud Dyer.

One of our sweethearts of the stage sings her love lyrics, touching every section of the audience with the caress of her eyes, and in a flight of wafted kisses vanishes behind the scenes, where she explodes in shrewish curses at the man who has dropped the curtain a quarter of a second too soon. On the stage, the actress: off the stage, the "real" woman.

Two young fellows entertain a starchy and correct elderly man before their fire. After some hours of serious talk, the elderly man withdraws. As the door closes behind him, one of the young chaps eases himself in the chair, stretches out his legs, yawns, and says: "Now, let's talk smut." The first part of the evening was passed in an uncomfortable illusion; the second part, amid the "realities of life."

The old-fashioned poets inspect their dreams and paint a woman as the object of every man's desire. But the naturalistic novelists see her and paint her

as she "really" is. They see her losing her temper, see her dowdy and with a smirched face, see her sick at the stomach, see her mean and cattish and sulky. A husband with a restless wife should say to her lover: "Here, take her and keep her for two years, and you will be as little enchanted with her as I am." The poets are professional liars. The novelists at last are giving us the "truth" about the great romantic humbug.

Such is the procedure of monoptic naturalistic criticism.

Now let us re-examine our last case—with two eyes, if we possess them. What is the real truth about falling in love? Is that object which commands the adoration of a young man's heart a mere brain-begotten fantasy of his own? By no means. What one falls in love with is, in most cases, "real" enough, what there is of it. But what one falls in love with is only a careful *selection* from the miscellaneous qualities possessed by the beloved person. The romantic passion of youth is monoptic. It is bred of occasional meetings, of prearranged contacts, of intercourse in agreeable settings, under favorable lights, with the two actors bringing to each other the best of their gayety, the choicest extracts of their talk, the distilled cup of their emotions, the flower of their personalities, all heightened a bit in value by the intoxication of young kisses and embraces, yet it is all substantial; that with which we fall in love is real enough.

Yet in so far as these romantic youths are love-

worthy persons, they are artists scrupulously employing their available means to produce a preconceived effect, namely, to appear lovable. They are acting a part—one of the several parts which they act; and perhaps they are doing it very well indeed. Perhaps they are throwing themselves so earnestly into their part that they conceive themselves to be essentially and mainly lovers, when, as a matter of fact, they are essentially and mainly a real estate agent and a cook, an egotistical novelist and a pianist, a financier and a female athlete, or a professor and a semi-professional bridge player. Presently they neglect their make-up and forget their cues. They stop acting. They slip back into their main business. They lapse to the level of their natural instincts and emotions. And the moment they begin to be entirely natural, they begin to bore each other; they begin to fall in hate. They look at each other with monoptic naturalistic gaze; and they fall in hate with a careful selection of the hateful qualities possessed by—by all men and women.

I have known in the entire course of my life perhaps half a dozen men and women who were invariably charming, the very sight of whom rejoiced and refreshed any company in which they appeared. They have a natural genius for being charming, no doubt; but they have something more than that. They have a delight in practising the fine art of charm; they understand the technique of charm; they have drilled themselves in the expression of charm, till they are accomplished artists, as in-

capable of a false note in personal relations as Paderewski is incapable of striking the wrong note at the piano. Do they never feel headache, melancholy, exasperation, fatigue, wrath? They are human: I am sure they do. But they are finished and highly conscientious performers in the art of life; and one never catches them out. Their "pose" seems effortless now. It seems to spring from a vital principle of their being. Whatever they do, whatever they say, gives delight, because the welter of their subconventional instincts and emotions finds no outlet except through beautiful forms.

When I think of these charming persons, I wish to write an essay in defense of "posing." It is very clear, in the light furnished by the psychoanalysts and the naturalistic novelists—it is very clear that whenever we have been decently agreeable to one another for an hour at a time we have been posing—we have been acting a part, and we are a little fatigued when it is over. There is work in it. There is real work done when a lady accepts with effusive joy an invitation to a dinner, which she tells her husband five minutes later that she would "rather die than attend."

Nature does so little for us. Nature does not even teach us how to walk or to speak or to eat in a fashion which is not repulsive to civilized society. Military training and the dancing master and the singing teacher and the *mater familias* have to stand over us with a stick for the first eighteen years of our lives to take the natural curvature out

of our spines, the shamble from our gaits, the squeak and snuffle from our voices, the cormorant from our table manners, before we are even physically fit subjects for any but the most indulgent scrutiny. No one who has ever been a parent but remembers how he longed for the time when his child would begin to "pose" as one who liked to have his face clean and his hair brushed. Eventually, one feels fairly sure that the child will like the part, and will keep his face clean and his hair brushed for the rest of his life, and will even add to these acquired graces daily manicure and shaving; but no analyst of human nature pretends that a well-groomed man is a sincere expression of the sub-conventional welter of instincts and emotions. He is the laborious triumph of art over nature.

All the world that is capable of ministering delight to any discriminating sense is a stage; and all the men and women, from pope to peasant, who do anything distinguished on this stage are merely actors. Why insult the bad actors by calling them hypocrites? A hypocrite is a man who has been cast for a part to which he is unsuited, and who consequently fails to identify himself with it. The sincere and successful actor is the one wise enough and fortunate enough to choose out of all the rôles open to him that which he likes the best, or those which he likes the best; and who then devotes himself with ardor to the perfection of his rôles. All that he possesses of virtue and power and passion and personality—practically all of it, if he is a great

actor—he finds means and occasions for using and expressing through his art. What remains—the dross and debris of his days—he destroys, if he can, as valueless; or if he is negligent about his rubbish, he leaves it as a rich legacy to some monoptic naturalistic biographer to be dished up after his death as the "real" man.

As I draw towards the conclusion of this meditation, my mind reverts to its starting point; and I ask myself quite simply the question: "Why do lovers fall out of love?" And now the reason has become as clear as daylight: They fall out of love because they grow too lazy to act their part. Pleased with my progress in discovery, I proceed to another question. I ask myself quite simply why the Dreiser-Hecht school of naturalistic or monoptic fiction and the Menckenian school of naturalistic or monoptic criticism are at the present time enjoying such wide popularity among our young people. And once more the reason is as clear as daylight: The monoptic or naturalistic vision and criticism of life are enjoying wide popularity because they are tremendously flattering to the performance of bad actors; they are tremendously flattering to the lazy men and women who are out of their part; they confer a sense of superiority upon that indolent and inferior portion of mankind which slips and slumps from the great stage which tests a man's art back into the subconventional, formless, unchanneled turmoil of instinct and passion.

VIII

AMERICAN STYLE

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"Have we a style that is recognizably American?" If one accepts Buffon's identification of style with "the man himself," and if one then inquires whether an English street urchin can recognize an American at sight, the answer is, yes. The street urchin can recognize us, and by some power of the higher criticism not dependent, as I shall testify, on the cut of our jib, the sound of our klaxon, or any merely sartorial distinctions in which we may garb ourselves.

Some years ago, before the angularities and rotundities of our dispositions had much developed, one of my compatriots, since become an editorial luminary, and I, at the crowded hour in the Strand, were weaving our way through the fog and the London citizenry in what we thought was a complete national incognito. Enveloped in two-shilling cyclist's capes, with ten-shilling knickerbockers, and caps and stockings purchased in Edinburgh, and with an accent studied for a month in the Highlands and for a week in Oxford, we were just flattering ourselves that we walked with national characteristics invisible, *nube cava amicti,* when a newsboy darted

upon us from the rear, extending a pink sheet and crying in dolorous tones, "Terrible accident in the Stites!—Brooklyn Bridge falls—T h o u s a n d s killed!" While we were sounding in our Scotch tweeds for the big red coppers, the youth explained, with an ingratiating grin, that he knew we were "good-natured Yankees," then pocketed our gratuity and ran on with his sporting extra. There is only one way to account for his penetration of our disguise: he recognized our style—*incessu patuit dea,* or as Virgil might have said, in American, "You could pipe the dame by the way she operated her stilts."

If an American can so easily be identified in an English crowd, it should seem to follow that an Englishman may by similar tests be identified in an American crowd. And as a matter of fact, on the "colorful" coast of California, where the sea washes up Mexican pottery, Hawaiian flowers and music, Japanese gods, jade, ivory, ginger, blue-and-tawny rugs from China, Russian tea, fire opals from South Africa, and some sun-loving Odysseus or other from every land, I have detected the English style in an Australian who was disguised by a good American tailor and an accent levelled by long colonial and American residence. Something more indelible than garb, vocabulary, or accent betrayed him: it was a latent quality of his entire gait and manner as he accosted our American Pierce-Arrow bus; it was some ineffaceable hint of the British Isles in his quiet scrutiny of his fellow passengers, and even

in his fugitive contact with our American ticket taker or conductor. Acclimated, naturalized, and settled for life in a grove of eucalyptus by the bay of Monterey, he still retained a distinction amid all the exotic color of the coast. Walking the streets of an Indiana village in wartime, he would have been brought to the attention of the vigilance committee as a suspicious alien.

But let us turn from "the man himself" to his self-presentment in literature. Since a foreign language puts an unmistakable mark on any style, our comparison must necessarily be confined to English and American writers. And we may fairly ask, to begin with, whether our transmarine relatives have themselves a literary style that is recognizably English. When William James met in our journals with an article, by an unknown hand, which particularly pleased him, it was, one regrets to reveal, almost customary with him to write in and inquire whether it was by an Englishman. He had a notion, it appears, that certain types of writing are definitely classifiable as not-American. He was probably right.

The following passage on public life, for example, has no contemporary American mark upon it. Possibly it might have been *felt* by Roosevelt in some rare interval of serenity. It could hardly have been *written* by any American later than John Adams. It is actually marked by its breadth and elevation and still more strongly by its balance and discrimination and by its logical and stylistic con-

catenation as belonging to the great age of English classicism, and, specifically, to Burke:

It is, therefore, our business carefully to cultivate in our minds, to rear to the most perfect vigor and maturity, every sort of generous and honest feeling that belongs to our nature. To bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth, so to be patriots that we are gentlemen. To cultivate friendships, and to incur enmities. To have both strong, but both selected; in the one to be placable; in the other immovable. To model our principles to our duties and our situation. To be fully persuaded, that all virtue which is impracticable is spurious; and rather to run the risk of falling into faults in a course which leads us to act with effect and energy, than to loiter out our days without blame and without use.

The following description of the perfected intellect is obviously not-American. No American conceives of a perfected intellect as the object or as "the result" of education. No American expresses such experienced delight in the things of the mind. It is un-American to attempt to see things steadily and to see them whole. It is not in the American mode to present in a single sentence a conspectus of an elaborate analytical process. These are the marks of a mind which has been effectively to school under Socrates—they are the marks of Newman:

But the intellect, which has been disciplined to the perfection of its powers, which knows and

thinks while it knows, which has learned to leaven the dense mass of facts and events with the elastic force of reason, such an intellect cannot be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous, cannot be at a loss, cannot but be patient, collected, and majestically calm, because it discerns the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, the law in every interruption, the limit in each delay; because it ever knows where it stands, and how its path lies from one point to another.

Let us have a case more nearly contemporary. Though it is American enough to attempt "plucking out" the heart of mysteries, it is not American to lay a long meditative siege to them, to sit brooding before a pictured woman's face till all experience seems to glimmer under her half-closed eyelids. It is not American to listen to the fall of one's phrases nor to imitate in the structure of a sentence the smooth gliding swell, the poising arch, abrupt break, and long creamy subsidence of a shattered wave. These are the marks of Englishmen infatuated with the music of their seventeenth century and with decadent Latin—modern euphuists, who weigh words like gold dust, and who are studious to preserve in the modern industrial world something of the "cadence, mysticity, and unction" of the Middle Ages. These are the marks of Pater:

If, in a voluntary archaism, the polite world of that day went back to a choicer generation, as it fancied, for the purpose of a fastidious self-correction, in matters of art, of literature, and even, as

we have seen, of religion, at least it improved, by a shade or two of more scrupulous finish, on the old pattern; and the new era, like the *Neu-zeit* of the German enthusiasts at the beginning of our own century, might perhaps be discerned, awaiting one just a single step onward—the perfected new manner, in the consummation of time, alike as regards the things of the imagination and the actual conduct of life.

These three specimens are, I think, all easily recognizable as by English writers. Without going back of 1776, one could readily extend the exhibit by adding, for instance, specimens of Johnson, Reynolds, Landor, Macaulay, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Ruskin, Stevenson, and Mr. Chesterton. All these writers show traits due to a common classical ancestry and to an unbroken English tradition. Though several of them have given their names to stylistic excesses—as the "Macaulayese" antithesis, the "Chestertonian" paradox—most of them are truly representative men, that is, men whose individual genius expresses with emphasis and splendor a spirit common to all classicists of George III's time, or to all Edinburgh reviewers, or to all neo-romantic Tories, or what not. Many of them have been widely influential in America. In the earlier numbers of "The North American Review" one can find specimens of "Macaulayese." A description of the Milan cathedral in a short story by Henry James in the 'sixties contains perfectly constructed "Ruskinian" sentences. Henry van Dyke has worn the "Stevensonian" velvet jacket in his day. And

every clever young journalist has tried now and then to write a "Chestertonian" column.

But now if we look around at home, what have we done in the last hundred and fifty years when we have tried to express ourselves? What styles have we invented which confess a representative American outlook as "Johnsonese" or "Macaulayese" confesses a representative British outlook? We can distinguish the styles of Franklin, John Adams, and Webster from one another but not, with any assurance, from that of some British contemporary. Franklin, for example, was for the greater part of his life a colonial Englishman, and though he struck out many phrases and maxims saturated in the color and spirit of the American provinces, and though he is a genuine source of our most vital native tendency, his homely idiomatic material style associates itself with the realistic bourgeois movement of early eighteenth century English prose, and does not steadily distinguish itself from the gait of Defoe. Most of the able statesmen and orators from John Adams to Webster represent, stylistically, an essentially undifferentiated American classicism, which did not fit with the closeness of a personal garment, nor with the distinction of a national garment, and which has, for better or for worse, disappeared. Among the older romanticists, Poe and Hawthorne, most musical of our prose writers, perfected, as a dominant trait of their styles, the cadence of the later English "Gothic" novels; but since their time no American prose writer has

had the ear to sustain their melody. So complete, indeed, is the present exclusion of musical elements from our prose, that whenever one of us discovers a stray cadence in his work, he joins the Poetry Society.

The research for a distinctive American style may fairly be said to begin with Emerson's first essay on "Nature," of which the gist is this: Discover, become, and express yourselves and nothing but yourselves. It was an injunction congenial to the spirits of a people who were then scrutinizing their own bosoms for new theories of government, religion, and social intercourse. Emerson himself and his more intelligent friends knew from experience of what immense assistance classical models are in this great business of self-discovery; but the main Emersonian impetus was toward a fresh exploratory contact with nature, and its not infrequent consequence was a self-reliant "blurting out" of whatever whim for the moment possessed the disciple. "Hundreds of writers," Emerson declares in a passage which called for revolt and indicated its direction, "hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation, who for a short time believe, and make others believe, that they see and utter truths, who do not of themselves clothe one thought in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature. But wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things."

The first step—and some phenomena of the season suggest that we have not yet progressed beyond the first step—the first step in the search for an American style was a rather excited research for the rudiments—for words and images; logical concatenation, melody and harmony could wait. Emerson is not always Emersonian; sometimes he weaves, sometimes he flows. But he made himself a style, called Emersonian, of which the effect is like that of a man in moccasins dashing into a dense wood with sharp little ax, leaping from log to log, and calling out his discoveries to his followers, with sharp little cries. It is definitely American. Here are some specimens recognizable as not-English:

Whilst we use this grand cipher (Nature) to expedite the affairs of our pot and kettle, we feel that we have not yet put it to its use, neither are able. We are like travellers using the cinders of a volcano to roast their eggs.

The bird is not in its ounces and inches, but in its relation to Nature; and the skin or skeleton you show me is no more a heron, than a heap of ashes or a bottle of gases into which his body has been reduced is Dante or Washington.

The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign—is it not? of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or

Provençal ministrelsy. I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds.

Emerson and Thoreau worked in the same vineyard, sometimes in the same garden; and they so freely exchanged tools and horticultural ideas that one cannot always distinguish the original possessor. "I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy," said Thoreau, "but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind. . . . I want the flower and the fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse. His goodness must not be a partial and transitory act, but a constant superfluity, which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious." Those sentences might have been written by Emerson. But Thoreau has a nonchalant and phlegmatic swing—a better all-day gait than Emerson's. He goes nearer the ground, adheres more strictly to the homely material manner of Franklin; and he so regularly comes to his writing desk with the taste and stain of wild grapes on his lips and with spoils of his rustic truancy, that one can hardly find a complete paragraph of his that is not marked Thoreau's and "made in America:"

Yet, for my part, I was never unusually squeamish; I could sometimes eat a fried rat with a good relish, if it were necessary. I am glad to have

drunk water so long, for the same reason that I prefer the natural sky to an opium-eater's heaven.

We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a taste of that musty old cheese that we are.

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls. Let me suggest a few comparisons that some one may convey an idea of my situation. I am no more lonely than the loon on the pond that laughs so loud. . . . I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horsefly, or a bumblebee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star or the south wind . . . or the first spider in a new house.

The piercing of "rotten diction," the fastening of words to our own "visible things"—this special pioneer quest of the American stylist, led by Emerson, followed by Thoreau, was pursued with immense and devouring gusto by Whitman and all his tribe.

Habitués of many distant countries, habitués of
far-distant dwellings,
Trusters of men and women, observers of cities,
solitary toilers,
Pausers and contemplators of tufts, blossoms, shells
of the shore.

The wood-cutter's song—the ploughboy's, on his
way in the morning, or at the noon intermission, or at sundown;
The delicious singing of the mother—or of the

> young wife at work—or of the girl sewing or washing—Each singing what belongs to her, and to none else.

"Each singing what belongs to her, and to none else." The conviction which underlies the Emersonian theory is that everyone has a style. In a sense, of course, the theory is sound, since style, speaking broadly, is only a comprehensive term for the total effect conveyed through all the various means by which a man reveals that he is himself and not someone else. And Providence, with infinite ingenuity, has contrived in some way to distinguish every one of us, if only by our thumb prints. When without resort to these, a man "gives himself away" by everything that he is and says and does, we say that he has a personality, meaning a distinctive personality. When such a personality, happening to be a writer, marks his diction, his images, his speed, breathing intervals, and emphasis, his ideas, point of view, and temper as unmistakably belonging to him, we say that he has style, meaning a distinctive style. Whose "song" is this?

So I finally opened the conversation myself. I said:

"The mosquitoes are pretty bad, about here, madam."

"You bet!"

"What did I understand you to say, madam?"

"YOU BET!"

Then she cheered up, and faced around and said:

"Danged if I didn't begin to think you fellers

was deef and dumb. I did b'gosh. Here I've sot, and sot, and sot, a-bustin' musketeers and wonderin' what was ailin' ye. Fust I thot you was deef and dumb, then I thot you was sick or crazy, or suthin', and then by and by I begin to reckon you was a passel of sickly fools that couldn't think of nothing to say."

Nothing so strikingly demonstrates the presence and the power of a distinctive style as its complete metamorphosis of any foreign substance which is cast into it. A play of Molière, for example, cast into the distinctive Anglo-Irish style of Synge and his friends becomes not a French play with Irish costume but an Irish play with an Irish soul. Mr. Untermeyer, a clever mimic, has recently demonstrated that many of our contemporary American poets possess distinguishable personal styles, by casting into them and transforming an ode of Horace, so that it reappears as recognizably the work of Mr. Sandburg or Mr. Frost—to mention two of his successful metamorphoses. We have therefore a variety of American styles; and that these are American you can judge by the shock that you feel in finding strains of Mr. Lindsay's "Congo" in the latest long poem of Mr. Masefield.

In similar fashion an ingenious person could doubtless translate, say "Pilgrim's Progress," into a half dozen of our rustic sectional idioms, that of Tennessee, or Maine, or Georgia; and, if he were sufficiently ingenious, the version would be stamped not merely with the obvious marks of dialectal difference but also with subtler distinctions in the

processes of thought and the shades of feeling. Since the gait and total effect of any work in these provincial idioms is readily distinguishable from that of the Anglo-Irish, Lancashire, or other provincial dramatists, we have manifestly several American styles which are more than personal styles.

Interest in these provincial styles has, beyond spelling and vocabulary, affected the character of what, for the moment, we may call "Standard American." Nothing perhaps in our literature is more remarkable than the immense abundance of our studies in "local color," the work of innumerable novelists and short-story writers. An impulse passes from them to the poets, making for a new intimacy of expression. If, eliminating prose writers who spell like Joel Chandler Harris and poets who spell like James Whitcomb Riley, we examine writers who employ standard American spelling, like Mr. Frost and Mr. Robinson, we find styles which have been formed in part by listening to the infrequent slow speech and harkening to the cautious, difficult, inexpressive soul of the New England farmer. "Something there is which does not love a wall:" that is the way the farmer would take hold of the thought; and that is about as far as he would get with it. Poets who listen to the calliope, the saxophone, and the Chicago *Tribune* betray still other subtleties of the national soul, into which I cannot now enter.

I should like to dwell on the fork in the stylistic

road, where one group of our native explorers branches off into the periphrastic Fifth Avenue style, which seems, at any rate, to fit them "like a glove," while the other group goes careening through Main Street on a "flivver," the entire stylistic baggage on the running board, naked to dust and derision. Both groups, singular to relate, are still animated by an inherited "Emersonian" desire to be themselves. Both are moving toward that consummation, without clear prevision of the end, with little acknowledged guidance, blazing the trail as they go, without any fear of trespass, rather with strengthening sense that nothing in all the wide forest is marked *Verboten,* and cheering one another from time to time with their marching song: "Get your effect, and with God be the rest." I should like, *inter alia,* to compare our aristocratic with our proletarian slang, and to inquire which is the more savory. But I will summarize our main tendency toward a universal American style, cutting across all dialectal differences, by remarking that John Adams or Chesterfield would probably have said: *"Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re";* James Russell Lowell or Disraeli might have said, "The iron hand in the kid glove;" but Theodore Roosevelt said: "Speak softly and carry a big stick;" and in an American novel of the season I find: "The wallop in the velvet mitt." It sounds like "home."

For the recreation of the curious, I will add an exercise in the higher criticism, which consists in

detecting the American soul in each of the following specimens:

The American Joke

A white man cannot drink the water of Mono Lake, for it is nearly pure lye. It is said that the Indians in the vicinity drink it, though. It is not improbable, for they are among the purest liars I ever saw.[1]

The Life of the Mind

He saw that she had instantly understood his motive, though the family dignity which both considered so high a virtue would not permit her to tell him so. The persons of their world lived in an atmosphere of faint implications and pale delicacies, and the fact that he and she understood each other without a word seemed to the young man to bring them nearer than any explanation would have done.[2]

A Bit of National Color

There floated from somewhere the scent of boiled corned-beef-and-cabbage and the clatter of dishes on the American plan.[3] (Quoted from memory.)

Pragmatic Distinctions

The capitalist can tell you to a dollar the amount of his wealth. The trust magnate "estimates it." The rich malefactor hands you a cigar and denies that he has bought the P. D. & Q. The Caliph

[1] Mark Twain in "Roughing It"; [2] Mrs. Wharton in "The Age of Innocence"; [3] O. Henry.

merely smiles and talks about Hammerstein and the musical lasses.[4]

Eternal Pathos of the Babe

The greatest and most wonderful thing in the world is a baby. Not so much for what he is, though that's astounding enough, but for his chemical and explosive possibilities. He's a marvelous little machine, an infant dynamo, and he has juice enough in his storage battery for a seventy-two-hour run, but the moment that is gone he goes out like a blown candle, *muy pronto,* unless he has connected up with his surroundings.[5]

Circumstances Over Which We Have No Control

"I like this very much myself," he will explain. "It's great stuff. I wish I could use it. That part about the bobbed hair is a scream. But none of it would mean anything to the farmer in Iowa. Won't you show me something again that isn't quite so sophisticated?" [6]

Picturesqueness of Labor

In those far-off times, in the city where I lived, all the hod-carriers were colored men—usually great, shiny fellows with immense knots of muscles in their legs and arms. The Irish had already become lawyers, city detectives, saloonkeepers, gang bosses, and Todsaufer for breweries. These colored men, in summer, liked to work with their chests bare. Swarming up the ladders in long files, each with his heavy hod on his shoulder, they made

[4] O. Henry in "Strictly Business"; [5] Woods Hutchinson in "The Saturday Evening Post"; [6] Heywood Broun in "Pieces of Hate."

an exotic, Egyptian, picture. One could fancy them descended in a direct line from the Nubians who carried the hod when Cheops built his pyramid.[7]

Something Always, Always Sings

It was flattering too—to have two personal slaves at once—the barber and the bootblack. He could have been completely happy if he could also have had the manicure girl. The barber snipped at his hair and asked his opinion of the Havre de Grace races, the baseball season, and Mayor Prout. The young negro bootblack hummed "The Camp Meeting Blues" and polished in rhythm to his tune, drawing the shiny shoe-rag so taut at each stroke that it snapped like a banjo string.[8]

The Nuance

For the bumptious and silly sides of them will fatten his soup—the other side won't. So he goes on, until his world is one vast nauseous Pullman smoker full of Rotarians, Fraternians, Boomers, Realtors, and Baboons getting off one damn fool remark after another.[9]

[7] Editor of "The Smart Set"; [8] Sinclair Lewis in "Babbitt"; [9] Anonymous in the BOOKMAN.

IX

AN APOLOGY FOR ESSAYISTS OF THE PRESS

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We live in an age of fascinating literary movements. First the poets organized a movement, which became so comprehensive that there was no public left to view the procession, and the only distinction attainable in connection with it was not to participate. Then the new truth-telling novelists started a parade along Main Street, clad in their dismalest togs and attended by bands of mismated, rebellious mid-Western wives, and joyless, unmated females of New England. (It is generally understood that every female residing in New England is a spinster.) And now a third movement,* of the essayists, is forming and sweeping down upon us, a somewhat rollicking movement, preluded by the victorious blast of Professor Stephen Leacock's trumpet: "The appearance of Benchley's first book is an event in the history of literature not equaled since Milton produced his 'Paradise Lost.' "

* See *Plum Pudding* by Christopher Morley; *Modern Essays* (33 essayists represented), selected by Christopher Morley; *Turns About Town* by Robert Cortes Holliday; *Seeing Things At Night* by Heywood Broun; *Of All Things* by Robert C. Benchley; *The Margin of Hesitation* by Frank Moore Colby.

Enter, then, Christopher Morley, with a scarlet plume in his cap, smoking his faithful pipe of briar and bearing aloft his plum pudding; Robert Cortes Holliday, swinging his walking stick like Taillefer at the Battle of Hastings; young Heywood Broun, tossing his witty quips to left and right, and bearing aloft Heywood Broun, Jr.; the before-heralded Robert Benchley, in cap and bells, presenting an excellent imitation of a Canadian professor of political economy; then, more sedately, Mr. Colby, with his hesitant smile, followed by the thirty other essayists, old and new, recently mustered by the scarlet-plumed master of the revels. The entire demonstration has a festive and holiday air. At the turn of the street one can fancy Mr. Morley leading in singing "God rest you, merry bourgeoisie, let nothing you dismay."

