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The Pleasures of Literature

'What I want to hold before my mind as I write this book is an average day in a book-lover's life; so that it may be possible to indicate what particular favourite books of mine will probably be *his* favourites too.'

So writes Mr. Powys in the Introduction to this new work. Here he has given us a book which covers the whole range of reading—from Biblical writ to Thomas Hardy. He discovers hidden beauties in famous books which may have been unseen by us in our reading, like a man running his fingers through a tray of jewels to point to new splendours here and there that were overlooked.

This is a book for anyone who likes reading. And whatever his form of reading, this book cannot but prove helpful and entertaining.

Among the writers and subjects Mr. Powys discusses in his usual brilliant fashion are:

The Bible as Literature

St. Paul	Walt Whitman
Dostoievsky	Milton
Homer	Goethe
Wordsworth	Dickens
Rabelais	Thomas Hardy
Cervantes	Melville
Montaigne	Poe
Shakespeare	Dante
Proust	Nietzsche

Greek Tragedy

As he says: 'If the first Prometheus brought fire down from Heaven in a fennel-stalk, the last will take it back—*in a book.*'

JOHN COWPER POWYS

By the Same Author

A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE

MAIDEN CASTLE

MORWYN

THE PLEASURES OF LITERATURE

By

JOHN COWPER POWYS

CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD
London, Toronto, Melbourne
and Sydney

First Edition . *1938*
Second Edition . *1946*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
JARROLD AND SONS, LTD., NORWICH
F.1145

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INTRODUCTION

MAGICIANS have never been able to control their angels or their demons until they discovered their names. The origin of all literature lies here. A word is a magic incantation by which the self exercises power—first over itself and then over other selves and then, for all we know, over the powers of nature.

After commanding and creating life, the next thing that words have to do is to criticize it. Many attempts have been made to codify, to catalogue, to differentiate the various forms taken by the vast mass of literature now accessible through our recent progress in printing and publication. We hear of the literature of knowledge and the literature of power; we hear of the literature of interpretation and the literature of escape; but when the whole thing is reduced to its essence it is hard to see how Matthew Arnold's dictum that good literature of any kind must be a Criticism of Life can be improved on.

In a very definite sense even a book like Grimm's Fairy Tales is such a criticism, playing upon the fantastic mysteries of luck; while on the other horizon you get Hegel's Logic, playing upon the fantastic mysteries of reason. Not the airiest lyric, not the most humorous comedy, not the most thrilling tale of adventure but, on its own particular level and in its own peculiar vein, offers some commentary, creates some mood, stirs up some speculation, emphasizes some significant fact, or theory, or feeling, which in its special connection, and in its own tone, accent and measure, criticizes our life upon earth.

And when you come down to bed-rock in the matter, how impossible it is to separate in its entirety one kind of writing from another!

All literature is "literature of power." All literature is "literature of knowledge." All literature is "literature of escape." A single remark of Spinoza's, for instance, is power, knowledge and escape, in one sentence!

A human ego, confronted by the shifting facts, the ambiguous laws, the evasive feelings of the experience of being alive, collects data, invents theories, utters oracles, yields to inspiration, exposes illusions, creates myths, tells a story, suggests a reform, agitates for revolution, advocates reaction, confesses its weaknesses, exhibits its peculiarities, boasts of its insight, weeps over its ignorance, pours forth its learning, declares its loves, its hates, its admirations, its hopes, its despairs, suggests, asserts, denies, discriminates; and, through it all, cries out to its fellows, "Consider these facts of mine! Have regard to this theory of mine! Let me dominate you with my magic, let me liberate you with my imagination, let me seduce you with my subtle impressions, let me take you out of your dull self with my whimsies, my fancies, my humours!"

The expression "Belles Lettres" seems to me quite as fatuous as the expression "Art for Art's sake." There is much more "art" in some of the seductive systems of philosophy than in all the *Arabian Nights*, and much more Belles Lettres between the black covers of any Bible than in the daintiest bindings of the bibliophiles.

But one thing is certain. Though books, as Milton says, may be the embalming of mighty spirits, they are also the resurrection of rebellious, reactionary, fantastical and wicked spirits! In books dwell all the demons and all the angels of the human mind. It is for this reason that a book-shop—especially a second-hand book-shop—is an

arsenal of explosives, an armoury of revolutions, an opium-den of reactions.

And just because books are the repository of all the redemptions and damnations, all the sanities and insanities, of the divine anarchy of the soul, they are still, as they have always been, an object of suspicion to every kind of ruling authority.

In a second-hand book-shop are the horns of the altar where all the outlawed thoughts of humanity can take refuge! Here, like desperate bandits, hide all the reckless progeny of our wild, dark, self-lacerating hearts. A book-shop is a powder-magazine, a dynamite-shed, a drug-store of poisons, a bar of intoxicants, a den of opiates, an island of Sirens.

Of all the houses "of ill-fame" which a tyrant, a bureaucrat, a propagandist, a moralist, a champion of law and order, an advocate of keeping people ignorant for their own good, hurries past with averted eyes or threatens with his minions, a book-shop is the most flagrant.

Plato, that poetical enemy of poets, would certainly recommend his philosopher-kings to abolish second-hand book-shops. A second-hand book-shop can blow sky-high the machinations of centuries of first-hand politicians. It sets the prophet against the priest, the prisoner against society, the has-nothing against the has-all, the individual against the universe! It is as heavily charged with the sweet mischiefs of sex as the privy-walls of a railway-station, or the imagination of St. Anthony.

Here are the poisons to kill, the drugs to soothe, the fire-water to madden, the ichor to inflame, the nectar to imparadise! The infinite pathos of all the generations lies here, their beatings against the wall, their desperate escapes, their triumphant reconciliations. In the Beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God—and

the Devil stole the Word out of the cradle. The everlasting contrariety, whereby creation is stirred into movement, seethes and ferments in books, in *all* books; and from the cold glaciers of books plunge down the death-avalanches of ultimate negation that whirl us into the gulf.

It is true that in certain moods we turn away in weariness and disgust—even as Solomon did—from all the books under the sun, finding in them nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. When we are in a mood like this the weight of so much printed matter, piled up ceiling-high in a second-hand shop, strikes us as Odysseus was struck by the hollow gibbering of the thin wraiths in Hades, as something almost unbearable, as something from which it is a comfort to escape.

And so we escape from it into the architectural spaces of the public library of our town, where matriarchy prevails, and where the mad reasonings of the sons of men are kept in complete control by the aid of catalogues and dusters.

But after all, one has only to think of those old, great, heroic book-worms of the early times, with their voracious, insatiable maws for everything written, only to think of Rabelais for instance, who certainly would have been caught invading those forbidden shelves, to be led back to our second-hand book-shop.

But alas! all is not as it should be even here, for the most amiable of shopmen is often inclined to look askance at a "browser" who with no more than a dime in his pocket is for ransacking all the spoils of Byzantium. For the truth must out. In the world of books, as in the world of other precious and lovely delights, poverty is a bitter handicap. Not only does it take from us the leisure, and often the heart to read, but it takes from us

—unless we have incredible tenacity of purpose—the power of accumulating more than a shelf or two of our favourite books.

And it can never be *quite* the same to read a great author in a library-book, as in one bought and paid for out of one's own pocket. Fiction, I think, *is* a little different in this respect. Most book-lovers, I fancy, wouldn't object to reading *The Possessed*, or *Cousine Bette*, or *War and Peace*, or *Jude the Obscure* in a library-edition; but to read *Urn Burial*, or *Thus spake Zarathustra*, or *Leaves of Grass*, or the *Oxford Book of Ballads*, or Rabelais himself, in a book with a public stamp on it, would give them the feeling that they were entertaining the Muse at a social tea, rather than laying the lovely immortal, as Burns would put it, between them "and the wa'."

What I would like to do in these pages is just this very thing. I would like to play pander between many sensitive and erotic souls and these immortal, invisible, and evasive odalisques.

And what I want to concentrate upon in this work—and here and now I kiss upon both cheeks whoever it may be that picks up *this* book from one of those pavement-counters to which all literary flesh must come—is not so much the general objective value of any particular volume as being of supreme influence in the making of human history or of capital importance in the technique of human art, as the emotional, realistic, and entirely personal effect it may have upon our individual nerves, upon our secret pleasures and pains, upon our furtive psychological reactions, upon our physical sensitivities, upon the hidden vices in us, as well as upon our attitude to those "fallings from us, vanishings, blank misgivings of a creature, moving about in worlds not realized," which startle us all at certain moments of our lives.

A book about books must obviously be addressed to people who love reading; and the question naturally crosses one's mind as to how big a percentage among us can be called lovers of reading. Would *one*, in every family, be too large a guess?

Well! granting *one to a family* to be a fair though a rough average, what I want to hold before my mind as I write this book is an average day in such a book-lover's life; so that it may be possible to indicate what particular favourite books of mine will probably be *his* favourites too, and how our imagination, our endurance, our insight, our pity, our genius for escape, can thereby be artfully increased, while our miseries are in some measure abated. I would like to prove myself such a master-abstractor of the quintessential relationships between books and reality that these same isolated persons may see that I know what the crises in life are likely to be, when we cry to the spirit of Dostoievsky, or Dante, or Homer, or Shakespeare, or Walt Whitman for spiritual insight and planetary cunning! I would like to summon up the particular kinds of psychological and emotional experiences—some gross, some spiritual, some touched by love, some touched by hate, some life-destroying, some life-giving, but all of a symbolic character—to which the reading of certain great books can suggest a clue, and over which they can give us a certain measure of imaginative control.

What I would like to do would be to bring these books, however ancient and primitive, into direct touch with the most realistic shocks of life and all its worst levels of monotony.

I would like—as in the mingling of chemicals in a laboratory—to note what would happen were the spirit of Gogol brought into contact with one kind of crisis, of Goethe with another, of Rabelais with another, of

Homer with another, and then of Proust, let us say, with yet another!

Of course the essence of my own experiences must inevitably saturate a book like this. Only so can it get pungency and poignancy. But by using my imagination I can well visualize how this same average book-lover—one from every family—could get grist for his mill out of the *Odyssey*, out of the *Inferno*, out of the *Mabinogion*, just as well as out of Hardy, or Theodore Dreiser, or Thomas Mann.

If such a thing were possible I would like to suggest the most stimulating and sustaining mental food for each epoch, in natural succession, of all the normal "Seven Ages" of man; but neither shall I feel quite satisfied if I do not dig a little deeper than I have ever done before into the life-springs of my own favourite writers. Our sophisticated epicures of literary flavours are forever comparing one nuance of taste with another, testing them with their aesthetic proboscis-tongues like humming-bird moths.

This method has its place, but it is not mine. I cannot rest till I have connected the most intimate peculiarities of a writer's style with the very centre of his soul's circumference and the widest parabola of its circling flight.

I doubt whether many readers among us realize how the profoundest motions of our minds are affected by particular words and by words in particular combinations. We all make secret mental gestures whose value is mysteriously enhanced when we give them names and think of them in connection with the long history of man's endurance of life.

And this, I think, is the reason why the "logoi" of those primitive Soothsayers, who were half-poets and half-prophets, are psychologically more valuable to us

than the elaborate systems of technical philosophy that seek to round off what refuses to be rounded off, and to eliminate contradiction and paradox from what seems made up of these "knots of contrariety."

Books are more than a second Nature. They are an under-Nature and an over-Nature. They are Nature in her appalling universality, strained through the divine-diabolic sieves of every type of human imagination.

Books are the ideas of things before things begin. Books create worlds and destroy worlds. Books are the mirrors of light and the mirrors of darkness in which the universe sees its own face.

People who say, "I can get on without books; I live by experience; my ideas are my own," *are themselves* no more than very simple and very well-worn books, letting the wind turn their pages; pages that have been turned millions of times before!

The conceit of the most drugged and dazed of doddering book-worms is nearer the Eternal Spirit that builds the world than the mock-modesty of these book-despisers.

Neither the one nor the other can escape the impact of the visible world. Who of the children of men *can* escape it? But the book-lovers possess two worlds. They are the bi-linguists of human destiny. They have to live; but they deal, pedantically enough very often but still they deal, with the ideas *from* which and *towards* which all life moves. Of course literature is art; but it is much more than art! That is where it is greater than music or painting or sculpture. Dancing alone precedes it. But dancing, with its accompanying gestures, is a kind of literature. As De Casseres well says, the essence of all writing, even the transcription of the gravest knowledge, is exhibitionism.

One writer exhibits himself in statistics, another in

mathematics, another in politics, another in ethics, another in some curious history of courtesans. The primal art-urge lies behind the baldest scientific statement, as it lies behind Homer and Shakespeare.

We catch the ear of another and hold it, by some trick, by some device, by some measure of charm, of clarity, of plausibility, of emphasis, of personal persuasion, whether what we want to convey to this other is our vision of a tiny segment of reality, or our vision of what the whole of reality *ought* to be.

In the beginning was dancing; and dancing implied everything: then came speech, then came song, and then the story. The magic dance included incantation and invocation. It was the cosmic goat-song to life-death and to death-life; and the nearer literature approaches to the dance, the more hypnotic is its effect.

All literature reeks of magic. Religion came soon after, and all literature smells of incense. The positive must appear before the negative. The oracle must be uttered before it can be gainsaid. Literature must taste first of holy smoke: afterwards it may smell as pungently as you please of all your unholy disinfectants!

What a history of human excesses a second-hand book-shop is! As you "browse" there—personally I can't abide that word, for to my mind book-lovers are more like hawks and vultures than sheep, but of course if its use encourages poor devils to glance through books that they have no hope of buying, long may the word remain!—you seem to grow aware what a miracle it was when second-hand book-shops were first invented. Women prefer libraries, free or otherwise, but it too often happens that the books an ordinary man wants are on the "forbidden shelves." But there is no censorship in a second-hand book-shop. Every good bookseller is a multiple--

personality, containing all the extremes of human feeling. He is an ascetic hermit, he is an erotic immoralist, he is a Papist, he is a Quaker, he is a communist, he is an anarchist, he is a savage iconoclast, he is a passionate worshipper of idols.

I believe from any carefully made census of the patrons of second-hand book-shops, and especially of those boxes on the pavement outside, it would be proved that by far the majority of visitors to these places are men, and not only men but poor men.

Women who are not rich, and a great many who are and who ought to go to the book-shops instead, make wonderful use of libraries! Nothing they bring home is more precious to them than these well-worn "containers" of life, and of the opium to forget life.

And yet you hear certain conceited virtuosos of literature sneering and scoffing, and making no bones about holding dirt-cheap the favourite story-tellers of women. God bless my soul! When do we find these contemptuous gentlemen lost to the world in the reading of Homer in his Greek, or even of the bawdy Petronius in his Latin?

Not at all! We find them amusing themselves with bagatelles compared with which——

But turning from bibliophiles to "browsers," you have only to watch the faces of the men who hover round those pavement-counters of books to catch a strange light upon the psychology of readers. Heads of priests, heads of prophets, heads of every kind of mystic, heads of every type of human eccentricity, perversity, fantasy, reaction and revolt, are gathered there; and yet this is only one side of the shield! In how many hidden chambers all over the world, in how many railway-carriages, subways, buses, cabins at sea, huts in the desert,

hospital-wards, prisons, mad-houses, pot-houses, cloisters, brothels, would be found, if some Martian Sociologist turned a super-X-ray upon this troubled earth, human faces looking up, dazed, bemused, entranced, imparadised, from the lethean comfort of the devil knows what queer fragment of print!

It seems as if there must be darkness and light, evil and good, in any great human work; yes, and clarity and obscurity too. Sometimes I am tempted to think that a supreme work of fiction cannot exist without an element of appalling *obscenity*. Even the most idealistic of great books often dips deep down into the mud, deep down into that abysmal silt at the bottom of the ocean without which reality would not be reality.

The over-sweetness of pious optimism comes at last to smack of death, till the bitter antidote of desperate pessimism galvanizes it back into life.

The "yea" of the white magician cloys the palate, till the "nay" of the black magician bites that sweet tongue. Nevertheless, for all their tragedy and for all their terrible reality, there rises from these books a mood, an atmosphere, an after-taste—but this is a mystery not lightly to be spoken of—that reveals something impossible to be put into words, something too tenuous to be called hope, and yet something utterly different from despair.

The great books are the books that create a world, a world to which, with its atmosphere, its situations, its characters, you can compare the haphazard chances and casual impressions of real life as they cross your path.

Such is the world of Dostoievsky, of Balzac, of Henry James, of Dickens, of Proust, of Theodore Dreiser. Life, as Goethe says, is always fumbling towards the very thing that the great artists create.

The highest honour you can do to a fragment of reality

is to call it Biblical, or Homeric, or Dantesque, or Shakespearean, or Dickensian, or Rabelaisian. The tough-minded or hard-boiled individual who despises books, but enjoys what he calls "life," carries his experience on the horn of a rhinoceros, on the hump of a camel, between the teeth of a shark! The "Something that infects the world" doesn't trouble him, the "Something far more deeply interfused" doesn't touch him. He is a slave of the transitory. The recurrent Symbols of the Permanent in nature and human nature, of which books are the everlasting mirrors, are to a man like this of less importance than the "ads" in his newspaper.

A person can be "successful" without books, he can grow rich without books, he can tyrannize over his fellows without books, but he cannot "see God," he cannot live in a present that is charged with the past and pregnant of the future without a knowledge of the Diary of our race.

A man may tell you he can think for himself, and thus has no need for books; but you have not to be long in his company without discovering that these native reactions, these original thoughts, this mother-wit of which he is so proud, are nothing but the tags and commonplaces of old folk-shrewdness dropped from ancient books into the crowded market-places of long ago.

The gathered wisdom of the old times was handed down in custom, in tradition, in ritual, in the sayings and proverbs and oracles of a still remoter past, but all this was, as it were, a mass of books, only of unwritten books; so that *even then* the originator, the prophet, the magician drew his inspiration from what had gone before. All progress in ideas is spiral, forever returning upon itself.

Every revolution is a reaction, every leap-forward a renaissance, every new thought a returning to a spring that has been choked up. Second-hand book-shops are

the oases where these old fountains of living water can still flow. Each age has its originators; but the prophets of each age petrify into the priests of the next, and the creators of each age wither into the scholars of the next.

It is all in books; only it is necessary to scrape away the rubble of scholarship and release the living stream that has flowed down the ages since the beginning.

The greatest miracle of evolution is man's moral sense, his pity, his justice, his gentleness—but these are the very things that we touch in rumours and legends of a remote paradisic past.

The Millennium is a reversion to the Golden Age. The Kingdom of Christ is a renewal of the Reign of Saturn. And in books alone is this occult continuity between our Lost Eden and our New Jerusalem kept unbroken through the generations.

No one thoroughly enjoys what does not satisfy his spirit, what does not release his imagination, what does not heighten his life. There is a time for drunkenness in this region, a time for drugs, and a time for the unspeakable relief of opium.

But for a more lasting pleasure, for a pleasure that can mitigate our labours and transform our monotonies, we need books that support, deepen, and thicken-out our profoundest life-illusion.

All the same it is nonsense to think that we can appropriate to our especial purpose *all* great books. Among books, as among people and events, our character is our fate. We can extend the boundaries of ourselves, we can enrich our native roots; but it is waste of time to struggle to enjoy what we are not destined to enjoy!

Thus the choice of books becomes, like the choice of a mate, or of a life-friend, a series of cross-roads of appalling significance. All readers with any consciousness of their

mental growth will recall the actual spot, the actual physical surroundings, where they first read the books that have affected them the most.

Youth is obviously the time for bold and drastic experiments. In middle-life we find ourselves narrowing our margins, straightening our boundaries, digging in and banking up. The lively advocates of modernity are liable to forget that the essentials of life upon earth remain the same, and our common human nature remains the same, below all the external changes; and they forget too that each of these old works is the culminating creation of many centuries and has survived the sifting and winnowing of many generations, whereas, on the face of it, it is unlikely that our own brief life-time should witness the emergence of *many* books of so supreme a value to the human spirit. Justice, tolerance, and pity are, it is true, a little more prevalent than they were, for in these things lies the only real progress, the only real path of Evolution; but the inspiration of these things is to be found in the most ancient books equally with the most modern, for the spirit that works in man drove him upon this difficult way from the beginning. This is still, and ever will be, the "over-soul" in all books; for in books, as in the rising waters of a great tidal-wave that mounts higher and higher as it rolls down the centuries, the burden from the beginning until this hour has been the same—by Justice, by Tolerance, and by Pity is the real Evolution known!

Yes, all constituted authorities from the dawn of literature have been suspicious of books, for it is in books that the unconquerable spirit of man moves forward into new Justice and new Tolerance, moves backward into old Justice and old Tolerance, breaking up the fatal hypnosis of the prejudices of the day. The tables of the old law, written on stone, are forever being broken to make room

for the tables of the new law, written on flesh and blood; but these also in their turn are erased, as the fire and the water of the Spirit work upon them.

And yet there is no stone fragment, there is no human hieroglyph without secrets to which the heart of man must forever be returning, lest in its struggle towards new points in the circumference it loses touch with the centre. The present is not enough; and the present and the future together are not enough. The past also hath its absolute; for the timeless underlies at every point the flowing of the mystery of time.

Sometimes in our testy moods we are tempted to draw back in disgust from the torrent of printed matter that rushes past us to-day, but this is a morbid feeling.

Our culture must be a poor thing if it undermines our philosophical tolerance and turns our sympathetic understanding into pharisaic contempt. A real book-lover looks with infinite indulgence upon the simplest person's choice of books. He has the wit to know that this flood of second-rate invention upon which so many feed their fancy and by which so many endure the monotony of their lives is something quite different from what it seems to the person who just glances at it as he passes by. He has the wit to know that every page of these second-rate books as it impresses the mind of the living reader is transmuted by the alchemy of the imagination into something beyond the literal meaning of the words. All readers are imaginative readers. They wouldn't be readers at all otherwise. And the sneerers at popular books must remember how it is with children; how children turn the most banal and ridiculous and vulgar words into eldorados of mysterious delight.

Goethe says that good literature lifts you up to its own level while bad literature develops your faults. This may

be true enough as long as you remember that "good" and "bad" are relative terms. Every reader has his own "good" and his own "bad" in the world of books, and if you are more sophisticated than I am, my "good" in literature, that which lifts me up and refines me, may very easily be your "bad" and carry with it loads of fertilizing manure for your most unpleasant faults.

Fanatics of the modern school love to point out that it is use and wont and reverent piety and liturgical repetition that give half their glamour to the old writers; but Croce's admirable doctrine that every creation *needs* its completion by the minds of the generations before it can be really mature, is the answer to this disparagement.

The great passages in Homer and the Bible and Shakespeare and Dante and Rabelais and Cervantes and Goethe and Dostoievsky are actually *greater*—i.e. more full of spiritual and imaginative power to stir us—by reason of the number of human souls who have been moved by them, and whose own experiences have added something to them as they were carried down the stream.

There are as many varieties of book-readers as there are diversities of human character; and in almost all of them *some* doubtful impulses play a part. It is better not to be too nice or meticulous with regard to our motives in reading. Snobbishness of some sort is almost sure to be present; and as in the composing, so in the enjoying of books, the desire to assert ourselves, to feel superior, to gratify our pride, is bound to enter. If there is the snobbishness of forcing ourselves to read "high-brow" books, there is also the snobbishness of being so curiously and exquisitely sophisticated that we prefer "low-brow" books.

It is just as possible for a scholar to read the greatest classics in a frivolous and trifling manner, fussing over

unessentials, as it is for an ignorant person to skip everything but the excitement of an engrossing plot. The urge to read is like charity. It covers a multitude of sins.

And all reading—even from the lowest motives—brings us in touch with the vast flowing tide of humanity's *second thoughts* upon its fate under the sun.

That is the whole thing. Below the formless chaos of chance and accident and blind occasion, below the senseless bludgeonings, the meaningless jolts, the brutal shocks, the infinite disgusts, the unspeakable loathings, below the intolerable monotonies and the barren wastelands, flows ever, large and free and deathless, refusing none, welcoming all, the boundless ocean of books!

Here are our human purposes fulfilled, our human efforts grandly, heroically, gloriously defeated. Here, blending, mingling, shifting, rising and sinking, like waves and ripples of one huge sea, all philosophies, all redemptions, all hopes against hope, that our race has ever had roll forward together, bearing *the thoughts of man* into the unknown cosmic future. The poorest, the grossest, the shallowest, the most melodramatic of books carry with them *something*, some tincture, some essence, some suggestion, of the wisdom of the ages that has melted into this vast flood.

Books are man's rational protest against the irrational, man's pitiful protest against the implacable, man's ideal against the world's real, man's word against the cosmic dumbness, man's life against the planetary death, man's revelation of the God within him, man's repartee to the God without him. Whoever touches a book touches not only "a man" but Man. Man is the animal who weeps and laughs—*and writes.* If the first Prometheus brought fire from heaven in a fennel-stalk, the last will take it back—*in a book.*

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

THE publication by Simon and Schuster in New York and by Heinemann in London of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Living Literature*, with Ernest Sutherland Bates as the Editor, has been a final proof—considering the huge response this edition has found on both sides of the Atlantic—of the truth of Matthew Arnold's words about the eternal value to humanity of what he called *Hebraism*.

The great critic's declaration that the two fountain-heads of all that is most precious in our Western civilization are the genius of the Hebrews and the genius of the Greeks, was one of those simple sayings that dive to the very bottom of the tossing and wavering ocean of ethnological values.

But it was Matthew Arnold who went on to add the more questionable remark that, since three-fourths of human life are Conduct, and since the Hebrew Scriptures deal pre-eminently with Conduct, their influence, at any rate on the English-speaking portion of our Western civilization, is three times as important as the influence of the Greeks.

This latter remark of Matthew Arnold's is, of course, calculated to arouse the most angry controversy; it being exactly the sort of airy generalization that stings our Western temperament as if with the flick of a whip; but the very turmoil it excites in us all—some of us stirred to one reaction, some of us to another—is proof that our British Socrates, whether we agree with him or not, touched the quick of one of the most jumpy of our human nerves.

It appears that few of the Reformed Dutch, or the Lutheran Germans either, went to the lengths of Bible-worship to which our English and American Puritans went; nor can it, I think, be disputed that of all the Western literatures it is our own that has been most deeply influenced by the Bible.

But not only in conduct! For although both our English and our American ancestors *were* affected in that practical sense—and their Bible-inspired conduct was by no means always charitable or desirable—an equally powerful influence was exerted over their emotions, over their imagination, over their most secret feelings.

Mr. Bates's *Bible as Literature* has certainly appeared at the right moment in our English-speaking countries; for I am old enough to have seen in the last half-century a tremendous change in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. I cannot tell whether the same change has passed over the habits of the less orthodox Hebrews themselves, but certainly when I was a child all my Gentile elders were saturated with Bible-reading; and their imagination as well as their conduct, both for good and evil, showed Biblical influence at every turn.

But now, after fifty years, it is not so any more. Neither in England nor in America do people read the Bible as they used to do. In fact, I would go further than that, and say that apart from educational compulsion, the professional studies of ministers and school-teachers, and the devotion of a few religious eccentrics and men of letters, it is unusual for a young modern person to read the Bible at all. Think of the working-men you know; do any of *them* read the Bible? Think of the doctors, lawyers, manufacturers, and gentlemen of leisure you know; do any of *them* read the Bible? When I was a child, from almshouse pensioners to admirals of the fleet, from bargemen and

engine-drivers to great merchants of the City, all elderly people read the Bible.

When I was young it was only the most extreme of free-thinkers who dared to express disbelief in this book; whereas to-day some of the most sensitive and spiritual-minded among my friends actually detest it, and do so on moral, aesthetic, and psychological grounds, quite apart from questions of science and philosophy!

The African population of the United States still, I fancy, reads the Bible; but the great Middle-West, which is the part of the country I know best and the part of the country least affected by European influence, has completely given up the custom; and I confess, though I so obstinately indulge in the habit myself, I would take a malicious pleasure in assuring Matthew Arnold that though the great American Middle-West no longer reads the Bible, no region in the world, in all the essential human charities, has a more *naturally Christian soul.*

But though the post-war generation may not read the Bible as its ancestors did, none of us can escape its influence. The thing has gone too deep. Humanity cannot saturate itself for centuries with a book like the Old Testament, and throw off the spell in a couple of generations. Writers of our race, on both sides of the water, especially the more prophetic ones, have always used the Scriptures to noble account; and now with this new tendency, encouraged by Mr. Bates's excellent version, to treat these books in a new, fresh, and secular manner, it seems likely enough that this underlying influence inherited from our fathers may take on a new and living meaning.

Undoubtedly such a revival of interest in the Bible cannot restore all the good that our ancestors got out of it. And let us hope it will not restore the evil! But we have to pay for our enjoyment of it in this new, fresh,

secular spirit by the loss of something that, both for good and evil, can never return.

I am thinking of those who come back to it after a real lapse of the habit. There are, of course, many of my own generation who, like their fathers in the time of Matthew Arnold, have gone on reading the book, though with minds free of the old gloomy and illiberal temper, and such have lost nothing. But when there *has* been this break in the atmospheric continuity those who return to it are apt to find that just in proportion as they have got rid of the old, evil, Puritan sanctimoniousness and sinister gloom, so also they have lost and can never quite get back that mysterious continuity of emotional atmosphere which, like those "happy pieties" spoken of by Keats, carries with it such magical and indefinable power.

And it is to the Puritans that we owe, both in Great Britain and America, this powerful Biblical tradition, from which, as I have hinted, so many individual free spirits from the time of Wycliffe down to the time of William Blake have drawn human inspiration.

For though plenty of evangelical gospel-men, both within and without the Church, have "preached Christ and Him Crucified," it has been on the strength of the less amiable, less peaceable, less mystical, but not less poetical Old Testament that so many men of the old breed on both sides of the Atlantic have sustained in perils of land and in perils of water, in the face of tyrants and in the teeth of penury and disaster, their indomitable endurance.

And it is from the stern spirits of these stout soldiers of fortune that a protest must always rise when our mystical interpreters would fain expurgate, prune, soften, and allegorize away, for the sake of "purer" conceptions, the human wisdom, the human sensuality, the human anger, the human justice, the human magnanimity, the human

triumph, of this old shameless Literature of the Old Testament.

What both the Sacerdotal and the Evangelical Churches are apt to forget, in their apologies for the Christian hope, is the innumerable company—for if the magical Christ is the God of youth, Jehovah is the God of old age—of old shepherds, old herdsmen, old hedgers and ditchers, old stone-masons, old carpenters, old sailors, old soldiers, old miners, old pioneers, old fishermen, together with their old wives, who have managed to dispense with all such airy expectations, whether Christian or otherwise, in the stoical consciousness of an "Eternal, not themselves, who makes for Righteousness," but whose ways, alas, are not their ways nor His thoughts their thoughts!

But whether forgotten or not by the livelier and more sociable children of the Mystery, it is these isolated and taciturn Stoics of the Scriptures who alone, save for a few old-fashioned Miltonic scholars, do real justice to the Old Testament. These are they who take life for that troubled and brief thing that the Wisdom of the Lord declares it to be.

> Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. . . . For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?

The Gospels are radiant with youthful joy and with fresh hope; and although Jesus frequently threatens His Father's enemies with "wailing and gnashing of teeth," the general feeling of the New Testament, though it is

too serious to be called buoyant, is certainly the opposite of pessimistic.

The Old Testament has a beautiful and poetic light shining from it, but it is the light of a sunset that is streaked with human blood; whereas the light that shines from the New Testament is the light of the dawn; and though it also is streaked with blood, it is the blood of a God, not the blood of men. The whole atmosphere of the New Testament is completely different from that of the Old, and our English translators have observed this difference, giving to the English words a correspondent tone, so that in comparison with the Old the style of the New resembles a picture in water-colours as compared with one in oils.

In spite of a few desperate ejaculations, the general drift of the Old Testament is against any life after death.

> Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?

And save for a certain vein in the Prophet Ezekiel which must have influenced William Blake, and an apocalyptic tone in Daniel that must have influenced the author of the Book of Revelation, the Old Testament is singularly free from what we usually call mysticism.

To speak plainly, the Old Testament is anything but a spiritual book; but on the other hand, it is a profoundly religious one, and although the Hebraic attitude to the Creator, whether under His name Elohim, or El Shaddai, or Yahweh, or the Lord of Hosts, is the propitiation of a jealous, revengeful and cruel deity; yet so passionately emotional towards the Unseen, so furiously faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, was the Hebrew spirit, that by the sheer intensity of its poetic imagination it transformed this

tribal Demiurge, first into the Creator of heaven and earth, and then into the High and Holy One who inhabiteth Eternity, in other words into the Nameless Tao or indefinable Absolute.

Spinoza's sublime conception of God—though he was excommunicated for holding it—was really implicit in the Old Testament from the start; not philosophically implicit, for the ancient Hebrews and the modern English resemble each other in their suspicion of philosophy, but emotionally, dramatically, and imaginatively so.

As one reads the story of Jacob in the first book of the Bible, and is forced against one's will to respect, and more than respect, this tenacious thief of blessings, one feels that, as he gathered together one of his heaps of desert stones under those far-off stars, he would not have been *emotionally* staggered or surprised, though he would have certainly been puzzled, had one of his "angels of the Lord," anticipating history, instructed him in the Philosophy of Spinoza.

But what we discover in reading King James's Bible, when once, by the help of our modern English Commentary, edited by Dr. Peake, and the *Bible as Literature*, edited by Mr. Bates, we use the book as we use *Homer*, is the surprising fact that instead of finding our religious awe in the presence of life undermined—that awe which Goethe said was the highest privilege of man—we find it intensified a hundredfold!

Liberated in this manner from that sinister, gloomy, morbid and wicked-pious atmosphere which the hypocrisy of human frailty has thrown over this work, we get a new and fresh inspiration; an inspiration not only from its literary beauty but from its real religious significance. One comes to feel as one gets older that intellectual persons make too much of the philosophic distinctions at

which they arrive with so much pains, whereas the value of the literary or poetic approach is that we realize with more and more clearness that, in this matter of reverence for the mystery of life, "feeling is all in all," while the precise philosophic groove through which this feeling expresses itself is of relatively small importance.

Thus our response to the Bible as poetry rather than as doctrine does not imply less emotional and imaginative feeling but more; because it is by great literature rather than by great doctrine that we save our souls alive.