Suppose for the moment we fix our attention on these three "literary movements," and inquire, in the impressionistic manner, how they affect us. After one has read a yard or two of average American contemporary verse, ranging from "Rodin" Lindsay's "Johnny Appleseed" to Mr. Masters's "Domesday Book," one is left with a faint sense of strain in the appreciative organs, coupled with a furtive suspicion that verse as a vehicle of modern American life is pretty nearly obsolete. After one has read a shelf full of the new novelists, ranging from Ben Hecht's "Erik Dorn" to the "Three Soldiers" of John Dos Passos, or Anderson's "The Triumph of the Egg," one is left with a sombre sense that one

is wandering in a wilderness, obscure with blue and gray shadows, where moon calves leap in and out of bramble bushes a-searching for their eyes. But when one has spent a week-end with the new essayists, one comes away, not exactly filled and satisfied, not precisely inspired and uplifted, but feeling, as Pepys would say, "mighty pleasant." In the psychical circumstances created by the two previous movements, this "mighty pleasant" feeling becomes significant and demands consideration.

Why do the essayists leave us with this "mighty pleasant" feeling, so that we are disposed to say to a young woman seeking advice, "Flirt with a poet, engage yourself to a novelist, but marry an essayist"? Well, first of all, the true essayist since Montaigne's time has been a man of even, easy, adaptable temper. Brought to a stand by the opposing pressures of Catholic piety and Renaissance paganism, the French ancestor of all our essayists found an escape from the over-strenuous appeals of faith in a mild but universal skepticism, including in its serenely quizzical consideration his own experience. And so at every recoil from the violence of partisanship, from the fatigue of "strained attitudes," the modern spirit tends to slip into the form of Montaigne.

The essay lends itself better to a balanced representation of life than either free verse or the current realistic novel. For the ordinary life is not like a modern poem—it has more rhythm and reason and regularity. Life is not like a "realistic" novel—

it has more bright spots, more sunlight and more apple blossoms, more spiritual variety. The ordinary life indeed is itself an essay, starting from nowhere in particular and arriving at no definite destination this side of death, but picking its way, like a little river, now with "bright speed," and now with reluctance and fond lingerings, over all sorts of obstacles and through all sorts of channels, which would be merely humdrum but for the shifting moods and humors that play over a bottom of commonplace with the transient magic of shadow and light.

But what is the distinctive feature of this new mass-movement of the essayists? Of course, we must recognize that there were American essayists of a sort before the advent of young Heywood Broun and young Robert Benchley. There were, for examples, Dr. Crothers and Dr. van Dyke; Professor Santayana, Professor James, Professor Matthews and Professor Woodberry; W. D. Howells, Henry James, P. E. More, and Mark Twain; Miss Repplier, Mrs. Gerould and others. Several of these elders also did some rather decent things in their day. But the special character of the new movement is not given by writers of their complexion. The piquant figures in it are no longer clergymen, professors, novelists and literary ladies, carefully excogitating smooth discourses in the calm intervals between sermons, lectures, novels and babies.

The new men, who give a quicker tempo to the movement, are a light-footed generation for whom

the way was prepared by Eugene Field, "Mr. Dooley," B. L. Taylor, Don Marquis and the blandly omniscient Simeon Strunsky. They are, in short, for the most part busy newspaper men, secretly with child of Heaven knows what grand poems and plays and novels, yet producing their serio-comic column with daily or weekly regularity, the office boy at their elbows and the presses roaring for copy. "Literature," you say in your haste, "produced by men who are too busy to write, for men who are too busy to read?" No, not that; literature, rather, by men capable of taking joy in writing, like a sporting robin which built its nest and laid its bright blue eggs just above the coupling-pin between the engine and tender of a jolting little train that, twice a week, links a series of villages among the Green Mountains.

These young men, with obvious community of feeling, are striving to create a new literary public and to provide for that public a new literary fare, relatively free from political intoxicants. Journalists or near-journalists by training or temper or "environmental" necessity, they contemplate no longer the narrow circle reached by the old-fashioned review, but the wide circle composed of every man and woman who reads a newspaper. This is the true democratic reading public. Like the periodical essayists of Queen Anne's time, with their Scandal Clubs and Tatlers and Spectator Clubs, they undertake to meet their readers where they are, and they know that to do so their writing must sound like an

extension of familiar conversation. It must introduce no topic that can't be made current. It must be light enough to be digested with coffee and rolls. It must be pointed enough to wake up the man from New Jersey crossing the ferry in the cool, sleepy-eyed morning. It must be amusing enough to relax the tension of the tired business man and make him forget, when he goes up to bed, to mourn for his lost night cap.

The "colyumist" blazed out the way to the new public. And cannibalistic critics among the elder bigwigs like to dispose of the "colyumist" as Dr. Johnson in his loftier vein disposed of his friend Garrick: "Davy hath a pleasant wit, but he is a futile fellow." Now the "colyumist," taken singly and in detail, is not very formidable, to be sure. But let us first analyze our specimens, and then construct the species.

Christopher Morley chats me some forty chats, from which I recall that he went to Haverford, that he formed himself on R. L. S. and Joseph Conrad; that he likes lunching in odd places about town with fellow-craftsmen; that he likes Captain Bone and all tales of the sea, and that he loves the pungent odors and mellow tints of old shops and streets around the Post Office and Bowling Green. I thrust my thumb into the plum pudding of this professional amateur of the city, this Jim Hawkins of Broadway, so keen to make Manhattan a treasure island, and I fetch out a plum on the best way to clean an old pipe, or I fetch out this

note on the character of the late Francis Gummere: "It was characteristic of him that he usually smoked Robin Hood, that admirable five-cent cigar, because the name and the picture of an outlaw on the band reminded him of the fourteenth century ballads he knew by heart." The Dignity of Letters has never laid her heavy hand on Christopher Morley, but the gusto of letters waits for him at every corner. Youth, romance, the sweetness of life and the shade of R. L. Stevenson in velveteen jacket—these are the spirits that have put him under obligation and that whisper him among the blue and gray shadows of an unimaginative realism to be blithe and yet more blithe.

Mr. Holliday takes me for twenty-eight turns about town. We visit undertakers' shops, murder trials, lunchrooms and hotels; we talk with "traffic cops" and landladies and editors; we patter about Mr. Huneker and other famous men who have recently died; we step into a "colorful" place where we can see John Drew and Joseph Hergesheimer and Alexander Woollcott and young Burton Rascoe toying with the celery; we glance over the want ads in the morning paper; we study some photographs which illustrate the difference between the female form divine as conceived by Fragonard and as seen by Schopenhauer, and then we dip into the underworld and visit various doggeries where gentlemen can obtain a thimbleful of the needful at "80 cents a throw." Mr. Holliday has been around a good deal, has acquired a kind of Beau Brummelish

sophistication, and notices with less gusto than young Jim Hawkins—I mean Christopher Morley—the pristine bloom of things. In compensation, he notices other things that might have escaped my attention. What I recall most distinctly of our "nosing" about Washington and our calls on celebrities in New York is that President Harding wore a single ring but "no pin to his tie," and that Mr. Chesterton wore heavy woolen socks, "very much coming down about his ankles." So we confirm that brilliant aphorism: Life is a bundle of little things.

Young Heywood Broun is a Harvard man of about 30. He likes Stevenson, Hardy, H. G. Wells, Leonard Merrick and Mark Twain; and he holds that a girl should think twice before marrying any one who doesn't like them. He declares that some of his best friends have been Yale men, and, regretting the strained feelings between Yale and Harvard, he suggests that all might get happily together in crying, "To hell with Princeton!" He intends to meet Clayton Hamilton's standards for the dramatic critic, namely, to stand bareheaded in the nave of Amiens, to climb the Acropolis by moonlight, and to walk with whispers into the hushed presence of the Frari Madonna of Bellini before he attempts to review the performance of "Up in Mabel's Room." He likes the zoo and baseball, has a nice paper on "How to be a Lion Tamer," and believes that "children who don't see Charlie Chaplin have, of course, been robbed of much of their childhood."

He has one two-year-old child who tells him that "Goliath loves you," and out of this wealth of parental experience he offers counsel to expectant motherhood. He has one touch of radicalism: in the rare intervals when he is not thinking of himself as the first parent, he informs his readers that Dr. Holt is a better guide to the upbringing of children than their grandmothers! He has courage: he doesn't hesitate to stuff all this into one container with dialogue, fables, and parodies, and call it a book.

Young Robert Benchley, as I have already intimated, is the most overt and unashamed humorist in our parade. I don't know why I should try to gild the refined gold of Professor Leacock's careful tribute, except to add that Gluyas Williams's illustrations are up to the text and are, in my opinion, altogether unequaled since Raphael produced his Sistine Madonna. If Hogarth could see how Mr. Williams has penetrated the soul of his author and doubled the force of his expression, he would blush to acknowledge his own crude sketches. Mr. Benchley's twenty-two masterpieces show a more constructive and impersonal imagination than we found in the scrapbook of Heywood Broun; and he discloses less of that studious, fostered and affectionate provincialism which distinguishes the true New Yorker. With feasting eye and wide-swooping wing he dives only for "nation-wide" interests, passes from letter-writing to amateur gardening and stoking one's own furnace, from bridge (the best thing since "Mrs.

Battle on Whist") to the higher salesmanship and New Year's resolutions, from Percy Mackaye's community drama to the sorrows of automobiling and tabloid versions of the *American Magazine, Harper's* and the *Saturday Evening Post.* And whenever he passes, one feels, if not better, yet more cheerful about things.

Frank Moore Colby has a professorial record in the background of his journalistic career; and he doesn't write with the abandon and gay incoherence of the "colyumist" who has never lost sleep by asking himself whether contributing to *Vanity Fair* is not *infra dig.* His title, however, The Margin of Hesitation, denotes him truly as one who has attained the right temper of the periodical essayist, the tolerant smiling skepticism of the literary newspaper man, who first writes out a blanket acceptance of the universe and then proceeds to question everything in it, not wholesale and with a shout like the editor of a radical weekly, but bit by bit, softly, like an epicure questioning the flavor of a glass of grapejuice. "The new thinker," says Mr. Colby thoughtfully, "is merely a man who does not know what other people have thought." Later he remarks in an excellent discourse on "The Pleasures of Anxiety:" "In middle-aged conversation there is always a certain coziness in political despair, and the thought of a large general disaster coming on has, at any rate, one bright side in the way it warms up elderly conversers." He, himself, reads for recreation the alarming radical journals which his

friends abhor, because, as he softly remarks: "Any man who is about half convinced that he and a few others are the sole remaining friends of civilization finds some dramatic zest in life." For a world that is always turning up with a painted face, dusty and overheated, Mr. Colby prescribes, like Mr. Dick: "Give it a bath—a bath of irony."

It may be true that the "colyumist" is a futile fellow, taken singly—as impotent as a single swallow to make a summer. But a mass-movement of them from their points of vantage on the great newspapers, a mass-movement of them against the doors of anxious publishers, merits attention. These wits and jesters and ironists of the press who buzz around the news and editorials are, or are becoming, a body of writers as sensible and useful as we possess. From the field of journalism they glean what little scent and nectar they can, and pass by quick flights into the adjacent field of literature. They bear the same relation to the "serious" editorial writer and the savage critic that bees bear to wasps and hornets. The raw stuff of life which in the one case goes chiefly to strengthen the sting is in the other case converted chiefly into wax and honey—"sources of sweetness and light." They are beginning to create a literary atmosphere with "organic filaments" of civility.

The present swarming of the diurnal and hebdomadal essayists is, therefore, agreeably ominous. They are not doing any "big constructive thinking." They refuse to accept responsibility for the universe.

These journalistic humanists are modest; they do not even attempt to reform the world. They are occupied rather in discovering how many likable things there are in the world as it is, and they seem satisfied if they make it no worse. Of all the sorts of their fellowmen they say, as Charles Lamb said of a certain not very prepossessing person: "How can we hate them? We know them." They recur to old things—old poetry, old customs, old streets—with an affectionate familiarity; and they touch vulgar things, the pompous and humdrum people, the annoying incidents, the tedious routine of daily life, with a humor which debrutalizes them and helps the man in a treadmill to see himself as a figure in a comedy. They are thus giving to New York City, for instance, a more genial and kindly air than it has had since the days of Diedrich Knickerbocker.

They refuse to have anything to do with notabilities, except in dressing-gown and slippers by the fire, in the disarming hours of the night, when a statesman will confidentially take back the lies he has been telling all day, and "Willy" Yeats, forgetting to chant about the silver apples of the moon, will gossip about his contemporaries with as spicy a malice as George Moore. They haunt that level, these humanists, where men are conscious of their common humanity; and they treat with equal respect all representatives who are great in their kind: Mr. Wells, Mr. Bryan, Charlie Chaplin, M. Viviani, Babe Ruth, Einstein, Pavlowa, Lloyd George, Jack Dempsey and Caruso. It is their habit to walk all

the way around wooden horses and to look all gift horses in the mouth. They are cultivating in themselves and in a pretty thick stratum of the great democratic reading public a Missourian temper of inquiry about some of the Big Constructive Thinking, a lenity and amused tolerance toward even the painful virtues of their neighbors, and a quiet self-possession (recall Mr. Holliday's observation that the President had "no pin to his tie")—a quiet self-possession and an ability to relish one's "daily bread" amid all the pomps and splendors and indignities of the human lot.

They tend to make the stranger at home in the world, and the lonely and insignificant man in town or country, who talks with no one morning, noon or night, feel yet, as he opens his paper, that he is not the only one of his kind, but that he is neighboured on all sides by his kindred and that in farmhouse and town mansion and White House there are millions of other strangers, essentially as lonely and insignificant as he. This is, perhaps, as near to a homelike feeling as a man can expect to come in this world.

X

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

X

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As a leader in the famous revolt of the Younger Generation, Mr. Sinclair Lewis is distinguished from many of his coevals by the velocity of his intelligence and the justice of his antipathies. Not quite incidentally, he is conspiring with the spirit of the times to become the most interesting and important novelist in America. Not, as is commonly supposed, a man of one book, he has marked his passage through the stage of brilliant promise by a succession of substantial accomplishments. Yet he is still so young and so brimming with energy, talents, and invention that he impresses one as a man from whom much is to be expected. With all his other gifts, he has that faculty for being opportune which the envious ascribe to luck but which the knowing perceive is a hard-earned acquisition and a part of the open-eyed efficiency of genius. Mr. Lewis is opportune, because he industriously studies himself and his age, like a good humanist, till he understands the needs and aspirations and powers of both. The times in America since the war of the German Invasions have clamored for adequate

representation in fiction; with vision of arresting centrality and sharpness, Mr. Lewis is giving it. The publication of *Babbitt* set a thousand reviewers to discussing whether it equalled the novel, *Main Street,* which fluttered their dovecotes in 1920. It is my purpose rather to invite somewhat more serious attention to the quality of his work as a whole, and his significance on the contemporary scene.

When Mark Twain, Henry James, and W. D. Howells died, the wide domain of American realism gaped for a masculine heir. There followed an interval in which no one would read an American who could get a British novel. The field swarmed with claimants who could not be taken seriously, who were just "outside" literature. There was an occasional offering by an old hand, but the "movement" halted for lack of adequate leadership. Poetry was said to be "looking up"—to Mr. Masters and to Miss Lowell, who from different directions had given it fresh impetus. But in prose fiction there seemed to be, say, ten years ago, no one "significant" to swear by or to swear at but Mr. Dreiser, a "barbarian" who had never learned to write English. In their desperation, the critical instigators of our "movement" urged us for a time to look up to Mr. Dreiser. Later they shifted their attention to a more scrupulous artist, Mr. Hergesheimer, who was veering uncertainly between realism and an exotic type of the historical-romantic, and to Mr. Cabell, who had achieved a *succès de scandale* in the erotic-fantastic. From the "lunatic fringe" of experimentation there

was an ominous buzzing of "Freudians." Whatever was most unwholesome in the fiction of Russia, France, Germany, and the younger England was cried up by our criticasters and seized upon for imitation. As a fairly direct consequence of the critical encouragement given to bad English and mad psychology, we are now asked to admire such erotic rubbish as Mr. Waldo Frank's *Rahab,* in which a female finds amid the "sickly dissolutions" of the underworld, as Mr. Lewis Mumford tenderly phrases it, "like a rainbow glimmering over a pool of stagnant water, a justification and a light." As I trust even Mr. Mencken would say,—"Bosh!" But in the fall of 1920 arrived, to deliver the beleaguered citadel of our hope and sanity, Mr. Sinclair Lewis with *Main Street.*

Now *Main Street,* a criticism of contemporary life with special reference to its interest and beauty, is important to us socially because, more thoroughly than any novel since *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* it has shaken our complacency with regard to the average quality of our civilization. But it and the other work of Mr. Lewis which I shall discuss, are equally important to our literature as a return to the main matter and the manner of our national narrative.

If we had applied ourselves more diligently to the search for a deliverer, we might have observed that Mr. Lewis was coming, far back in 1914, when he published *Our Mr. Wrenn*—as the seductive title suggests, a merrily bubbling story with a "happy ending," somewhat in the vein of H. G. Wells's

Kipps and *Mr. Polly*. Mr. Wrenn, age thirty-five, sales-entry clerk in the Souvenir and Art Novelty Company of New York, is described as "a meek little bachelor—a person of inconspicuous blue ready-made suits, and a small unsuccessful mustache." What makes this little clerk significant is a rudimentary poetic impulse. With a hunger for adventure stimulated by the moving-picture and the work of Mr. Kipling and Jack London, the hero gently revolts from the routine of office, visits England in a cattleboat, and finds romance incarnate in a red-haired art student in a green crash smock, Istra Nash, who amuses herself with his guileless Philistinism; but he returns in the end to a good domestic Nelly and the evening paper with seven cents' worth of potato salad from the delicatessen shop.

In this, his first picture of Main Street, Mr. Lewis utilizes a formula which is perhaps more or less familiar to students of the *Saturday Evening Post*. But already one can mark his possession of faculties which are to give new interest and seriousness to the ancient tale of the grocer's apprentice. Here is a mastery of the racy American vernacular unequalled since O. Henry flourished; vivid and abundant observation; the realistic "discovery" of the cattle-ship. Here the Middle-Western Rotarian is introduced in a single synoptic sentence: "An American who had a clipped mustache, brisk manners, a Knight-of-Pythias pin, and a mind for duck-shooting, hardware selling, and cigars." Here is an imag-

ination which explores with equal success the small mind of Mr. Wrenn superheated in a sales campaign, and the psychology of a frustrated art student from California, cursed by ambition without power. And here finally is a point of view, detached, critical, illumined by the comic spirit—a point of view from which the romantic hunger of Mr. Wrenn and his kind, and the artistic and intellectual aspirations of the girl with red hair and her kind, can be treated with that "mixture of love and wit," which Thackeray declares is the essence of humor. Says Istra Nash to Mr. Wrenn, speaking of the Bohemians: "Being Free, of course they're not allowed to go and play with nice people, for when a person is Free, you know, he is never free to be anything but Free." It is a sentence indicative of that early maturing of the critical faculty which distinguishes the first novel of Mr. Lewis from, let us say, the first novel of Mr. Floyd Dell.

His second book, *The Trail of the Hawk,* 1915, is dedicated to "the optimistic rebels (including his present publisher), through whose talk at luncheon the author watches the many-colored spectacle of life." It is on the surface a story about one of the earlier successful American aviators; but I find, under this curious disguise, the nearest approach that Mr. Lewis has yet made to an "autobiographical" novel, to a revelation of the motives and the influences which have shaped his own career. The imaginative progeny of the realist is, of course, usually related in some fashion to the seven wrestlers

who struggle within himself. The animating passion even of little Mr. Wrenn—his quest for romance in love and travel—Mr. Lewis doubtless found duplicated in his own heart; but in the case of Mr. Wrenn, he diluted the passion and gently caricatured its embodiment. In *The Trail of the Hawk* he treats the same quest but he treats it seriously, and he endows his hero with an important additional passion—the desire for distinction, the love of glory. Carl Ericson of Joralemon, Minnesota, a second-generation Norwegian, is described as "heir-apparent of the age," the typical American of his period: "It was for him to carry on the American destiny of extending the Western horizon; his to restore the wintry Pilgrim virtues and the exuberant, October, partridge-drumming days of Daniel Boone; then to add, in his own or another generation, new American aspirations for beauty."

There is our theme: the emergence of a typical American from our midwestern frontier, in the generation who were small boys in 1890. The stages are interesting. First, there is a healthy athletic boyhood in an American small town, where a spark is dropped by a village radical who has read Robert Ingersoll, Karl Marx, and Napoleon—a preliminary sketch of Bjornstam in *Main Street*. "Life," says this rural philosopher to the boy, "is just a little old checker game played by the alfalfa contingent at the country store unless you've got an ambition that's too big to ever quite lasso it. You want to know that there is something ahead that's bigger

and more beautiful than anything you've ever seen." Next comes a course in Plato College, a course terminated abruptly by the boy's open championship of an instructor from Yale who has ruined his usefulness to the institution by discussing the works of H. G. Wells and G. B. Shaw and by admitting the existence of the theory of evolution. There follows a period of miscellaneous adventure as chauffeur, traveling actor, porter on the Bowery, mechanic in the Canal Zone and Mexico, then an apprenticeship in a school of aviation in California, flying for country fairs, a series of prize flights followed by intoxicating ovations, the development of the Touricar company, a love affair on the Palisades and in the Berkshires, respectability and entrance upon contemporary "civilization," such as it is, including modern plumbing, individual bed-rooms, candles on the dinner table, Sunday morning breakfasts with a choice of conversation or auction-bridge; and the reading of *Tono-Bungay, David Copperfield, Jude the Obscure, The Damnation of Theron Ware, Madame Bovary, McTeague, Walden, War and Peace,* Turgenev, Balzac and William James. In a free poetic fashion, I assume that this narrative sketches Mr. Lewis's own flight from Sauk Centre, Minnesota, by way of Yale College, New York and San Francisco journalism, and the short story magazine, into literature.

The Trail of the Hawk is a book with extravagant variety of scenes and atmospheres, the first two-thirds of it written with much gusto. It is

important for our study of Mr. Lewis's development as exhibiting the intellectual stuffiness of the stagnating midwestern town, which was the point of departure for his own "revolt." It is still more important as disclosing plainly some of the things which his taste and intelligence recognize as beautiful and desirable. Mr. Lewis is a good hater, but, contrary to the common rumor, he is not all compact of antipathies. He has, I am convinced, a generalized conception of the Good, which, if he were a lyric poet, he could capture in a net of images, like Shelley addressing the Skylark. He likes free air, the swoop of the hawk, arrows that go straight to the mark. Everything that is candid, crisp, fresh, alert, clean, supple, active and darting, he likes. He has felt the allurement of "beauty with a touch of strangeness"; but he instinctively revolts when beauty is touched with morbidity. From Kipling, perhaps, he acquired an inclination for purposeful young men who keep themselves fit and are capable of bridging the Ganges, and for young women to match, with temperament controlled by intelligence —of the Beatrice type. Of Istra Nash, who reappears in *The Trail of the Hawk,* he remarks significantly: "She always wants new sensations, yet doesn't want to work, and the combination isn't very good." Carl Ericson, the flyer, relishes his adventures, and Mr. Lewis reports them with such sense of flight and clouds and the upper air as I have felt nowhere else save in Mr. Norman Hall's

High Adventure. But this enterprising young man is notably hard-headed, a hard worker, with a good workman's prejudice in favor of keeping himself and his tools in order. Mr. Lewis's beauty is always tonic—never relaxing. I remember hearing him say, with a grimace, that he liked best in *Main Street* the purple patches over which he had sweat blood, but that no one else noticed them. His use of landscape is rigorously economical, but there are paragraphs, even in this earlier book, done with a touch that recalls Tolstoy and Turgenev in their great hunting scenes. Here is a whiff of the hero's boyhood in Minnesota:

He loitered outside the shed, sniffing at the smoke from burning leaves—the scent of autumn and migration and wanderlust. He glanced down between houses to the reedy shore of Joralemon Lake. The surface of the water was smooth, and tinted like a blue bell, save for one patch in the current where wavelets leaped with October madness in sparkles of diamond fire. Across the lake, woods sprinkled with gold-dust and paprika broke the sweep of sparse yellow stubble, and a red barn was softly brilliant in the caressing sunlight and lively air of the Minnesota prairie. Over there was the field of valor, where grown-up men with shiny shotguns went hunting prairie chickens; the Great World, leading clear to the Red River Valley and Canada.

Three mallard ducks, with necks far out and wings beating hurriedly, shot over Carol's head. From far off a gun-shot floated echoing through forest hollows; in the waiting stillness sounded a rooster's crow, distant, magical.

If Mr. Lewis could "abandon his mind" for a season to landscape and the joy of our American seas and mountains, he could give us our most exhilarating tale of country life. He has the eye and the zest. But as yet he is so jealous for his purely human interest that he is capable of cramming all California into a parenthesis.

There is good writing, there are humor and invention, there are various milieus effectively rendered in Mr. Lewis's first two novels; but in his third, *The Job,* presented in 1917, there are three or four admirable pieces of characterization and a sobriety and firmness of composition which entitle this book to a place next to *Main Street* and *Babbitt.* As he swooped to meet the airmen in 1915, so he swoops, in 1917, to meet the new woman making a career in business. Una Golden of Panama, Pennsylvania, graduate of a business college, who becomes a stenographer in New York, works into suburban real estate, and then into the assistant-managership of a line of hotels, is, you may say, a typical heroine of the "success" magazines. Agreed: in a sense, so she is, just as Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger is their hero. The editors of the "success" magazines guiltily share with novelists like Mr. Bennett and Mr. Lewis a sense for recognizing the significant types of our changing civilization. Una Golden differs, however, from the smart short-story writer's girl-with-the-powder-puff as, to take a familiar illustration, Lear's daughters differ from their sketches in Holinshed. She has been seriously and minutely

considered. She has been sympathetically and intelligently studied. She has been understood in her pathetic relations to her mother; in her variously irritating relations to a series of employers; in relation to the humdrum suitor that she leaves in Panama, the brilliant young cub who leaves her, the fat-necked voluble commercial traveller whom she marries; in relation, finally, to the intimate inner conflict between her sexual and emotional instincts and her desire to respect herself and to "amount to something." The thing is, as Henry James used to say, "done," and with great precision of stroke. Una Golden lives, and her futile mother. The erratic and "dynamic" young cub, Walter Babson, lives. Eddie Schwirtz, the commercial traveller, a gorgeous beast, lives. And they and dozens of subordinate characters move without confusion through dozens of offices, apartments, boarding-houses and streets, each eruditely saturated with the appropriate elements of its own atmosphere.

Not an interesting group, till Mr. Lewis became vividly interested in it. What value does he see in Una Golden? What beauty? Well, he sees her as an intelligent and purposeful feminine will, emerging from the respectable helplessness and hopelessness of girls who married their first choice and "settled down" in Panama, Pennsylvania,—emerging into the beauty of a self-directed life. He sees her as a girl with youth's hunger for enchantment, with arms outstretched for it, missing it, but closing resolutely upon what the wisest among the

children of men generally accept as the second best. From the lights of Main Street in Panama, also from certain city lights here flashed upon her, this adventurer derives her "value."