For Catholics the Miracle of the Mass is greater than all theological doctrine *about* the Mass; and in the same way for us, as devoted Lollards, the poetry of the Bible is beyond all doctrines *about* the Bible.

And in truth the Bible, as we enjoy it to-day in this astounding Translation, in which all that is deepest in the Hebrew nature mingles with all that is deepest in our Anglo-Celtic nature, is not a book for one, but a book for all. Never was such a melting-pot of all those beautiful, natural, inevitable *contradictions* with which, from its Missing-Link ancestors down to this day, humanity has contradicted itself!

Whatever this dubious entity Truth is *not*, we know one thing that it certainly *is*, namely a monstrous container of insoluble contradictions.

And what proves the Bible to be a greater book than any other in the world except Homer and Shakespeare is the huge gamut of contradictory moods that mount up in its cresting tide.

In King James's Authorized Version we have a beautiful proof of the power of both the Hebrew race and the Anglo-Celtic race to "contain," as Walt Whitman said he himself did, "multitudes"! In fact, in this unique book can be found the *literary equivalent* to that power of adapt-

ing themselves to so many various *climates* which is the mark of both your wandering Jew and your wandering Englishman.

It seems incredible that the same blending of old Hebrew and old British scholarship could pass from narration as perfect as that when Joseph in Egypt first sees Benjamin among their brothers—

> And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son.
>
> And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

—pass, I say, from narration like that to poetry like this:

> O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. . . .
>
> Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

No! the power of the Bible does not lie in its doctrine, does not lie in its spirituality, does not even lie in its righteousness. It lies in its supreme emotional contradictions, each carried to its uttermost extreme, and each representing, finally and for all time, some unchanging aspect of human life upon earth.

What an individual needs so as to deepen the poetry of

its life, what a race needs so as to deepen the poetry of its life, are various ritualistic and traditional *sets of words* in its own tongue, but in a heightened and dignified example of its own tongue, like some noble old piece of domestic furniture, a thousand years old, smooth with the touches of generations.

Up-to-date editions of the Bible may be examples of lively cleverness and sincere piety. But what I personally feel about them is that they are simply *not the Bible.* They have their place. They belong to the category of pious experiments and revivalistic movements; whereas the Bible, our Authorized Jewish-British Classic, is part of our normal daily life. We taste it with our bread. We drink it with our beer. We smoke it—as John Milton used to do—with our tobacco. To the tune of its words we are born and die. To the tune of its homely grossness we enjoy the pleasures of bed and board. It blesses the spade with which our garden is dug, the plough that ploughs our fields, the keel of the boat from which our fish are caught.

Nor is there a natural and normal sin—among those which we all of us commit every day—that cannot be sinned, and punished, and repented of, to the accompaniment of these ancient words!

The Bible is to us what Homer was to the Greeks. Its words have become more than words. They have become a magic touch that throws across the passing details of each individual life the undying beauty of the life of humanity. And into the actual words themselves of the Authorized Version the life of humanity has now passed; so that when we hear the Revised Version translate that clue-word of the Secret of Jesus—the word *agapē*—as "love" in place of the familiar "charity" we get an uncomfortable shock. Nor does "love" mean the same thing. Technically it may. Actually it *does not!*

The Bible, as we read it now in the Authorized Version, has for its main theme the ways of man to the Eternal and the ways of the Eternal to man. Man's ways to man and man's feeling for Nature are the warp and the woof between which this dominant thread moves. It is as illogical to say that there is no God because Jehovah acts in an arbitrary and immoral manner as to say that there is no civilization because man used to dress in skins and fight with weapons of flint.

Jehovah was the name that the old Hebrews applied to the Nameless Power behind our astronomical universe; and when the Hebrews describe their Jehovah as at once infinitely merciful and infinitely cruel I cannot for my own part see that in this He differs very much from the Ultimate Mystery before whom we must all bow.

Too well do we know that the laws of the Nameless for human life upon earth are like Its laws for the lives of beasts and birds and reptiles and fishes—dark and strange and utterly inscrutable! We must needs trust in Him, for He is all there is. He is life. He is death. He is pleasure. He is pain. He is the whole; and He is beyond the whole. He is the Great Tao of whom to say nothing is the best wisdom. He is Being. He is Not-Being. He is Matter and He is Mind. He is the One and He is the Many. We mortal creatures of a day, conceived in darkness and acquainted with tribulation, born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, who are we to do more than dodge His thunder and enjoy His sunshine, until our dust returns to the earth it was, and our spirit unto Him who gave it?

And the strange thing about the Old Testament is that it is so easy, I might say so *inevitable*, to feel in this tribal God of Israel, this Lord of Hosts, this Yahweh, this Jehovah, this Elohim, the deeper, more mysterious

presence of the nameless Sustainer and Absorber of all things.

This is the gist of the whole business; this is the sum and meaning of all. We feel awe in the Presence of *that* which we cannot name, of *that* which, judging by the cruelty and indifference of Nature, seems to us—as It did to Job—no more good than It is evil; and yet with this very awe, and in proportion as we experience this awe, there rises in us the feeling that what we have come to call *goodness* is the one thing alone that in the last resort really matters.

That is the point. "Feeling is all in all. The name is sound and smoke, obscuring Heaven's clear glow." Names are nothing and everything. They are nothing, because their sounded syllables are but breath and air and custom. They are everything, because behind this breath, behind this custom, is the *feeling of awe*, the awe that points to simple goodness as the needle points to the north! Our ship goes down; we are gathered to our fathers; but "the Word of the Lord"—that is to say the Goodness that survives us—"endureth from generation to generation."

The Nameless Power that excites this awe seems Itself, judging by the ways of Its universe, to be in no whit less wayward than Yahweh or Elohim, but the awe It excites in us is an atmosphere, say what you will, that suits the good better than it suits the evil.

What we call "morality" changes with epoch and place. It is a thing of custom and convention, and is often both cowardly and wicked; but the spirit of goodness is the same "yesterday, to-day, and forever."

And it is this awe excited by the Nameless, that is to say by what the prophets of Israel called "God," that the merciful man—in spite of the ways of Nature—feels to

be *with* him, while the unmerciful man feels it to be *against* him.

The Old Testament is the inspiration of the race which, of all races, has felt the *awe of the Nameless* most powerfully; and when some unsophisticated "Uncle Tom" or some simple-minded John Bunyan broods over this book, it doesn't matter how "anthropomorphic," as we call it, his own image of the Nameless is, or how immoral the ways of Jehovah were. What matters is that he feels the "awe of God" and the "presence of God" and comforts and sustains his soul amid the flow of the things that pass away by the feeling of being in touch—and what right have we to call such a feeling an illusion?—with That which was, and is, and is to come.

The Old Testament gives us no assurance about life after death, no commands to be spiritual or chaste. It conveys to us no delicate scruples about lying and fighting and eating and drinking and being revenged on our enemies. It suggests no ascetic suspicion that the accumulation of riches is wrong, no implication that the pleasures of sex are unlawful.

Jacob, or Israel, the father of the Twelve Tribes, is fully as crafty and tricky as the Homeric Odysseus, and bargains and argues and pleads with his jealous God, just as Odysseus does with Athene.

Wherein then, it may be asked, lies the greatness of this Patriarch's character? Wherein, for all the patient and humble and much-enduring men and women who have learnt by heart this tale "of our Father Jacob," is to be found the secret of the attraction that holds them? Does it not lie, as in all exciting stories from the beginning, in the protagonist's intense *awareness of his destiny*, his intense self-consciousness in everything he does, the unconquerable tenacity of his purpose? Isn't the whole secret of the

Old Testament's attraction for egoists like ourselves to be found in that remark of Goethe's, "Earnestness alone makes life eternity"? The crafty, amorous, patient, unswerving, unwarlike Jacob takes his life with a gravity, with an awareness, with a sense of responsibility that is overwhelming, that is sublime, that is something before which all obstacles melt, as if by a slow, resistless magic!

Think of what the man must have felt when he awoke that morning after that tricky marriage—"*and behold it was Leah*"! But to serve another seven years for the woman he loved was as inevitable to his incorrigible tenacity as it was to steal Esau's birthright. Every sunrise that smote red into his tent found him, metaphorically speaking, wrestling with his angel, found him with his obstinate head on some sacred stone.

"How mysterious, how memorable," he is always thinking, "is this godlike spot, this godlike dawn, this godlike hour!" And with his "ladder" always ascending from time and space into the Nameless, Jacob naturally, inevitably, becomes Israel, the Father of multitudes!

The most stirring and dramatic part of the four books that follow this patriarchal Genesis, namely Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which are by far the least inspiring and the least interesting books in the whole Bible, have to do with the extraordinary personality of Moses, furious leader and far-sighted lawgiver, who must have been a sort of inspired Hebraic Merlin with his neurotic moods of "meekness," his fits of blind wrath, his black magic, and his terrifying intimacies with Jehovah.

Certain stories we are told about Moses carry upon their face, casually though they are related, the very seal of psychological truth. Such is the story, for instance, of how Aaron and Miriam, his brother and sister, revolted

against him, because he, the great eugenic Medicine-man, took to wife an Ethiopian woman.

But do we not get the whole secret of the magnetic ascendancy of Moses in the effect of his appeal to his Divine Friend against these jeering purists, this High-Priest and this priest-loving lady; an appeal that was so effective that the great soothsaying Miriam had to flee from the face of that Ethiopian, and from the face of the whole camp, literally sick with terror!

In this single sentence it can be seen why it is that the English, the most individualistic of all races, had until yesterday such a mania for this Hebrew book.

> And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: if there be a prophet among you I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

From the disappearance of Moses—for none knoweth his sepulchre unto this day—to the establishment of the kingdom under Saul and David the Old Testament intensifies its awe-inspiring drama.

The main theme of this great accumulative symphony is still the relation between man and the Nameless; and still does the Nameless, as in the stories of Samson and of Saul, find in Jehovah exactly what Jehovah found in Moses, an erratic, wayward, cantankerous, but faithful mouthpiece to Its mysterious will.

And after all, as we know from bitter experience, neither Milton's pure and eternal Spirit, who "Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss and mad'st it pregnant,"

nor the "loving Father" of Jesus, fill up or complete altogether the characteristics of the Power that governs the cosmos.

There has always been found, in Its ways to men, and to animals and birds and fishes too, an element that is different from both these qualities, an element neither spiritual nor loving, an element indeed that has not only cruelty in it but an unmistakable touch of satanic malice.

It was St. Paul who made of Jesus—"but we have the mind of Christ"—what Aeschylus lacked the penetration to make of Prometheus, that is to say a God of *pure goodness*, to stand between us and this devilish element in the Nameless; for it was no more concealed from St. Paul than it was concealed from Dostoievsky how impossible it is to justify "the ways of God to man."

Certain figures in the Old Testament stand forth with dramatic outlines as distinct and with intensity of feeling as tragic as any figures in classic or Nordic literature. Such are the figures of Samson the Nazarite and Elijah the Tishbite. Both these gigantic personalities were peculiarly dear to the heart of the Nameless, who, as we read, inspired them with something of Its own cruel violence as well as with Its own creative spirit.

How often must the Hebrew race, and many another race, too, in their hour of subjection, have pondered, as Milton under the "barbarous dissonance" of the Restoration, upon the death of this hero of the Eternal!

The description of the death of Samson, as our King James's Version translates it, is indeed a perfect example of how when we treat the Bible "as literature" we neither lessen its grandeur nor diminish its inspiration.

Treated as "the Word of God," as our fathers treated it, how easily by taking it all for granted in one monotonous level of consecrated gloom can we lose altogether

that poetry which is the highest "word" of all, and which is without any question the very inspiration of the Nameless!

> And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. . . . And Samson called upon the Lord and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. . . . And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

But that Elijah its Prophet made an even deeper impression on the Hebrew mind than Samson its Champion is proved by the words of Jesus Himself who hesitates not to declare that His great herald, John the Baptist, was actually a re-incarnation of Elijah.

But unquestionably the favourite book of the Old Testament with average philosophic Nordics is the Book of Job. And how significant it is of the manner in which Jehovah so effectively represents the Nameless, that God's only reply to our outraged indictment of His extraordinary ways should be a thundering description of our weakness compared with His strength!

It would be difficult to find anything more different from the tender and desperate piety of the Psalms than the sly worldly wisdom of the Proverbs; and how characteristic it is of the particular genius of our English translators that just as they can respond to the revolutionary spirit of these old writings, so they can convey

in their version of the Proverbs that particular tone of what might be called moderation in virtue which is the chief characteristic of our English Prayer Book!

"Be not over-righteous, nor take upon thyself to be too wise. Why should'st thou destroy thyself?" And certainly in their power of catching the poetic cynicism of Ecclesiastes side by side with the desperate humilities of the Psalms King James's scholars were not less than inspired. My own favourite book in the Bible is the Psalms, and it gives me a peculiar satisfaction to know that this was the feeling of our most sophisticated of all secular critics, Walter Pater. And what a book for the lonely and the unhappy the Psalms is!

Rationalist opponents of religion speak sometimes as if the organized churches were responsible for the Bible's hold over people. Nothing could be more untrue! The Old Testament, as cannot be repeated too often, remains the grand revolutionary arsenal for the individual's weapons against all constituted authority; and if, as William Blake says, Jesus Christ was the greatest Revolutionary of all time, was indeed the supreme Anarchist, who—

> His seventy disciples sent
> Against Religion and Government!

it is from the prophetic books of the Old Testament that Jesus drew, as so many others have done, the spirit of divine revolt against "the Powers of this World."

The "Biography" of our English Bible is, as Mr. Bates so admirably sums it up, the story of the resistless demand of the masses of the people, *against the will of constituted authority*, to possess this dangerous book.

We have, however, as the Editor of *The Bible as Literature* willingly admits, to give the credit for our unequalled Authorized Version to one of our most eccentric

rulers, namely to "the wisest fool in Christendom," King James the First! Making use of the earlier labours of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, this learned monarch's committee of scholars, headed by Dr. Reynolds of Corpus Christi, Oxford, and by Dr. Lancelot Andrews, Dean of Westminster, brought out this work—the greatest Translation ever made—in the year 1611. Ardent as he was in this noble undertaking and assiduously pushing his churchmen on, James, Mr. Bates reminds us, insisted that no return should be made to the Tyndale-Coverdale translation of the Greek word *ecclesia* in the proper, classical, democratic sense of an "assembly" or "congregation," but that the sacerdotal expression, "church," used in the so-called "Bishop's Bible," should be the word employed.

But never has the peculiar genius of English scholars, and never has, one must add, the peculiar genius of the English language, been displayed to grander effect than in this book, the actual words of which, even in the case of sundry expressions that cleverer and smarter revisions have "improved upon," have sunk so deeply into our popular consciousness that they have become for many of us the inveterate form through which our love, our hate, our happiness, our lust, our greed, our pity, our pride, our humility, our despair, our ecstasy, yea! and even our cursing of life, must be expressed, if they are to be expressed from the bowels of our soul!

And the curious thing is, that, while for those who instinctively respond to the prelatical translation of "ecclesia" as "church" our English Prayer Book offers its unequalled counterpart to the Latin of authority, of tradition, of order, of *organization*, King James's Bible has remained to this day the inexhaustible inspiration of heretics outlaws, and rebels!

From the time of the Lollards this book has been the book of those who, like Walt Whitman, are critical of Institutions, critical of Priesthoods, critical of States and Governments. The culmination of the Old Testament is in the spirit of Prophecy; and the Prophet, from the beginning of time unto this day, has been the despised of the rich, the trouble of the priests, and the mad terror of the ruler.

If any unwearied reader of the Bible were asked why, after racing through this book from cover to cover, he proceeds to repeat this singular performance, his answer would in essence be the same as that of Uncle Tom, the same as that of Tom o' Bedlam, the same as that of a vast anonymous multitude of Toms and Johns; namely, that it gives him the will, the tenacity, the cunning, even if it cannot give him the strength or the courage, *to put the World's values in their place!*

The greatest literary works of our Western World, and I cannot help suspecting of the whole round Earth, are three in number. They are the Hebrew Scriptures, Homer, and Shakespeare. It was the greatest of Germans who said, "How can I hate the French when I owe to them my intellectual culture?" and it is hard not to feel that this Goethean idea of the power of Literature to destroy race-prejudice is destined to outlive all that an inhuman and illiterate science can do in its eager desire to put weapons of destruction into the hands of oppressors.

And how ironical it is that any bold free-thinker among us with any real imaginative response to life should, out of his "intolerance of intolerance," give up enjoying this shameless, passionate, poetical, earth-loving Old Testament, in which there is no illusion about personal immortality, no illusion about ethical idealism, no illusion about the friendliness of the universe, no false hopes about this

"thinking reed" so preposterously made in the image of God!

How ironical that such persons should say in their hearts: "The Bible is so obscure, so inconsistent, so full of sweet mirages and pleasant lies; let us therefore put in its place the simple, indubitable utterances of speculative psychology and the profound never-to-be-changed revelations of experimental physics!"

Many attempts have been made to explain the secret of the peculiar beauty of this great Translation. One feels at once that the essential quality both of its prose and its poetry is at the opposite pole from the prevailing stylistic manner of modern writers.

The form of the ancient Hebrew poetry, as the Authorized Version catches its spirit, depends chiefly upon two elements, imaginative exaggeration and musical repetition.

It is in its subject-matter, however, that its power chiefly lies, and this consists in the inter-blending of three dominant *motifs*, the glory and shame of Man, the beauty and terror of Nature, and the sometimes appalling and sometimes consoling Mystery of the First Cause. Each of these recurrent *motifs* is constantly appearing and disappearing, as the wild music of the ocean of life flows forward; while it is always with this life, and never with any attempt to attain another life, that the Old Testament is concerned. Nor does the ancient prose style of the Hebrews, as King James's scholars render it, differ very much from that of their poetry, save that the rhythmic repetition is less pronounced, and the majestic realism of the simple narration holds the subject even yet closer to the earth.

The Eternal must help us, *at least by the feeling of His Presence* in this actual life; for it is unlikely—so runs the constant refrain of the Old Testament—that we shall hear

His voice out of the dust. It is impossible for persons who love reading the Bible from beginning to end, not to feel thankful that the *canonical order* of the books it contains, so artfully different from the chronological conclusions of scientific research, has been allowed, by the deep dramatic sense of those who arranged it and those who translated it, to mount up, exactly as we have it to-day, from Genesis to Malachi!

The Book of Genesis contains, as it should contain, the simplest narrations of all; monumental vignettes of human pathos and drama, only equalled by Homer.

> And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.
>
> And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.

But then, as we read on, following this totally unscientific but surely inspired canon, though it be but the canon of a multitude of anonymous Hebrew scholars, and pass from Moses to the Judges, and from the Judges to Saul and David and the Kings, the tone of the writing grows steadily more subjective, more lyrical, more cosmic.

> And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.
>
> And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before

the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice . . . yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

Still following the canonical order handed down to us from these old nameless Jewish sages, an order charged with the *amor fati* of the most fate-conscious of all races, we arrive at the Book of Job, where, *de profundis* indeed, the soul of man turns upon the Manager of his World-Show, and, as Ivan Karamazov says, "returns Him the ticket."

And Job spake and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. . . . Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein . . . let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes . . . for now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest . . . as an hidden untimely birth, I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.

The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul . . . which rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave?

And thus having reached the uttermost depths; and peradventure, like Job, finding ourselves still alive, still going to and fro upon the earth, what chord, in this great

ancient world-tragedy, will be struck after the Second Act, struck as the orchestra plays for the Intermission?

Which of us who have lasted it out to middle-age and tested the nature of the world cannot respond to the voice of the Preacher, that low-pitched paean of the Second-Best, whose disillusionment no Horace, no Voltaire, no Anatole France can surpass, but which by some dramatic instinct in humanity has fallen into its place in the very centre of the Bible?

> For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
>
> For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. . . .
>
> . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.
>
> I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Thus we hear the voice of the Preacher, "And behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

"All," as the greatest of the Greek philosophers said, "all flows away and nothing abides."

Nothing? Faint and low, as if upon the wind of Space, outside all our egoistic cravings, outside all our inevitable frustrations, comes still the voice of the Psalmist, that voice from "the God," as Emily Brontë says, "within our breast," the God within us and yet beyond us, that is our real "Being and Breath."

> My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. . . . Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old

like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

When Matthew Arnold said that the power of the Bible lay in its appeal to mercy and justice, in its appeal to what we call "righteousness," he was not wrong; but there is more in it than that.

The culmination of the Old Testament is in the Prophets. All leads up to the Prophets. Prose and poetry, lamentations and exultations, despairs and resignations, to the Prophets it mounts up, and with the Prophets it ends.

The poetry of the Psalms washes, like a cleansing air, over the bitterness of every personal life; and its lyrical burden, soothing away our personal griefs, is always the same. We as individuals are and are not; but the Power by which we live, the Power into whose hands we sink when we die, *That*, and *That* alone, abideth forever; and in *That*, and not in the self that perishes, is immortal life.

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth. . . .

. . . The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Some will say, "What comfort is it to the individual who perishes that God, that the Nameless, should live forever?" I think the answer is that for all its tragic finality

there remains a strange beauty, a deep feeling of peace and calm and infinite escape, in the thought of the death of the individual self and the eternity of something that is not individual.

The greatest of modern American poets, Edgar Lee Masters, has expressed this feeling, the feeling that comes over us again and again as we give ourselves up to the ebb and flow of this Psalm-music, a music like a sad and tender night-wind passing over the roofs of the world and over the "window'd raggedness" of the outcasts of the world, giving us not hope but peace.

> Ice cannot shiver in the cold,
> Nor stones shrink from the lapping flame.
> Eyes that are sealed no more have tears;
> Ears that are stopped hear nothing ill;
> Hearts turned to silt are strange to pain;
> Tongues that are dumb report no loss;
> Hands stiffened, well may idle be;
> . . . . . .
> Work is, but folded hands need work not;
> Nothing to say is for dumb tongues.
> The rolling earth rolls on and on
> With trees and stones and winding streams—
> My dream is what the hill-side dreams!

Yes, there is a strange satisfaction, mysterious as death, a satisfaction that the music of poetry alone can give in this feeling of the troubles of time being over, and the timeless "hill-side" of the Eternal alone continuing.

The individual passes; but there come moments when we are content that it should be so; for we feel that the thoughts of the most abject among us are not altogether lost. In the Eternal they still live—those thoughts and the labours of those hands.

> Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be

upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea the work of our hands establish thou it.

It is easy enough—alas, we all know that!—to lay so much stress upon the loss of our personal identity—this Jack and Tom and Bob and Bill, this Bess and Nell and Sue and Kate which is all we feel ourselves to be—that such talk as this about our "thoughts," or our "work," or some unearthly de-personalized "essence," surviving in the Eternal, sounds like a mockery of wordy rhetoric.

But living men are we, lively particles of dust and vapour, not algebraic equations, and if in everything else we get comfort from faint, vague, dim, flickering chances, and intimations of chances, such as when you press too hard upon them flit away like smoke, surely it is no mere priestly trick but a natural motion of the soul, as inevitable as the clutch of an embryo's fingers, that we should make the most of these old dim paleolithic hints of immortality.

But if the poetry of the Psalms is like the music of a long-drawn wind in the night, in the beauty of which we accept the passing of that which most certainly passes and the abiding of that which we may hope abides, when we come to the Prophets a different note is heard.

It is obscurer, it is wilder, it is more irrational. There is that in it that struggles to find an utterance for an inspiration that rolls away the great stone that all our reasonable, and all our natural, and all our logical conclusions have placed upon the Wishing-Well of the heart's desire, the Well of "our father Jacob," in the great Desert.

In a new and unpredictable direction does this prophetic cry carry us. Hitherto, in the books of the Old Testament, it has been by tenacity of purpose, by heroic endurance, by strength and courage and faith, by the proud fulfilling of the Law, by the magnanimous practice of Benevolence and Righteousness, that the will of the Eternal was obeyed.

But in the Prophets the mystery of the universe is approached from a totally different direction. It is in fact not "approached" at all. *It is found within ourselves.* Yes, this great thundering and undying Eternal, whose only answer to Job was to shout him down, is now discovered to be a living part, the only living part, of the individual soul that perishes!

> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. . . . Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. . . . For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. . . . I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

It is as though the poetry of the Psalms had brought an echo out of Infinite Space.

For what is the "high and lofty One" doing here except answering the cry of that familiar Psalm that quivers through the chords of man's betrayed nerves like the wind through telegraph-wires?

> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. . . .
>
> For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. . . .

There is certainly nothing like this in Homer, and not very much resembling it in Shakespeare; nor, to confess the truth, is it very common in the Old Testament. It belongs rather to that particular aspect of the New Testament whereof Dostoievsky is the greatest modern exponent.

But rare though it be, it is the climax towards which

the whole of the Old Testament moves, since Cain, the first-born, went forth a wanderer over the face of the earth. It is nothing less than that psychological emptiness in the heart's abyss, which, when it is filled by the spirit of the Nameless, becomes what Emily Brontë calls "the God within my breast."

The difference between this Hebrew emptiness in the soul that can only be filled by the Spirit beyond all worlds —dark and strange though that Nameless be—and the metaphysical selflessness advocated by Buddhism, is that the former treats the Nameless as a Person.

It was none other than Goethe who said, "And there is room for this also"; and for myself, as a sworn irrationalist, I can only say that I am proud to follow William Blake in placing this Semitic Book above all our Aryan metaphysic.

After all, the only thing I know *for certain* is my own personal mind; and *that* I know to be a Being that loves and hates and feels pleasure and pain. Why then must I interpret the Eternal in terms of mathematical symbols of which I know nothing and of chemical forces which I only know from the outside, while I reject as a childish analogy the living identity which I know so intimately *and from the inside?*

It is true that these subtle intellectual systems in dealing with the self and "the escape from the self" call upon us to enter upon a cold-blooded scientific "process of salvation" in which by a premeditated method we craftily drop the part of the self that anyway is doomed, in order to hitch some evasive fragment of what is left, as securely as we can, to the slippery spirals of the Absolute.

But the reason why the Jewish Bible has so completely beaten off the field—at any rate as far as our Anglo-Celtic soul is concerned—all this Aryan Metaphysic, is because

it interprets the world in terms of the heart rather than in terms of the head; and because it finds, as indeed the great Kant himself found, that the secret of things lies in the inspiration of the human conscience rather than in the cunning decrees of the human intellect.

And here again I cannot see why humility *before* the Eternal and an escape from ourselves *into* the Eternal in the simple emotional manner of the Psalms and the Prophets, should not lift us into the Timeless quite as effectively as any mental concentration.

Jesus was only carrying the Psalms and Prophets a "fathom and a half" further when He used His famous expression about losing your life to save it; and the mere fact that the imaginative tone in the Psalms and the Prophets turns the relations between the temporal and the eternal into a poetic one rather than a chemical or a mathematical one is from my point of view all to its advantage.

Few impassioned readers of the Bible have been dutiful adherents of organized sacerdotal Religion; for the spirit of both Old and New Testament is a spirit of revolt against organization of every kind.

Certainly in Great Britain, from the time of the Lollards to the present hour, the strongest Bible-lovers have been anything but meek adherents of either Church or State. Very often, as with the old Independents, they have been fierce opponents of them both. This is where the spirit of the Bible differs from the spirit of the Prayer Book; and I am tempted to think that whereas the more docile and more feminine piety in these islands cleaves to the Prayer Book, the Bible is still the inspirer of the greater number of solitary souls who prefer to worship in the "House not made with Hands."

For myself I lean to the view that if our survival after

death depends, as some maintain, upon the measure of our detachment from self-absorption, there is a stronger liberating magic in the psychological humility of the Semitic method than in the metaphysical Humility of the Aryan method, the former being spontaneous and imaginative, the latter premeditated and scientific.

In any case I am sure that the growing prejudice which so large a segment of our younger generation feels against the Bible is due to the fact that they link it with the disgusting hypocrisy, the sly maliciousness, the half-suppressed goatishness, of so many among its official champions.

But to hate the Bible because many of its adherents are repulsive is as absurd as to hate Homer because you had an unpleasant teacher at school. Herein lies the advantage of coming fresh to this book as if it were heathen literature. It puts back the heart into it, the heart that has been destroyed by the repulsive hypocrisies and odious cruelties of the past.

Written in the East, and made the supreme Sacred Book in the West, this living projection of the soul of Israel will no doubt have its re-births and its re-valuations to the end of time.

And we have to face the fact that our Anglo-Celtic race has come to find its *individual religion* in Jewish emotion and in Jewish imagination as nowhere else. This when you come to think of it is a very strange thing. I doubt if even the practical Romans allowed themselves to be dominated by the genius of the poetical Greeks to such a tune as this!

How has this come about? For it is clear that in the Latin of the Catholic Church the Hebrew element is not preserved to anything like the extent it is in our English Bible. Is it because we are the most unphilosophic and individualistic of all races and the race above all others to

exalt the Prophet at the expense of the thinker and the priest? Or was there, perhaps, in the ancient Iberian aboriginals of these islands a pre-Celtic strain that was not Aryan at all, and that is stirred in its atavistic depths by this Semitic book?

It is at any rate significant that just as the Irish were strengthened in the struggle to retain their racial identity by the Roman Church, so have the Welsh been strengthened in a similar struggle by the Welsh Bible.

Anyway the whole of this Authorized Version, wherein the religious spirit of England is wedded to the religious spirit of the Jews, is inspired by what we call the *religious idea*, namely, the idea, defined by Goethe, at the end of *Faust*, that all transitory things are symbols of what is beyond time.

"The great globe itself," as Shakespeare says, "yea! all which it inherit, shall dissolve and . . . leave not a rack behind."

But how can there be this flowing away without some hidden permanence whereby in reality we measure the speed of the flow? But the existence of this permanence, beyond and beneath the universal flux, is rather an intimation that comes to us in moments of deep feeling than a scientific conclusion.

And its presence, the presence of something beyond the laws of cause and effect, not unfrequently presents itself—at least it did to the ancient Hebrews and old-fashioned Englishmen—in the form of what we now call the "miraculous."

Thus Matthew Arnold's contention that the Bible will survive by its "morality touched by emotion" does not cover the whole field. What the Bible lives by is its undying protest in imperishable poetry against a world wherein "miracles" cannot happen!

The Biblical attitude is that creation *implies* the "miraculous"; and when one thinks of the fantastic shifts to which science has been put to get life going without the miraculous ever since Democritus had to supply his atoms with fish-hooks it seems that the Biblical attitude still holds good.

The Bible is great Literature; but it is Literature that "has the peculiarity," as the ancient Welsh books would put it, of giving our earth-wisdom a wholesome shock; the sort of shock that Hercules gave Antaeus when he lifted him into the air. But "this kind goeth not forth" without inspiration; and is the prerogative of the prophet rather than of the philosopher.

> The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them, round about; and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry.
>
> And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?
>
> And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.

I believe that most of us feel in our hearts that it is easier to "enjoy," as we say, "simply as literature" the Old Testament than the New.

The Old Testament contains the grandest mass of poetry, history, drama, jurisprudence, ever collected in one human volume; and the comfort of it is that we can throw ourselves into it, as Poetry and Mythology and religious and irreligious Soothsaying, without being any more committed to its varied ways of taking life than we are in the case of Homer or of Shakespeare.

But it is a very different story when we open the New Testament! Here we are confronted, sentence by sentence, verse by verse, with words that have become the mystic and ritualistic background, the moral and aesthetic atmo-

sphere, of our whole life. We may have long ago given up "going to church," but few of us with any sensitiveness or imagination or curiosity about existence have been able to dodge the familiar scenes and familiar sayings in the Gospels.

With what a mixture of shyness, of awe, of *temps retrouvé*, of heathen resistance, of uneasy conscience, do we turn these pages! That disconcerting, disarming, disturbing *personal appeal* of our Man-God's divine narcissism, majestically, magnetically drawing us towards Him—"I am the way, the truth, and the life" . . . "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden" . . . "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"—is certainly a thing, whether we consciously resist it or passionately yield to it, or, as most of us do, dodge it with uneasy respect, so startling in our individual experience, that it seems outside what we hear scientific scholarship so coolly entitle the history of comparative religion.

Alas! There are few modern philosophers as liberated from both rationalistic and religious prejudice as the late incomparable William James; and yet what we want, we humble, patient, and Pyrrhonian free spirits in the presence of this fatal Lover, whose irresistible magnetism begins to trouble our little skiff, even when still leagues away from its in-sucking whirlpool, is a protective psychology of the imperilled conscience.

A capricious book-worm is hardly the person to supply this need; but I have myself found it a protection against the sorcery of the Man-God of my childhood to realize the fact that the mere possession of human consciousness gives us perforce such an *interior sensation of spiritual space* that it is hard not to surround this "interlunar cave"

within ourselves with an aerial atmosphere of *divine* consciousness frighteningly aware of everything we think and feel! This interior landscape, this far-stretching mental space within us with its Watchful-Warden, is the scene of a constant painful drama, with the compass-needle of our free-will, that delicate instrument, as Nietzsche so beautifully says, *of torture*, wavering and shivering between the South Pole of "I want" and the North Pole of "I ought," while the Man-God, "who died on tree," watches gravely and sadly its distressing jerks backward and forward.

Now when once we have become thoroughly aware of the teasing necessity of "having the feeling" of this interior mental space, so easily invaded by the flickering needle of free-will and by the insatiable "divine eye" and "sacred heart," we have in a curious way protected ourselves, protected our natural timid bookworm selves, from this formidable "Lovest thou me?" with its fatal mystic attraction and its appalling corollary that if you *don't* respond you will lose your immortal soul. I think that to a cautious earth-bound mind this implicit threat, mingled with sweet love, this threat almost feminine in its fury of love rejected—"I know ye not! Depart from me into everlasting fire!"—is alone a considerable protection.

Approaching the New Testament, therefore, in an unrationalistic but at the same time a cautious spirit, perhaps more in the spirit of "the devils who believe and tremble" than of Herbert Spencer with cotton-wool in his ears, the first thing that must strike us is that the writings of St. Paul are much closer to our modern nervous troubles than the magical story told by St. Luke or the metaphysical love-rhapsodies of St. John. And this is because St. Paul is the *psychologist* of the Revelation;

and it is of the nature of psychology to dive into the ocean of life and move through that ocean at a deeper level than either magic or metaphysics. By metaphysics we scan the horizons and find where water ends and air begins; by magic we make fish fly and birds float, but in the "Nautilus" named "Psyche" we swim through the very heart of the element itself.