There were a score of mild, matter-of-fact Unas on the same Elevated train with her, in their black hats and black jackets and black skirts and white waists, with one hint of coquetry in a white-laced jabot or a white-lace veil; faces slightly sallow or channeled with care, but eyes that longed to flare with love; women whom life didn't want except to type its letters about invoices of rubber heels; women who would have given their salvation for the chance to sacrifice themselves for love. . . . And there was one man on that Elevated train, a well-bathed man with cynical eyes, who read a little book with a florid gold cover, all about Clytemnestra, because he was certain that modern cities have no fine romance, no high tragedy; that you must go back to the Greeks for real feeling. He often aphorized, "Frightfully hackneyed to say, 'woman's place is the home,' but really, you know, these women going to offices, vulgarizing all their fine womanliness, and their shrieking sisterhood going in for suffrage and Lord knows what. Give me the reticence of the harem rather than one of these office-women with gum-chewing vacuities. None of them clever enough to be tragic."

Readers who turn to fiction for "heavenly rest" are not a little disturbed by the presence in all Mr. Lewis's books of certain signs of what is called "social unrest" or, with more overtly hostile intention, "socialistic feeling." Of Una Golden, for

example, we are told that, "Into her workaday mind came a low light from the fire which was kindling the world; the dual belief that life is too sacred to be taken in war and filthy industries and dull education; and that most forms and organizations and inherited castes are not sacred at all." Now, to the intelligent mind there is really nothing less perturbing than the emergence, in classes and individuals, of intelligence and taste, bestirring themselves, in an imperfectly adjusted world, to seek their own level. That kind of unrest does not destroy, it creates, the "divine order." The unrest of girls like Una Golden is the hope of the middle-class; and the middle-class, Mr. John Corbin has just assured us, is the hope of our society. From the time of the Rape of the Sabines to the time of Samuel Clemens there has been a danger, in unsettled societies, that social bandits would dash in from the border and carry off the carefully nurtured daughters of "first families." That danger is the spice of life in a democracy, which offers no more kindling incentive to its undiscovered talents than admission, after due ordeals and the probation of a generation or two, into its first families. I for one regret to observe that our ancient custom of assuring every schoolboy of his right to hope for the Presidency is falling into desuetude—without the slightest visible reason why it should. A novelist who inspires the Younger Generation by reviving this and kindred conceptions of democratic oppor-

tunity and reward is restoring one of our invaluable traditions.

I make this solemn transition to *Free Air,* 1919, because it is a "light" novel, constituting a humorous interlude in Mr. Lewis's realistic march. Gravely captious critics may be disposed to dismiss it as a pot-boiler, prepared for the fancy of our touring automobilists. We have frankly admitted that Mr. Lewis is opportune. I do not see how anyone who has ever cranked a Ford can resist this crisp tale of the girl from Brooklyn in her Gomez-Dep roadster and the ingenious young mechanic in his "bug" from Schoenstrom, Minnesota, who discover each other's attraction in an exciting drive, by way of Gopher Prairie and the Yellowstone, to Seattle, with an engineering education and a Sabine marriage just ahead. The plot is, indeed, anybody's; but the execution is that of a masterly realist on a lark—not raising any question about the main conventions and conditions of his modern fairy-tale but playing the game with such zest that one almost forgets to enquire whether a nice girl from Brooklyn ever could so far forget herself on a summer vacation as to find anything in common with a garage man. Love as a specialized passion is, as Mr. Lewis treats it in his most serious vein, but a welcome additional zest to companionship in the adventure of life. Here, it is but a fillip to the intensely serious consideration of extricating a car from a "morass of prairie gumbo" or piloting it in safety up the last pitch of the continental divide. If in the end Milt Daggett

has learned something about the care of his nails from his association with Claire Boltwood, and she something about shifting gears from him, the affair, like the *Beggar's Opera,* is carried off with too light an air to effect subversively the foundation of society.

Main Street, 1920, is another story. Mr. Lewis had been incubating it for six or seven years, though I suspect that his faculties were edged for its final revision by his comparative study of American small towns, made on that excursion over the Lincoln Highway, which he so gaily chronicled in *Free Air.* A second novel as deeply rooted in his native soil and in his own past would be as difficult a feat for him as, for their respective authors, a second *Huckleberry Finn,* a second *David Copperfield,* a second *Mill on the Floss,* a second *Pendennis,* a second *Clayhanger.* Like these other five great novels, *Main Street* appears to be the harvest of the writer's best land, which is so often his native heath and the deep impressions of early life, ineffaceable by the lapse of years, and poignantly touching the heart through the revisiting eyes of age. In its exhibition of the interwoven lives of the community, it has the authority, the intimacy, the many-sided insights, the deep saturation of color, which no journalist can ever "get up," which are possible only, one is tempted to say, to one who packs into his book the most vital experience and observation of a lifetime. One must have *lived* that stuff in order to have reproduced it as living organism. And it is with some vague sense that a man can contain only one great

autobiography that many readers of *Main Street* have prophesied against Mr. Lewis's future.

To those who wish to believe that they have found not merely a new novel but also a new novelist, capable of fresh flights for distance and altitude, certain reassuring considerations may be presented. *Main Street,* unlike three-fourths of the novels of the day, is not autobiographical. It is to an extraordinary degree an objective representation of contemporary society extended through a period of not more than half-a-dozen years. In this society Mr. Lewis himself has not a single "personal representative." Neither Dr. Kennicott, nor Carol, nor Guy Pollock, nor Vida Sherwin, nor Sam Clark, nor Percy Breshnahan, nor Erik Valbord, nor Miles Bjornstam, nor Fern Mullins, nor Mrs. Bogart is his "register." Each one of these persons is a perfectly distinct individual with firm centre and contours honestly constructed after innumerable observations and hard, earnest work of the realistic imagination. Mr. Lewis will not exhaust his material while he retains his present capacity for research. Deeply indebted as he may be to Mr. Wells for the illumination of his point of view as an observer of the human spectacle, he has studied the art of constructing the novel under other masters with far greater respect for their profession than that famous producer who semi-annually charges a new lay figure with the task of communicating to the world the latest state of his own consciousness. The contemporary English novelist whose best work is

most comparable with *Main Street* is Mr. Bennett in *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger*. But the book from which, I should say, Mr. Lewis, without losing a particle of his own idiom or the independence of his American vision, has learned his most valuable "secrets," is *Madame Bovary*.

Both *Main Street* and *Madame Bovary* are mordantly critical representations of contemporary civilizations. In each case, the criticism is intensely focused upon the bourgeois society of a representative provincial town. In each case, the "hero" is a country doctor, who is, thanks to an insensitive æsthetic organization, sufficiently content with his lot and in love with his young wife. In each case, the "heroine" has been touched by literature and contact with the city to revolt against the Philistinism of her husband and the restrictions of her life, in behalf of romantic ideals of which she is unable to find any worthy incarnations. In each case the searching criticism which plays over the scene and the actors is delivered indirectly by an intricate system of contrasts and the cross lighting and reflected lighting of subordinate characters. I will add an observation which many readers fail to make: Flaubert was in love with Emma and Mr. Lewis is in love with Carol; and both authors analyze and expose the object of their affection with a merciless rigor which no woman can either understand or pardon—she can understand the rigor but not the love which inflicts it and survives it. Their heroes they treat with similar austerity—with the difference

that Flaubert despises his, and the American author does not. To the student of Mr. Lewis's indirect analytical method, I commend his remorseless twenty-fourth chapter, beginning with the "thesis": "All that midsummer month Carol was sensitive to Kennicott"; likewise his subtle record of Carol's reaction to Breshnahan in relation to her husband. So much for the parallelism between the French master and the American disciple.

As for the divergence, it is not all to the advantage of Flaubert. Mr. Lewis saw more types of people, more kinds of activity, more meshes of the social network in Gopher Prairie than Flaubert saw in Rouen. Without destroying their artistic subordination, he made more of his secondary personages. He increased greatly the significance and the tension of his novel by choosing, as the principal representatives of middle-class revolt and middle-class stability, characters with a far higher degree of general and professional intelligence than is possessed by the French protagonists. He faithfully presents the specific erotic passion as only occasionally or seasonally perturbing the average American temperament—not obsessing it, not hounding it. Flaubert sees this passion as the centre of his theme. Mr. Lewis does not. If our novelists generally were not dissuaded by the terrors of our censorship, if they dared to tell the truth, would they, like many of their European colleagues and like one or two of their American confrères, would they represent the average middle-class American as living feverishly

from one liaison to the next? Mr. Lewis does not appear to think so. Dr. Kennicott had, before his marriage, been around "with the boys," and perhaps he never became utterly incapable of a slip; but I doubt whether Mr. Lewis has been guilty of any important suppression of the truth in declaring that the doctor's mind was absorbed in his five hobbies: medicine, land-investment, Carol, motoring, and hunting. As for Carol—that well-turned, dynamic, rather intensely feminine, too taut young woman, whom I meet with greater frequency each year, flinging her coat into chairs and "exploding" into other living rooms than those of Gopher Prairie, to the disgust of the stodgy and to the delight and the refreshment of the others—she might be more simply happy or more simply miserable if the sex instincts were stronger in her; if she could content herself with being either mother, wife or mistress; if she could repeat *ex animo* that sweet and wistfully cadenced line of Byron's which, alas, I have forgotten, to the effect that love is only an incident in a man's life—" 'tis a woman's whole existence" —something like that.

When I found that I had forgotten the exact words of this phrase, which in my youth I have heard a hundred times on plaintive lips, I went to some friends one generation older than mine, and confidently asked them to recall it. I wanted it, as you see, to conclude the preceding paragraph. But they too, had forgotten it, or they remember it, rather, as I remember it—as something that people

used to repeat, or as something that Robert Browning might have excogitated in meditating on the early life of that eminent early Victorian, the authoress of *Aurora Leigh*. The oblivion which is overtaking this "familiar quotation" is a straw indicating a shifting of the winds of social change. The words no longer give an echo to the seat where modern love is throned.

Opportunities for women opened by the war, the steady stimulation of middle-class daughters by the state universities, and various other causes are making the situation of intelligent girls marooned in our innumerable Gopher Prairies appear acutely painful and almost intolerable. The clear-eyed and hard-headed ones see in time, and the others too late for easy solution of their problems, that a girl who lets love become her "whole existence" is snared, excluded from the special interests and activities of her age, and in a fair way to become tedious to her husband and to herself. In this new middle-class society which is forming around them, the clear-eyed and hard-headed ones perceive that abstract "womanhood" is destined to receive less lip-service and specific women more attention than they have received in the past. The woman who counts, like the man who counts, will be esteemed more and more for the developed virtues of her own individuality, whatever they may be, and less and less frequently conceived of as a "skirt," whatever its quality.

Now so far as *Main Street* is "the story of Carol

Kennicott," it shows an eager young creature beating her luminous wings rather wildly, as young creatures do, yet not without some sense of the direction in which light and freedom are. A "back-yard" affair with Erik Valborg—that for example, she discovers decisively, is not the way out. That might be an alleviant to the yearnings of Emma Bovary but it would not be even a temporary sop to her. With true insight into the significant aspect of the present unrest among young women, the revolt of Carol is shown to have very little relation with the much advertised movements for "sexual freedom." Carol is, on the contrary, rebellious precisely at the fetters which accepting the things of sex as a "woman's whole existence" has imposed upon her. Her revolt is inspired by a general hunger of the heart for its own development through appropriate activities of hand and will and brain. In so far as this is true, I judge her revolt to be not only significant but beautiful and not altogether hopeless, as I should attempt to show if I had space to discuss the "improvable greatness" of Mr. Kennicott and to prognosticate his wife's ultimate discovery of it, and their transmission of their complementary virtues to their offspring.

But that, adequately done, would demand another novel, dealing with the Kennicotts of the second generation, which I hope Mr. Lewis will write when that generation has revealed itself to him.

At present, however, while his satirical powers are at their height, the younger people who are

just emerging from college may be congratulated that his devastating searchlight is still playing upon the middle-aged. His new novel *Babbitt* is not a sequel to *Main Street* but a parallel and co-ordinate extension. It is a picture of contemporary American society not in the small towns and villages but in the cities of some numerical pretensions. Zenith, the prosperous midwestern city of 350,000, in which George F. Babbitt, the prosperous "realtor," establishes himself on Floral Heights, is inhabited largely by people who had in their youth ambition enough to get up and get out of the "hick burgs." They flatter themselves that, leaving behind them all the elements that constituted the dinginess and dreariness of Gopher Prairie, they have pressed forward to the mark of the high calling of hustling, right-thinking, forward-looking boosters, good-fellows, and 100% Americans. For iron they have substituted copper sinks in the kitchen; for the Saturday night tubbing, the daily bath; for golden-oak, near mahogany; for the Ford the limousine; for the dirty ramshackle huddle of shops and visibly suspendered tobacco-chewing shopkeepers, blocks of aspiring office buildings and hotels with manicure girls attending in the Pompeian Barber Shop; for the somnolent barn-like church, an up-to-date competitive "community centre" with press-agents, military organization, and pep-masters; for cigars and poker in the parlor with Sam Clark and "the boys," monogrammed cigarettes and mixed auction bridge at the country club; for "open meetings" of the

Thanatopsis society, week-end parties with prohibition anecdotes and cocktails.

With comprehensive and mordant notation of detail coupled with a formidable power of generalization, Mr. Lewis shows how the city attempts to solve the problem of the small town. Between Gopher Prairie and Zenith, there is the material progress of a generation—a long march in America. But between Gopher Prairie and Zenith, civilization, according to this record—civilization, judged by the decisive tests—has not advanced an inch. The quantity of human happiness has not increased, nor has its quality improved. The people are not more open-minded nor more upright nor more beautiful nor more interesting. This is not the story of Carol; and the unrest among young women, which she so vividly illustrated, finds here no adequate representative. The "leading lady" does not lead. Myra Babbitt, Mrs. George F., is a woman, "definitely mature," who has, in a dull fashion, accepted her universe: "She was a good woman, a kind woman, a diligent woman, but no one, save perhaps Tinka, her ten-year-old, was at all interested in her or entirely aware that she was alive"—a tragical sentence, applicable enough to the average middle-class American woman of forty. This is primarily a story of a man's unrest. This is the story of Babbitt, the graduate of a state university, the "swaddled American husband," the prosperous American broker, the Rotarian, the leading citizen, the consequence and cause of civilization as it exists

in Zenith, and the embodiment of nearly all its vices and its virtues.

Babbitt is a more important character than Dr. Kennicott in that he is more nearly ubiquitous. Less trustworthy as a man, he will perhaps be found more interesting as a "hero," because he has less of character and more of temperament. Unlike the Doctor, he is highly self-conscious, he has a "soft" streak, he is an egotist, and he is eager for the applause and admiration of men and women, not excluding his wife, for whom he feels an habitual tolerance, and including his stenographer, whom he wishes to impress as a "great man," and his manicurist, to whom he is willing, in relaxed and erratic moods, to appear as a person with possibilities of romance. In the morning Mr. Babbitt wears a well-made, well-pressed gray suit with white piping on the V of the vest. In the evening he wears, when there is important company, a "Tuxedo" which Mrs. Babbitt vainly insists that he should call a "dinner-jacket"—that is the precise "note" of their social status. He is diligent in business and not more crooked than William Washington Eathorne, President of the First State Bank, a chilly old gentleman who lives in an old brick house of the Civil War period, and who impresses Babbitt as "the real thing" by quietly ringing for a whiskey toddy, instead of mooing and baying around the subject, as in his own circle is the custom when the host produces something illicit from the ice-box.

This is one of the many incidents by which Mr. Lewis illustrates the peculiar pathos of his hero's situation. With all that the civilization of Zenith can offer at his disposal, Babbitt is restless and unsatisfied. He has money enough, things enough, physical comforts enough. He has, like great numbers of our prosperous middle-class, reached the point where the multiplication of things gives no addition of content. There is a gnawing hunger in him but he can think of nothing that he wants to eat. In a vague way he desires "the right thing" for himself, for his family, for his community; but there is no authoritative standard, there is no one to tell him, there is nothing in the society of Zenith to show him by example, what the "real right thing" is. Consequently, in the restlessness of satiety and inner boredom, Babbitt unintelligently and unimaginatively gropes for his missing felicity in unfruitful directions: in imitating Mr. Eathorne, in speech-making and prominence at business men's conventions, in running off to the Maine woods where one can wear old clothes and chew tobacco and "cuss" in freedom, and finally in various experiments in marital infidelity. But from all these ventures he returns with the taste of sand and ashes in his mouth. And the only gleam that lights the final pages of the book is his indulgent humor towards his children, one of whom is studying the drama and labor statistics, while the other, his son, has just revealed his secret off-hand marriage. To the boy he says:

"Practically I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life. I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along . . . Well, maybe you'll carry things on further. I don't know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil! I'll back you. Take your factory job, if you want. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours!"

I have no high expectation regarding Babbitt's son. He gives as little promise as his father of capacity for finding delight in the things of the mind. The daughter may conceivably become an interesting individual, perhaps only an intense and difficult one.

Babbitt is not a representation of the highest American standards of morals and manners. But neither is *The Rise of Silas Lapham* nor *Huckleberry Finn* nor Henry James's *The American*. Neither is *Vanity Fair* a representation of the highest standards of morals and manners in England, nor is *David Copperfield,* nor *Pride and Prejudice*. It is not the business of the realistic novelist nor dramatist to confine his studies to those small and isolated spots in which the society of his contemporaries approaches perfection. To propose such an aim is absurd. A jury of award which accepted it would at once be obliged to exclude from its consideration

practically everything that is worth considering. In the age of Elizabeth the acceptance of such an aim would have excluded from consideration the chief tragedies of Shakespeare and all the comedies of Ben Jonson. The most important business of the capable painter of contemporary society from Balzac to the present day has been the portrayal of the great representative types. In an immense and motley democracy, booming furiously through the stages of material progress, few of the great representative types know anything about the "highest standard of manners and morals in America."

All that we may fairly demand of our novelists —and it is a large demand—is that they themselves, as observers of the human spectacle, should be aware of this "highest standard," should paint their great representative types at a point of view at which the best society is at least within their vision. It is a large demand but it is a fair demand to make of a class of men who undertake to govern us through our imaginations. It is a fair demand to make of men whose profession involves a connoisseurship of truth and beauty. It is a necessary demand, if their criticism of life is to have any social value; *Vanity Fair,* for example, though it is for the most part a picture of a selfish and disagreeable world, is obviously written by a man who understands what an unselfish and agreeable world might be, while Mr. Dreiser's *Genius,* for another example, is a picture of a selfish and disagreeable

world, written by a man apparently incapable of conceiving anything else.

Now Mr. Lewis, with increasing clearness of apprehension and vitality of presentation, has devoted himself to the portrayal of the representative. There is no denying the vigor or the representativeness of the types presented in *The Job, Main Street* and *Babbitt.* Nor is there doubt in anyone's mind that Mr. Lewis's contemporary scene is drenched in irony and raked with satire. The one rather serious objection which one hears raised against his work is that the standards, the existence of which are implied in any consistently satiric picture of society,—the standards by which Mr. Lewis judges, for instance, Gopher Prairie and Zenith—are not sufficiently in evidence. The publication of *Babbitt* is likely to increase the frequency of that objection; for while in *Main Street* there are at least four persons, including Carol, with quite definite conceptions of what ought to be done to increase beauty and interest in Gopher Prairie, in *Babbitt* these quite definite improvements have been made, without essential increase of beauty or interest in the lives of the citizens; and no one in the book seems to understand what to do next. We are on the brink of a Tolstoyan problem. The artistic charm and vivacity of this novel, to say nothing of its social stimulation, would have been heightened by somewhat freer employment of those devices of dramatic contrast of which Mr. Lewis is a master—by the introduction of some character or group capable of

reflecting upon the Babbitts oblique rays from a social and personal felicity, more genuine, more inward than any of the summoned witnesses possesses. Eventually, if Mr. Lewis does not wish to pass for a hardened pessimist, he will have to produce a hero qualified to register in some fashion the result of his own quest for the desirable; he will have to give us his Portrait of a Lady, his Pendennis, his Warrington and his Colonel Newcome. Meanwhile I am very well content to applaud the valor of his progress through Vanity Fair.

XI

WHERE THERE ARE NO ROTARIANS

XI

WHERE THERE ARE NO ROTARIANS

For the realistic novel which enlarges and quickens our consciousness of the world we live in —especially for the novel in which the characters, setting, and "problems" possess a genuine representative value—I have an almost insatiable appetite. Since the New Year's night when I sat up till two o'clock feasting on *Main Street,* exulting from chapter to chapter in my sharpening sense of the characteristics of my countrymen, I have read many more or less satisfactory tales of provincial life, more or less inspired by the man from Minnesota; yet few of them have prevented my dropping off to sleep at my customary hour. The fictional gleaners in the small towns have not gone into the field with the gusto of discoverers. They have appeared rather to regard *Main Street* as a harvest which any industrious writer could duplicate by driving Mr. Lewis's mowing machine along the parkings of any midwestern small town and gathering up the results with an ordinary hay rake. "Yes," one began to mutter, "still another bale of that midwestern hay. The second crop is not up to the first." There seemed to be little more to say about the small town.

just now—at least, from the point of view of a satirical intellectual; and Mr. Lewis himself, leaving the mowing machine to rust in Gopher Prairie, had promptly "twitched his mantle blue," and moved upon Zenith, the booming stronghold of the Rotarians.

Then came Edith Summers Kelly with *Weeds*, and I discovered under the midnight lamp that we hadn't done with the provinces yet, and that the satirical Intellectuals were attempting to dispose of our yokelry and our Rotarians in altogether too summary a fashion. This is another "social study," that is, a picture of an American community from a critical point of view, somewhere outside it. But it is no mere aftermath of *Main Street*. It is a fresh harvest in a new field. The scene is rural Kentucky. The characters are small tobacco growers. The manners are not those of materialized mid-western "puritans"—New Englanders pushing grimly westward. No; from the first page you feel yourself in the presence of another spirit. A softer and warmer air caresses the cheek. You are touched by a breath of the South. You find yourself in a community of a slower tempo. You are subtly invaded and surrounded by impressions of a certain lovable slackness and leisure and lazy kindliness and hospitality and easygoing humor. Of modern literature, romantic hungers, and scientific curiosity these good people are as innocent as our first parents in Eden. They are not within hailing distance of the rural civilization denoted by the possession of Ford cars

and victrola. They are still at the accordion and lumber wagon stage, where they were left by their great-grandfathers, and there is no "drive" in them to indicate that they will ever emerge from it. On the contrary, their old stock is degenerating from intermarriage and excessive childbearing and malnutrition and corn whiskey and too long and too exclusive association with "hawgs" and mules. The community as a whole is slowly falling below its own traditional folk standards—it is running to weeds.

Except in the biting monosyllabic title, this conclusion is not preached at you in any didactic fashion. It emerges with gradual cumulative force as the inner significance of a singularly intimate and vital artistic representation. Of Bill Pippinger's weedy family, one daughter, Judith, receives by the incalculable chances of heredity far more than a Pippinger's share of vital energy, mental and physical. A vivid little jet of passionate animation, she darts out early in the story to rescue a tortured cat from the neighborhood boys: "Naow, then, one of you jes dass come near here an' I'll run this knife right in yer guts! See if I don't!" As Wordsworth so sweetly sings, "the floating clouds," "the stars of midnight"—the various other aspects of holy nature not noted by the poet—"mold the maiden's form by silent sympathy." Eager, fearless, self-reliant, she finds her man when her mating season comes, and together they enjoy a brief period of lively affection and high spirits as they settle upon their farm. Then, little by little, they become serfs

of the soil and slaves of circumstances. The heavy routine of daily life beats at them and drags them down. Children, too soon and too many; ignorance of housekeeping and farm management; sickness and ignorance of hygiene; drudgery; crop failure and high prices, and abundant crops and no market; corn bread and salt pork, whiskey and patent medicines; cold and hunger and labor and hopelessness, break them down and wear them out and defeat them. The characters do very little wailing—like sheep before the shearers they are pretty dumb. They feel themselves lapsing into defeat by irresistible processes which they don't understand. They accept defeat with the mild querulousness with which we accept bald heads, false teeth, and old age —as the unlovely but inevitable order of nature.

Neither does the author wail much over her tragedy. I think, in fact, that she is curiously and secretly smiling over it. She is not smiling with the derisive smile of the satirist; her book is full of an intimate but quite unsentimental sympathy with her Kentucky farmers—a sympathy and humor which steadily preserve the narrative from drabness and oppressiveness. She knows that these Kentuckians, unlike Mr. Lewis's hard-shelled midwesterners, are not fit subjects for satire. They are not complacent. They are not impervious. They are not hidebound. They are merely desperately ignorant and helpless. Before they can become proper subjects for satirical comedy, something must be done by a power not themselves; they must be con-

nected by some kind of State road with—Main Street.

I did not unadvisedly begin the discussion of this book by a reference to Main Street and the Rotarians. And one who will take the trouble to read *Weeds, Main Street,* and *Babbitt* in succession will find himself willy nilly becoming a sociologist. The three books represent three distinct stages in the "march of civilization"—only the Kentucky community hasn't begun to march. The author of *Weeds* must forgive me if I state baldly what seem to me some of the more obvious social implications of her book.

First, it strikes me as perfectly obvious that her Kentucky community is degenerating precisely from the lack of such efficient internal organization as is effected by an ordinarily intelligent band of Rotarians, Kiwanis, or Lions. Second, it seems obvious that the most serious economic need of the small tobacco growers is some system of coöperative marketing which shall make it more profitable to haul in their crop than to burn it in the dooryard. Third, it is clear that the Kentucky legislators, instead of debating whether the doctrine of evolution should be taught in the schools, had better employ their leisure in devising some means of giving country boys and girls an education in household science and scientific agriculture. Fourth, in Kentucky and elsewhere it will be very profitable for legislators to consider whether scientific birth control or primitive methods of abortion furnish the better solution

of the problem of a degenerating physical stock, due to excessive childbearing.

When the rural community has reached the level of Main Street, then we may begin to talk satirically about the "culture" of its inhabitants; then we may begin to ship in carloads of Maeterlinck and Dunsany and Max Beerbohm. But while the rural community remains in the condition so powerfully depicted in *Weeds* let us quite unabashedly thank God for the Rotarians.

XII

MR. TARKINGTON ON THE MIDLAND PERSONALITY

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MR. TARKINGTON ON THE MIDLAND PERSONALITY

Mr. Tarkington has written another of his nice novels.

The reference in it to the time when Saratoga was the place to see the social world recalls naturally enough the "passing" of the Saratoga trunk. It is not the least of Mr. Tarkington's titles to our gratitude that he was himself a pioneer of the change—that he was among the first to feel the convenience and pleasure of travelling light, of carrying all one's belongings in a hand bag. If one eliminates top hats, frock coats, starched shirts, woolen underwear, hoops and whalebone-and-steel contraptions, it is astonishing how many essential things of fine smooth texture one can pack into a hand bag or into a bead purse or even pull through the circle of a wedding ring. None of our novelists is fonder of travelling light than Mr. Tarkington; and yet he is always nicely, even "niftily," garbed. He steadily succeeds in being our best-dressed novelist; and he has been that so long that, quite unlike the begoniaed dandies of a later generation, he never calls the slightest attention to his dress.