Modern criticism takes the view that the Fourth Gospel —the metaphysical one—is of much later date than the rest, is indeed, perhaps, the last human addition made to the Bible; but it surmises the existence of two earlier documents used by all the first three Evangelists, one of which it visualizes as an original sketch or skeleton of the events filled in later by the three writers, and the other as an anonymous collection of the sayings of Christ.

More in harmony with our present purpose is a comparison between the Gospels in the light of what we can gather as to the particular treatment of Jesus of Nazareth in each of them; and certainly from this angle of investigation the most arresting discovery we make is the superiority over the others in the pure art of biography of the Gospel according to St. Luke. St. Luke's personality, with its method, its style, its predilections, its culture, its taste, its unique genius, is a thing we can grasp, a thing we can understand in the most natural and human sense.

Across the crimes and manias and blunders of nearly twenty centuries the voice of this great poet-physician is still personally audible, with its almost Shakespearean tenderness and its ballad-like grace.

You have only to hurry through Matthew and Mark—reading them as if you had never read them before—and plunge into St. Luke, to find yourself at once under the spell of a really great biographer, and one of a peculiarly winning and endearing charm.

Like Shakespeare, this great healer of souls, whom I suspect to have saved the "Russian" nerves of St. Paul, the subject of his second masterpiece, by a wisdom as godlike as any of the miracles he records, was in a special sense a champion and interpreter of that sex towards which his excitable friend was so perversely hostile.

We come upon this peculiarity at the very start, in relation to the birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist. In sentence after sentence, full of a magic like that of the pictures of the Old Masters, and full too of a homely beauty like that of the anonymous Ballads, he sketches the figures of the women whose sons are to change the world.

Nothing is more appealing in art, as Pater so well said, speaking of the early Renaissance, than the mingling of different "Cultures" when each has behind it a deep and rich tradition; and St. Luke did through the medium of poetry what St. Paul did through the medium of psychology. He fused the humane intelligence of the Greek mind with the passionate poetry of the Hebrew soul. And, beyond both of these things, St. Luke anticipates the romantic feeling of the Middle Ages. Poet and Physician in equal measure, it is as if he reverted on one hand to the healing science of the great classical Galen, while on the other he stretched forward to the Celtic enchantments of Malory and the Holy Sangreal.

St. Luke and St. Paul are indeed the two writers to whom the New Testament owes what is most precious and memorable in its pages, and while the latter's Epistles are the earliest of our Christian documents, St. Luke's two amazing biographies dedicated to his friend Theophilus —and what would not we book-lovers give to possess translations in English of all the manuscripts in the library of this excellent bibliophile!—make up together what we

might call the Record of the Case for the Defence in the Trial of God before the Court of Man.

St. Luke's biography of Paul of Tarsus, commonly called the "Acts of the Apostles," certainly does much to increase our confidence in him as the biographer of Jesus. It is true his use of the pronoun "we" in the apostles' adventures evokes a realistic assurance to which the poetic spell he casts over the more momentous story carries no counterpart; but this is compensated for by the world-importance of the events. There have been rationalists who held the view—there may be some still—that Jesus of Nazareth never existed; but since it is impossible to question the existence of St. Paul, and since both in his own letters and in St. Luke's chronicle of his "excursions and alarums" St. Paul is forever reverting to the recent death of his Man-God and hesitates not to dispute about Him with St. Peter, it is very hard to take this view. It becomes still harder to take it when, in reading St. Luke's Gospel, the actual personality of Jesus with His ways, His paradoxes, His tenderness, His furious bursts of anger, His frustrations, His miraculous life-illusion, gathers body and blood before us.

Had St. Luke done with Him as we can conceive some crafty Simon Magus doing with some Hebraic Mithras, in order to obtain an occult background for his own sorceries, St. Luke would be a genius as much greater than Cervantes as Christ was greater than Don Quixote.

If the Jesus of St. Luke never lived, all one can say is that it is St. Luke and none other who is responsible for inaugurating that magic fairy Christ of the Middle Ages whom it is hard not to regard as humanity's most poetic creation, as much more aesthetically beautiful as he is less *verifiable* than the "Christ" in our own deep, dark hearts, revealed to us by St. Paul!

But the point is, if it hadn't been for the Jesus whose biography St. Luke writes, St. Paul would never have discovered that there was what he calls "the mind of Christ" in all human souls, that "mind of Christ" which is the best hope of our blasted civilization.

Indeed one can say that if it hadn't been for the existence of Jesus St. Paul himself would never have existed, though no doubt there would have been in the annals of Tarsus a truculent and very learned Jew, proud of having been born at once a Pharisee of the Pharisees and a citizen of Rome; while the greatest step forward in evolution, where alone evolution matters, that is to say in the *humanizing of individuals*, would have been indefinitely postponed.

St. Luke makes it clear what an instinctive dramatist he is, and no vulgar special pleader for the "Kingdom," by the prominence he gives to John the Baptist as the herald of this Transvaluation of all values. The Baptist's own moral teaching was certainly sound and simple from the specimens St. Luke gives of it, and like Jesus Himself, this Voice crying in the Wilderness seems to have been an implacable enemy to the crafty hypocrisies of Church and State. And yet with what dramatic feeling for the subtle differences between the great Rebels does St. Luke indicate the touching confidence the Baptist shows in the superiority of his rival. And St. Luke with the most delicate art elucidates this superiority. He makes it consist entirely in the nature of the "Kingdom," a kingdom revealed by Jesus as already present "among us" as well as "within us," but its *recognition* by our hard hearts and clever brains "hidden," as St. Paul would put it, "from the foundation of the world"!

And let us pretend for a moment, reader, that you are literally, and not merely metaphorically, a book-worm, a

book-worm endowed with superhuman curiosity, who, in some huge terrestrial Bodleian, has nibbled at the "logoi" of Lao-Tze and Kwang-Tze, at the "logoi" of Heraclitus and Pythagoras, at the "logoi" of Buddha and Zoroaster, a real book-worm, more innocent of the actual world than the greatest scholar. What would such a devourer of Great Men make of this biography of Jesus as the artful poet-doctor rounds it off for the benefit of Theophilus?

He would be quite ignorant, let us remember, of the disputes of Catholics and Protestants, of Rationalists and Religionists. He would not "even so much as have heard" that there was an Archbishop of Canterbury. All he would know about Jesus, and about this "Kingdom" of his, would be what St. Luke tells him—no more and no less. It would be King James's Version he would be devouring; and as he moved from page to page of that strange itinerary, with Jerusalem ever growing always nearer, and the place called Golgotha, "which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull," growing always nearer, and the as-yet-untenanted tomb of the Arimathean growing always nearer, he would, I think, cry out that he had found a drama equal to all the Greek plays put together. Ignorant of so much as he would have been, he would at least, in his vermicular progress through the library of Theophilus, know what physical pain meant and what necessity meant, and what the "insolence of office" meant, and what shame and remorse and humiliation meant, and what pride and hypocrisy and self-righteousness meant. Above all, he would know, what every worm knows, whether born in the leaves of a Bible or in the wood of a Gallows, that there's some illness, some sickness, some curse upon life, that makes cheerful endurance rather than thrilling happiness the prevailing temper of organic creation.

And our vermicular pilgrim would be surprised to discover that the *phenomenon of pain*, whether physical or mental, was *not* here, as it was with Buddha, the crux, pivot, and chief motive-force of all philosophizing. He would soon become aware that pain for the children of the "Kingdom" was incidental to life, was a means to life; and instead of "Nirvana," or escape from the Great Wheel, what "My Father's Kingdom" offered was simply "more life," life more abundant than ear has heard, or eye seen, or heart dared to imagine!

And he would further discover—with less of a shock, perhaps, *being what he was*, than if he'd been the body-louse of a Lama—that to be the lowest rather than the highest, the slave rather than the master, the fool rather than the wise, the last rather than the first, the tramp rather than the statesman, the harlot rather than the matriarch, the failure rather than the success, the abject rather than the distinguished, the desperate rather than the competent, was, though no more than pain and suffering, an end in itself, in fuller harmony with the spirit of the "Kingdom" and offering a better chance of the "life everlasting."

Our book-worm would also be amazed, and even perhaps, if he were a very scholarly worm, a little horrified, at the part played by women in St. Luke's Life of Jesus. Unused it may be to *quite* such an *equality of all souls*, our little friend would find the "tempo" of this biography to savour more of the cheaper daily papers than of the *Education of Henry Adams*. Women and marvels, Love and marvels, Wedding-Feasts and marvels, Madmen and marvels, Obstruction of Traffic and marvels, Faith-healing and marvels, Riots in Temples and marvels, Disturbances at Funerals and marvels, Contempt of Court and marvels, Damage to Property and marvels, Interference with Justice and marvels; and always women and love, women

and death, and always the difference between the "Haves" and the "Have-nots"!

With women and the opening of the womb this artful doctor begins his story; and with women and the opening of the tomb he ends it.

And certainly it is not only scientists who have cause to be disturbed by this healing of the sick, this curing of the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, without recourse to vivisection. The consistent moralist has every reason to be offended. "He that is not with me is against me." "He that is not against me is with me." What are we to make of such contradictions? And the unhappy fig-tree? And the drowned swine? And the unfair treatment of the hard-working elder son who got no "fatted calf," and the laborious workers who had "borne the burden and heat of the day" compared with the lucky rogues who slipped in at the eleventh hour? And the subtle, complicated, mysterious ironies, as puzzling to us as to the simple disciples, about making friends with Mammon, and agreeing with our Adversary quickly, and paying tribute to Caesar, and letting the dead bury their dead? Well, there it is! Had these Gospel-writers been the tricky priests our rationalists call them, would they not have smoothed out these enigmatical creases in the Coat without a Seam?

Apparently the great Baptist was completely satisfied before that fatal "Strip-Tease Dance" took place in the Palace; but modern critics want, it appears, quite other credentials from a Man-God than the lame walking, and the deaf hearing, and the poor being told they are nearer the "Kingdom" than the rich. And so the burden of that reiterated question still runs on, sighed, moaned, wailed, by a multitude of articulate and inarticulate voices, "Is this He we look for, or do we wait for another?"

Certainly upon one modern trouble of ours St. Luke's Jesus is strangely silent. What about the question, "Is it all worth it? Is it better to be alive than to be dead?" Or, again, is it perhaps all equal, all the same, one event or the other event, something or nothing, to be or not to be, all the same, all equal, the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, the merciful and the unmerciful, all equal, all a weariness and a folly?

But read as we may in this biography of Jesus, it does not appear that for one single moment did this ultimate doubt *as to the worth of life* present itself to the mind of the "Son of Man." And why was this? Why—so our worm might enquire—did the Devil, in his Temptation in the Wilderness, confine himself to such obvious human weaknesses as greed and power-lust and pride, and not suggest to the mind of the Saviour a Mephistophelean doubt as to the value of God's having meddled at all with the original and most blessed *Nothingness*?

I fancy myself that our vermicular critic will have to wait for any bookish answer to this terrific question, this question as to why St. Luke didn't make a craving for Nothingness, a longing for Annihilation, our Lord's final temptation, till he arrives in his nibbling progress at Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Here he will discover that our Four Gospels represent the "Spring-time of Magian Culture"; and that it is the characteristic of the "Spring-time" of every "culture" not only to take an optimistic view of the value of life, but to be *incapable of imagining any other view*.

We ourselves may be permitted to ask: "Is it the Semitic instinct as against the Hindu instinct, this upward-moving, dawn-growing, sap-rising *life-love* in St. Luke's Jesus?" One can hardly say so, in face of the abysmal world-weariness in certain places in the Old Testament, particu-

larly in the Book of Ecclesiastes. And if "Nothingness" and its familiar-spirit "Death-longing" are absent from the thoughts of Jesus, it is certain also that Carlyle was wrong when he called Christianity a "Worship of Sorrow."

Pain and grief, tears and mourning, privation, beggary, humiliations, insults, injuries—all these things are *only the way* to more natural happiness, to fuller natural life. They are a means to an end. They are *not* the end. Carlyle made the grand mistake of all perverted Puritans.

I suspect that the poetical St. Luke, in his medical attendance upon Paul of Tarsus, reached an intimate knowledge of the fatal Manichaean twist that *could* be given to such sayings as, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart," which is, after all, only what Shakespeare makes King Lear remark of the Beadle and the Whore. One has only to contemplate the life-tempo of the majority of the physically comfortable people one knows; and how dull, how stupid, how weary, stale, flat and unprofitable they have allowed their response to life to grow!

The truth is, you can much more justly accuse the Jesus of St. Luke of an immoral refusal to make *virtue its own reward* than you can accuse him of worshipping pain or calling upon anyone else to worship pain. The *tribulations* of those who accept the "Kingdom of Heaven" are certainly one great way of overcoming the world, but St. Luke's Jesus never implies they are the *only* way. One feels sure that St. Luke did in the end get it into the head even of his self-tormenting patient, the neurotic St. Paul, that the great thing is not to worship the tribulations, but to *overcome the world!*

And St. Luke makes it quite clear that initiates of the "Kingdom of Heaven" fight with the world and with the powers of the world, and with the conventions and

brutalities of the world, not for morbid or masochistic motives, but simply because, by reason of some profound cosmic law that Jesus discovered, it is actually possible "to die to live," and that by "taking the lowest place" and diffusing one's self-assertion, and sacrificing one's pride, yes! by the actual endurance of pain itself, you sensitize your nature to subtleties unguessed at, and throw open, as it were, the pores of your Psyche to magnetic waves of happiness from unknown depths!

But I would myself suggest that the problem of why Satan didn't tempt Jesus with the futility of creation and with the escape of Nothingness, is best answered in a most simple way. All the feelings attributed by St. Luke to Jesus are natural feelings, natural and actual and human, though by no means always moral. May it not be, therefore, that St. Luke's Jesus does not struggle with a craving for Nothingness and a weariness of Creation for the simple reason that this "Nothingness" about which we moderns are so fond of talking, this "nihilism" with which we satisfy our cosmic sadism, has no *real existence!*

St. Luke's Jesus is a terrifying realist. He is so much a realist that he refuses, just as his heroic antagonist Nietzsche did, to dodge or to cover up with ideal phrases the ultimate contradiction between the Will to Power in us and the Will to Sacrifice. Neither of them compromised: for the one said, "Not my will, but thine, be done!" and the other said, "Not I, but the Over-man!" But we must confess the truth—the truth which as children, learning our "gentle-Jesus" rigmaroles, we longed to cry out!—the truth that St. Luke's Jesus is startlingly, shockingly, violently *arbitrary*. Inconsistency is the life-breath of realism. It is not our instinct, it is our reason that is consistent—"and that way madness lies." Had St. Luke's Jesus displayed the "sweet-reasonableness" with which

Matthew Arnold credited him, humanity would never have been brought to worship him as a God. Nietzsche has described some of the qualities of his Over-man; but a far more interesting problem is, What are the qualities necessary to a Man-God?

And this problem has been solved once for all by St. Luke. This great biographer emphasizes in his magical picture of Jesus just exactly those qualities that lend themselves most to the desire, to the desperate *determination* of the anonymous generations of humanity that some particular "Son of Man" should be also the "Son of God." And is it necessary to repeat, what our vermicular pilgrim through the library of Theophilus has already discovered, that among these essential qualities in the Making of a God it is not justice, not morality, not self-control, not stoicism, not reason, not consistency, that supply the necessary chemistry? And this is natural enough; for all these are qualities adapted rather to *disciples* of the "Kingdom" than to its "King."

Majestic lovableness and a magnetic passion for being loved, these are the chief characteristics that our Gospels—for it is not wily priests but imaginative poets who are the god-makers—give to their creations. Wherein lies the superiority, in this theandric art, of Christ over Buddha? Well, for the chief thing, Buddha never had a Semitic Greek like St. Luke to paint his picture!

It is the poetical scenes—Christ washing His disciples' feet, Mary Magdalene washing His feet, His encounter with the polyandrous woman at the well, His raising of Lazarus, His blessing the children, His turning water into wine, His encounter with the beautiful and rich young man, His riding into Jerusalem, His fondness for the young St. John, His praying in the garden, His denial by Peter, His shattering cry in His pain that His Father had left Him

—much more than His blessings or His cursings or His parables, that make us call out as we read, like the remorseful centurion at the end of the Crucifixion, "Surely this *must* be the Son of God!"

No, it is the poetic realism of St. Luke's Jesus that saves him from our modern conception of *Nothingness*. And, as I tried to hint just now to my imaginary book-worm, it *may* be that such Nothingness doesn't exist but is a mere invention of our generation. Man invents devils and hells, why shouldn't he invent *Nothingness*? Of course as a matter of fact no one has ever *experienced* this *Nothingness*, nor, in the nature of things, ever *can* experience it. Even in sleep we do not know it, for we always dream, whether we remember our dreams or not. The Hell that Jesus believed in, and to which He consigned His Father's enemies, so that the sound of their wailing and the gnashing of their teeth and their screams for one single drop of water might reach the glorified ears of all the Lazaruses in the bosom of Abraham, is a very different thing from *Nothingness*.

I cannot tell how far Spengler would regard a belief in an everlasting Hell for the hypocritical rich and for those who do not see in "the least of these little ones" the lineaments of God, as a healthy optimistic sign, a sign of a "Spring-time Culture." But in any case it seems to me that, after once worshipping Christ, humanity will never be able to go back to Dionysus and his Vine-leaves, and will be extremely dubious about all Over-men.