In the provinces, a change of fashion is completed slowly. And so when a midwestern novelist announces a new book, one instinctively glances over his shoulder for his Saratoga trunk; and when he takes the little thing out of a handbag, one tends to conclude that the visitor comes on no very serious errand. After I had read *The Midlander,* there was a perceptible interval before I thought of it as anything more than another of Mr. Tarkington's nice novels. It is neat but not dapper. Its tone is nearer nonchalance than emphasis. It hasn't a particle of western "breeze" or a single note of western stridency. It doesn't seem to present truth through the colored medium of temperament; its atmosphere is as pellucid as window-glass. It presents, in level gentlemanly voice, the following situation:

The two Oliphant boys, Harlan and Dan, sons of an old midwestern family in comfortable circumstances, are different. Harlan is bookish, close, conservative, inadventurous. Dan as a boy likes to make things with his hands; he is expansive, progressive, and subject to sanguine enthusiasms. An admirable midwestern girl, big, healthy, with little or no nonsense in her, lives in the big house next door. But the boys go to an eastern college. Dan fools around for a while in New York, and then brings home as his wife a New York girl who may briefly be described as a neurasthenic "flapper." There are some parents and a wealthy grandmother who react in various ways to the eastern wife; and

Dan and his wife contribute one child to our present younger generation.

One doesn't expect the adventure to turn out very well. It doesn't. At the time Dan married he had already conceived his life-work: he is to develop an "addition" to his midwestern city. With an unsatisfactory home life, he himself develops into a mere megaphone for his real-estate business. We will not divulge his domestic or pecuniary troubles beyond this point, nor shall we speak further of the cold-hearted Harlan. What one feels, at first, about all these people, except Dan's toughminded old grandmother and the "hickory" father of the girl next door—what one feels is, that one has had hardly any *feeling* whatever. What they do and say is all real enough, plausible enough; yet there is no mordancy or bite in their total effect. Nothing unexpected ever falls from their dusty lips. They never burst or blurt or blunder into any arresting actuality. All there is to their lives is on the surface: the inside, if there is an inside, is without distinction and without charm—it is devoid of interest. It neither rejoices one nor hurts one—much.

When I finished *The Midlander,* I asked myself what it had said to me—what its theme was. It isn't the familiar story of the discontented wife or the disillusioned husband. The girl is an uncomfortable enough little beast, so far as Mr. Tarkington has indicated her. But she really isn't "done": discontented wives are infinitely richer in the resources of misery than this shallow creature shows

herself. And as for the husband's conjugal experience, neither Mr. Tarkington nor the husband himself seems to regard that as matter of much consequence. There is no intimate illumination of the "sexual problem" whatever. What *The Midlander* said to me, on first consideration, was simply this: "If you are a well-rooted midwestern man with a stake in your section of the country, for heaven's sake don't marry one of these silly little New York flappers, but marry the fine big healthy midwestern girl next door." And so I wrote, as the heading for this review: "Mr. Tarkington Discountenances Sectional Miscegenation."

The argument for this view is that the mild humor of the book is an intersectional humor. The author has considerable legitimate midwestern fun at the expense of our metropolitans. The New York girl and her family are place-proud and family proud; and they think of the west and westerners as "just awful"—without, of course, really knowing anything of the subject except what they learn from the red barbarians of the Chicago school. Mr. Tarkington makes a valuable contribution to intersectional understanding by showing that old midwestern cities also have their old proud families, proud of their bank accounts, and their brains, and their achievements,—yes, but proud also of their blood and their ancestors, and aristocratically hostile to the dilution of their virtues by inter-marriage with wasters and wastrels.

But the more I think of it, the more I suspect

that Mr. Tarkington may possibly have desired *The Midlander* to say something to us a little deeper than this. Under the surface humor, under the apparently superficial representation of character, there is a discoverable tragedy. I have said that Dan Oliphant, a various and lively youth, becomes at maturity a mere "megaphone" of his real estate business. He becomes the almost impersonal expansiveness of an ugly booming city. This explains the curious fact that the reader suffers little when Dan is checkmated and ejected from his own enterprise. All that was real in Dan is preserved in roads, factories and bungalows. He has lost all his private personality. The tragedy of the novel is precisely the defeat and extinction of his personal life. And that is the tragedy which, up to date, midwestern civilization has been fondest of inflicting upon its loyal pioneers.

Accept that view, and you have a kind of artistic defence of the thinness and deficient vitality of the characterizations. The true Midlander, perhaps the author would have us understand, is personally a thin, empty man. If Mr. Tarkington really meant to say all that, if our nonchalant and best-dressed novelist actually sauntered up to say anything as profoundly melancholy and disillusioning as that—well, he has said a "mouthful," and we must never trust these languidly jaunty fellows with light traveling bags any more! If it is true, then *The Midlander* isn't a nice novel at all.

XIII

OSCAR S. STRAUS

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OSCAR S. STRAUS

A wise book, charmingly written, is the autobiography of Oscar S. Straus, called *Under Four Administrations*. The reasons follow. Between an outspoken natural man and a public official there is something like the difference which exists between an "instructed" and an "uninstructed" delegate. By an apparent paradox the uninstructed delegate appears to possess more intelligence than the instructed delegate. This is really creditable to human nature, for it shows the superiority of a man over a marionette. An official is often so much a marionette, so fully operated by strings which are yet out of sight, that he is almost customarily credited by the press, before his term of office has expired, with being a blockhead. But no man, not even a journalist, can really believe that presidents, judges and Congressmen are actually as stupid as he says they are, or as they sometimes appear, even to the laity, to be. It is incredible. No one has a right to expect in an official such exhibition of heart and brains as one expects in an outspoken natural man, any more than one has a right to expect a satisfactorily thrilling embrace from William

James's "automatic sweetheart," however plausibly the behavioristic philosophers may have argued that it ought to be "just as good" as the genuine article.

Whenever, from excessively reading the results of the intelligence tests, or the daily newspapers, or the weekly journals of opinion, or the seasonal output of small-town biographical novels—whenever from too long immersion in the turbulent surf of our discontent, one emerges, chilled and despairing of the Republic, one should read as a stimulant and as a restorative the biography of one of our representative men who have "returned to nature" by retiring from office.

The season's biographies and the season's fiction, as fiction is written nowadays, equally recite, with a fair degree of veracity, the adventures of contemporary men; but in the one case the hero is ordinarily a quite insignificant person enmeshed in a Freudian "complex" and depicted with entire disregard of the Aristotelian maxim that "no very minute animal can be beautiful," while, in the other case, the hero is usually a person by nature "of a certain magnitude," increased by his participation in the great affairs of the world. Whenever one wonders why so much of our fiction seems ugly and depressing and why, on the other hand, so much of our biography affects us as stimulating, consolatory and beautiful, one should recall that neglected assertion of Aristotle's: "Whatever is beautiful must be of a certain magnitude." And then one should recklessly thank whatever gods there be that

America has not relied exclusively upon a hereditary public service nor a "trained diplomatic corps," steeped in the hopeless cynicism of the profession, but has so often picked unspoiled men of heart and brains, wherever she has found them—a Page, a Lane, a Hoover, a Straus—and has set them to work out, with splendid "indiscretions," the salvation of the people.

The career of Mr. Straus illustrates with peculiar force the wisdom of calling many, even when few are to be chosen. In a double sense, he belongs to the Chosen People, having been set apart by birth in a race which achieved civilization so many centuries before the Russians, Germans and Anglo-Saxons emerged from barbarism that the latter even now find it difficult to "keep up." There is reason to believe that he, with his eminent brothers, began life in America with a special family inheritance of intelligence and character. His success does not prove that a fool or a knave will find every door of opportunity in America wide open. But in other respects, the demonstration of "democratic opportunity" is here as complete as can be desired, since, but for the advantages of nature, Mr. Straus started at the scratch.

Nothing in his memoirs is more charming in tone than his simple and affectionate treatment of the beginnings of the Straus family in America, with its pictures of the father, a Bavarian immigrant of 1852, first peddling his wares among the hospitable Georgia planters, then setting up his store in Tal-

bottom, bringing over his young family in 1854, entering the children in school and swiftly adapting the ways of his household to the spirit of a new community. On the persuasion of a Baptist minister, the boys were sent to a Baptist Sunday School, but, remarks Mr. Straus significantly: "My main religious instruction came from conversations with my father and from the discussions the ministers of various denominations had with him, which I always followed with great interest." This Bavarian peddler, who seems to have had Franklin's attraction for "ministers of various denominations," had brought into the country something more than the small merchant's stock in trade; he had brought an ability to explain to the hard-shell, slavery-upholding Southern Baptists that the Bible is an historical record, requiring historical interpretation, and that the Biblical sanction of slavery is a shaky foundation for modern institutions.

If one were to single out the dominant trait in the Straus family, which was to be most strikingly represented in Oscar Straus, it would be the instinct for civility in its broadest sense, including the duties of good citizenship and considerably more than the average sensual man's preference of intelligence to force in the adjustment of human relations. This instinct reveals itself at the outset in the promptitude with which the family allied itself with whatever intellectual and spiritual elements a small Georgia town afforded, in its appreciation of Southern courtesy and hospitality, in its dislike of slavery,

its disgust at the immoderate gin and whisky drinking of the country squires, its revolt from the hazing of the Georgia Military Academy, and its general sense of dismay at the destruction of the elementary ideas of brotherhood by civil strife, in which incidentally most of its own savings were swept away by the looting and burning of a rabble led by drunken Federal soldiers. In consequence of the war, the family moved to New York; and there once more the members of the Straus family showed their practical instinct for civilization by pooling their resources in order to allow one of their number to contribute in their behalf to the intellectual and professional life of their adopted country—to be set apart and "chosen" for the second time and in the American sense.

One dwells on these beginnings, because in spite of all that is occasionally achieved by vagrants who enter the vineyard at the eleventh hour, so much depends upon beginning right and beginning early. Mr. Frank Jewett Mather has a pretty passage in which he tells how John La Farge rebuked him for speaking as if an artist, after starting his picture, were free to develop it in various ways: "He went on to show how the first firm line set on a canvas excludes all incompatible lines thenceforth, so that by the third or fourth leading contour the design must advance by a kind of fatality."

When Oscar Straus entered Columbia College in 1867 he did not see the picture of himself escorted by eight royal carriages to the Sultan's palace or

presiding over the Department of Labor in Roosevelt's Cabinet, but he had determined the "color" of the picture, he had set the "first firm line" on the canvas. He had already "a restless ambition to have a useful career," and in this environment his intellectual eagerness developed rapidly. He read widely in biography and history, which he then preferred, and still prefers, to fiction. He strove to excel in his studies, and was one of three nominated for the Alumni Prize, awarded to "the most deserving student in the graduating class." He records gleefully that he defeated Brander Matthews for the office of class poet. But perhaps the clearest premonitory sign of his diplomatic talent was his restoring to order an insubordinate class in the Evidences of Christianity—an incident which for inward sweetness is comparable only with the tumult of the bands playing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," at every town in New York where this progressive Jew spoke in his great campaign for Governor.

"The fervent aspiration" which animated him at Columbia was to devote his life to the nation. He had applied personally, with recommendations from President Barnard, to President Grant for an appointment to the United States Military Academy; but as these appointments were reserved for the sons of officers killed in the war he fortunately settled in his senior year upon the law as his vocation, and was graduated from the Columbia Law School in 1873. If one examines his photograph taken at about this period, with its thoroughly awakened,

clear-eyed and almost luminous expression of intelligence and refinement, one has no difficulty in understanding the ease with which the young lawyer found his place in the best legal circles of New York and won the friendship and confidence of such eminent gentiles, for example, as Joseph Choate and Henry Ward Beecher—without, on the other hand, forfeiting the confidence of his own people. It was indeed part of his ambition to prove that a man's Americanism is independent of his race and the form of his religion and "by a personal demonstration" to show the entire compatibility of his own race and religion with the most useful type of citizenship. In conjunction with his friends he organized the Young Men's Hebrew Association. He was secretary of the executive committee of an independent group organized to re-elect a good Mayor. He was secretary of the New York Business Men's Association organized in 1884 to assist in the election of Cleveland.

His diplomatic career began in this fashion. In 1885 he commenced as author with "The Origin of the Republican Form of Government." This book attracted the attention of Senator Gorman, who first proposed to him the Turkish mission. Carl Schurz, Straus's intimate friend, and the editors of the *Times* and the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* bestirred themselves to bring the matter to the attention of Cleveland. The President was impressed, but since the principal business of the Turkish Minister was to look after the interests of Christian

missionaries, he hesitated to send a man who might be *persona non grata*. This objection was overcome by the hearty support of the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and by an urgent and enthusiastic letter from Henry Ward Beecher! Finally Cleveland seems to have made the appointment, not in spite of the fact that Mr. Straus was a Jew, but rather because he was a Jew and a Jew so without reproach that his appointment afforded an opportunity to emphasize the non-sectarian basis of American citizenship and eligibility for honorable service. From one point of view the most impressive thing in these memoirs is precisely this: Mr. Straus's ability to serve wisely and successfully all sorts of conflicting interests, and, on the other hand, their hearty concurrence in being served by him.

Without making a detailed review of his public services, certain significant features may be noted. The salary of Minister to Turkey when Mr. Straus accepted the mission was $7,500; he spent four times that sum and got his compensation in wide acquaintance with the world, in serving his country and in leaving an honorable name to his family. He won the applause of his government and the cordial favor of Abdul Hamid, and he threw himself with ardor and enjoyment into his work at Constantinople —as long as he was instructed and permitted to devote his energy chiefly to protecting educational interests and safeguarding human rights of Jews and Gentiles and removing occasions for armed con-

flict. When, however, under Mr. Taft's Administration, he was sent for a third time to Turkey, in despite of promises to retain him in the Cabinet, and when Mr. Knox instructed him to give his main attention to advancing "prestige" and commercial railway interests in the East, Mr. Straus asked to be relieved, being convinced that the Administration was preparing the way for dangerous and imperialistic entanglements, in which he was unwilling to be involved. He had entered public life to advance public, not private, interests.

This action was becoming in that kind of independent who may be described as at heart an old-school philosophical Democrat. Beginning his public service under Cleveland and continuing under two Republican Presidents, he was naturally twitted with being on both sides of the fence. He replied, half jestingly, that "the fence had moved." As a matter of fact, he seems to have devoted himself to the same sound human and truly American objects through all four of his administrations. In 1898, for example, he urged upon President McKinley a pacific plan for obtaining the virtual independence of Cuba and at the same time saving the face of Spain. The plan fell through because, though McKinley liked it and thought it feasible, he could not resist "the jingo agitation in Congress and the storming for war of the American press."

Mr. Straus does not conceal the fact that he was fascinated by the talents of McKinley's successor and by the heart-warming cordiality of his friend-

ship. Whoever serves to some extent complies; yet he managed to serve even Roosevelt in his own way. It was he whose appeal to our greatest publicity expert not to outstep the modesty of nature elicited the famous retort: "This is a poster, not an etching." With regard to the Alaska boundary dispute, Roosevelt had expressed with characteristic vigor his repugnance to arbitration. He had made up his own mind: that was enough. Then he turned mockingly on Straus and exclaimed: "Straus, you are a member of The Hague Tribunal; don't you think I'm right?" "As a member of The Hague Tribunal," replied his Secretary, "I should first have to hear what the other side had to say." "And we all had a good laugh," adds Mr. Straus.

At what did they laugh—at The Hague Tribunal or at Mr. Roosevelt? Perhaps each at his own subject of merriment; but Mr. Straus, one feels sure, in the covert of his beard smiled at his Master with some of that secret irony which Disraeli employed toward his royal Mistress. In each case I believe the Jew was by instinct and inheritance a more thoroughly "civilized" being than the Gentile. He served Roosevelt indeed most truly by pressing upon our great advocate of the Big Stick the uses of "sweetness and light" in promoting industrial peace at home and harmonious relations abroad. While his friend, relying on the prestige of his own personality, gesticulated with the navy, Mr. Straus sought to strengthen the permanent instrumentalities of arbitral justice and international law.

Perhaps the most piquantly characteristic, if not the most important, bit of his diplomatic service was arresting the descent of the Big Stick. While he was in Constantinople he had discovered that in the Philippines, over which our inexperienced flag had newly risen, there were considerable Moslem elements which recognized the Sultan as their spiritual head. He suggested to the Sultan, to whom this fact seems also to have been a discovery, that he extend his spiritual jurisdiction by advising his co-religionists to submit to the authority of the United States. It was then ascertained by a telegram that two Sulu chiefs were on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Prompted by Mr. Straus, the Sultan instructed them to return home and prevent bloodshed, in consequence of which action the Sulu Mahometans refused to join Aguinaldo's insurrection. The sequel: In 1902 an American soldier in the Philippines was killed while laying a telegraph line in the territory of these Sulu Mahometans. Our press announced that a "punitive expedition" of twelve hundred men would be dispatched—according to the approved imperial methods of dealing with "subject peoples." Mr. Straus, then a private citizen in the United States, immediately advised President Roosevelt against this use of the "strong hand" as likely to provoke a general uprising. He urged instead a diplomatic inquiry, with the assistance of our Mahometan friends, whom his chiefs from Mecca had pacified. This course was successfully followed.

A man with a passion for peace is one thing. A man with the tact to get the Sultan of Turkey, Sulu chiefs and Theodore Roosevelt working together for a solution of their problems without resort to brandished lance, shaken fist or shining armor possesses, as I have said, an instinct for civility. The spirit of this incident was curiously reproduced at a later period, when Mr. Straus, then devoting himself with full heart to his great work for industrial peace, found a basis upon which capitalists and laboring men could confer face to face at the White House, and Andrew Carnegie agreed to meet the leaders of the Homestead strike at the ex-Ambassador's dinner table. As one of the four United States members of the Court of Arbitration at The Hague, as Secretary of Commerce and Labor, as vice-president of the National Civic Federation and the International Law Association, as chairman of the overseas committee of the League to Enforce Peace and in all the various capacities in which he served during the late war and through the protracted ordeal of the so-called peace conference, Mr. Straus has wrought diligently and consistently at his lifelong purpose: to be useful to a nation whose higher spirit this memoir proves that he understands —a spirit which his entire activity as an author has been devoted to explaining. His life work has been crowned with as much success as can be sagely hoped for by a man who attempts to make the ideal of civility effective in a world which is still more than half barbaric.

XIV

BRANDER MATTHEWS AND THE MOHAWKS

XIV

BRANDER MATTHEWS AND THE MOHAWKS

Criticise the book before you, and don't write a parallel essay, for which the volume you have in hand serves only as a peg. This is No. VII of Twelve Rules For Good Reviewers, formulated by Brander Matthews in an essay on "The Whole Duty of Critics," 1892.

I should try to follow this rule if its maker himself had not led me astray by sub-announcing in *"The Tocsin of Revolt"* a theme which he does not develop. Here is the theme which lurks in the first short essay:

When a man finds himself at last slowly climbing the slopes which lead to the lonely peak of threescore-and-ten he is likely to discover that his views and his aspirations are not in accord with those held by men still living in the foothills of youth. He sees that things are no longer what they were half a century earlier and that they are not now tending in the direction to which they then pointed. If he is wise, he warns himself against the danger of becoming a mere praiser of past times; and if he is very wise he makes every effort to understand and to appreciate the present and not to dread the fu-

ture. He may even wonder whether he is not suffering from a premature hardening of the arteries of sympathy. He finds himself denounced as a reactionary; and he doubts whether he has the courage of his reactions.

Whenever I turn away from this paragraph to comment on the other essays in this volume, I seem to see Brander Matthews peering into a dusky street, and to hear the sound of the tocsin bell.

"The younger generation is knocking at the door." That is the pretty phrase which used to be employed to describe the coming of age of a numerous group of new talents. It evokes the image of eager but modest youngsters, rather timorously offering their maiden speeches, their first poems, and their unsunned paintings to the critical scrutiny of their elders and their masters. And as a matter of fact one can call up out of literary history actual instances of such behavior on the part of the younger men—even in America, and even among critics and poets. With such deference the youthful William Dean Howells approached James Russell Lowell. With such reverence, Whitman offered his *Leaves of Grass* to his master Emerson. For the moment I am unable to think of other American cases. But then consider the respect of Johnson for Pope, of Pope and Congreve for Dryden, of Dryden for Honest Ben, or the religious tribute of the young Milton to his immediate predecessor, Shakespeare. The graceful antique mode of "knocking at the door" is now so completely for-

gotten that I must be allowed to present one exquisite illustration of it by a Son of Ben:

When I a verse shall make,
Know I have pray'd thee,
For old religion's sake,
Saint Ben, to aid me.

Make the way smooth for me,
When I, thy Herrick,
Honouring thee on my knee
Offer my lyric.

Candles I'll give to thee,
And a new altar
And thou, Saint Ben, shalt be
Writ in my psalter.

The beauty of this antique relation between the elder and the younger writers is lost because the younger generation no longer knocks at the door. It thunders at the door, it batters, it hammers, it bangs, it thumps, it kicks, it whacks, it wrenches, it lunges, it storms—it would require a Rabelaisian vocabulary to express all the indignities which the younger generation substitutes for knocking at the door. This somewhat barbaric performance, Brander Matthews, with his unfailing courtesy of phrase, calls sounding a "tocsin" at the door.

The ringleaders of this innovation in manners, the most impatient of our young people, are hardened journalists of forty, with a following of youths upon whose caustic lips the maternal milk is hardly

dry. They are determined to have a better time than their fathers had. I sympathize with the object. But I am not always sure that they are going about "the great task of happiness" in the best way. From Samuel Butler of saintly memory, for example, they have adopted the theory that the chief obstacle to happiness in the path of children is their parents. At first thought the idea perhaps commends itself as offering to youthful impatience —generally so vague and objectless—something definite to work upon. But then I pick up the morning paper and read that one of our young people has confessed to having placed poison in her father-in-law's coffee because "he was old and such a care." That obstacle to her happiness is removed, but now another has arisen in its place. To put the matter in the happiest light, there is a certain want of amenity in the act, which one suspects, will rather poison the pleasure which the act was intended to procure. There is an inauspicious rowdiness about the present picnic on Parnassus. Laurel wreaths snatched from the heads of others seem somehow to lack the significance of laurel wreaths bestowed—the leaves are scattered, the garland is bare.

It may be due to a Chinese prejudice, but I have never been able to join with any great alacrity of spirit in the nearly universal contemporary sport of deriding the classics, or indeed any perpetuated mold in which the human spirit of a bygone age or generation expressed all that it knew of grace or

charm or power. In cruel old myths, in grotesque images of primitive art, in the hard brilliance of early eighteenth century verse, in the perhaps excessive saccharinity of early Victorian representations of women, even in fashion-plates five years old, there is the pathos of things that Time, the "eternal philanderer," once loved and caressed and swore eternal fidelity to, and then left behind him in the vacant banquet halls and the grey solitudes of history. One of our newspapers has the custom of displaying every Sunday, side by side with the latest idols of stage and society, the idols of 1900, in all the borrowed glories that twenty years have filched. If we think a guffaw the right reaction to the best effect that 1900 could produce, we had better laugh quickly and have it over with, before our laughter is drowned by an outburst from the chucklers at our heels. But in the contemplation of these contrasts, the finer sense will shiver, knowing how soon *le dernier cri* becomes the farewell of warm life frozen into the past.

The literary Mohawks, however, are somewhat deficient in the finer sense. As the fighting organization of the younger generation, they fear the past as an enemy at their rear, and they hold that military considerations demand the devastation of the territory immediately behind their lines, and the destruction of all able-bodied men who will not actively enlist in their band. For some time, as everyone knows, they have been trying to blow up the National Academy of Arts and Letters as the

stronghold, precisely, of the preceding generation. At frequent intervals their chieftains have advanced whooping to the portals of that serene citadel, and, uttering every taunt known to them, have challenged the Academicians collectively and severally to come forth and do battle. In the interior of a national academy there broods the quiet of a club organized by old field marshals. Its membership is made up for the most part of men who are remembering, not fighting, their campaigns. In the judgment of their peers, they have reached the head of their professions. They have passed through the cold spring of experimentation and the dusty summer of struggle and unrecognized achievement to that clear autumnal season in which one writes one's memoirs, and composes tributes to one's departing comrades, and turns an eye of curiosity and unenvious welcome upon the promising work of younger men.

If you are a member of the Academy, as Brander Matthews is, and if you hear ringing through the streets and alleys of the Republic of Letters the shouts of the Mohawks and the detonation of their bombs against your door, you will probably feel some astonishment at the alteration in literary manners during the last decade, and some irritation at the disturbance of your peace. You do not understand what grievance the Mohawks have against you.

You have, to be sure, reached the age when the transitory fashions of the hour no longer impress

you as overpoweringly interesting, nor the fashions of twenty years ago as overwhelmingly funny. You are interested now rather in those permanent human passions and virtues and powers, in that play of wit and imagination, in that instinct of craftsmanship, in that study of perfection, in all those fluid elements of the intellectual and artistic life which are present in every great age, and which make the artists and scholars of all ages, in the higher sense, contemporary. You can appreciate the talent of Charlie Chaplin, and yet remember without humiliation your admiration for Coquelin and Edwin Booth. Your relish for the work of contemporary playwrights does not, to you, seem to require the "scrapping" even of so old a workman as Molière. You have given many younger men their "start," and have been the first to salute their maiden efforts; and yet you have not denounced your own masters, Arnold and Lowell, nor renounced your own coevals. You have dared to honor the memory of many men, friends of yours, who were born in your own time or a few years earlier or later—Aldrich, Bunner, Lounsbury, Stevenson, Austin Dobson, Andrew Lang, Howells, Stedman, McDowell, Mark Twain, Saint-Gaudens, and innumerable others.

With that eagerness to understand the world you are living in, which has always characterized you, you lean from your window to catch the hostile shouting of the Mohawks in the street, so that you may learn the head and front of your offending.

From the cries that come up, you find that they hate all things that begin with P. They are carrying on a propaganda against the following: Propagandists, Prohibitionists, Prudes, Purists, Puritans, and Professors. You scrutinize your conscience. You find that in strictness you are none of these.

You were ever a "clubbable" man. You stepped without struggle into a congenial and intelligent society which you had no desire to "reform." You have regarded literature and the arts not as instruments of social salvation but rather as part of the accomplished expression of society. You have sought to give distinction to the American short story by perfecting its technique. You have been a zealous friend to the living drama and to all the arts of the theatre. You followed Lowell in your graceful defense of the independence of American writers and of the free creative American use of the English tongue.

They may charge you on technical grounds with being a professor; but in your own conscience you know that you have never been that. You were formed before pedagogy had a chance to deform you. You were forty before you ever told anecdotes in a professorial chair or brought the intoxicating airs of Bohemia and the great world of letters within the drab walls of a classroom. No Mohawk hates the pedantries of scholarship more sincerely than you do. You have successfully resisted the laws of gravitation. You are a lover of artistic form, you are a craftsman, and in whatever you

have touched, criticism, the informal essay, the story, the drama, even the New York *Times,* you have shown your delight in literary workmanship. Your immense acquaintance with the interesting people of your time at home and abroad, your French clarity and ease of expression, and your sense that the highest use of learning is to increase the vivacity and the charm of human intercourse during a man's own lifetime—these things have made you what the Mohawks are howling for, a man of letters who is also a man of the world.

What, then, is the young people's grievance against you? Your unpardonable sin is that you are seventy. Therefore they batter at your door. It is the new manners.

In these circumstances a wise man, after due reflection, will probably be inclined to treat the disturbance like the bombardment of Halloween revellers. But there are three methods of dealing with Halloween revellers. One is to close shutters and say nothing. That is what is called "giving the absent treatment." One is to discharge a shotgun among the crowd. This is bucolic incivility. Brander Matthews is incapable of incivility. It is an incapacity which he shares with most of the distinguished writers of his generation. He adopts the third method. He steps out on his verandah, makes a charming speech to the Mohawks on youth and age and their common need of the traditions of their art, and then he distributes cider and apples

—he blandly discusses American aphorisms, American architecture, repartee, conversation, cosmopolitan cookery, the length of Cleopatra's Nose, the modernity of Molière, Roosevelt, and memories of Mark Twain.