The great question is, are there depths, I will not say in official Christianity, for *that* as we know has its "Faith Once for All Delivered" and had better stick to it, but in following Jesus, as we catch a clue here and a light there in the New Testament as Literature, that are still unfathomed?

Spengler and others have suggested that such a new direction may be found in the metaphysical Gospel of St. John. I do not believe it! And if I may at the last identify myself with our Theophilistic worm, I would confess a worm-like hesitation in accepting even William Blake's "Everlasting Gospel."

> Had he been Anti-Christ, creeping Jesus,
> He 'd have done anything to please us!

Well, I'm not quite sure about that. Of course you can say that the proof of the pudding is in the eating and that there is something aesthetically unpleasing about the pale, bland, soft, unrugged, edgeless, unbedeviled look of certain types of Christian; and I daresay these were the gentry whose "creeping" souls Blake so heartily damned. But on the other hand, what is sometimes called "muscular Christianity" is almost equally unpleasant; and most of us Theophilus-worms have been bothered in our time by types that managed to blend together *both* these disagreeable elements. But to the devil with all this ungenerous un-Rabelaisian carping! God made them, these unengaging ones; and I daresay we, their heathen critics, don't always appear as beautiful as Shelley or as witty as Voltaire.

I cannot, all the same, help thinking that there *are* yet left deep veins of psychological secrets in the art of handling life and getting happiness out of life to be found in the literature of the New Testament that have scarcely been tapped at all. And for myself I would look for these new underground mole-runs in the direction I will now try to indicate, a direction not metaphysical but psychological.

As I have hinted, our Theophilus-worm after devouring pages of Lao-Tze and Kwang-Tze found the Semitic

Saviour of the world a little too simple in his promises of life-happiness to those who loved him and suffered for his sake. But suppose we discount these promises as arguments *ad homines*. Isn't it possible that there are deep electric power-currents in the human *psyche* that can be tapped by exactly the same uncontending, uncompeting, un-self-assertive spirit, such as Jesus was to reward so liberally in "My Father's Mansions," without any very vivid hope of ever reaching that "House, Eternal in the Heavens"?

And can one not imagine, too, a happy reversion to Rabelaisian Christianity, and even some subtle merging —hints of which I fancy I have found in Rabelais—of a cosmic beatitude and a delight in all sex-joys that "mean no harm" with the feeling of "being born again" into a selfless equality of all souls?

My San Francisco friend, Doctor Schott, has developed, on lines not unlike those followed by the famous Miss Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*, a theory about the birth of our Lord that gives it a ritualistic rather than a supernatural origin; but for my own purpose just here it is on the *Gospel itself* rather than the Gospel-Bringer that I want to concentrate.

Is it not sad how the unkind and spiteful piety of orthodox believers militates against the psychological evolution of Christ's Kingdom? How can we do justice to the divine anarchism that emanates from this Person until, as He suggests Himself. we prefer to blaspheme against Him rather than against the Spirit?

And the point that rationalists tend to forget is that if Western humanity *hadn't* worshipped Him as a God, this terrific and shattering "Message" would have only reached us as the sayings of Heraclitus or Pythagoras did, without *that weight*, as of "One who spoke with authority,

and not as the scribes." Is it not possible that the evolutionary Power in *and behind* our Cosmos did actually reveal in this Person's revolutionary attitude to human valuations a Secret so important that the manner by which He reached it, whether by being a great magician, or by being a great prophet, or by being "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," is comparatively unimportant? Surely to any simple-hearted reader who tries to rule his thoughts—the one thing that does seem almost within our power!—by the godlike books produced by inspired men, the problem as to the particular relation between this one inspired Person and the Power behind the universe is a less important problem than the *intrinsic nature* of His revelation?

What St. Luke's Jesus found to be the *Best in Life* was and remains something of such magnitude in the evolution of our species that whether His view of Himself as "Son of Man" and "Son of God" was, or was not, a scientifically correct one, cannot, in comparison with the *content* of His revelation, trouble us very much. And if what Jesus thought about Himself in relation to God is of minor importance, one may certainly say that to anyone who, while holding a magical view of life, holds that in Literature—in the New Testament itself, for example!—rather than in organized religion, such a view is found in its purest integrity, the question as to what the churches decide to believe, or to disbelieve, is a matter of no importance at all.

We are grateful, profoundly grateful, to Church and State for keeping alive our interest in "the Gospel according to St. Luke"; but we cannot but remember that the first translators of this subversive Book, this portrait of the Jewish Anarchist "whose Kingdom was not of this World," were revolutionary scholars who were per-

secuted, tortured, burnt, and their very bones desecrated, by organized government.

What St. Luke's Jesus did was to crack the heavy stone rolled by the privileged and the powerful and the clever and the scientific upon the spirit of man. The stone is there still, with "the Children of this World" worshipping it, *but the crack is there too*; and henceforth there must always come moments in our lives when we doubt whether benevolence and righteousness are quite enough, moments when, like Dostoievsky's Alyosha accepting the fact that his hero's corpse stank, we catch a breath of air through that crack, a breath of air from outside, a breath of air that writes like a finger in the dust. The world hums on and the cosmos hums on—and our last word is not St. Luke's; nor knoweth any man what it is. The world hums on and the cosmos hums on. . . . "But Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground *as though he heard them not.*"

HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

WERE the Chinese the first among philosophers to indicate the magic power of the virtue of humility? The ancient Taoists certainly perceived, not only the spiritual, but the pragmatic efficacy of this subtle and—for most men—this very difficult intellectual secret.

Nothing gets in the way of the culture of the young so much as a certain self-confident conceit in their own judgment, and not only in their own but in the equally self-confident, snap-verdicts of contemporary opinion.

Few things, it seems to me, are more important, in the art of appropriating to our individual use the famous books of the past, than a certain cautious suspension of judgment where our personal reaction differs *negatively* from the long-accumulated consensus of human feeling. As Goethe discovered, in one grand flash of illumination during his Italian pilgrimage, it is better to give up once and for all this vice of wasting our energy on the negative, on attacking what we *don't* appreciate, instead of quietly and steadily enlarging the sphere of what we *do*. The stultifying curse of this kind of conceit works, of course, both ways. Many of us, just because we don't understand and don't want to understand the creation of new forms and the subtlety of new feelings, waste our strength in deriding what is to us strange, obscure, repulsive. But I confess there seems more excuse for this—for after all there must be *some* contemporary fashions that will soon be buried in complete oblivion—than for the same

sort of negative arrogance applied to books that the anonymous generations of our race have sifted out from the rest as being of undying value.

The ideal thing, as far as our personal culture is concerned, is to have as few literary principles and convictions as possible; and to "advance," if I may say so, forwards and backwards at the same time, learning to overcome both our natural distaste for the very new and our natural distaste for the very old.

The easiest epoch to appreciate, among the writers offered us, is the epoch just passing away. The further we go back the harder it is, and we all know our difficulty with an absolutely new genius, who has, as Coleridge so neatly says, "to create the taste by which he is enjoyed."

The cultural "humility" I am advocating is, after all, only the application to intellectual matters of the Taoistic and, in a sense, the Christian secret as applied to more mystical things.

Coming to Homer, then, in this unprincipled, unopinionated, and fluid state of mind we find ourselves confronted by a legend of grandeur that has gathered weight for what I suppose must be nearly three thousand years. Here is the origin of that wearisome word "epic," which, like its exhausting relative, the word "saga," has become a catchword of sounding hollowness and tinkling tedium. There is something strangely symbolic in the fact that both Homer and Shakespeare, the greatest poets among men up to this hour, should have lost their identity as persons.

I do not say that in a corresponding manner we too must lose our individual life-illusion in order to enjoy these great Mediums of the anonymous generations; but I do suggest that there is a certain kind of personal conceit that sometimes hinders people from getting the full

benefit from Homer and Shakespeare as well as from more personal poets such as Dante and Milton and Goethe.

But the humility I have in mind is not at all the renouncing of our ego or the sacrifice of the inalienable "I, I, I" that urges us on, and by which we live. It is in fact the enlarging of this "I," and its unspeakable enrichment.

For when we read Homer the hard opaque stuff of our narrower selves melts into an element far more flowing, far less limited. Like water, like air we become; and in place of losing its identity, the "I" in us slips out of its own brief transitoriness into the enduring continuity of endless generations of lives. In place of being a rock-bound pool of the ocean's flood, we become a living wave of its vast tide, rising and falling with it, and realizing our identity with it.

There are many reasons why a modern person finds it easier to read the *Odyssey* than the *Iliad*; and since up to the present I have shared this weakness—if weakness it be—and there does seem something hypocritical in advocating a virtue one has dodged oneself, I intend to confine my remarks to this easier work.

There are several reasons why the *Odyssey* is better adapted to modern minds than the austerer and more warlike poem. The first of these is the fact that women play a much more prominent part. Such a part indeed do they play—and not only women in person, whether mortal or immortal, but the things belonging to women's lives—that the more often we read the *Odyssey* the more indulgent we find ourselves to Samuel Butler's daring idea that a woman was its author!

Against this, however, must be set the passionate sympathy with minstrels that the poem displays, and with feudal servants, both masculine and feminine; and I

sometimes feel as if it were more natural to attribute the *Odyssey* to the legendary blind Homer, leaving the advocates of the bardic school of oral reciters to apply their unappealing and to my mind unconvincing theory to the earlier poem.

At any rate it is hard to resist the impression, as one reads, that the *Odyssey* is not only a later poem than the *Iliad*, but much more definitely the work of one hand.

It has, in fact—and that brings me to its second appeal to modern minds—an extremely marked *novelistic* interest. The Wrath of Achilles is a larger, more complicated, more dramatic theme, and certainly our sympathy with that "sweet war-man" Hector supplies an antagonist lacking in the *Odyssey*, but for the simple and natural excitement—what is going to happen next?—the later work holds us more powerfully, holds us indeed as Odysseus himself held the crowd in the palace of Alcinous: "And they were all hushed in silence, and were spell-bound throughout the shadowy halls."

But in addition to the emphatic feminine element, with so much space given to domestic life and to the feelings of servants, and in addition to the more intense interest of one single hero's adventures by land and sea, there is yet a third thing—and one much harder to define—that strikes us as more apparent in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*; I mean the romantic note. Here we get a touch, a tone, a feeling, especially in description, that comes very near to that peculiar Celtic quality so beautifully indicated by Matthew Arnold in his phrase "natural magic."

The essence of the Homeric attitude to life is the same in both poems, only a modern reader is, I think, seduced into an appreciation of this, and even—I would say—into an *acceptance* of this, more easily in the poem of adventure than in the poem of war.

Certain single episodes in the *Iliad* rise to grander, austerer, more rugged, more poignant, and, I admit, more overwhelming heights, heights unsurpassed in the Bible or in Shakespeare; but except for some of the speeches at the very beginning there is nothing tedious in the *Odyssey*. It is the kind of tale that, from the neolithic age to our own, human beings have sat late by their fires to hear; whereas the everlasting killing and being killed in the *Iliad* does frequently grow very wearisome.

And what *is* this Homeric attitude that takes its place alongside of all the other abiding philosophies which our race has found for the endurance of life under the sun? It certainly comes nearer to the Nietzschean attitude than to any other. Can you not catch the amoral aestheticism of Nietzsche's tone in this characteristic Homeric remark, "The Gods spin the skein of ruin for men, that there may be a song for those yet to be born"?

But it is more massive, more earthy, and in a sense more tender and magnanimous than the desperate *sanctity-reversed* of that misunderstood prophet of the spirit. And it is more pessimistic; for Nietzsche regarded death after the manner of all the great individual pagans from Catullus to Hardy, as an eternal sleep—*nox est perpetua una dormienda* —whereas in the Homeric system "the weary nations of the dead" survive in a pitiful half-life, in the dim Cimmerian under-world of Hades.

Some would say, "Why should we try to realize and to appropriate to our imaginations this Homeric view, if it be so dark and tragic?" Because it is not the tragedy of the general human fate that debases our spirit and lowers the temper of our lives; it is the burden of our private griefs, our private wrongs, and the weight of all the private ills "that flesh is heir to." It may be noted, in passing, how, in connection with Homer's view of death, there occurs

one of the most flagrant of all pietistic meddlings with a great passage. In Homer's Hades none other than Heracles himself speaks of his doom "although a son of God"; whereat some optimistic commentator hurries to interpolate a pious reminder that *this* Heracles is only an "eidolon" of the real one.

Granting that the Homeric view of the fate of the dead is the darkest—save for Dante's Hell for the enemies of God—that has ever been accepted as life's background, it remains that it saves a man from that irrational fear of vengeance of the Creator, which, while it has kept few cruel ones from their cruelty, has driven insane so many sensitive and gentle natures.

And what most of us suffer from is our absorption in our own cares and worries and afflictions, not any indignant spiritual protest against the general fate of the human race.

The value of "appropriating to our imagination" any intellectual or poetical view of death that has made a deep dent on the consciousness of the generations, is that it shakes us out of the dull lethargy and sordid cares of the moment, and forces us to retort to the vision that shocks us with a different vision, more congenial to our heart and our mind.

And what applies to this dark Homeric attitude to death —though it must be noted, in passing, that unlike the feeling of Catullus and Hardy and so many other noble heathen, the Homeric view allows for certain great exceptions to this sad half-life beneath the earth—applies also to the Homeric view of the primal importance of fame. To be had in honour among those who shall come after you, that is the grand wish-fulfilment, repeated over and over again, through the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

And we find exactly the same note in Dante and Milton. It is the one irresistible bribe that Dante's guide uses, all

through the Inferno, to make the lost souls reveal their identities. "This man I bring with me can give you fame upon earth."

And my point here is, not that we should accept this view of the importance of fame, which obviously can be of comfort only to the few, but that by being forced to substitute some subtler or more spiritual, or more philosophical life-value for this emphasis on earthly renown, we are pulled up in the midst of our meaner preoccupations to establish some other life-illusion for ourselves, that shall give dignity and meaning to our days.

Come, let the word be said! It does not matter much what set of ultimate life-values we select, the Homeric, the Mediaeval, the Shakespearean, the Christian. What is important is that our consciousness should be continually absorbing the magnetic ether of our race's subtler inspirations; and if they clash and contradict one another it matters nothing. Indeed the clash between several noble ways of life is the high tragedy of human existence, the everlasting drama whereof the gods themselves are the audience!

If we are to be the true heirs of our immense heritage we should aim at the power of passing from one to another of these great ways of life, not merely picking out from them something *here* or something *there*, for in eclecticism of such a kind we tend to miss the deeper secrets of them all, but actually throwing ourselves whole-heartedly first into one of them *in its totality* and then into another! The richer our own nature is, and the stronger our imagination, the deeper we can go in fathoming the diverse secrets of these opposing ways of life, all of which have their own magic, their own mystery, their own illumination and their own eternal values. The supreme sin, as Jesus would put it, against the Holy Ghost, is to allow ourselves to develop

that opaque encrustation of naïve modern conceit which renders us blind to the high tragic drama that is being played out every moment behind "the passing show," as the imperishable ideals of humanity meet and clash in the over-ether of the spirit. Nothing in sacerdotal Christianity, nothing in the less dogmatic moral Christianity of our time, nothing in Mediaeval romance, nothing in the Bible, nothing in the great metaphysical systems of the Orient, can take the place, in our actual day-to-day life, of what it is possible to draw from Homer.

The Homeric secret, if I may use an expression applied to a very different way of life by Matthew Arnold, reduces itself in essence to a bold and drastic *selection* amid the chaos of fleeting impressions brought to us by our daily life.

Man is the valuing animal. His fellow-creatures driven by instinct and necessity suffer and perish, even as he does; but one thing they lack—the glory and the pain of choice.

All men, even the most miserable, even those most driven by necessity, have innumerable occasions for making decisions. Such moments are often our most unhappy ones, for what we call "free-will," whether an illusion or not from the point of view of rational logic, is man's supreme curse as well as his unique glory. It exists, for all our logic, as an intuitively-felt fact. And it applies not only to our outward actions but to our thoughts, to our emotional and sensuous responses to the life-stream around us. And this power of choice belongs to the deepest abysses of the soul. It is wilful, it is arbitrary, it is often insane; it is the assertion of the unique self within us against all reason, against all order, decency, duty, interest. The self within us, down in its unfathomable profundities, is the accomplice not only of life but of death, not only of creation but of destruction.

A man, as Dostoievsky explains in that story of his to which Hamlet might have given the title "the fellow i' the cellarage," frequently wills his own hurt, his own injury, his own debasement, his own destruction.

But he can also will—even in the midst of the malice of circumstance—a certain *selection of things* upon which to concentrate, such as, set up in opposition to the venom of casuality, can give a grace, a dignity, a significance to the drift of his days.

Nor is that grouping of things, that isolation of things, that disentangling of certain things from certain other things, which the Homeric secret implies, out of the reach of any man or woman who is free from extreme physical pain.

Some heroic spirits among us can even practise this art when they *are* in great physical suffering, but this is so far beyond our average power that we need not consider it. In such extremity a man needs superhuman possession by the spirit, for at such times all normal philosophies, all systems, all methods, all secrets fail.

It is a question, *then*, of the spirit or nothing! The naked soul wrestles then with the adversary as best it may, and in a loneliness whereof few who have endured such things return to report. But the Homeric way of taking life is a perpetual process of mental and sensuous selection. It does not imply any idealization of life, or any enduring of this world on the strength of faith in another. It implies, above everything, an aroused and heightened consciousness of *the life-feeling in itself.* It implies a conscious pleasure in the feel of our limbs, feeble, ailing, or unathletic as these may be! It implies a conscious pleasure in movement as well as in rest, in getting up as well as in lying down, in the sweetness of falling asleep as well as in the sweetness of awakening to a new day.

By its continual process of selection, together with its parallel process of reducing to nonentity all the drift and rubble that it does not select, it enables us, *without idealizing anything*, to take each successive experience of the most normal day in a peculiar and special manner, and under a particular light.

Each of the experiences it selects, reducing the rest to automatic unconsciousness, is of a definite sort, of the sort that by natural necessity has been repeated in the lives of men for thousands of years.

The use of water is the first of these. Never in Homer is the act of washing the hands before a meal allowed to pass unrecorded. Then the meal itself is never partaken, according to Homeric ritual, without some kind of offering to the Immortals "from men who eat bread upon the earth."

And along with the gravest symbolic emphasis upon the simple act of the making of your bed, or the preparing of a bed for a guest—and all strangers at your gate, especially the destitute and poor, are under the peculiar and special protection of the Father of Gods and Men, the friend of supplicants—there is always placed a magical significance upon the mere act of crossing the threshold, either to enter or to go forth, of any, even the humble abode of men. Nor can too much be made of a certain exquisite delicacy of feeling at these Homeric hearths, a feeling full of what one might call super-domestic refinement; such as when the king stops Demodicus in the middle of his lay because of the sobbing of his guest.

What I have presumed to call the "secret" of Homer is indeed the isolation of, *and the poetic deepening of our consciousness of*, those recurrent situations, necessities, significant human gestures, in the span of any ordinary life, that in the nature of the case have been repeated since

the beginning. What the Homeric way of thought delivers us from is that accursed habit of taking the essentials of life for granted which cheapens, debases, and vulgarizes all, and steals the heart out of the very mystery of being alive.

The Homeric secret restores to the relation between man and wife, child and parent, chief and companion, comrade and fellow, that overtone of poetic dignity that in its essence is a religious acceptance of fate. It gives back to life, and it gives back to death as the inevitable rounder-off of life, that sense of a tragic and a pitiful grandeur, which our overbalanced concentration on absorbing realistic details takes away.

In our unphilosophical sophistication we pine for a thousand assuagements, demanding novelties, excitements, distractions, agreeable shocks, tributes to our vanity, and a thousand sweet morsels for the palate of our insatiable egoism such as the nature of things in the normal continuity of human life cannot supply. "If *only* it had been *so*," we groan. "*If only* we had chosen *that* instead of this"; while all the while the large, majestical Zodiac Signs of the destiny that *is* ours look down in melancholy wonder upon our fussy petulance.

Hard and difficult was life for our fathers before us; hard and difficult is life for us. But, along with the endurance of this, there remains our consciousness of the historic dignity of the struggle itself, and the preciousness of those recurrent compensations that of necessity come round in their hour to all but the most unhappy.

There are moments of terrible tragedy in these Homeric poems, and there are moments of radiant exultation; but the deeper note that rises up from the accumulated weight of their oceanic flow is a note of solemn quiet, of fate accepted, of life not exuberantly commended but taken for

what it is, grim and pitiful, with its own strange, sad beauty, and at least able to be justified—as an incredible tale.

In all the greatest poems of the world, as they tell us this tale of fate, this struggle and this acceptance, there come moments, often near the end of it all, that convey an indescribable sense of peace. At such moments there rises from the very simplicity of the words a magic and a healing that totally evade definition. Under the touch of this magic a great quiet descends upon our spirit, and we grow ashamed of our turbulence, our hurry, our ignoble self-pity, our insatiable discontent. It is not—as with the Christians—that we turn from defeat in this world to triumph in another. It is rather as though we heard the voice of our personal wrongs and private miseries caught or sinking down into the orchestral utterance of all the generations, into the tune of the ancient sorrow of the earth herself.

Shakespeare has a passage of this sort where Lear's madness is cured by Cordelia; and again where they go away to prison together. Dostoievsky has it between the Prince and Rogojin when they meet over the murdered corpse of Nastasia. And in the *Odyssey* we get it as early as in the thirteenth book, when, long after he has had his final word with the daughter of the house whose love he has had to reject, after he has finished his tale and the sun has gone down, and the ship is ready for its silent voyage through the night, he prepares to cross for the last time that hospitable threshold.

> So he spoke . . . and they poured libations to the blessed gods, who hold broad heaven, from where they sat. But goodly Odysseus arose and placed in the hand of Arete the two-handled cup, and spoke and addressed her with winged words:
>
> 'Fare thee well, O queen, throughout all the years, till old age and death come, which are the lot of mortals. As for me,

I go my way, but do thou in this house have joy of thy children and thy people and Alcinous the king.'

So the goodly Odysseus spake and passed over the threshold.

Now I am not unaware that to many among my readers these simple lines will convey no particular significance; but, as Plato might say in his tentative manner, does it not seem as if a certain magical end-of-the-day evocation, full of tender assuagement and an almost religious solemnity, gathers upon us as we read, not so much like the rich, harsh, mystic note from some Gothic bell-tower, as like the very sound of the river of life itself, deep and full-brimming, infinitely sad and yet infinitely healing?

No, the underlying secret of Homer's poetry, below all the stirring romance and below all the majestic primordial drama, is *a divine spirit of selection* by which the monumental facts of human existence, caught under a certain imperishable poetic light, stand forth in noble relief, freed from the vulgarity, the triviality, the litter and debris, of the transitory and the unessential.

Who that loves to read Homer can cross any human threshold, either entering or leaving, without something of that momentous symbolic feeling that is so well summed up in the familiar biblical expression, "Peace be upon this house!"?

And it is the same with the basic dignity of human beings themselves. Along with the thoughtless cruelties of that age of pitiless brass, following perhaps only too closely upon a kindlier age, the legended "Saturnian Age" of peace and the unbloody cult of the Great Mother, along with women sold for so many heads of cattle, along with the reckless sacking of cities, and all the slaughter and the blood, there does appear—stress the proud aristocratic note as much as you please!—a grand primeval natural democracy in these poems, wherein to be a man under the sun,

or a woman under the sun, is a thing *in itself* of magical awe and reverence.

None who has read Homer can say that swords and spears and chariots and horses are the only poetry he knows. Not only are earth and sea and the revolving seasons and the stars in their courses treated as they have never been treated since, but the recurrent amenities of life within our gates, the preparation of fire and food, the mixing of wine, the pouring of water, and above everything the handywork of women, their fabrics, appliances and utensils, together with the exquisite crafts of divine artificers, all in fact that might be called the eternal poetry of man's domination of matter, play such a part in these cosmogonic ballads that those who read only for the excitement of the action will be fain to skip many long-drawn passages.

There is no poem in the world in which the dramatic significance of the revolving hours of the day plays so dominant a part. From the earliest rising of "rosy-fingered dawn" upon her twilit "dancing lawns," till the moment when "all the ways grow dark" we are made aware of the huge ethereal background against which we are fated to yield or endure, to perish or survive.

And although the abiding monotone of the whole is the long endurance of man amid his arduous days and his incessant tribulations, there come moments again and again, when the ineffable dew of golden happiness, of large and liquid rest, descends to redeem all sorrows. To bear for a bitter space, to enjoy for a brief moment, is the Homeric norm; but beneath both the long endurances and the divine interludes there is always a thin film of inextinguishable exultation—exultation, if one may say so, in being permitted the double-edged experience at all, in being allowed the privilege of sharing the tragic human

consciousness, before which and through which the enchanting and abominable spectacle is unfolded.

Those who read Homer merely as beautiful poetry, or enjoy it with antiquarian zest as something old and naïve and quaint, miss entirely, in my view, the real Homeric spirit. The mistake of such readers is to put an impassable gulf between our life and the Homeric life, treating our gods, our cults, our ways of feeling as true to reason and common sense, while Homer's have a merely pedantic, a merely curious, a merely aesthetic interest.

Quite the reverse of this is the case. Much of our modern thought depends upon scientific dogmas that will only last a few brief years before they are superseded by others, doomed in their turn to be discarded; whereas in its essentials the Homeric secret pertains to the unperishable gestures and the eternally-recurrent situations of life, which are as real and as true to-day as they were ten thousand years ago!

Another mistake these curious dalliers and dabblers fall into, is to lay all the stress upon the warlike and athletic aspects of these poems, completely missing what the mere legend of Homer himself as a blind slave among the women and the minstrels should have led us to look for, and of which the poets who have most loved him, nervous sensitives like Cowper, cripples and invalids like Pope, imaginative city-dwellers like Keats, are the best proof, namely that, as in the case of Walt Whitman and Rabelais and Shakespeare, there is a magical secret here which is dedicated, above everything else, to put new life into the feeble knees, new strength into the feeble hands, and a new world-feeling into the perverted senses of the depressed, the timid, the sickly, the degenerate.

Each of us who can say in his heart, "I am a man" or "I am a woman," and "I still eat bread upon the earth,"

and "I am still among the living and have not yet gone down among the dead," when one of these four winds, of which Homer is always speaking, blows upon his face, or when one of these constellations, to which Homer is always pointing, rises above his head, or when that unique voice, of what Homer calls the "many-sounding" sea, comes surging to his ears, or the Master of Life, "who seeth all things and heareth all things," comforts him with his rays, and can once more gather up "his steadfast heart within him" to endure and enjoy, lives, whether he knows it or knows it not, in the spirit of the secret of Homer.

For there is a magic touch in these poems that arouses something in the deep soul of a man that accepts our hard fate beneath the sun, though it never hinders him from relieving his soul in the sweet comfort of shameless weeping.

There is certainly no Nordic pride here over the restraining of tears! In Homer we always feel that tears themselves are an essential part of the mystery of life, linking cradle to grave on the sobbing surge of a great salt sea of lamentation.

> So saying, he sat down, and Telemachus, flinging his arms about his father, wept and shed tears; and in the hearts of both arose a longing for crying. And they wailed aloud more vehemently than birds . . . sea-eagles . . . whose young the country-folk have taken from their nest before they were fledged; even so piteously did they let tears fall from beneath their brows.

And it must be remembered that all this unconquerable acceptance of the way life is has always as its infinitely pitiful background what must seem to many of us a sadder fate than absolute annihilation.

> So she spoke, and I pondered in heart, and was fain to clasp the spirit of my dead mother. Thrice I sprang towards her, and

> my heart bade me clasp her, and thrice she flitted from my arms like a shadow or a dream, and pain grew ever sharper at my heart . . .
>
> My mother, why dost thou not stay for me, who am eager to clasp thee, that ever in the house of Hades we two may cast our arms each about the other, and take our fill of chill lamenting?

But even this pitiful glimpse of the state of the dead is not totally unredeemed. The great pendulum between pleasure and pain can still swing a little, even in the final abyss!

Odysseus tells Achilles in that sad twilight the one piece of news that could really stir him.

> So I spoke, and the spirit of the son of Aeacus departed with long strides over the field of asphodel joyful in that I said that his son was pre-eminent.

One piece of advice I want especially to offer to all young people anxious to be initiated into the Homeric attitude to life. Avoid, like the devil, *all* poetical translations. Let the Homeric secret reach you through the simplest, barest, baldest prose translation! Let it be *your* business to throw the imaginative and the poetic glamour over what you read. Out of *your* mind, out of *your* sensibility must come the magical touch, what I might call *the Homeric Greek of the soul.* Something of this sort is necessary even if, in your youth, you have learnt the Greek letters; but if the literal Greek remains impossible to you, remember that no poetic rendering, except what springs from your own mind and imagination, is of the least avail.

Make the simplest prose version your text, and let your own spirit be the great original! All the supreme poets of the world can adapt their secrets somehow to our modern life, but none can do so as naturally, as easily, as inevitably as Homer.

Aeroplanes, skyscrapers, automobiles, the wireless, the new ways of love, the new illusions, the new disillusions, all can be accepted, all can be disregarded, in the Homeric mood.

For the spirit of Homer is the spirit of man's contact with the elements, of his life in relation to the elements.

As long as air and water, as long as earth and fire remain, none else but these can be the real background of our struggle.

The dignifying, the simplifying, the heightening of our endurance depends still upon those large and significant moments wherein something corresponding to the Homeric secret blows like a fresh wind upon the turmoil of our days.

Still, as in the great king's prayer, in the third book of the *Iliad*, we instinctively fortify our weakness by calling upon these immortal spectators of our loyalties and treacheries, that they may strengthen our covenant. "O Sun," we cry still, "who beholdest all things and hearest all things! O rivers! O earth! O ye that in the world below have done with life! Be our witnesses this day that we keep faith with ourselves, and with one another, and with our fathers that were before us!"

DOSTOIEVSKY

TO my mind Dostoievsky is as much greater than all other novelists as Homer and Shakespeare than all other poets. For he is superior to the rest in all the main essentials of fiction. He is a greater artist ; a greater psychologist; a greater prophet; and a greater thinker.

By the art of Dostoievsky I mean, first of all, his power of communicating an irresistible sense of reality. He creates a world of his own; but the Dostoievsky-world is not only one degree, but several degrees nearer our common impression of the world we live in than is the work of others.

As a realist in this sense he is unapproachable. Once led into this world, the convincing verisimilitude of it all is overpowering. It is for this reason that so many find it hard to read him. The terribleness of the things we all have to bear, the pity and frightfulness of so much in life, returns upon us with too deadly an impact from his pages. Compared with his penetration into the startling, corrosive, explosive stuff of our universal experience, other realism, composed of the mere piling up of physical details, seems not only gross, heavy, and unillumined, but false to our natural human experience.

And the extraordinary thing is that he arrives at this startling closeness to the actuality of our impressions by following a method that leaves out the one aspect of our common human life that fills the largest space of all. I refer to our *work*.

All the accompaniments of the various jobs that occupy

so great a part of our time are absent. Peasants come in and out; but there is no description of the way they till the soil or gather its produce. The whole subject-matter of Hardy's novels, for instance, is simply non-existent here.

Tradesmen, artisans, labourers, craftsmen, merchants, shopkeepers, factory-hands, bakers, butchers, tinkers, tailors, apothecaries, masons, cobblers, brewers, tanners, printers, along with all the economic paraphernalia of their occupations, scarcely appear, even as a vague background, in this overpoweringly real world!

All that huge mass of economic complication of which Balzac, for example, makes so much, and of which we are all so vividly conscious, has melted into thin air. Nobody has a job. Nobody works, either with hand or brain. Many of his people are rich. Many are very poor. Some of them *must* have had to work in their time, but we hear nothing of it.

All we know of them is their passion and their pain, their spiritual sufferings and their spiritual ecstasies, their loves and their hates, their faith and their unfaith, their obsessions, their crimes, their intrigues, their illuminations, their devotions, their vices, their pride, their cruelty, their pity, their humility.

It cannot be repeated too often that every great writer creates his own world, but a world, all the same, drenched and saturated in the crude elements of the chaotic reality around us.

It is impossible to imagine a world more different from Homer's, for example, than the world of Dostoievsky. Both are real; both are crowded and vital, both of huge epic proportions, both of oceanic grandeur and turbulence and mass.

But between Homer and Dostoievsky Christianity has appeared, forcing the great flood of human feeling inwards,

thrusting the whole stage of the human tragedy, together with its background, upon an interior plane.

In reading Dostoievsky we get a prophetic sensation that some vast spiritual change is coming over human life. It is like reading the Book of Revelation. Its interest is apocalyptic, charged with startling premonitions of mystical events. This must be one of the reasons why there is such an amazing neglect of the materials, appurtenances, experiences, of ordinary human labour.

There is exactly the same sort of spiritual tension in the books of the New Testament, the profound psychology of which Dostoievsky exploited to such an extreme point that it would be possible to call the whole mass of his writings "the Fifth Gospel"—the Gospel according to the soul of Russia! Christ in his parables refers, it is true, more frequently than does his strange Russian disciple to the ordinary labours of humanity; but on the other hand he is for ever calling people away from these things, "for the end of this world is at hand."

It is this tremulous and vibrant anticipation of some kind of Second Coming, when, as the apostle says, and as Kirilov in *The Possessed* says, "we shall all be changed," that renders the psychological atmosphere of Dostoievsky's books so singularly like the atmosphere of those early turbulent communal churches, with whose erratic motions from mystical ecstasy to sensual excess St. Paul is for ever contending.

No real lover of the imaginative rendering of human life in books can miss the stupendous contrast between what Spengler would call the new Magian Culture in Dostoievsky and the old spring-time Classic Culture in Homer.

To see the spiritual ecstasies and the emotional lacerations of the great Russian in their true world-setting,

consider one of the desperate soul-rending talks between Kirilov and Shatov, or between Prince Muishkin and Rogojin, over their samovars, and compare it with this not less tremendous crisis in the *Odyssey*. I quote from A. T. Murray's translation.

> And for them the strong and mighty Alcinous sacrificed a bull to Zeus, son of Chronos, god of the dark clouds, who is lord of all. Then, when they had burned the thigh-pieces, they feasted a glorious feast, and made merry, and among them the divine minstrel Demodocus, held in honour by the people, sang to the lyre.
>
> But Odysseus would ever turn his head towards the blazing sun, eager to see it set, for verily he was eager to return home.
>
> And as a man longs for supper, for whom all day long a yoke of wine-dark oxen has drawn the jointed plough through fallow land, and gladly for him does the light of the sun sink that he may busy himself with his supper, and his knees grow weary as he goes; even so gladly for Odysseus did the light of the sun sink.