XV

'A NOTE ON GERTRUDE STEIN

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Some time ago Sherwood Anderson had an article in the *New Republic* of the sort that every one likes to read. It was a discussion of the three or four living writers who are "really worth while." I regret that I have mislaid this article and that I have forgotten who Mr. Anderson's important writers were—all but one. I seem to remember, however, distinctly enough that the article had a climactic structure—that Mr. Anderson led us rather disdainfully up the rungs of appreciation till we emerged at a dizzying level. "And here," said our guide in a voice of utter reverence—"and here is Gertrude Stein!" I had never seen a line of Gertrude Stein's work nor had I even heard a whisper of her name. Yet here she was at the pinnacle of expression, engaged, we were assured, in marvellous experiments with English words. It was exciting.

Months went by during which I went about murmuring vainly, "Who is Gertrude Stein?" I began to think her a creature of myth, a fabulous being evoked by the idealizing imagination of the author of "Many Marriages." To-day there lies on my desk a substantial volume, 419 well-printed pages,

with the haunting name on the title-page, *Geography and Plays,* and with a jacket full of biography: Pennsylvania birth, early years in Vienna and Paris, Radcliffe, Johns Hopkins Medical School, return to Paris and art, friendship of Matisse and Picasso, publication of two famous books—*The Portrait of Mabel Dodge* and *Tender Buttons*—war work with a Ford car, a long silence, and now *Geography and Plays.* It was all real.

Better still, there is an introduction by Sherwood Anderson. It is exciting, just as that article in the *New Republic* was. One lingers over it in breathless expectation, and, after reading the book, one returns to it in brooding retrospect. Taken by itself, it makes very good and very absorbing sense. Some of the arresting sentences are these:

[Miss Stein is] a woman of striking vigor, a subtle and powerful mind, a discrimination in the arts such as I have found in no other American born man or woman, and a charmingly brilliant conversationalist.

Since Miss Stein's work was first brought to my attention I have been thinking of it as the most important pioneer work done in the field of letters in my time.

What I think is that these books of Gertrude Stein's do in a very real sense recreate life in words.

To these sentences should be added this shy little tribute from the wrapper:

Out of her early experiments has sprung all modern writing.

Of a writer so little known yet so overwhelmingly important we had better have some specimens before us before we attempt to add anything to Mr. Anderson's appreciation. Her work, it may be said, though various in theme, form, and style, is of singularly even quality, so that we may dip in almost at random and find a perfectly characteristic bit. Let us have first the opening sentence from a nine-page *Portrait of Constance Fletcher.*

When she was quite a young one she knew she had been in a family living and that that family living was one that any one could be one not have been having if they were to be one being one not thinking about being one having been having family living.

To this let us add a paragraph from *France:*

All there is of more chances is in a book, all there is of any more chances is in a list, all there is of chances is in an address, all there is is what is the best place not to remain sitting and suggesting that there is no title for relieving rising.

Finally let us have a morsel from *Scenes:*

The whole place has that which it has when it is found and it is there where there is more room. Room has not that expression. It has no change in a place. It is not dirty, there is no cleaner passage and the best way to have it all express that is to cook a dinner. There is enough to get a suit that is not bad when there is no hope. That is the difference if there is much and there is much more.

"All modern writing," we are told, has sprung from "experiments" like these. One thinks first perhaps of the "masterpiece" of James Joyce. That literary physician who has lately been looking obliquely at literature, Dr. Joseph Collins, extracts some fragments from *Ulysses* which superficially resemble these by Gertrude Stein. That is, he declares that to the ordinary reader they mean nothing, but that to the initiated they are transparent. Though I do not profess any special psychopathic initiation, I myself find long tracts of *Ulysses* in which the verbal symbols seem to correspond to intelligible sensational experience with attendant mental phenomena. From this fact I infer that James Joyce is not a "modern writer" of pure derivation from the source. He therefore can shed little light on the problem before us.

As I studied Gertrude Stein's work, endeavoring to understand its purpose, I will admit that once or twice it occurred to me faintly that it might just possibly be a joke. But it is impossible to make a joke out of 419 such pages. If you set out in quest of hilarity, before you read twenty pages you are ready for hara-kiri. It is no more like a joke than the Mojave Desert or the Dead Sea. I dismissed that hypothesis.

I tried the guess that the entire book is written in a cipher of which the publishers possess a key purchasable at an enormous price, but then I thought of a man who deciphered the Etruscan inscriptions in six volumes, yet couldn't find a pub-

lisher. The notion seemed repellent—commercially; and I abandoned it.

Next I explored the assumption that Gertrude Stein's epoch-making experiment was designed to show what words can do by themselves with practically no assistance from the manipulator or with mere mechanical manipulation. I took a sheet of paper and made five columns. In the first I wrote at random fifteen or twenty adjectives; in the second the same number of nouns; in the third a job lot of conjunctions, prepositions, and articles; in the fourth, verbs; in the fifth, adverbs. I then cut up my columns and placed the separate words face downwards in five piles of parts of speech. Then I played off the words something in the style, I suppose, of Canfield (which I don't play). I thrust in a bit more punctuation than Gertrude Stein employs, and this was the result:

Red stupidity; but go slowly. The hope slim. Drink gloriously! Dream! Swiftly pretty people through daffodils slip in green doubt. Grandly fly bitter fish; for hard sunlight lazily consumes old books. Up by a sedate sweetheart roar darkly loud orchards. Life, the purple flame, simply proclaims a poem.

I drew back in astonishment from the result of my own little experiment. My Hercules, what phrases!—"red stupidity," "loud orchards roaring darkly," "pretty" people slipping through daffodils in *"green doubt,"* and then those "bitter fish" flying so grandly, and the proclamation of "life, the pur-

ple flame." "Drink gloriously" struck me as a little too close to "gloriously drunk," which is of course a *cliché;* but even there the hortatory note adds a kind of foaming and exuberant novelty to the concept. Life had leaped from my parts of speech in tongues of flame. By a mechanical manipulation I had recreated life in words. And when I compared my specimen of it with Gertrude Stein's exhibits, it appeared to me indisputable that the vividness, the color, and the abounding energy of my "work" made hers seem gray and protoplasmic.

It is necessary, therefore, to discard the theory that her book was written by any kind of mechanical device. It seems almost impossible by any unimpeded mechanical process to assort words in such a fashion that no glimmer of mind will flash out from their casual juxtapositions. The thing can be done only by unremitting intelligence of the first order—if it can be done at all. Now we know on the high testimony of Mr. Anderson that Gertrude Stein possesses intelligence of this order. The work before us leads me to believe that she has attempted precisely the difficult feat which my scissors and shuffled parts of speech failed to accomplish. And so far as the perfection of the enterprise is humanly possible, her efforts have been crowned with success.

XVI

SAMUEL BUTLER: DIOGENES OF THE VICTORIANS

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Until I met the Butlerians I used to think that the religious spirit in our times was very precious, there was so little of it. I thought one should hold one's breath before it as before the flicker of one's last match on a cold night in the woods. "What if it should go out?" I said; but my apprehension was groundless. It can never go out. The religious spirit is indestructible and constant in quantity like the sum of universal energy in which matches and suns are alike but momentary sparkles and phases. This great truth I learned of the Butlerians: Though the forms and objects of religious belief wax old as a garment and are changed, faith, which is, after all, the precious thing, endures forever. Destroy a man's faith in God and he will worship humanity; destroy his faith in humanity and he will worship science; destroy his faith in science and he will worship himself; destroy his faith in himself and he will worship Samuel Butler.

What makes the Butlerian cult so impressive is, of course, that Butler, poor dear, as the English say, was the least worshipful of men. He was not

even—till his posthumous disciples made him so—a person of any particular importance. One writing a private memorandum of his death might have produced something like this: Samuel Butler was an unsociable, burry, crotchety, obstinate old bachelor, a dilettante in art and science, an unsuccessful author, a witty cynic of inquisitive temper and, comprehensively speaking, the unregarded Diogenes of the Victorians. Son of a clergyman and grandson of a bishop, born in 1835, educated at Cambridge, he began to prepare for ordination. But, as we are told, because of scruples regarding infant baptism he abandoned the prospect of holy orders and in 1859 sailed for New Zealand, where with capital supplied by his father he engaged in sheep-farming for five years. In 1864, returning to England with £8,000, he established himself for life at Clifford's Inn, London. He devoted some years to painting, adored Handel and dabbled in music, made occasional trips to Sicily and Italy, and wrote a dozen books, which generally fell dead from the press, on religion, literature, art and scientific theory. "Erewhon," however, a Utopian romance published in 1872, had by 1899 sold between three and four thousand copies. Butler made few friends and apparently never married. He died in 1902. His last words were: "Have you brought the cheque book, Alfred?" His body was cremated and the ashes were buried in a garden by his biographer and his man-servant, with nothing to mark the spot.

Butler's indifference to the disposal of his earthly

part betokens no contempt for fame. Denied contemporary renown, he had firmly set his heart on immortality, and quietly, persistently, cannily provided for it. If he could not go down to posterity by the suffrage of his countrymen, he would go down by the shrewd use of his cheque book: he would buy his way in. He bought the publication of most of the books produced in his lifetime. He diligently prepared manuscripts for posthumous publication and accumulated and arranged great masses of materials for a biographer. He insured an interest in his literary remains by bequeathing them and all copyrights to his literary executor, R. A. Streatfeild. He purchased an interest in a biographer by persuading Henry Festing Jones, a feckless lawyer of Butlerian proclivities, to abandon the law and become his musical and literary companion. In return for these services, Mr. Jones received between 1887 and 1900 an allowance of £200 a year, and at Butler's death a bequest of £500, the musical copyrights and the manifest responsibility and privilege of assisting Streatfeild with the propagation of Butler's fame, together with their own, in the next generation.

These good and faithful servants performed their duties with exemplary zeal and astuteness. In 1903, the year following the Master's death, Streatfeild published "The Way of All Flesh," a book packed with satirical wit, the first since "Erewhon" which was capable of walking off on its own legs and exciting general curiosity about its author—curiosity in-

tensified by the announcement that the novel had been written between 1872 and 1884. In the wake of this sensation there began the systematic annual relaunching of old works, with fresh introductions and memoirs and a piecemeal feeding out of other literary remains, culminating in 1917 with the publication of "The Note-Books," a skillful collection and condensation of the whole of Butler's intellectual life. Meanwhile, in 1908, the Erewhon dinner had been instituted. In spite of mild deprecation, this feast, with its two toasts to his Majesty and to the memory of Samuel Butler, assumed from the outset the aspect of a solemn sacrament of believers. Among these was conspicuous on the second occasion Mr. George Bernard Shaw, not quite certain, perhaps, whether he had come to give or to receive honor, whether he was himself to be regarded as the beloved disciple or rather as the one for whom Butler, preaching in the Victorian wilderness, had prepared the way with "free and future-piercing suggestions."

By 1914, Streatfeild was able to declare that no fragment of Butler's was too insignificant to publish. In 1915 and 1916 appeared extensive critical studies by Gilbert Cannan and John F. Harris. In 1919 at last arrives Henry Festing Jones with the authoritative memoir in two enormous volumes with portraits, documents, sumptuous index, elaborate bibliography and a pious accounting to the public for the original manuscripts, which have been deposited like sacred relics at St. John's College, the

Bodleian, the British Museum, the Library of Congress and at various shrines in Italy and Sicily. Here are materials for a fresh consideration of the man in relation to his work.

The unconverted will say that such a monument to such a man is absurdly disproportionate. But Butler is now more than a man. He is a spiritual ancestor, leader of a movement, molder of young minds, founder of a faith. His monument is designed not merely to preserve his memory but to mark as well the present importance of the Butlerian sect. The memoir appears to have been written primarily for them. The faithful will no doubt find it delicious; and I, though an outsider, got through it without fatigue, with a kind of perverse pleasure in its perversity.

It is very instructive, but it by no means simplifies its puzzling and complex subject. Mr. Jones is not of the biographers who look into the heart of a man, reduce him to a formula and recreate him in accordance with it. He works from the outside inward, and gradually achieves life and reality by an immense accumulation of objective detail, without ever plucking out, or even plucking at, the heart of the mystery. What were the man's "master passion" and his master faculty? Butler himself did not know; consequently he could not always distinguish his wisdom from his folly. He was an ironist entangled in his own net and an egotist bitten with self-distrust, concealing his wounds in self-assertion and his hesitancies in an external aggres-

siveness. Mr. Jones pierces the shell here and there, but never removes it. Considering his opportunities, he is sparing in composed studies of his subject based on his own direct observation; and, with all his ingenuousness and his shocking but illuminating indiscretions, he is frequently silent as a tomb where he must certainly possess information for which every reader will inquire, particularly those readers who do not, like the Butlerians, accept Samuel Butler as the happy reincarnation of moderation, common sense and fearless honesty.

The whole case of the Georgians against the Victorians might be fought out over his life and works; and indeed there has already been many a skirmish in that quarter. For, of course, neither Streatfeild nor Mr. Jones is ultimately responsible for his revival. Ultimately Butler's vogue is due to the fact that he is a friend of the Georgian revolution against idealism in the very citadel of the enemy; the extraordinary acclaim with which he is now received is his reward for having long ago prepared to betray the Victorians into the hands of a ruthless posterity. He was a traitor to his own times, and therefore it follows that he was a man profoundly disillusioned. The question which we may all reasonably raise with regard to a traitor whom we have received within our lines is whether he will make us a good citizen. We should like to know pretty thoroughly how he fell out with his countrymen—whether through defects in his own temper and character or through a clear-eyed and

righteous indignation with the incorrigible viciousness of their manners and institutions. We should like to know what vision of reformation succeeded his disillusion. Hitherto the Georgians have been more eloquent in their disillusions than in their vision, and have inclined to welcome Butler as a dissolving agent without much inspecting his solution.

The Butlerians admire Butler for his withering attack on family life, notably in "The Way of All Flesh"; and many a studious literary man with a talkative wife and eight romping children would, of course, admit an occasional flash of romantic envy for Butler's bachelor apartments. Mr. Jones tells us that Theobald and Christina Pontifex, whose nakedness Butler uncovers, were drawn without exaggeration from his own father and mother. His work on them is a masterpiece of pitiless satire. Butler appears to have hated his father, despised his mother and loathed his sisters in all truth and sincerity. He nursed his vindictive and contemptuous feelings towards them all through his life; he studied these feelings, made notes on them, jested out of them, lived in them, reduced them to a philosophy of domestic antipathy.

He was far more learned than any other English author in the psychology of impiety. When he heard some one say, "Two are better than one," he exclaimed, "Yes, but the man who said that did not know my sisters." When he was forty-eight years old he wrote to a friend that his father was in poor health and not likely to recover; "but may

hang on for months or go off with the N. E. winds which we are sure to have later on." In the same letter he writes that he is going to strike out forty weak pages in "Erewhon" and stick in forty stronger ones on the "trial of a middle-aged man 'for not having lost his father at a suitable age.'" His father's one unpardonable offence was not dying early and so enlarging his son's income. If this had been a jest, it would have been a little coarse for a deathbed. But Mr. Jones, who appears to think it very amusing, proves clearly enough that it was not a jest, but an obsession, and a horrid obsession it was. Now a man who attacks the family because his father does not die as promptly as could be desired is not likely to propose a happy substitute for the family: his mood is not reconstructive, funny though it may be in two old boys of fifty, like Butler and Jones, living along like spoiled children on allowances, Butler from his father, Jones from his mother.

The Butlerians admire Butler for his brilliant attack on "romantic" relations between the sexes. Before the advent of Shaw he poured poison on the roots of that imaginative love in which all normal men and maidens walk at least once in a lifetime as in a rosy cloud shot through with golden lights.

His portraits show a man of vigorous physique, capable of passion, a face distinctly virile, rather harshly bearded, with broad masculine eyebrows. Was he ever in love? If not, why was he not?

Elementary questions which his biographer after a thousand pages leaves unanswered. Mr. Jones asserts that both Overton and Ernest in "The Way of All Flesh" are in the main accurately autobiographical, and he furnishes much evidence for the point. He remarks a divergence in this fact, that Butler, unlike his hero, was never in prison. Did Butler, like his hero, have children and farm them out? The point is of some interest in the case of a man who is helping us to destroy the conventional family.

Mr. Jones leaves quite in the dark his relations with such women as the late Queen Victoria would not have approved, relations which J. B. Yeats has, however, publicly discussed. Mr. Jones is ordinarily cynical enough, candid enough, as we shall see. He takes pains to tell us that his own grandfather was never married. He does not hesitate to acknowledge abundance of moral ugliness in his subject. Why this access of Victorian reticence at a point where plain-speaking is the order of the day and the special pride of contemporary Erewhonians? Why did a young man of Butler's tastes leave the church and go into exile in New Zealand for five years? Could a more resolute biographer perhaps find a more "realistic" explanation than difficulties over infant baptism? Mr. Shaw told his publisher that Butler was "a shy old bird." In some respects he was also a sly old bird.

Among the "future-piercing suggestions" extolled by Mr. Shaw we may be sure that the author of

"Man and Superman" was pleased to acknowledge Butler's prediscovery that woman is the pursuer. This idea we may now trace quite definitely to his relations with Miss Savage, a witty, sensible, presumably virtuous woman of about his own age, living in a club in London, who urged him to write fiction, read all his manuscripts, knitted his socks, reviewed his books in women's magazines and corresponded with him for years till she died, without his knowledge, in hospital from cancer. Her letters are Mr. Jones's mainstay in his first volume and she is, except Butler himself, altogether his most interesting personality. Mr. Jones says that being unable to find any one who could authorize him to use her letters, he publishes them on his own responsibility. But he adds, "I cannot imagine that any relation of hers who may read her letters will experience any feelings other than pride and delight." This lady, he tells us, was the original of Alethea Pontifex. But he marks a difference. Alethea was handsome. Miss Savage, he says, was short, fat, had hip disease, and "that kind of dowdiness which I used to associate with ladies who had been at school with my mother." Butler became persuaded that Miss Savage loved him; this bored him; and the correspondence would lapse till he felt the need of her cheery friendship again. On one occasion she wrote to him, "I wish that you did not know wrong from right." Mr. Jones believes that she was alluding to his scrupulousness in matters of business. Butler himself construed the words as an overture

to which he was indisposed to respond. The debate on this point and the pretty uncertainty in which it is left can surely arouse in Miss Savage's relations no other feelings than "pride and delight."

This brings us to the Butlerian substitute for the chivalry which used to be practised by those who bore what the Victorians called "the grand old name of gentleman." In his later years, after the death of Miss Savage, in periods of loneliness, depression and ill-health, Butler made notes on his correspondence, reproaching himself for his ill-treatment of her. "He also," says his biographer, "tried to express his remorse" in two sonnets, from which I extract some lines:

She was too kind, wooed too persistently,
Wrote moving letters to me day by day;
Hard though I tried to love I tried in vain.
For she was plain and lame and fat and short,
Forty and overkind.

'Tis said that if a woman woo, no man
Should leave her till she have prevailed; and, true,
A man will yield for pity if he can,
But if the flesh rebel what can he do?
I could not; hence I grieve my whole life long
The wrong I did in that I did no wrong.

In these Butlerian times one who should speak of "good taste" would incur the risk of being called a prig. Good taste is no longer "in." Yet even now, in the face of these sonnets, may not one exclaim, Heaven preserve us from the remorseful moments of a Butlerian Adonis of fifty!

The descendants of eminent Victorians may well be thankful that their fathers had no intimate relations with Butler. There is a familiar story of Whistler, that when some one praised his latest portrait as equal to Velasquez, he snapped back, "Yes, but why lug in Velasquez?" Butler, with similar aversion for rivals, but without Whistler's extempore wit, slowly excogitated his killing sallies and entered them in his notebooks or sent them in a letter to Miss Savage, preserving a copy for the delectation of the next age: "I do not see how I can well call Mr. Darwin the Pecksniff of Science, though this is exactly what he is; but I think I may call Lord Bacon the Pecksniff of his age and then, a little later, say that Mr. Darwin is the Bacon of the Victorian Era." To this he adds another note reminding himself to call "Tennyson the Darwin of Poetry, and Darwin the Tennyson of Science." I can recall but one work of a contemporary mentioned favorably in the biography; perhaps there are two. The staple of his comment runs about as follows: "Middlemarch" is a "long-winded piece of studied brag"; of "John Inglesant," "I seldom was more displeased with any book"; of "Aurora Leigh," "I dislike it very much, but I liked it better than Mrs. Browning, or Mr., either"; of Rossetti, "I dislike his face and his manner and his work, and I hate his poetry and his friends"; of George Meredith, "No wonder if his work repels me that mine should repel him"; "all I remember is that I dislike and distrusted Morley"; of Glad-

stone, "Who was it said that he was 'a good man in the very worst sense of the words'?" The homicidal spirit here exhibited may be fairly related to his anxiety for the death of his father.

It was on the whole characteristic of Victorian free-thinkers to attack Christianity with reverence and discrimination in an attempt to preserve its substance while removing obstacles to the accepting of its substance. Butler was Voltairean. When he did not attack mischievously like a gamin, he attacked vindictively like an Italian laborer whose sweetheart has been false to him. I have seen it stated that he was a broad churchman and a communicant; and Mr. Jones produces a letter from a clergyman testifying to his "saintliness." But this must be some of Mr. Jones's fun. From Gibbon, read on the voyage to New Zealand, Butler imbibed, he says, in a letter of 1861, "a calm and philosophic spirit of impartial and critical investigation." In 1862 he writes: "For the present I renounce Christianity altogether. You say people must have something to believe in. I can only say that I have not found my digestion impeded since I left off believing in what does not appear to be supported by sufficient evidence." When in 1865 he printed his "Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," the manner of his attack was impish; and so was the gleeful exchange of notes between him and Miss Savage over the way the orthodox swallowed the bait. In his notebook he wrote: "Mead is the lowest of the intoxicants, just as Church is the low-

est of the dissipations, and carraway seed the lowest of the condiments." He went to church once in 1883 to please a friend and was asked whether it had not bored him as inconsistent with his principles. "I said that, having given up Christianity, I was not going to be hampered by its principles. It was the substance of Christianity and not its accessories of external worship, that I had objected to . . . so I went to church out of pure cussedness." Finally, in a note of 1889: "There will be no comfortable and safe development of our social arrangements—I mean we shall not get infanticide and the permission of suicide, nor cheap and easy divorce—till Jesus Christ's ghost has been laid; and the best way to lay it is to be a moderate churchman."

Robert Burns was a free-thinker, but he wrote the "Cotter's Saturday Night"; Renan was a free-thinker, but he buried his God in purple; Matthew Arnold was a free-thinker, but he gave new life to the religious poetry of the Bible; Henry Adams believed only in mathematical physics, but he wrote of Mont St. Michel and Chartres with chivalrous and almost Catholic tenderness for the Virgin: for in all these diverse men there was reverence for what men have adored as their highest. There was respect for a tomb, even for the tomb of a God. Butler, having transferred his faith to the Bank of England, diverted himself like a street Arab with a slingshot by peppering the church windows. He established manners for the contemporary But-

lerian who, coming down to breakfast on Christmas morning, exclaims with a pleased smile, "Well, this is the birthday of the hook-nosed Nazarene!"

Butler's moral note is rather attractive to young and middle-aged persons: "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of making ourselves as comfortable as we easily might have done." His ethics is founded realistically on physiology and economics; for "goodness is naught unless it tends towards old age and sufficiency of means." Pleasure, dressed like a quiet man of the world, is the best teacher: "The devil, when he dresses himself in angels' clothes, can only be detected by experts of exceptional skill, and so often does he adopt this disguise that it is hardly safe to be seen talking to an angel at all, and prudent people will follow after pleasure as a more homely but more respectable and on the whole more trustworthy guide." There we have something of the tone of our genial Franklin; but Butler is a Franklin without a single impulse of Franklin's wide benevolence and practical beneficence, a Franklin shorn of the spirit of his greatness, namely, his immensely intelligent social consciousness.

Having disposed of Christianity, orthodox and otherwise, and having reduced the morality of "enlightened selfishness" to its lowest terms, Butler turned in the same spirit to the destructon of orthodox Victorian science. We are less concerned for the moment with his substance than with his character and manner as scientific controversialist. "If

I cannot," he wrote, "and I know I cannot, get the literary and scientific bigwigs to give me a shilling, I can, and I know I can, heave bricks into the middle of them." Though such professional training as he had was for the church and for painting, he seems never to have doubted that his mother wit was sufficient equipment, supplemented by reading in the British Museum, for the overthrow of men like Darwin, Wallace and Huxley, who from boyhood had given their lives to collecting, studying and experimenting with scientific data. "I am quite ready to admit," he records, "that I am in a conspiracy of one against men of science in general." Having felt himself covertly slighted in a book for which Darwin was responsible, he vindictively assailed, not merely the work, but also the character of Darwin and his friends, who naturally, inferring that he was an unscrupulous "bounder" seeking notoriety, generally ignored him.

His first "contribution" to evolutionary theory had been a humorous skit, written in New Zealand, on the evolution of machines, suggested by "The Origin of Species," and later included in "Erewhon." To support this whimsy he found it useful to revive the abandoned "argument from design"; and mother wit, still working whimsically, leaped to the conception that the organs of our bodies are machines. Thereupon he commenced serious scientific speculation, and produced "Life and Habit," 1878; "Evolution Old and New," 1879; "Unconscious Memory," 1880; and "Luck or Cunning," 1886. The

germ of all his speculations, contained in his first volume, is the notion of "the oneness of personality existing between parents and offspring up to the time that the offspring leaves the parent's body"; thence develops his theory that the offspring "unconsciously" remembers what happened to the parents; and thence his theory that a vitalistic purposeful cunning, as opposed to the Darwinian chance, is the significant factor in evolution. His theory has something in common with current philosophical speculation, and it is in part, as I understand, a kind of adumbration, a shrewd guess at the present attitude of cytologists. It has thus entitled Butler to half a dozen footnotes in a centenary volume on Darwin; but it hardly justifies his transference of Darwin's laurels to Buffon, Lamarck, Erasmus Darwin and himself; nor does it justify his reiterated contention that Darwin was a plagiarist, a fraud, a Pecksniff and a liar. He swelled the ephemeral body of scientific speculation; but his contribution to the verified body of science was negligible, and the injuries that he inflicted upon the scientific spirit were considerable.

For their symptomatic value, we must glance at Butler's sallies into some other fields. He held as an educational principle that it is hardly worth while to study any subject till one is ready to use it. When in his fifties he wished to write music, he took up for the first time the study of counterpoint. Mr. Garnett having inquired what subject Butler and Jones would take up when they had

finished "Narcissus," Butler said that they "might write an oratorio on some sacred subject"; and when Garnett asked whether they had anything in particular in mind, he replied that they were thinking of "The Woman Taken in Adultery." In the same decade he cheerfully applied for the Slade professorship of art at Cambridge; and he took credit for the rediscovery of a lost school of sculpture.

At the age of fifty-five he brushed up his Greek, which he "had not wholly forgotten," and read the "Odyssey" for the purposes of his oratorio, "Ulysses." When he got to Circe it suddenly flashed upon him that he was reading the work of a young woman! Thereupon he produced his book, "The Authoress of the Odyssey," with portrait of the authoress, Nausicaa, identification of her birthplace in Sicily, which pleased the Sicilians, and an account of the way in which she wrote her poem. It was the most startling literary discovery since Delia Bacon burst into the silent sea on which Colonel Fabyan of the biliteral cypher is the latest navigator. That the classical scholars laughed at or ignored him did not shake his belief that the work was as important as anything he had done. "Perhaps it was," he would have remarked, if any one else had written it. "I am a prose man," he wrote to Robert Bridges, "and, except Homer and Shakespeare"—he should have added Nausicaa—"I have read absolutely nothing of English poetry and *very little* of English prose." His inacquaint-

ance with English poetry, however, did not embarrass him, when, two years after bringing out his Sicilian authoress, he cleared up the mysteries of Shakespeare's sonnets. Nor did it prevent his dismissing the skeptical Dr. Furnivall, after a discussion at an A. B. C. shop, as a poor old incompetent. "Nothing," said Alethea Pontifex, speaking for her creator, "is well done nor worth doing unless, take it all around, it has come pretty easily." The poor old doctor, like the Greek scholars and the professional men of science, had blunted his wits by too much research.

Butler maintained that every man's work is a portrait of himself, and in his own case the features stand out ruggedly enough. Why should any one see in this infatuated pursuer of paradox a reincarnation of the pagan wisdom? In his small personal affairs he shows a certain old-maidish tidiness and the prudence of an experienced old bachelor, who manages his little pleasures without scandal. But in his intellectual life what vestige do we find of the Greek or even of the Roman sobriety, poise and decorum? In one respect Butler was conservative: he respected the established political and economic order. But he respected it only because it enabled him, without bestirring himself about his bread and butter, to sit quietly in his rooms at Clifford's Inn and invent attacks on every other form of orthodoxy. With a desire to be conspicuous only surpassed by his desire to be original he worked out the central Butlerian principle, videlicet: The fact that all the

best qualified judges agree that a thing is true and valuable establishes an overwhelming presumption that it is valueless and false. With his feet firmly planted on this grand radical maxim he employed his lively wit with lawyer-like ingenuity to make out a case against family life, of which he was incapable; against imaginative love, of which he was ignorant; against chivalry, otherwise the conventions of gentlemen, which he had but imperfectly learned; against Victorian men of letters, whom, by his own account, he had never read; against altruistic morality and the substance of Christianity, which were repugnant to his selfishness and other vices; against Victorian men of science, whose researches he had never imitated; and against Elizabethan and classical scholarship, which he took up in an odd moment as one plays a game of solitaire before going to bed. To his disciples he could not bequeath his cleverness; but he left them his recipe for originality, his manners, and his assurance, which has been gathering compound interest ever since. In the original manuscript of "Alps and Sanctuaries" he consigned "Raffaele, along with Socrates, Virgil [the last two displaced later by Plato and Dante], Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Goethe, Beethoven, and *another,* to limbo as the Seven Humbugs of Christendom." Who was the unnamed seventh?

XVII

THE DISRAELIAN IRONY

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I

In this world where, as he was to discover, "nothing is allowed and everything is done," Disraeli was born in 1804, and flourished—flourished is the word—continuously from 1826 till 1881. Certain pairs of celebrities are linked like Alpine climbers; so that if one slips into the crevasse of oblivion, the other pulls him out. Three or four years ago I mentioned to a friend of strongly conservative faith that I was reading Morley's "Gladstone," being at the time midway in the second thick volume of that intricate and austere record of parliamentary combinations and cabinet councils, and perhaps rather proud of my progress.

"You will never finish it," he said. Instantly he added, "Monypenny's 'Disraeli' is another matter."

I smiled and thought otherwise. For I had always admired the high moral seriousness of both Gladstone and his biographer, and had copied into my notebook abundance of the Grand Old Man's injunctions of this order: "Be inspired with the belief that life is a great and noble calling; not a mean

and grovelling thing that we are to shuffle through as we can, but an elevated and noble destiny."

Now Gladstone, whose influence upon the tone of public life was, as I still believe, far more elevating and ennobling than Disraeli's, was characterized by Disraeli as "a sophisticated rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Disraeli himself spoke of life as a "dazzling farce" and an engrossing "game." One does not quite like the gamester's attitude in a statesman. Disraeli was animated, at least in his earlier years, by a peacock vanity. Carlyle had taught us to think of him as a "superlative Hebrew conjurer," to be disdained even by a conservative, provided he were a serious and sober conservative. It was my impression that "Dizzy" and his literary works were dead, and well dead, and that it would never be really necessary to return to them.

But my friend was right. I left Gladstone at the end of the second volume; and my intention of reading the third volume is still serving as pavement in an overpaved place. Eventually I turned to Disraeli. Everyone was doing so, usually with a contemptuous fling at Gladstone, which pricked curiosity.

When I began the Monypenny-Buckle "Life of Benjamin Disraeli," I repeated, in little, the experience of his own contemporaries; and this is clearly a tribute to the biographers' dispassionate, gradual, exhaustive elaboration of their hero. I contemned him, I ridiculed him, I disapproved of

him, I compared his character unfavorably with that of his liberal adversary Gladstone and with that of his Tory leader Lord Derby. I distrusted him. Yet all the while I was amused, astonished, delighted, mystified, impressed, and never wearied by him. And I read straight through the six volumes of the Life—interspersing the novels at suitable points—with only a little flagging in the middle, with vivid interest in the final volume, to the victorious and triumphant end. And now I strangely sympathize with the English lady who was asked which she would prefer as a husband, Disraeli or Gladstone. With feelings mixed but not altogether muddled, she replied that she would prefer to be married to Gladstone but in the first year to elope with Disraeli.

II

To say, as has been said, that Gladstone possessed all the virtues and Disraeli all the charms, may account for the duplicity of the English lady's feelings; but it is too simple to explain, for example, the immense vogue of Disraeli's novels in America at a period when the type of society which they exhibited and the political party which they seemed to support were peculiarly obnoxious to the main current of American sentiment. Disraeli, delighted by the splendor of a life in the historic grand style and dreaming of a theocratic polity and an aristocratic renascence, despised the American scene

and American institutions as affording no adequate theatre and no adequate rewards for great actors.

Yet multitudes of sober-suited American equalitarians read his duke-thronged novels and followed his parliamentary opposition to "democracy," as they had previously followed Frederick the Great and Napoleon, as they were soon to follow Bismarck, as they were later to follow William II—with fascinated interest and secret iniquitous adoration. When in his old age he came home from the Congress of Berlin, flushed with his great diplomatic victory, having manifestly manœuvred the spoils of the Russo-Turkish War from the very paws of the Russian Bear, even Lowell's old contempt for "Dizzy" struggled vainly against his new admiration. "I think," he said, "if Beaconsfield weren't a Jew, people would think him rather fine." Bismarck, who had studied with the keen, hard eye of a *Real-Politiker* all the celebrated contestants at that famous jousting, remarked without qualification: "Der alte Jude, das ist der Mann. . . ." (the old Jew, he is the man that understands the realities in the situation and deals with them effectively).

Bismarck frankly admired, most of us furtively admire, men who get what they go after, whatever it is. Though the better part of mankind respects principles, the greater part of mankind responds, in spite of principles, with the deep ungovernable applause of its primitive nature to exhibitions of successful power. Something within us instinctively

murmurs: "Beautiful is virtue, and charm is ingratiating; but power, after all, is the source of all the charms and all the virtues, without which all the virtues and all the charms are but idle attitudes and futile gesticulations." Disraeli refreshes, delights and inspirits us because his life is a perpetually varied exhibition of successful power, in literature, in society, in politics—power overcoming difficulties, surmounting obstacles, setting itself almost inaccessible objectives, and attaining them by fertile resources and indefatigable tenacity. The pursuit of power and its perquisites and its glories was Disraeli's religion. It is one manifestation of his spirit which is untainted with a touch of insincerity. It is the dominating passion that unifies his life and illuminates all that is mysterious and paradoxical in his utterances and in his career.

III

The critic who centres his attention on the old prime minister, Earl of Beaconsfield and lord of Hughenden Manor, may attempt a unification by thinking of him as essentially a natural born Tory and, as Mr. Buckle calls him, an "aristocrat to the bone." It will not do. No one can dissipate the "mystery" of Disraeli who forgets for a moment that he was, like the first Napoleon, an adventurer risen from the people. What does he prove—that the aristocratic system welcomes such men as Disraeli, or that the aristocratic system can't keep such

men out? His career on the whole impresses a Liberal less as a glory of the conservative principle than as a bewildering satire upon it. When he had chosen his part, he played it, to be sure, superbly, upholding as loyally as the bluest-blooded of old English nobles the prerogatives of the Crown, the prestige of the Church, the privileges of Parliament, and the predominance of the landed gentry. And yet behind the sallow mask, decorous and immobile, of the Earl of Beaconsfield who had refused a dukedom, there was seldom absent a suggestion of silent, mocking Semitic laughter. Says Bertie Tremaine in "Endymion," the last novel of one whose deadly banter had made him minister: "Men destined to the highest places should beware of badinage. . . . An insular country subject to fogs, and with a powerful middle class, requires grave statesmen." Now, the best place from which to laugh at Bourbons is their throne.

Disraeli was not born an English Tory. He was born an emancipated Jew, the son of an emancipated Jew. His father Isaac, the literary antiquarian, had withdrawn from business because it bored him, had withdrawn from the synagogue because it annoyed him, had baptized his children because conformity was convenient, and had kept out of politics and other engagements in order to enjoy in the isolation of his rich library the free play of his curious, volatile, speculative mind. By his intellectual detachment, if not by his universal knowledge, he might have served as a model for the omniscient Sidonia

of "Coningsby." Benjamin inherited from his father the volatile, speculative mind, with an additional tincture of Voltairean wit. His free intelligence sported throughout his life with a flame-like swiftness and levity over and under the surface of all things, human and divine. It is a charm of Disraeli and the secret of his pervasive and savory irony that his intellect never conformed, never lost its quick untrammeled lambency—that it remained to the end the most mobile of all earthy types of mind, the absolutely aweless intellect of the emancipated Jew.

In the composition of the son there was a fiery element, not present in the father, namely, a romantic imagination, which had been stirred by the French Revolution, colored by the romances of Scott, and kindled to a flame by the poetry of Shelley, and by the poetry, the picturesque travels, and the social celebrity of Lord Byron. As a boy in his teens, Benjamin attended with his father the publisher Murray's literary dinners; and among his earliest jottings is a record of a conversation between him and Tom Moore with regard to Byron who was then, 1822, in exile. The effect of these various stimuli upon his lively sensibility was to make him for the time being a literary and political radical, for a long time to come a Byronist in his moods and manners, and perhaps for the rest of his life something of a Byronist in his inexhaustible appetite for celebrity, for being conspicuous, for making an impression. He was to declare later that "a great

man is one who affects the mind of his generation." His own experience proved to him that an imaginative writer who molds the purposes of young men entering their majority governs them as truly as the statesman who taxes their incomes.

Byron died in 1824. Disraeli "carried on" in 1826 by publishing at twenty-one his first novel, "Vivian Grey," in which the hero, meditating a career in Parliament, thinks "Don Juan" may serve as a model for his style in the Commons, Milton in the House of Lords. He introduced Byron as Apollo in his delectable skit "Ixion in Heaven" and as Lord Cadurcis in "Venetia." Travelling through the East in imitation of his predecessor, he conceived his "Revolutionary Epick," with its apotheosis of Napoleon, at a Byronic moment, "standing," as he tells us, with full sense of the romantic magnificence of his posture, "upon Asia, and gazing upon Europe with the broad Hellespont alone between us, and the shadow of night descending on the mountains." He carried on by returning to England smoking a chibouk in token of his oriental sojourn. He wrote oriental tales. He thought himself a great poet afflicted with a hopeless woe. He indulged in gloomy vapors and in outbursts of cynicism. He solaced himself with the society of fair women, with whom he quarreled melodramatically and whom he flattered extravagantly and successfully. He anticipated the sallies of Whistler and Wilde by remarking to a host who had praised his own wine at a dinner party and boasted that he had

wine twenty times as good in the cellar: "No doubt, no doubt, but my dear fellow, this is quite good enough for such *canaille* as you have got today." He carried on the Byronic dandyism as a readily available means of imposing upon the imagination of his time. As late as 1833, he is described as appearing at a dinner in "a black velvet coat lined with satin; purple trousers with a gold band running down the outside seam, a scarlet waistcoat, long lace ruffles, falling down to the tips of his fingers, white gloves, with several brilliant rings outside them, and long black ringlets rippling down upon his shoulder."

The inside of his romantic ostentation at the age of twenty-nine, his clear-eyed egotism, the anguish of his ambition, the drive and direction of his lust for power, are revealed in a fragment of the journal that he kept in 1833:

My life has not been a happy one. Nature has given me an awful ambition and fiery passions. My life has been a struggle, with moments of rapture —a storm with dashes of moonlight—Love, Poetry. . . . I make it a rule never to throw myself open to men. I do not grudge them the knowledge I could impart but I am always exhausted by composition when I enter society, and little inclined to talk, and as I never get anything in return, I do not think the exertion necessary. . . .

The world calls me *conceited.* The world is in error. I trace all the blunders of my life to sacrificing my own opinion to that of others. . . . I have an unerring instinct—I can read characters at

a glance; few men can deceive me. My mind is a continental mind. It is a revolutionary mind. I am only truly great in action. If ever I am placed in a truly eminent position I shall prove this. I could rule the House of Commons, although there would be a great prejudice against me at first. . . . The fixed character of our English society, the consequence of our aristocratic institutions, renders a career difficult.

Poetry is the safety-valve of my passions but I wish to act what I write. My works are the embodiment of my feelings. In *Vivian Grey* I have portrayed my active and real ambition. The *Psychological Romance* ("Contarini Fleming") is a development of my poetic character.

IV

Every stroke of this veracious prophecy, this astonishing piece of self-delineation, lays bare with precision the excited nervous system of his genius; but let us pause to develop a little one remarkable sentence: "I have a revolutionary mind." At the time this passage was written, Disraeli was brooding upon his poem on Napoleon, which, as he conceived it, was to celebrate the spirit of his own time as the "Divine Comedy" had celebrated the Catholic Middle Ages, and as Milton's work had celebrated the consequences of the Reformation. "Since the revolt of America," he writes in December, 1833, "a new principle has been at work in the world, to which I trace all that occurs. This is the Revolutionary principle, and this is what I wish to embody

in the *Revolutionary Epick.*" He goes on to explain that he has the Feudal Genius and the Federal or Democratic Genius appear before the Omnipotent to plead their respective causes. The Omnipotent declares that "a man is born of supernatural energies and that *whichever side he embraces will succeed* [my italics]. The man is Napoleon, just about to conquer Italy. . . . He adopts the Federal or Democratic side."

It is obvious that at this period Disraeli thought of himself also as a man of "supernatural energies," and that he, too, heard the Omnipotent Power whispering in his ear that whichever side *he* embraced would succeed. It is equally obvious that the modernity of his intelligence, coupled with his immense self-confidence and his lack of any inherited position in the "feudal" ranks, powerfully suggested his espousing the cause of democracy. It is obvious from the following passage in "Coningsby," that ten years later he still regarded wealth and hereditary rank with the eyes of an intellectual radical and revolutionary:

Nothing is great but the personal. . . . The power of man, his greatness and his glory, depend on essential qualities. Brains every day become more precious than blood. You must give men new ideas, you must teach them new words, you must modify their manners, you must change their laws, you must root out prejudices, subvert convictions if you wish to be great. Greatness no longer depends on rentals, the world is too rich; nor on pedigrees, the world is too knowing.

In the year of the great Reform Bill, 1832, Disraeli, still sympathetic with reform, refused to inscribe himself a member of the Conservative Club and declined being returned for a Tory borough. In 1834, it was a Liberal minister, Melbourne, offering to assist him and asking him where his ambition lay—it was a Liberal minister whom he astounded by declaring that he wished to be prime minister. Yet in 1837, when at last he entered Parliament, he entered as a member of the Conservative party. Why, after his initial appearance as a Radical and a Reformer, did he finally throw his "supernatural energies" into the "Feudal" cause?

The reasons are not one but many. First and foremost, his desire to "rule the House of Commons" quite transcended his interest in either of the parties. Secondly, after repeated failures to break into Parliament as an independent, he discovered that he should never get in without party support. Thirdly, toward the end of 1834 he formed a strong personal attachment to Lord Lyndhurst, which led to the establishment of Conservative connections. Fourthly, the Whig Government, which at the passing of the Reform Bill had expected to last "forever," began in 1834 to break up, and the Tory prospects to brighten. Fifthly, the Philosophic Radicals of the Bentham and Mill type were as antipathetic to him as they were to Carlyle: they were too dryly rational, they dwelt too much in the thin air of abstract rights, they were "logic-chopping doctrinaires." "The Utilitarians in politics," he

said in 1883, "are like the Unitarians in religion; both omit imagination in their systems, and *imagination governs mankind.*" Sixthly, the more Disraeli saw of high-bred Tories in London society and especially in their country houses, the more obvious it became to him that there was a vacancy in their ranks which his brains could fill. With the impressionable eye of an artist, he looked on the garter and riband and golden fleece of the Duke of Wellington, and saw how he could use such trappings to govern men through their imaginations.

His choice reminds one a little of a famous philosopher who at the most radical moment of his career decided upon the most moderate course of conduct. Descartes tells us with almost impenetrable irony in his "Discourse on Method," that when he arrived at his intellectual maturity he resolved to denude himself utterly of all past beliefs and in naked simplicity to seek the truth that was in him. But he hastens to add that expediency dictated his conforming in politics, religion, etc., to those with whom he should have to live. He adopted further the maxim that he was to be as firm and resolute in his actions as he was able, and "not to adhere less steadfastly to the most doubtful opinions, when once adopted, than if they had been highly certain." In such wise and in such a mood did the emancipated Jewish intelligence of Disraeli wrap the mantle of English Toryism about the naked sincerity of his approach to power.

V

He wore his Tory mantle with a difference, for, as we have seen, he had a taste for a certain distinction, for a certain splendor, in his attire. He soon proposed a renovation of the old garment. He conceived a Young England, a new Toryism, of novel cut and arresting color, with a substance of modern philosophical weaving but embroidered with traditions and adorned with antique jewels, which should impose upon the imagination of beholders as his own personal raiment did, when in his gaudy youth he walked in such glory that the crowds gave way, "like the Red Sea," before him. Accordingly he harked back to the Stuarts for a theory of the royal prerogative as the diamond brooch for his mantle; he laced and braided it with the golden popular monarchism of Bolingbroke's dream and with the hierarchical conceptions of Burke's historical philosophy; he re-enforced it with the anti-liberalism of Newman, the High Church revival and Catholic reaction of the eighteen-thirties; but the main stuff and the pattern were suggestive of the greatest living tailor to the Tories, Thomas Carlyle, the romantic and radical designer of the aristocracy of talent, the loyal subjection of the populace, and the imperial destiny of the English. When Disraeli became a professing Tory, he closed his Byron and opened his Carlyle.

His rôle was now to act upon the English stage the part of an arch-aristocrat of talent with such

manifold arts and graces as to persuade the people that the Tory party was the truly national, the truly progressive, the truly popular party. His rôle was to wean the popular ear from Bright and Cobden and Gladstone, who went storming through the provinces on what he derisively called "passionate pilgrimages," crying up the "nostrums" of liberty and equality, and preaching such perilous doctrines as man's moral right to the ballot, Italy's moral right to nationality, and England's moral duty toward peoples subject to the Turkish sword. His rôle was to teach the country to chant after him the new Tory catchwords: "The splendor of the Crown, the lustre of the Peerage, the privileges of the Commons, the rights of the poor."

It was his business also to give as much reality to these conceptions as possible. I fear it cannot be shown that he took a very effective interest in the "rights of the poor," though he had a hand in conceding their political enfranchisement, driven to the measure by the tactics of the Opposition. Much has been made of the sympathy he exhibited for the wretched condition of the miners by writing his novel "Sybil," what though he voted against mine inspection to show his sympathy for his friend Lord Londonderry, who was a mine owner. He proved his respect for talent by putting his private secretary and his solicitor into the peerage. But his really conspicuous masterpieces of statesmanship were performed to enhance the splendor of the Crown. By purchasing the Egyptian shares in the Suez Canal

he made straight the British highway into the Orient. He presided over the White Man, taking up his burden in South Africa and Afghanistan. He presented to his royal mistress as the most substantial of his magnificent compliments the title of Empress of India. And when that pious and patriotic lady, whose conceptions of the royal prerogative he had incessantly fostered and flattered—when that excitable lady repeatedly cracked the whip over him and his recalcitrantly pacific cabinet and threatened to resign her "crown of thorns" if he did not act, Disraeli at last girded up his old loins; sent a confidential threat of war to St. Petersburg; marched to Berlin; forced Russia to withdraw from Constantinople, to restore the outraged Christians to the Turk, and her Slavic friends to Austrian auspices; and so by a right John-Bullish settlement of a European problem laid a firm foundation for the war of 1914.

VI

There are, of course, sacrifices to be made and embarrassments to be undergone by a Jewish radical but one generation removed from the merchant class, who becomes champion of the "gentlemen of England." It did very well for Disraeli to insist in his fashion that the new Toryism was to be unselfish, comprehensive, national. But it became his duty, as a practical politician bent upon overthrowing the "Whig oligarchy," to turn a disdainful back to his

own class, to play the ends against the middle, to court the aristocracy and to flatter the peasantry, who, as he regretted to observe, were beginning to call themselves "labourers" and to form unions and to fraternize with the insolent middle class and to harken to middle class orators, instead of looking to the game-preserving lords of their land, as in the good old days of the Stuarts.

As leader of the country gentry, it behooved him to follow their ancient and honorable custom and occupation of "owning land." This was a rather serious responsibility for one whose chief accumulations consisted of an enormous mass of debts, on which he was paying extortionate interest, when he was not dodging his creditors and the bailiffs. But the man had genius. He married a coquettish widow who made him a "perfect wife," and also brought him £5,000 a year. He entered into a romantic correspondence with an eccentric lady of seventy or eighty who presently died leaving him a legacy of £30,000. He wrote a life of Lord George Bentinck, for which some interested person rewarded him in lordly fashion. Another admirer took charge of all his debts and apparently lent him unlimited thousands at two per cent. He never was out of debt, but with these helps and windfalls, and with the income of his offices and novels and his paternal inheritance, he managed eventually to possess and occupy, if not perfectly to own, land enough with manor, parks, timberland, peacocks, etc., to support the dignity of an English earl.

To touch on the economic aspects of Disraeli's adventure is to hint at a "seamy side" of life in the grand style, at what might have been, for a tender economic conscience, a kind of sham and ignominy embittering the external show. But Disraeli's conscience was not tender. Perhaps it had been toughened by recollection of the debts of other great prime ministers. Perhaps it had been prepared, spiritually prepared, by Lord Byron, who had looked at these pecuniary matters in a cool realistic way, or, as we should say nowadays, in a Butlerian way:

Sweet is a legacy, and passing sweet
  The unexpected death of some old lady
Or gentleman of seventy years complete,
  Who've made "us youth" wait too—too long already
For an estate, or cash, or country seat.

Toughness, tenacity, relentless aggressiveness, and a diabolically cool remorseless wit had characterized Disraeli's approach to power in Parliament. According to his reputation and his record, copiously illustrated in the "Life," he was one of the most finished and formidable debaters who ever rose in the House. A great part of his forty years of public life he was in Opposition; and the business of an Opposition, as his biographer reminds us, is to oppose. At this task he was a matchless master. When he had perfected his style, his favorite technique at the crucial points of his philippics was in the manner of Tybalt's sword play: One! Two!—a flourish of a cambric handkerchief—and the third

in your bosom! He cut up a great minister at his appointed hour with the apparent nonchalance of an epicure dismembering a quail. He studied invective like a fine art. While the victim twitched and paled, he launched his barbed and icy sarcasms with a finely precalculated murderous precision. When he himself was attacked, he sat immobile, impassive, impervious, or with head sunk on bosom, feigning indifference or sleep. He had the gift of making his silence ominous, his repose sphinx-like, sinister. In action, by the sheer thrust and flashing velocity of his edged intellect he dazzled his hearers till slower-witted men gave way before him and fell behind and followed him, as one falls behind a dangerous weapon.

Opportunist to the finger tips, he treated party "principles" as but expedients to be retained or discarded with reference to their utility in getting the government out and himself and his friends in. If a Liberal ministry became warlike and used a "strong hand" in China, he immediately became pacific and humane. But if Gladstone raised a humanitarian cry over Bulgarian atrocities, Disraeli remarked that the worst of the atrocities was Gladstone's pamphlet, and he spoke in Parliament with such playful levity of the massacre of ten or twenty thousand unarmed peasants that he fairly exposed himself to the charge of inhuman callousness. As advocate for the landed interest, he supported, in Opposition, the nefarious Corn Laws. But the very principle of Protection, which he employed with

dramatic and ruthless force to destroy Peel, his former leader, who had abandoned it, he himself stealthily abandoned as soon as the work of destruction was accomplished, thus exactly duplicating the "treachery" with which he had charged the man whom he displaced, and proving that a practical politician is one who repeats the sins of his predecessor. In the course of his assault, he seems, as his biographer admits, to have lied deliberately and solemnly, to the House full of the "gentlemen of England," in denying that he had sought office under Peel. In 1865 he solemnly warned the House against sanctioning any "step that has a tendency to democracy"; for Lord Russell was pressing for an extension of the suffrage. But two years later, he himself strode toward democracy—or, as Carlyle screamed in septuagenarian panic, "leaped Niagara"—by putting through the Reform of 1867, which emancipated the lower as the legislation of 1832 had emancipated the middle class. Such things occur when a born revolutionary in a Tory mantle advances on power with perfect inflexibility of purpose and perfect mobility of principle.

Guizot said to Disraeli on his accession to acknowledged leadership: "I think your being the leader of the Tory party is the greatest triumph that Liberalism has ever achieved." Guizot was clairvoyant in perceiving the joke on the country gentry involved in their accepting the guidance of this radical mind; but he perhaps overstated the "triumph" of Liberalism in the ambiguous position

and conduct of its "lost leader." Disraeli did indeed do something to liberalize the institutions of England and to prepare the way for that radically free aristocracy which his free Jewish intellect approved as the ideal form of society, as the truly conservative form. But he lowered the tone of his leadership, he corrupted the influence which he exerted upon his generation, by his public subscription to outworn conservative cant, by sacrificing his professed principles to momentary expediencies, by seeming always to yield to the pressure of liberal circumstances and the deep liberal current of the time grudgingly, fatalistically, cynically. The politician and the statesman ring hollow, like something which resembles an Ionic column of Ferrara but is really a stucco-coated contrivance of lath and plaster. Gladstone and Wordsworth were right when they agreed that "a man's personal character ought to be the basis of his politics." Disraeli's politics were not grounded squarely upon that basis.

VII

Let us acknowledge that in this case the duplicity of the statesman is the peculiar spice of the novelist, and that our generation is just beginning to recognize how spicy Disraeli's novels are. Professor Saintsbury gives them but a paragraph in his history of literature in the nineteenth century; yet he remarks significantly that "good judges, differing widely in political and literary tastes, have found

themselves at one as to the strange way in which the reader comes back to them as he advances in life." What the mature reader discovers as he returns to them in that the purple of the *purpurei panni* is frequently finely royal; that the characterization, especially in the later books, is often masterly and occasionally exquisitely fine; that there are abundant passages of noble feeling and delicate sentiment; that the numberless epigrams which stud the pages from the exuberant "Vivian Grey" to the mellow sobriety of "Endymion" are not merely brilliant but increasingly sage, weighty with an experience in public affairs and in the society of the "great world" such as no other English novelist has enjoyed, wise with the distilled wisdom of native insight and of prolonged critical reflection upon the ways of human nature. But, above all, one discovers that these novels are far more subtle than a first reading revealed and far more deeply saturated with irony than most of Disraeli's contemporaries suspected.

In his lifetime his books were generally received and labeled as "fashionable novels," and as such they have come down to us. Their piquancy in their day seems to have consisted largely in the fact that many of the characters were understood to be portraits of contemporary celebrities, as indeed they were. To assist in the identification of the originals, the curious were provided with a "key." But that was comparatively puerile sport. The only true key, the master key, to the Disraelian

fiction is such an insight into the personality of the author as one derives from passing back and forth between the novels and the Monypenny-Buckle biography, keeping always in mind this remark of St. Aldegonde in "Lothair":

"I hate a straightforward fellow. As Pinto says, if every man were straightforward in his opinions, there would be no conversation. The fun of talk is to find out what a man really thinks, and then contrast it with the enormous lies he has been telling all dinner, and, perhaps, all his life."

The inexhaustible fun which Disraeli offers to the student consists in contrasting the nervous, subtle, highly civilized intellectual that he was with the representative English country gentleman that he affected to be. The moment one enters into it, one is on the trail of Disraeli's own fun in life and in fiction. One perceives with fresh vividness that his grand society, his dukes and duchesses, his lords and ladies, and the entire bag and baggage of his traditional Tory system are riddled with his own Voltairean satire, are ablaze with his own sense of their comedy. The "Young Duke," whose coming of age "creates almost as great a sensation among the aristocracy of England as the Norman Conquest;" Lord Monmouth, who leaves his immense fortune to his natural daughter by an actress of the Théâtre Français; St. Aldegonde, who travels, by Jove, "three hundred miles for a slice of cod and a beefsteak"—these and countless other noble beings are pictured for derision. What the real Disraeli

thought of the profuse and idle minions of splendor who paraded his pages he actually put into the mouth of Millbank, the Manchester manufacturer in "Coningsby":

"Is it not monstrous, then, that a small number of men, several of whom take the titles of Duke and Earl from towns in this very neighbourhood, towns which they never saw, which never heard of them, which they did not form, or build, or establish, I say is it not monstrous, that individuals so circumstanced, should be invested with the highest of conceivable privileges, the privilege of making laws? Dukes and Earls indeed! I say there is nothing in a masquerade more ridiculous."

Disraeli, like all of the "dark sex," was sensible to "female loveliness;" but probably no Jewish intellectual who ever lived could long be dazzled by good looks in a man, when unaccompanied by adequate mental equipment. Of Lord Deloraine, the gartered viceroy in "Sybil," he remarks demurely: "He might have been selected as the personification of aristocracy: so noble was his appearance. . . . He was also very accomplished and not ill-informed; had read a little, and thought a little, and was in every respect a superior man." Superior he was, presumably, to the Warwickshire peer in the same novel, who had thought not at all, and who, when confronted with the idea of social betterment, gasped indignantly: "Well, that is sheer radicalism —pretending that the people can be better off than they are, is radicalism and nothing else." Everyone

will recall Arnold's remark about the "cock of Lord Elcho's hat" being "quite the finest thing we have." Disraeli parallels that vein of irony in "Lothair," where Mr. Phoebus extols the preoccupation of the aristocracy with the things of the body:

"What I admire in the order to which you belong is that they live in the air, that they excel in athletic sports; that they can only speak one language; and that they never read. This is not complete education, but it is the highest education since the Greek."

Even more deliciously mischievous toward the conservative principle and order which Disraeli professed to uphold, is the following bit of dialogue from "Endymion":

"How can any government go on without the support of the Church and the land?" cries Zenobia, the ruling lady among the Tories. "It is quite unnatural."

"That is the mystery," remarks the ambassador. "Here is a government, supported by none of the influences hitherto deemed indispensable, and yet it exists."

Someone remarks that the newspapers are behind it and the Dissenters, etc., and, "Then there is always a number of people who will support any government—and so the thing works."

"They have a new name for this hybrid sentiment," says the ambassador. "They call it public opinion."

"How very absurd!" Zenobia exclaims, "a mere

nickname. As if there could be any opinion but that of the Sovereign and the two Houses of Parliament."

Now turn from this stiff Zenobian orthodoxy of Toryism to Disraeli himself as he exhibits, in private letters of 1862-3 addressed to Mrs. Willyams, his instinctive, spontaneous response of delight to the play of revolutionary power:

It is a privilege to live in this age of rapid and brilliant events. What an error to consider it an utilitarian age! It is one of infinite romance. Thrones tumble down and crowns are offered, like a fairy tale, and the most powerful people in the world, male and female, a few years back, were adventurers, exiles, and demireps. *Vive la bagatelle.* . . . The Greeks really want to make my friend Lord Stanley their king. This beats any novel. I think he ought to take the crown, but he will not. Had I his youth, I would not hesitate, even with the earldom of Derby in the distance.

Mr. Disraeli, commoner, glows, at the age of fifty-eight, at thought of a great adventure which fails to stir his young friend, the noble lord. It is an outflashing of the never quenched Napoleonic passion of his youth. It is an expression of a pure personal impulse to rule, with a sense that the power is in himself, a sense which is always accompanied by a certain tendency to regard parliamentary procedure impatiently and all the talk of either Whigs or Tories as but "eternal palaver." In his stronger imaginative moods, Disraeli becomes sin-

cerely eloquent in praise of the aspiring will, the spirit behind the forms and shows of things, which saved him and his hero Coningsby from "profligacy" on the one hand and from "pedantry" on the other—

> That noble ambition, the highest and the best, that must be born in the heart and organized in the brain, which will not let a man be content, unless his intellectual power is recognized by his race, and desires that it should contribute to their welfare. It is the heroic feeling; the feeling that in old days produced demi-gods; without which no State is safe; without which political institutions are meat without salt; the Crown a bauble; the Church an establishment, Parliaments debating-clubs, and Civilization itself but a fitful and transient dream.

The tragedy of the romantic dreamer and intellectual who seeks in action to embody his dream, is to discover with Sybil that "great thoughts have very little to do with the business of the world; that human affairs, even in an age of revolution, are the subject of compromise; and that the essence of compromise is littleness." The decrepit power which the radical had been taught existed only by sufferance Disraeli discovered, as Sybil discovered, "was compact and organized, with every element of physical power at its command, and supported by the interests, the sympathies, the honest convictions, and the strong prejudices of classes influential not merely from their wealth but even by their numbers." He had thought himself "a man of destiny;" he was to find, like Prince Florestan in "Endymion,"

that the "irresistible principle of historical necessity" was a principle "not recognized by Her Majesty's Ministers!"

There speaks the man who recognized the realities in the situation at the Congress of Berlin. From the novels, let us return once more to the biography, to the final volume, for a last specimen of the Disraelian irony playing upon himself and at the same time upon the great German master of the arts which he himself practised. England, as part of her share of the plunder divided by the victorious statesmen—England, or rather Disraeli personally, had secretly seized upon Cyprus; and in a confidential interview with the "honest broker" had communicated the fact to Bismarck. I quote the passage in which Disraeli reports this interview to his sovereign:

When he (Bismarck) heard about Cyprus, he said: "You have done a wise thing. This is progress. It will be popular; a nation likes progress." His idea of progress was evidently seizing something. He said he looked upon our relinquishment of the Ionian Isles as the first sign of our decadence. Cyprus put us right again.

"His idea of progress was evidently seizing something." Evidently Disraeli's idea of progress was not precisely that. The Bismarckian point of view and personality interested him, to be sure, piquantly. He was mildly amused by the "iron" statesman's table talk, with its "Rabelaisian monologues." He was astounded by his "endless revelations of things

he ought not to mention." He was struck by the "ogre-like form" and pleased by the contrasting voice, "which is sweet and gentle." But the effect of Bismarck's fundamental conceptions upon his subtly civilized Semitic mind was that of something elementary, crude, barbaric. With an exquisite shade of sarcasm, he hints, just hints, at this effect, to his queen. For he knows that in the veins of his "adored" sovereign runs, after all, the same Teutonic blood, beating to the same barbaric rhythm. Had she not, in order to quicken the cooler blood of her dear Lord Beaconsfield in the months preceding the Congress—had she not written to him with her own royal hand that, if she were a man, "she would like to go and give those Russians such a beating!" He was her minister to do her good pleasure. And so, with a merciless diplomatic craft, which is the full intellectual "equivalent" of war, he gave those Russians "such a beating." He added Cyprus to her Crown. He played for her, with an intimate consciousness of its absurdity, the great game, which, along with shooting pheasants and horse racing, still delights the rude imaginations of these occidentals!

His action was, as Bismarck had predicted that it would be, popular—immensely popular. *Der alte Jude* was rewarded by a grateful sovereign with an English earldom. He now took a place of eminence and splendor in that order which his radical spokesman in "Sybil" had declared "stands before Europe the most gorgeous of existing spectacles,"

governing "the most miserable people on the face of the globe." With the loyalty to the temporal power characteristic of his race, he had rendered to Cæsar such service as Cæsar prizes. Judging by the standards of the people among whom he lived, his life, as he declared near the end of his tenure of it, had not been altogether vanity.

Yet in the end one recognizes regretfully in the man reserves of power of another sort, which his occasions never fully called forth, and potentialities of influence which his political choices made unavailing. He himself recognized them, when in his seventy-sixth year he abandoned the premiership for "Endymion." One likes to think of his return upon himself in his penultimate spring, when the days "were getting very long, and soft, and sweet," and he lay under the purple oaks of Hughenden, among his loved violets and primroses, lost in the fathomless revery of which he was capable—"one of those reveries when the incidents of our existence are mapped before us, when each is considered with relation to the rest, and assumes in our knowledge its destined and absolute position; when, as it were, we take stock of our experience, and ascertain how rich sorrow and pleasure, feeling and thought, intercourse with our fellow creatures and the fortuitous mysteries of life, have made us in wisdom." In those last calm days of illumination and quiet retrospection, what, one wonders, was his final judgment upon the ancient wisdom of his own race, when, secure in the sense of its spiritual supremacy and

refusing to contend with the Napoleons and Cæsars of the "impious younger world,"

> The East bow'd low before the blast
> In patient deep disdain;
> She let the legions thunder past,
> And plunged in thought again.

What if, like the saints and martyrs whose heroic spirit really touched his imagination, he had declined the handful of silver, the riband to stick in his coat, and had undertaken the spiritual recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, a mission with which his Tancred trifles? "Strange power of the world," he exclaims with the insight of one who has yielded to it, "that the moment we enter it, our great conceptions dwarf!" Sympathy with the world dwarfs our dream in youth. The "sense of the ridiculous" dwarfs it in age. There was too much of Lucian, too much of Voltaire, too much of Don Juan, too much of Heine, and, above all, too much of the hard radical realism of Napoleon in Disraeli, for a saint. At the end of every aspiring flight, he returns to earth; he takes his stand on human nature as it is, not as the dreamer conceives it ought to be. And he concludes, with a richly experienced smile: *"Perhaps these reveries of solitude may not be really great conceptions;* perhaps they are only exaggerations; vague, indefinite, shadowy, founded on no sound principles, founded on no assured basis." Perhaps the world is right; and the beatific vision, only a dyspeptic dream.

XVIII

GEORGE SAND AND GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

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GEORGE SAND AND GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

The correspondence of George Sand and Gustave Flaubert, if approached merely as a chapter in the biographies of these heroes of nineteenth century letters, is sufficiently rewarding. In a relationship extending over twelve years, including the trying period of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, these extraordinary personalities disclose the aspects of their diverse natures which are best worth the remembrance of posterity. However her passionate and erratic youth may have captivated our grandfathers, George Sand in the mellow autumn of her life is for us at her most attractive phase. The storms and anguish and hazardous adventures that attended the defiant unfolding of her spirit are over. In her final retreat at Nohant, surrounded by her affectionate children and grandchildren, diligently writing, botanizing, bathing in her little river, visited by her friends and undistracted by the fiery lovers of the old time, she shows an unguessed wealth of maternal virtue, swift, comprehending sympathy, fortitude, sunny resignation, and a goodness of heart that has ripened into wis-

dom. For Flaubert, too, though he was seventeen years her junior, the flamboyance of youth was long since past; in 1863, when the correspondence begins, he was firmly settled, a shy, proud, grumpy, toiling hermit of forty, in his family seat at Croisset, beginning his seven years' labor at *L'Education Sentimentale,* master of his art, hardening in his convictions, and conscious of increasing estrangement from the spirit of his age. He, with his craving for sympathy, and she, with her inexhaustible supply of it, meet; he pours out his bitterness, she her consolation; and so with equal candor of self-revelation they beautifully draw out and strengthen each the other's characteristics, and help one another grow old.

But there is more in these letters than a satisfaction for the biographical appetite, which, indeed, finds its account rather in the earlier chapters of the correspondents' history. What impresses us here is the banquet spread for the reflective and critical faculties in this intercourse of natural antagonists. As M. Faguet observes in a striking paragraph of his study of Flaubert:

"It is a curious thing, which does honor to them both, that Flaubert and George Sand should have become loving friends towards the end of their lives. At the beginning, Flaubert might have been looked upon by George Sand as a furious enemy. Emma (Madame Bovary) is George Sand's heroine with all the poetry turned into ridicule. Flaubert seems to say in every page of his work: 'Do you want to know what is the real Valentine, the real

Indiana, the real Lelia? Here she is, it is Emma Roualt.' 'And do you want to know what becomes of a woman whose education has consisted in George Sand's books? Here she is, Emma Roualt.' So that the terrible mocker of the bourgeois has written a book which is directly inspired by the spirit of the 1840 bourgeois. Their recriminations against romanticism 'which rehabilitates and poetises the courtesan,' against George Sand, the Muse of Adultery, are to be found in acts and facts in Madame Bovary."

Now, the largest interest of this correspondence depends precisely upon the continuance, beneath an affectionate personal relationship, of a fundamental antagonism of interests and beliefs, resolutely maintained on both sides. George Sand, with her life-long passion for propaganda and reformation, labors earnestly to bring Flaubert to her point of view, to remold him nearer to her heart's desire. He, with a playful deference to the sex and years of his friend, addresses her in his letters as "Dear Master." Yet in the essentials of the conflict, though she never gives over her effort, he never budges a jot; he has taken his ground, and in his last unfinished work, *Bouvard and Pécuchet,* he dies stubbornly fortifying his position. To the last she speaks from a temperament lyrical, sanguine, imaginative, optimistic, and sympathetic; he from a temperament dramatic, melancholy, observing, cynical, and satirical. She insists upon natural goodness; he, upon innate depravity. She urges her faith in social regeneration; he vents his splenetic contempt

for the mob. Through all the successive shocks of disillusioning experience, she expects the renovation of humanity by some religious, some semi-mystical, amelioration of its heart; he grimly concedes the greater part of humanity to the devil, and can see no escape for the remnant save in science and aristocratic organization. For her, finally, the literary art is an instrument of social salvation—it is her means of touching the world with her ideals, her love, her aspiration; for him the literary art is the avenue of escape from the meaningless chaos of existence—it is his implicitly critical condemnation of the world.

The origins of these unreconciled antipathies lie deep beneath the personal relationship of George Sand and Gustave Flaubert; lie deep beneath their successors, who with more or less of amenity in their manners are still debating the same questions today. The main currents of the nineteenth century, with fluent and refluent tides, clash beneath the controversy; and as soon as one hears its "long withdrawing roar," and thinks it is dying away, and is become a part of ancient history, it begins again, and will be heard, no doubt, by the last man, as a solemn accompaniment to his final contention with his last adversary.

George Sand was, on the whole, a natural and filial daughter of the French Revolution. The royal blood which she received from her father's line mingled in her veins with that of the Parisian milliner, her mother, and predestined her for a

leveler by preparing in her an instinctive ground of revolt against all those inherited prejudices which divided the families of her parents. As a young girl wildly romping with the peasant children at Nohant she discovered a joy in untrammeled rural life which was only to increase with years. At the proper age for beginning to fashion a conventional young lady, the hoyden was put in a convent, where she underwent some exalting religious experiences; and in 1822 she was assigned to her place in the "established social order" by her marriage at seventeen to M. Dudevant. After a few years of rather humdrum domestic life in the country, she became aware that this gentleman, her husband, was behaving as we used to be taught that all French husbands ultimately behave; he was, in fact, turning from her to her maids. The young couple had never been strongly united—the impetuous dreamy girl and her coarse hunting mate; and they had grown wide apart. She should, of course, have adjusted herself quietly to the altered situation and have kept up appearances. But this young wife had gradually become an "intellectual"; she had been reading philosophy and poetry; she was saturated with the writings of Rousseau, of Chateaubriand, of Byron. None of the spiritual masters of her generation counselled acquiescence in servitude or silence in misery. Every eloquent tongue of the timespirit urged self-expression and revolt. And she, obedient to the deepest impulses of her blood and her time, revolted.

At the period when Madame Dudevant withdrew her neck from the conjugal yoke and plunged into her literary career in Paris, the doctrine that men are created for freedom, equality and fraternity was already somewhat hackneyed. She, with an impetus from her own private fortunes, was to give the doctrine a recrudescence of interest by resolutely applying it to the status of women. We cannot follow her in detail from the point where she abandons the domestic sewing-basket to reappear smoking black cigars in the Latin Quarter. We find her, at about 1831, entering into competition with the brilliant literary generation of Balzac, Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Mérimée, Stendhal, and Sainte-Beuve. To signalize her equality with her brothers in talent, she adopts male attire: "I had a sentry-box coat made, of rough grey cloth, with trousers and waistcoat to match. With a grey hat and a huge cravat of woolen material, I looked exactly like a first-year student." In the freedom of this rather unalluring garb, she entered into relations platonic, fraternal, or tempestuously passionate with perhaps the most distinguished series of friends and lovers that ever fluttered about one flame. There was Aurélien de Sèze; Jules Sandeau, her first collaborator, who "reconciled her to life" and gave her a *nom de guerre;* the inscrutable Mérimée, who made no one happy; Musset—an encounter from which both tiger-moths escaped with singed wings; the odd transitional figure of Pagello; Michel Euraed; Liszt; Chopin, whom she loved

and nursed for eight years; her master Lamennais; her master Pierre Leroux; her father-confessor Sainte-Beuve; and Gustave Flaubert, the querulous friend of her last decade.

As we have compressed the long and complex story of her personal relationships, so we must compress the intimately related history of her works and her ideas. When under the inspiration of Rousseau, the emancipated George Sand began to write, her purposes were but vaguely defined. She conceived of life as primarily an opportunity for unlimited self-expansion, and of literature as an opportunity for unrestricted self-expression. "Nevertheless," she declares, "my instincts have formed, without my privity, the theory I am about to set down,—a theory which I have generally followed unconsciously. . . . According to this theory, the novel is as much a work of poetry as of analysis. It demands true situations, and characters not only true but real, grouped about a type intended to epitomize the sentiment or the main conceptions of the book. This type generally represents the passion of love since almost all novels are love stories. According to this theory (and it is here that it begins) the writer must idealize this love, and consequently this type,—and must not fear to attribute to it all the powers to which he inwardly aspires, or all the sorrows whose pangs he has observed or felt. This type must in no wise, however, become degraded by the vicissitude of events; it must either die or triumph."

In 1831, when her pen began its fluent course through the lyrical works of her first period—*Indiana, Valentine, Lelia, Jacques,* and the rest —we conceive George Sand's culture, temper, and point of view to have been fairly comparable with those of the young Shelley, when fifteen years earlier, he, with Mary Godwin, joined Byron and Jane Clairmont in Switzerland—young revoltés, all of them, nourished on eighteenth century revolutionary philosophy and Gothic novels. Both these eighteenth century currents meet in the work of the new romantic group in England and in France. The innermost origin of the early long poems of Shelley and the early works of George Sand is in personal passion, in the commotion of a romantic spirit beating its wings against the cage of custom and circumstance and institutions. The external form of the plot, whatever is fantastic and wilful in its setting and its adventures, is due to the school of Ann Radcliffe. But the quality in Shelley and in George Sand which bewitched even the austere Matthew Arnold, in his green and salad days, is the poetising of that liberative eighteenth century philosophy into "beautiful idealisms" of a love emancipated from human limitations, a love exalted to the height of its gamut by the influences of nature, triumphantly seeking its own or shattered in magnificent despair. In her novels of the first period, George Sand takes her Byronic revenge upon M. Dudevant. In *Indiana* and its immediate successors, consciously or unconsciously, she declares to the

world what a beautiful soul M. Dudevant condemned to sewing on buttons; in *Jacques* she paints the man who might fitly have matched her spirit; and by the entire series, which now impresses us as fantastic in sentiment no less than in plot, she won her early reputation as the apologist for free love, the adversary of marriage.

In her middle period—say from 1838 to 1848—of which *The Miller of Aginbault, Consuelo,* and *The Countess of Rudolstadt* are representative works, there is a marked subsidence of her personal emotion, and, in compensation, a rising tide of humanitarian enthusiasm. Gradually satiated with erotic passion, gradually convinced that it is rather a mischief-maker than a reconstructive force in a decrepit society, she is groping, indeed, between her successive liaisons for an elusive felicity, for a larger mission than inspiring Musset's Alexandrines or Chopin's *Nocturnes.* It is somewhat amusing, and at the same time indicative of her vague but deep-seated moral yearnings, to find her writing rebukingly to Sainte-Beuve, as early as 1834, apropos of his epicurean *Volupté:* "Let the rest do as they like; but you, dear friend, you must produce a book which will change and better mankind, do you see? You can, and therefore should. Oh, if poor I could do it! I should lift my head again and my heart would no longer be broken; but in vain I seek a religion: Shall it be God, shall it be love, friendship, the public welfare? Alas, it seems to me that my soul is framed to receive all these impressions, with-

out one effacing another. . . . Who shall paint justice as it should, as it may, be in our modern society?"

To Sainte-Beuve, himself an unscathed intellectual Odysseus, she declares herself greatly indebted intellectually; but on the whole his influence seems to have been tranquillizing. The material for the radical program, economic, political, and religious, which, like a spiritual ancestor of H. G. Wells, she eagerly sought to popularize by the novels of her middle years, was supplied mainly by Saint-Simon, Lamennais, and Leroux. Her new "religion of humanity," a kind of theosophical socialism, is too fantastically garbed to charm the sober spirits of our age. And yet from the ruins of that time and from the emotional extravagance of books grown tedious, which she has left behind her, George Sand emerges for us with one radiant perception which must be included in whatever religion animates a democratic society: "Everyone must be happy, so that the happiness of a few may not be criminal and cursed by God."

One of George Sand's French critics, M. Caro, a member of the Academy, who deals austerely with her religious enthusiasms and with her Utopian projects for social reformation, remarks gravely and not without tenderness:

"The one thing needful to this soul, so strong, so rich in enthusiasm, is a humble moral quality that she disdains, and when she has occasion to speak of it, even slanders,—namely resignation. This is not,

as she seems to think, the sluggish virtue of base souls, who, in their superstitious servitude to force, hastens to crouch beneath every yoke. That is a false and degrading resignation; genuine resignation grows out of the conception of the universal order, weighed against which individual sufferings, without ceasing to be a ground of merit, cease to constitute a right of revolt. . . . Resignation, in the true, the philosophical, the Christian sense, is a manly acceptance of moral law and also of the laws essential to the social order; it is a free adherence to order, a sacrifice approved by reason of a part of one's private good and of one's personal freedom, not to might nor to the tyranny of a human caprice, but to the exigencies of the common weal, which subsists only by the concord of individual liberty with obedient passions."

Well, resigned in the sense of defeated, George Sand never became; nor did she, perhaps, ever wholly acquiesce in that scheme of things which M. Caro impressively designates as "the universal order." Yet with age, the abandonment of many distractions, the retreat to Nohant, the consolations of nature, and her occupation with tales of pastoral life, beginning with *La Mare au Diable,* there develops within her, there diffuses itself around her, there appears in her work a charm like that which falls upon green fields from the level rays of the evening sun after a day of storms. It is not the charm, precisely, of resignation; it is the charm of serenity—the serenity of an old revolutionist who no longer expects victory in the morning yet is still secure in her confidence of a final

triumph, and still more secure in the goodness of her cause. "A hundred times in life," she declares, "the good that one does seems to serve no immediate purpose; yet it maintains in one way and another the tradition of well wishing and well doing, without which all would perish." At the outset of her career we compared her with Shelley. In her last phase, she reminds us rather of the authors of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Mill on the Floss,* and of Wordsworth, once, too, a torch of revolution, turning to his Michaels and his leech-gatherers and his Peter Bells. Her exquisite pictures of pastoral life are perhaps idealizations of it; her representations of the peasant are not corroborated by Zola's; to the last she approaches the shield of human nature from the golden side. But for herself at least she has found a real secret of happiness in country life, tranquil work, and a right direction given to her own heart and conscience.

It is at about this point in her spiritual development that she turns towards Gustave Flaubert—perhaps a little suspiciously at first, yet resolved from the first, according to her natural instincts and her now fixed principles, to stimulate by believing in his admirable qualities. Writing from Nohant in 1866 to him at Croisset, she epitomizes her distinction as a woman and as an author in this playful sally: "Sainte-Beuve, who loves you nevertheless, pretends that you are dreadfully vicious. But perhaps he sees with eyes a bit dirty, like that learned botanist who pretends that the germander is of a

dirty yellow. The observation was so false that I could not help writing on the margin of his book: *'It is you, whose eyes are dirty.'*"

We have spoken of George Sand as a faithful daughter of the French Revolution; and by way of contrast we may speak of Flaubert as a disgruntled son of the Second Empire. Between his literary advent and hers there is an interval of a generation, during which the proud expansive spirit and the grandiose aspirations imparted to the nation by the first Napoleon dwindled to a spirit of mediocrity and bourgeois smugness under a Napoleon who had inherited nothing great of his predecessor but his name. This change in the time-spirit may help to explain the most significant difference between Flaubert and George Sand. He inherited the tastes and imagination of the great romantic generation; but he inherited none of its social and political enthusiasm. He was disciplined by the romantic writers; yet his reaction to the literary culture of his youth is not ethical but æsthetic; he finds his inspiration less in Rousseau than in Chateaubriand. He is bred to an admiration of eloquence, the poetic phrase, the splendid picture, life in the grand style; with increasing disgust he finds himself entering a society which, he feels, neither understands nor values any of these things, and which threatens their destruction. Consequently, we find him actuated as a writer by two complementary passions: the love of splendor and the hatred of mediocrity—two passions, of which

the second sometimes alternates with the first, sometimes inseparably fuses with it, and ultimately almost extinguishes it.

The son of an eminent surgeon of Rouen, Gustave Flaubert may have acquired from his father something of that scientific precision of observation and that cutting accuracy of expression, by which he gained his place at the head of modern French realism and won the discipleship of the Goncourts, Daudet, Zola, and Maupassant and the applause of such connoisseurs of technique as Walter Pater and Henry James. From his mother's Norman ancestry he inherited the physique of a giant, tainted with epilepsy; a Viking countenance, strong-featured, with leonine moustaches; and a barbaric temper, habitually somewhat lethargic but irritable, and, when roused, violent and intolerant of opposition. He had a private education at Rouen, with wide, desultory reading; went to Paris, which he hated, to study law, which he also hated; frequented the theatres and studios; travelled in Corsica, the Pyrenees, and the East, which he adored, seeing Egypt, Palestine, Constantinople, and Greece; and he had one, and only one, important love-affair, extending from 1846 to 1854—that with Louise Colet, a woman of letters, whose difficult relations with Flaubert are sympathetically touched upon in Pater's celebrated essay on "Style." When by the death of his father, in 1854, he succeeded to the family-seat at Croisset, near Rouen, he settled him-

self in a studious solitude to the pursuit of letters, which he followed for thirty-four years, with anguish of spirit and dogged persistence.

Flaubert probably loved glory as much as any man; but he desired to receive it only on his own terms. He profoundly appeals to writers endowed with "the artistic conscience" as "the martyr of literary style." In morals something of a libertine, in matters of art he exhibited the intolerance of weakness in others and the remorseless self-examination and self-torment commonly attributed to the Puritan. His friend Maxime Du Camp, who tried to bring him out and teach him the arts of popularity, he rebuffed with deliberate insult. He developed an aversion to any interruption of his work, and such tension and excitability of nerves that he shunned a day's outing or a chat with an old companion, lest it distract him for a month afterward. His mistress he seems to have estranged by an ill-concealed preference to her of his exacting Muse. To illustrate his "monkish" consecration to his craft we cannot do better than reproduce a passage, quoted by Pater, from his letters to Madame Colet:

"I must scold you for one thing, which shocks, scandalises me, the small concern, namely, you show for art just now. As regards glory be it so—there I approve. But for art!—the one thing in life that is good and real—can you compare with it an earthly love?—prefer the adoration of a relative beauty to the *cultus* of the true beauty? Well! I tell you the truth. That is the one thing good in me: the

one thing I have, to me estimable. For yourself, you blend with the beautiful a heap of alien things, the useful, the agreeable, what not?

"The only way not to be unhappy is to shut yourself up in art, and count everything else as nothing. Pride takes the place of all besides when it is established on a large basis. Work! God wills it. That, it seems to me, is clear.

"I am reading over again the Æneid, certain verses of which I repeat to myself to satiety. There are phrases there which stay in one's head, by which I find myself beset, as with musical airs which are forever returning, and cause you pain, you love them so much. I observe that I no longer laugh much, and am no longer depressed. I am ripe, you talk of my serenity, and envy me. It may well surprise you. Sick, irritated, the prey a thousand times a day of cruel pain, I continue my labour like a true workingman, who, with sleeves turned up, in the sweat of his brow, beats away at his anvil, never troubling himself whether it rains, or blows, for hail or thunder. I was not like that formerly."

The half-dozen works which Flaubert beat out on his "anvil," with an average expenditure of half a dozen years to each, were composed on a theory of which the prime distinguishing feature was the great doctrine of "impersonality." George Sand's fluent improvisations ordinarily originated, as we have noted, in an impulse of her lyrical idealism; she began with an aspiration of her heart, to execute which, she invented characters and plots, so that she is always on the inside of her story. According to Flaubert's theory, the novel should originate in a desire to present a certain segment of

observed life. The author is to take and rigorously maintain a position outside his work. The organ with which he collects his materials is not his heart but his eyes, supplemented by the other senses. Life, so far as the scientific observer can be sure of it, and so far as the artist can control it for representation, is a picture or series of pictures, a dramatic scene or a concatenation of dramatic scenes. Let the novelist first, therefore, with scrupulous fidelity and with minute regard for the possible significance of every observable detail, fill his notebooks, amass his materials, master his subject. After Flaubert, a first-rate sociological investigator is three-fourths of a novelist. The rest of the task is to arrange and set forth these facts so that they shall tell the truth about life impressively, in scene and dramatic spectacle, the meaning of which shall be implicit in the plot and shall reach the reader's consciousness through his senses.

Critics have spent much time in discussing the conflict of "romantic" and "realistic" tendencies in Flaubert's works. And it is obviously easy, so far as subject-matter is concerned, to group his books in two divisions: on the one hand, *The Temptation of St. Anthony, Salammbô,* and two of the *Trois Contes;* on the other hand, *Madame Bovary, L'Education Sentimentale,* and the incomplete *Bouvard and Pécuchet.* We may call the tales in the first group romantic, because the subject-matter is remote in time and place, and because in them Flaubert indulges his passion for splendor—

for oriental scenery, for barbaric characters, the pomp of savage war and more savage religion, events strange, terrible, atrocious. We may call the stories in the other group realistic, because the subject-matter is contemporary life in Paris and the provinces, and because in them Flaubert indulges his hatred for mediocrity—for the humdrum existence of the country doctor, the apothecary, the insipid clerk, the vapid, sentimental woman, and the charlatans of science. But as a matter of fact, all his books are essentially constructed on the same theory: all are just as "realistic" as Flaubert could make them.

Henry James called *Madame Bovary* a brilliantly successful application of Flaubert's theory; he pronounced *L'Education Sentimentale* "elaborately and massively dreary"; and he briefly dismissed *Salammbô* as an accomplished work of erudition. *Salammbô* is indeed a work of erudition; years were spent in getting up its archæological details. But *Madame Bovary* is also a work of erudition, and *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is a work of enormous erudition; a thousand volumes were read for the notes of the first volume and Flaubert is said to have killed himself by the labor of his unfinished investigations. There is no important distinction to be made between the method or the thoroughness with which he collected his facts in the one case or the other; and the story of the war of the mercenaries against the Carthaginians is evolved with the same alternation of picture and dramatic spectacle and the same

hard merciless externality that distinguish the evolution of Emma Bovary's history.

We may go still farther than that towards wiping out the distinction between Flaubert's "romantic" and his "realistic" works; and, by the same stroke, what is illusory in the pretensions of the realists, namely, their aspiration to an "impersonal art." If we were seeking to prove that an author can put nothing but himself into his art, we should ask for no more impressive illustrations than precisely, *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*. These two masterpieces disclose to reflection, no less patently than the works of George Sand, their purpose and their meaning. And that purpose and meaning are not a whit less personal to Flaubert than the purpose and meaning of *Indiana,* let us say, are personal to George Sand. The "meaning" of *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô* is, broadly speaking, Flaubert's sense of the significance—or, rather, of the insignificance —of human life; and the "purpose" of the books is to express it. The most lyrical of idealists can do no more to reveal herself.

The demonstration afforded by a comparison of *Salammbô* and *Madame Bovary* is particularly striking because the subject-matters are superficially so unlike. But take any characteristic series of pictures or incidents from *Salammbô:* take the passing of the children through the fire to Moloch, or the description of the leprous Hanno, or the physical surrender of the priestess to her country's enemy, or the following picture of the crucified lion:

"They were marching through a wide defile, hedged in by two chains of reddish hillocks, when a nauseous odor struck their nostrils, and they believed that they saw something extraordinary at the top of a carob tree; a lion's head stood up above the foliage.

"Running towards it, they found a lion attached to a cross by its four limbs, like a criminal; his enormous muzzle hung to his breast, and his forepaws, half concealed beneath the abundance of his mane, were widely spread apart, like a bird's wings in flight; under the tightly drawn skin, his ribs severally protruded and his hind legs were nailed together, but were slightly drawn up; black blood had trickled through the hairs, and collected in stalactites at the end of his tail, which hung straight down the length of the cross. The soldiers crowded around the beast, diverting themselves by calling him 'Consul!' and 'Citizen of Rome!' and threw pebbles into his eyes to scatter the swarming gnats."

And now take any characteristic series of pictures or incidents from *Madame Bovary:* take Bovary's bungling and gruesome operations on the club-footed ostler's leg, with the entire village clustering agape; take the picture of the eyeless, idiotic beggar on the road to Rouen; or the scene in which Emma offers herself for three thousand francs to Rodolphe; or the following bit, only a bit, from the detailed account of the heroine's last hour, after the arsenical poisoning:

"Emma's head was turned towards her right shoulder, the corner of her mouth, which was open, seemed like a black hole at the lower part of her

face; her two thumbs were bent into the palms of her hands; a kind of white dust besprinkled her lashes, and her eyes were beginning to disappear in the viscous pallor that looks like a thin web, as if spiders had spun it over. The sheet sunk in from her breast to her knees, and then rose at the tips of her toes, and it seemed to Charles that infinite masses, an enormous load, were weighing upon her.

"The church clock struck two. They could hear the loud murmur of the river flowing in the darkness at the foot of the terrace. Monsieur Bournisien from time to time blew his nose noisily and Homais' pen was scratching over the paper."

In these two detached pictures—the one from a so-called "romantic," the other from a so-called "realistic," book—one readily observes the likeness in the subjects, which are of a ghastly repulsiveness; the same minuteness of observation—e.g., the lion's hind legs "slightly drawn up," the woman's thumbs "bent into the palms of her hands"; the same careful notation of effect on the several senses; the same rhetorical heightening—e.g., the "stalactites at the end of his tail," the web in the woman's eyes, "as if spiders had spun it over"; and finally, that celebrated detachment, that air as of a medical examiner, recording the results of an autopsy. What can we know of such an author? All, or nearly all, that he knew of himself, provided we will searchingly ask ourselves what sort of mind is steadily attracted to the painting of such pictures, to the representation of such incidents, and what sort of mind expresses a lifetime of brooding on

the significance of life in two such books as *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*.

At its first appearance, *Madame Bovary* was prosecuted, though unsuccessfully, as offensive to public morals. In derision of this famous prosecution, Henry James with studious jauntiness, asserts that in the heat of his first admiration he thought what an excellent moral tract it would make. "It may be very seriously maintained," he continues, "that M. Flaubert's masterpiece is the pearl of 'Sunday reading.'" As a work of fiction and recreation the book lacks, in his opinion, one quite indispensable quality: it lacks charm. Well, there are momentary flashes of beauty and grace, dazzling bits of color, haunting melancholy cadences in every chapter of Flaubert; but a charming book he never wrote. A total impression of charm he never gave —he never could give; because his total impression of life was not charming but atrocious. It is perhaps an accident, as has been suggested, that one can so readily employ *Madame Bovary* to illustrate that text on the "wages of sin." Emma, to be sure, goes down the easy alluring path to disgrace and ruin. But that is only an incident in the wider meaning of Flaubert's fiction, a meaning more amply expressed in *Salammbô,* where not one foolish woman alone but thousands on thousands of men, women, and children, mingled with charging elephants and vipers, flounder and fight in indescribable welters of blood and filth, and go down to rot in a common pit. If I read Flaubert's meaning

right, all human history is there; you may show it by painting on broad canvas a Carthaginian battle scene or by photographing the details of a modern bedroom: a brief brightness, night, and the odor of carrion, a crucified lion, a dying woman, the jeering of ribald mercenaries, the cackle of M. Homais. It is all one. If Flaubert deserved prosecution, it was not for making vice attractive, but for expressing with invasive energy that personal and desperately pessimistic conception of life by which he was almost overwhelmed.

That a bad physical regimen, bad habits of work in excessive quantities, and the solitude of his existence were contributory to Flaubert's melancholy, his exacerbated egotism, and his pessimism is sufficiently obvious in the letters. This Norman giant with his aching head buried all day long in his arms, groping in anguish for a phrase, has naturally a kindly disposition towards various individuals of his species—is even capable of great generosity; but as he admits with a truth and pathos, deeply appealing to the maternal sympathies of his correspondent, he has no talent for living. He has never been able, like richer and more resourceful souls, to reconcile being an author with being a man. He has made his choice; he has renounced the cheerful sanities of the world:

"I pass entire weeks without exchanging a word with a human being; and at the end of the week it is not possible for me to recall a single day nor any event whatsoever. I see my mother and my

niece on Sundays, and that is all. My only company consists of a band of rats in the garret, which make an infernal racket above my head, when the water does not roar or the wind blow. The nights are black as ink, and a silence surrounds me comparable to that of the desert. Sensitiveness is increased immeasurably in such a setting. I have palpitations of the heart for nothing.

"All that results from our charming profession. That is what it means to torment the soul and the body. But perhaps this torment is our proper lot here below."

To George Sand, who wrote as naturally as she breathed and almost as easily, seclusion and torment were by no means the necessary conditions of literary activity. Enormously productive, with a hundred books to his half a dozen, she has never dedicated and consecrated herself to her profession but has lived heartily and a bit recklessly from day to day, spending herself in many directions freely, gaily, extravagantly. Now that she has definitely said farewell to her youth, she finds that she is twenty years younger; and now that she is, in a sense, dissipating her personality and living in the lives of others, she finds that she is happier than ever before. "It can't be imperative to work so painfully"—such is the burden of her earlier counsels to Flaubert; "spare yourself a little, take some exercise, relax the tendons of your mind, indulge a little the physical man. Live a little as I do; and you will take your fatigues and illnesses and occasional dolours and dumps as incidents of the day's work

and not magnify them into the mountainous overshadowing calamities from which you deduce your philosophy of the universal misery." No advice could have been more wholesome or more timely. And with what pictures of her own busy felicity she reënforces her advice! I shall produce three of them here in order to emphasize that precious thing which George Sand loved to impart, and which she had the gift of imparting, namely, joy, the spontaneous joyousness of her own nature. The first passage is from a letter of June 14, 1867:

"I am a little remorseful to take whole days from your work, I who am never bored with loafing, and whom you could leave for whole hours under a tree, or before two lighted logs, with assurance that I should find there something interesting. I know so well how to live outside of myself. It hasn't always been like that. I also was young and subject to indignations. It is over! Since I have dipped into real nature, I have found there an order, a system, a calmness of cycles which is lacking in mankind, but which man can, up to a certain point, assimilate when he is not too directly at odds with the difficulties of his own life. When these difficulties return, he must endeavor to avoid them; but if he has drunk the cup of the eternally true, he does not get too excited for or against the ephemeral and relative truth."

The second passage is of June 21:

"I love everything that makes up a *milieu,* the rolling of the carriages and the noise of the workmen in Paris, the cries of a thousand birds in the country, the movement of the ships on the waters.

I love also absolute, profound silence, and, in short, I love everything that is around me, no matter where I am."

The last passage gives a glimpse of the seventeenth of January, 1869, a typical day in Nohant:

"The individual named George Sand is well: he is enjoying the marvellous winter which reigns in Berry, gathering flowers, noting interesting botanical anomalies, making dresses and mantles for his daughter-in-law, costumes for the marionettes, cutting out scenery, dressing dolls, reading music, but above all spending hours with the little Aurore, who is a marvellous child. There is not a more tranquil or a happier individual in his domestic life than this old troubadour retired from business, who sings from time to time his little song to the moon, without caring much whether he sings well or ill, provided he sings the motif that runs in his head, and who, the rest of the time, idles deliciously. . . . This pale character has the great pleasure of loving you with all his heart, and of not passing a day without thinking of the other old troubadour, confined in his solitude of a frenzied artist, disdainful of all the pleasures of the world."

Flaubert did "exercise" a little—once or twice—in compliance with the injunctions of his "dear master"; but he rather resented the implication that his pessimism was personal, that it had any particular connection with his peculiar temperament or habits. He wished to think of himself as a stoic, quite indifferent about his "carcase." His briefer black moods he might acknowledge had transitory causes. But his general and abiding conceptions of

humanity were the result of dispassionate reflections. "You think," he cries in half sportive pique, "that because I pass my life trying to make harmonious phrases, in avoiding assonances, that I too have not my little judgments on the things of this world? Alas! Yes! and moreover I shall burst, enraged at not expressing them." And later: "Yes, I am susceptible to disinterested angers, and I love you all the more for loving me for that. Stupidity and injustice make me roar—and I howl in my corner against a lot of things 'that do not concern me'." "On the day that I am no longer in a rage, I shall fall flat as the marionette from which one withdraws the support of the stick."

So far as Flaubert's pessimism has an intellectual basis, it rests upon his researches in human history. For *Salammbô* and *The Temptation of St. Anthony* he ransacked ancient literature, devoured religions and mythologies, and saturated himself in the works of the Church Fathers. In order to get up the background of his *L'Education Sentimentale* he studied the Revolution of 1848 and its roots in the Revolution of 1789. He found, shall we say? what he was looking for—inexhaustible proofs of the cruelty and stupidity of men. After "gulping" down the six volumes of Buchez and Roux, he declares: "The clearest thing I got out of them is an immense disgust for the French. . . . Not a liberal idea which has not been unpopular, not a just thing that has not caused scandal, not a great man who has not been mobbed or knifed. 'The

history of the human mind is the history of human folly,' as says M. Voltaire. . . . Neo-Catholicism on the one hand, and Socialism on the other, have stultified France." In another letter of the same period and similar provocation: "However much you fatten human cattle, giving them straw as high as their bellies, and even gilding their stable, they will remain brutes, no matter what one says. All the advance that one can hope for, is to make the brute a little less wicked. But as for elevating the ideas of the mass, giving it a larger and therefore a less human conception of God, I have my doubts."

In addition to the charges of violence and cruelty, which he brought against all antiquity as well as against modern times, much in the fashion of Swift or the older Mark Twain, Flaubert nursed four grave causes of indignation, made four major charges of folly, against modern "Christian" civilization. In religion, we have substituted for Justice the doctrine of Grace. In our sociological considerations, we act no longer with discrimination but upon a principle of universal sympathy. In the field of art and literature, we have abandoned criticism and research for the Beautiful, in favor of universal puffery. In politics we have nullified intelligence and renounced leadership, to embrace universal suffrage, which is the last disgrace of the human spirit.

It must be acknowledged that Flaubert's arraignment of modern society possesses the characteristics

commended by the late Barrett Wendell: it is marked in a high degree by "unity, mass and coherence." It must be admitted also that George Sand possessed in a high degree the Pauline virtue of being "not easily provoked," or she never could have endured so patiently, so sweetly, Flaubert's reiterated and increasingly ferocious assaults upon her own master passion, her ruling principle. George Sand was one whose entire life signally attested the power of a "saving grace," resident in the creative and recuperative energies of nature, resident in the magical, the miracle-working, powers of the human heart, the powers of love and sympathy. She was a modern spiritual adventurer who had escaped unscathed from all the anathemas of the old theology; and she abounded, like St. Francis, in her sense of the new dispensation and in her benedictive exuberance towards all the creatures of God, including not merely sun, moon, and stars and her sister the lamb but also her brother the wolf. On this principle she loves Flaubert!—and archly asserts her arch-heresy in his teeth. He complains that her fundamental defect is that she doesn't know how to "hate." She replies, with a point that seems never really to have pierced his thick casing of masculine egotism:

"Artists are spoiled children and the best are great egotists. You say that I love them too well; I like them as I like the woods and the fields, everything, everyone that I know a little and that I study continually. I make my life in the midst of all that,

and as I like my life, I like all that nourishes it and renews it. They do me a lot of ill turns which I see, but which I no longer feel. I know that there are thorns in the hedges, but that does not prevent me from putting out my hands and finding flowers there. If all are not beautiful, all are interesting. The day you took me to the Abbey of Saint Georges I found the *Scrofularia borealis,* a very rare plant in France. I was enchanted; there was much —— in the neighborhood where I gathered it. Such is life!

"And if one does not take life like that, one cannot take it in any way, and then how can one endure it? I find it amusing and interesting, and since I accept everything, I am so much happier and more enthusiastic when I meet the beautiful and the good. If I did not have a great knowledge of the species, I should not have quickly understood you, or known you or loved you."

Two years later the principles and tempers of both these philosophers were put to their severest trial. In 1870, George Sand had opportunity to apply her doctrine of universal acceptance to the Prussians in Paris. Flaubert had opportunity to welcome scientific organization in the Prussian occupation of his own home at Croisset. The first reaction of both was a quite simple consternation and rage, in which Flaubert cries, "The hopeless barbarism of humanity fills me with a black melancholy," and George Sand, for the moment assenting, rejoins: "Men are ferocious and conceited brutes." As the war thickens around him and the wakened militancy of his compatriots presses him hard, Flaubert be-

comes more and more depressed; he forbodes general collapse of civilization—before the century passes, a conflict of races, "in which several millions of men kill one another in one engagement." With the curiously vengeful satisfaction which mortals take in their own misery when it offers occasion to cry "I told you so," he exclaims: "Behold, then, the natural man. Make theories now! Boast the progress, the enlightenment and the good sense of the masses, and the gentleness of the French people! I assure you that anyone here who ventured to preach peace would get himself murdered."

George Sand in her fields at Nohant—not "above" but a little aside from the conflict—turns instinctively to her peasant, doggedly, placidly, sticking at his plow; turns to her peasant with a kind of intuition that he is a symbol of faith, that he holds the keys to a consolation, which the rest of us blindly grope for: "He is imbecile, people say; no, he is a child in prosperity, a man in disaster, more of a man than we who complain; he says nothing, and while people are killing, he is sowing, repairing continually on one side what they are destroying on the other." Flaubert, who thinks that he has no "illusions" about peasants or the "average man," brings forward his own specific of a quite different nature: "Do you think that if France, instead of being governed on the whole by the crowd, were in the power of the mandarins, we should be where we are now? If, instead of having wished to enlighten the lower classes, we had busied

ourselves with instructing the higher, we should not have seen M. de Kératry proposing the pillage of the duchy of Baden."

In the great war of our own time with the same foes, our professional advocates of "preparedness," our cheerful chemists, our scientific "intellectuals" —all our materialistic thinkers, hard-shell and soft-shell,—took the position of Flaubert, just presented; reproached us bitterly for our slack, sentimental pacifism; and urged us with all speed to emulate the scientific spirit of our enemy. There is nothing more instructive in this correspondence than to observe how this last fond illusion falls away from Flaubert under the impact of an experience which demonstrated to his tortured senses the truth of the old Rabelaisian utterance, that "science without conscience is the ruin of the soul."

"What use, pray," he cries in the last disillusion, "is science, since this people abounding in scholars commits abominations worthy of the Huns and worse than theirs, because they are systematic, cold-blooded, voluntary, and have for an excuse, neither passion nor hunger?" And a few months later, he is still in mad anguish of desolation:

"I had some illusions! What barbarity! What a slump! I am wrathful at my contemporaries for having given me the feelings of a brute of the twelfth century! I'm stifling in gall! These officers who break mirrors with white gloves on, who know Sanskrit, and who fling themselves on the champagne; who steal your watch and then send you their visiting card, this war for money, these civil-

ized savages give me more horror than cannibals. And all the world is going to imitate them, is going to be a soldier! Russia has now four millions of them. All Europe will wear a uniform. If we take our revenge, it will be ferocious in the last degree; and, mark my word, we are going to think only of that, of avenging ourselves on Germany."

Under the imminence of the siege of Paris, Flaubert had drilled men, with an out-flashing of the savage fighting spirit of his ancestors, of which he was more than half ashamed. But at heart he is more dismayed, more demoralized, more thoroughly prostrated than George Sand. He has not fortitude actually to face the degree of depravity which he has always imputed to the human race, the baseness with which his imagination has long been easily and cynically familiar. As if his pessimism had been only a literary pigment, a resource of the studio, he shudders to find Paris painted in his own ebony colors, and his own purely "artistic" hatred of the bourgeois, translated into a principle of action, expressing itself in the horrors of the Commune, with half the population trying to strangle the other half. Hatred, after all, contempt and hatred, are not quite the most felicitous watchwords for the use of human society. Like one whose cruel jest has been taken more seriously than he had intended and has been turned upon his own head, Flaubert considers flight: "I cherish the following dream: of going to live in the sun in a tranquil country." As a substitute for a physical retreat, he buries himself in a study of Buddhism, and so gradually returns

to the pride of his intellectual isolation. As the tumult in his senses subsides, he even ventures to offer to George Sand the anodyne of his old philosophical despair: "Why are you so sad? Humanity offers nothing new. Its irremediable misery has filled me with sadness ever since my youth. And in addition I now have no disillusions. I believe that the crowd, the common herd, will always be hateful. The only important thing is a little group of minds, always the same—which passes the torch from one to another."

There we must leave Flaubert, the thinker. He never passes beyond the point in his vision of reconstruction: a "legitimate aristocracy" established in contempt of the average man—with the Academy of Sciences displacing the Pope.

George Sand, amid these devastating external events, is beginning to feel the insidious siege of years. She can no longer rally her spiritual forces with the "bright speed" that she had in old days. The fountain of her faith, which has never yet failed of renewal, fills more slowly. For weeks she broods in silence, fearing to augment her friend's dismay with more of her own, fearing to resume a debate in which her cause may be better than her arguments and in which depression of her physical energy may diminish her power to put up a spirited defence before the really indomitable "last ditch" of her position. When Flaubert himself makes a momentary gesture towards the white flag, and talks of retreat, she seizes the opportunity for a short

scornful sally. "Go to live in the sun in a tranquil country! Where? What country is going to be tranquil in this struggle of barbarity against civilization, a struggle which is going to be universal?" A month later she gives him fair warning that she has no intention of acknowledging final defeat: "For me, the ignoble experiment that Paris is attempting or is undergoing, proves nothing against the laws of the eternal progression of men and things, and, if I have gained any principles in my mind, good or bad, they are neither shattered nor changed by it. For a long time I have accepted patience as one accepts the sort of weather there is, the length of winter, old age, lack of success in all its forms." But Flaubert, thinking that he has detected in her public utterances a decisive change of front, privately urges her in a finely figurative passage of a letter which denounces modern republicanism, universal suffrage, compulsory education, and the press —Flaubert urges her to come out openly in renunciation of her faith in humanity and her popular progressivistic doctrines. I must quote a few lines of his attempt at seduction:

"Ah, dear good master, if you could only hate! That is what you lack, hate. In spite of your great Sphinx eyes, you have seen the world through a golden color. That comes from the sun in your heart; but so many shadows have risen that now you are not recognizing things any more. Come now! Cry out! Thunder! Take your great lyre and touch the brazen string: the monsters will flee.

Bedew us with drops of the blood of wounded Themis."

That summons roused the citadel, but not to surrender, not to betrayal. The eloquent daughter of the people caught up her great lyre—in the public *Réponse à un ami* of October 3, 1871. But her fingers passed lightly over the "brazen string" to pluck again with old power the resonant golden notes. Her reply, with its direct retorts to Flaubert, is not perhaps a very closely reasoned argument. In making the extract I have altered somewhat the order of the sentences:

"And what, you want me to stop loving? You want me to say that I have been mistaken all my life, that humanity is contemptible, hateful, that it always has been and always will be so? . . . What, then, do you want me to do, so as to isolate myself from my kind, from my compatriots, from the great family in whose bosom my own family is only one ear of corn in the terrestrial field? . . . But it is impossible, and your steady reason puts up with the most unreasonable of Utopias. In what Eden, in what fantastic Eldorado will you hide your family, your little group of friends, your intimate happiness, so that the lacerations of the social state and the disasters of the country shall not reach them? . . . In vain you are prudent and withdraw, your refuge will be invaded in its turn, and in perishing with human civilization you will be no greater a philosopher for not having loved, than those who threw themselves into the flood to save

some débris of humanity. . . . The people, you say! The people is yourself and myself. It would be useless to deny it. There are not two races. . . . No, no, people do not isolate themselves; the ties of blood are not broken; people do not curse or scorn their kind. Humanity is not a vain word. Our life is composed of love, and not to love is to cease to live."

This is, if you please, an effusion of sentiment, a chant of faith. In a world more and more given to judging trees by their fruits, we should err if we dismissed this sentiment, this faith, too, lightly. Flaubert may have been a better disputant; he had a talent for writing. George Sand may have chosen her side with a truer instinct; she had a genius for living. This faith of hers sustained well the shocks of many long years, and this sentiment made life sweet.