Human life upon earth was the same in essentials then as in the middle of last century when Dostoievsky's desperadoes of the spirit met over their samovars; but what a change in the imaginative perspective!

And since Dostoievsky the outward wheel has turned again, and once more, though with steel engines in place of wine-dark oxen, the labour of men's hands, along with their physical relief when the sun descends upon it, becomes the modern stimulus to powerful writing.

But Dostoievsky would not be the greatest of novelists if he were not, beneath his "magian" visions and his "Fifth Gospel" illuminations, an inspired artist.

To find a parallel for his grandest effects in imaginative realism we have to leave prose literature altogether and turn to Shakespeare. There is the same use of small, homely, insignificant things, endowed at a crisis with an

atrocious and frightful livingness. There is the same indescribable concentration upon some single fatal gesture, isolating it under a blood-red search-light and causing the rest of the visible world to vanish into black annihilation, as if what took place were projected on a flame-lit promontory washed by a gulf of timelessness.

There is the same appalling sense of the monstrously grotesque—Stavrogin's putting soap on his death-rope, those jars of disinfectant that the murderer arranges round the body of Nastasya, Father Karamazov's preparations for Grushenka—and the same pitifully humorous repetition of some particular phrase or image that plays the part of those pregnant refrains of the old tragical ballads.

And in spite of the huge life-gap left unfilled, by the absence of all ordinary scenes of diurnal human labour, so that one almost comes to feel as if everyone in these books were either rich, idle, irresponsible magnates, or priests, beggars, hangers-on, courtesans, mystics, intellectuals, pensioners, policemen, officials, visionaries, tramps and paupers, there are such rapid, vivid, unforgettable vignettes of natural background, sketched in to give perspective and weight to the mighty tide of the plot, that we are continually being reminded of those tremendous vistas of natural surroundings across which such sudden and magical lights are thrown in crisis after crisis in Shakespeare's plays. Palpable and breathing effects of dawn and noon and twilight and thick darkness catch us suddenly, as if by the hair of the head, forcing upon us the very smell of the damp, of the dust, of the mud, of the rain, of the low-hung clouds travelling across the horizons of desolation.

Like Dickens, only with less detail, he can conjure up the magical effects of life in a great city, endowing the

Inanimate with a brooding identity of its own, which acts and reacts upon the moods of the characters.

How overwhelming is his unearthly, phantasmal handling of Metropolitan reality, by which the effect upon the mind of city-life, its streets, its squares, its slums, grows so portentous, and hangs heavily over us with a dim, rich, thick-smouldering gothic gloom!

How we are made to feel the towering-dusky porticoes and all the intricate masonry, arches and windows and stairways and attics, of the famous Nevsky Prospect, for instance, with the rain and the snow and the biting winds and the faint spring airs and the dark water!

And what deep holes, as one might say, into the underworld, and *through that* into dim eternities of occult desperation, open as we read him, under our feet! Spiritual mineshafts they are, sinking down into mysteries just as impalpable and insubstantial—only of a darker significance—as the airy gulfs and spacious horizons of the most magical rural scene. I am, all the same, inclined to feel that it is not in his Moscow or Petersburg, but rather in his smaller provincial towns, left purposely nameless, that the purest Dostoievskian essence is distilled. Think how, in *The Possessed* and the *Brothers Karamazov*, he accentuates, with an overpowering weight of piled-up suggestion, what you might call "neighbourhood reality," till the whole place becomes a living entity!

In this massed, entangled, and intricately rooted effect he can rival Balzac; for he has that same rare gift, granted to so few novelists, of conveying the full cubic sense of a community's life, the sense of the gathered-up weight of a human group, as it acts and reacts on itself within a given circle, and is swept to and fro by the mysterious currents and eddies and back-washes of popular prejudice and opinion.

And the astonishing thing is that he can accomplish this miracle, perhaps the hardest thing of all to a writer, without having recourse to the ordinary details of our daily work! Those unlucky factory-hands in *The Possessed*, for instance, living an isolated slum-life in a particular quarter of "our town," down there by the river, whose boarded footpaths, muddy banks, and melancholy wooden hovels suggest similar districts in America, who knows what their daily labour is? And yet in some subtle, unaccountable way the psychic "aura" of their condition surges up at the chief crisis of the story, and becomes an important, almost a predominant element in the final catastrophe. And what a startling Shakespearean gift he has for suggesting, as it were sideways, and by the most casual and haphazard indirections, the natural backgrounds of his dramatic scenes!

Those desolate Dostoievsky roads stretching out into the unending plains around these straggling towns—roads that remind us so often, save for the new concrete and the automobiles of the spacious American scene—how wonderfully, as in his great master Gogol, is their infinite melancholy suggested!

And the muddy footpaths between wooden fences leading from house to house in these old-fashioned provincial places, how they lend themselves to sinister encounters! And how well, too, we come to know these old Russian gardens, so many of them, like the one in which Smerdyakov's idiot-mother was seduced and where he himself in his ghastly dandified way would, between his fits, solace himself with music, dedicated to assignations and murderous conspiracies. And though the labour on which all this weird intellectual and spiritual and vicious life must have depended, like leprous fungoid growths upon the roots of a tree, is kept out of sight, the everlasting tragedy

of absolute penury, the existence of the tramp, the beggar, the desperate wayfarer, is never long allowed to be forgotten.

Dostoievsky's imaginative awareness of the feelings of these wanderers, as the worm i' the bud of all our well-being, is as Shakespearean as it is Homeric and Biblical, and brings us down, as Lear was brought down, to the basic level.

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
> From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
> Too little care of this.

Or as the disguised Odysseus tells the friendly swineherd:

> Than roaming naught else is more evil for mortals! yet for their cursed belly's sake men endure evil woes, when wandering and sorrow and pain come upon them.

There are moments in reading Dostoievsky when he seems to become a veritable medium through whom all the wild froth of the Russian soul and the Russian nerves—and a bloody spume from the heart's abyss it often is rather than froth—spills over, and wastes itself in a mad frenzy of words.

Again and again in listening to the desperate talk of these people—and it is by no means only his chief characters who become as voluble as tipsy demons—I find myself reminded, for they are all obsessed by religious revelations, of that warning of St. Paul's, who himself, as a thaumaturgic pathologist, had so much in common with it, against the excess of speaking in "strange tongues," lest this thing prove a stumbling-block to certain sturdy heathen among us!

> If therefore the whole church [as seems not unfrequently to occur in our author's stories] be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

The truth is, Dostoievsky carried the whole massive art of novel-writing into a new dimension—*the dimension of the nerves.*

And he carried it there without abating a jot of its weighty circumstantial realism. His nervous explosions would not be what they are if they did not burst forth like water-spouts from a swelling ocean of human drama.

Nor do these prophetic utterances, that diversify the tension of his emotional plots, *idealize away* the convincing power of his tremendous realism. They emerge from the realistic tide and they return to it. They are the spume of the voyaging whales, they are the leaps of the flying fish, of these terrific navigations. The ship of reality goes on her path undeterred by them; but not without an abiding sense of an unearthly touch upon the rudder! The most comprehensive of all human arts, the art of the novel, must now of necessity be divided into two great historic epochs; the novel *before* Dostoievsky and the novel *after* Dostoievsky.

It is extraordinary how as we read him we are convinced of the reality of these strange beings and of the reality of their backgrounds. So many modern writers, who here and there catch something of his demonic psychology, fail entirely in the creation of living characters. How he does what he does is one of the insoluble secrets of the art of writing; and it is the more impressive to us because of the absence of those devices of obscurity and fantasy and preciousness and premeditated roughness which in our day have established themselves as the hall-marks of genius. As far as a reader ignorant of Russian can

judge, neither Balzac nor Scott is freer from stylistic mannerism.

But after all, what makes Dostoievsky so much greater than other novelists is that this superb and mysterious art of his, an art that like Shakespeare's cracks and breaks beneath the dark thunder of the tragedy of the soul, is all the way through the vehicle of a disturbing and *prophetic* philosophy.

When Spengler, whose own greatness is rather that of a poet than a logical thinker, looks about him to-day for any sign of the birth of a new spiritual "culture" among the nations, it is in Dostoievsky alone that he finds anything approaching such a thing. Nietzsche too, as he steered the lightning-struck barque of his desperate sailing past the flickering light-ships of man's forlorn coasts, crossed more than once the bows of Dostoievsky's Phantom Ship and lowered with awe his pirate flag.

It would be making as great a mistake as so many have made in Nietzsche's own case to try and deduce a clear and definite system of thought from the trail of this portentous comet as it falls from the zenith into the bottomless sea.

Nietzsche learnt much from him of the infernal thaumaturgy of weakness, of the potency of those tears of self-laceration that are, as William Blake would say, "intellectual things." But this terrible secret of the ecstasy of yielding to the limit, of distilling a strange dark magic dew out of such tears, Dostoievsky derived not only from the deep wells of his own nature, but from that limbec of siren treacheries, the New Testament of Christ, the mere inclusion of which, in the same volume as the virile Hebrew Scriptures, was to Nietzsche the supreme betrayal of the human spirit.

Contemplating the death-masks of these two great seers, the tragic Lucifer and this still more mysterious Dema-

gorgon of our Faustian decadence, it is hard not to feel that the Russian was the stronger and more formidable personality. There is a rugged force in Dostoievsky's countenance, to which the only parallel I know is in the portrait busts of the old Greek dramatists, notably in that of Euripides.

Among the Greeks it is perhaps Euripides whose tone comes nearest to Dostoievsky's; though in other respects those "psychological mole-runs" of his cast up an earth-mould whose taste is sometimes singularly reminiscent of Paul of Tarsus. Some of us have a foolish tendency to heap praise on certain modern writers—Nietzsche started this unenlightened simplicity—on the ground that they keep themselves unspotted from the "unclean spirit" of Christian consciousness. We even praise Goethe for being such an imperturbable heathen; forgetting that his own words run to a quite different tune and that *Faust* is anything but a wholesome pagan production.

As a matter of fact, it is hard to see how a deep and formidable artist can remain indifferent to the thickening and subtilizing of the human situation brought in by the phenomenon of Christianity.

To accept these secrets of God in an orthodox sense is one thing: to make use of them to intensify and deepen our natural vision is another: and, as Spengler hints, the better way is to regard the Christian element in Dostoievsky simply as the richest and subtlest of his organs of research, research into the mystery that baffled and disturbed him to the end.

I have found myself wishing that Dostoievsky had written a commentary upon that strangest book in the Bible, the Book of the Revelation. That this most weird and magical *finale* to the Scriptures did arrest his interest is proved by his putting into the mouth of one of the least

appealing characters in *The Idiot* that curious passage about "the star called Wormwood."

I cannot find myself in agreement with Spengler and others in their emphasis upon the character of Alyosha Karamazov as the final embodiment of Dostoievsky's spiritual philosophy. Certain aspects of his vision of human goodness undoubtedly reach their climax in this engaging character. But I feel as if the same startling insight into the mysteries of the human soul which culminates in the creation of Alyosha is at work through book after book, on parallel though opposite lines, in the case of his most characteristic wicked characters.

What interests him, like a divine-demonic obsession, is first and last the ultimate depths in the soul of spiritual good and spiritual evil. And the thing that startles us most as we read him is a dawning suspicion that these two underground channels, both thaumaturgic, both tapping fathomless reservoirs of magical power, come, in those subterranean regions of the spirit, into astonishing proximity! One feels this in the case of Raskolnikof in *Crime and Punishment*, and even—though more faintly—in that of the terrible Svidrigilaiov in the same story. In Rogojin in *The Idiot* you feel it, and much more in the enigmatic Stavrogin in *The Possessed*. In Ivan Karamazov these thaumaturgical, half-supernatural currents of good and evil drift alarmingly close to each other, at times almost coalescing.

Both Kirilov and Shatov in *The Possessed* and the hero's father in *The Raw Youth* are borne along on the double streams, that, like a fresh and a salt current running side by side, flow tortuously through the lake of the soul. Alyosha makes me think of Walter Pater's "Diapheneité" and of those strangely guileless and spiritually incorruptible figures of Raphael who look, in their in-

herent purity, so immune to all obsessions from the underworld of our nerves! The Idiot himself is quite different from this; and to me he always seems a much subtler and deeper creation.

Quite as untouched by the wickedness round him as the other, he yet—as though his very physical infirmity and mental danger made his imaginative sympathy more clairvoyant—seems able to enter much further than Alyosha into the mystery of the evil he rejects.

Just as Dostoievsky disregards as of minor importance the burden and heat of our daily struggle for bread, that struggle which he himself found so bitter, so he carries us into a stratum of life, into a dimension of good and evil, barely hinted at in other novelists.

And who can help noticing that the appalling mental drama, continuous throughout his books, depends upon one terrible and fatal reality—the reality of free-will.

In no writer does the mysterious arbitrariness of our insane and monstrous power of will play such a part.

Did Dostoievsky believe in God? Like one of his own characters when driven to the wall on this crucial point, he would refuse, I think, a categorical affirmative to that question. And yet his answer would certainly not have been a negative one. The truth seems to be that like Jacob with the angel he wrestled all his life with a great Darkness, with Something that was and yet was not, holding that Nameless Thing by the hair of its head with all the fury of his demonic will, never quite believing in it, but always feeling the *alternative* to it to be so horrible as to be unthinkable! Then a second question. Did he believe in Christ? His silence this time would, I think, be of a more intimate nature, more committed, more explosive, more tragic and involved, more emotionally reckless of reason.

The truth is that whatever these traditional expressions, "God" and "Immortality," really meant to his deep and dark soul, they served, as did the Sign of the Earth-spirit, with Faust, to conjure up, against all logical evidence, an inner reality before which he reeled and staggered, exultant, triumphant, dead to all that intervened!

There is no doubt that into this wrestling with what sometimes seemed a cloud, sometimes a fire, sometimes a bottomless void, he threw both the spiritual good in him and the spiritual evil. In reading him you feel over and over again that other divers into the desperate Psyche of our doom have no notion what the words "good" and "evil" mean.

A man on the edge of despair and suicide could read Dostoievsky, when all other books would be to him a mockery and an aggravation.

When he uses the traditional religious expressions they take on a different aspect, a different colour. They seem to burn with a black interior flame that trembles under the breath of the Eternal.

Turgeniev called him "sadist"; but that terrible word only proves how spiritually deep his insight into evil was. Dostoievsky never plays *for its own sake*, as certain modern writers do, upon that fatal nerve. His allusions to it are always allusions to the past, to a past repented of in the flame of the abyss. They are the confessions of lost souls, or of redeemed souls, never indulgences in a present excitement, never the gloating relish of a literary *voyeur's* lust.

When Ivan Karamazov, who accepts God but cannot accept His world, "returns" Him "the ticket," it is of sadistic cruelty to the helpless in His intolerable Performance that he is especially thinking.

The most significant passage in all Dostoievsky, except

perhaps the tormented outcries wrung from Shatov and Kirilov in *The Possessed*, is the passage in which in "the Underground Spirit" he speaks of man's *will* to self-abasement and self-destruction, and of his divine-demonic yearning that "two and two" should make "five" instead of "four"!

It would be silly to claim for him anything approaching the humour of his master Gogol, a humour that is *sui generis* and without parallel; but there is no doubt that the chemical constituents of that ghastly and appalling humour, which one might almost call the grimace of reality upon the earth, are diffused from beginning to end of his work.

It is indeed with the word "reality" that we begin and end in thinking of him; but *his* reality is only in part the reality which is here and now. Another reality, that of the thing which is not yet but *will* be, gathers weight and substance as we saturate ourselves with his work. For he stands between the living and the dead. He is the medium of the spirit of man, changing as it evolves, but changing into something compared with which all the outward mutations of mechanical science are as the rising and setting of the star Wormwood!

RABELAIS

TO my way of thinking and feeling Rabelais is one of the few supreme writers this planet has produced. I put him higher than Plato or Cervantes or Montaigne. I put him along with Homer and Shakespeare. And as with all the greatest men of genius, you feel, every time you read him, that no one has really properly interpreted him and that, long ago as he lived, we are only beginning to understand him.

With a good deal of strain, and with something of self-conscious virility, Walt Whitman, on his own American lines, has revived something of his cosmic optimism, just as Balzac, with Gallic and phallic bravado, has echoed his cyclopean drollery.

But no one comes near him! The humour of Dickens is a unique inspiration, human in the richest sense, racy, idiomatic, irresistible; but its scope, though imaginative and deep, lacks the huge tellurian swing of the Rabelaisian orbit. The quaintness of character upon which it depends is localized and particularized; nor, save for its impassioned benevolence, has it got much mystical or spiritual background.

To drag forward the poetic satire of Aristophanes or the misanthropic fury of Swift in relation to Rabelais, is as absurd as to link him with the age-old tradition of literary eroticism which moralists disparage under the abusive word pornography. His attitude to the excremental is as different from Swift's as it is from that of the modern author of *Ulysses*; and only a mind with a most excep-

tional prep-boy obsession could derive aphrodisiac excitement from his colossal bawdiness.

Like all the true revelations of life, the substance of Rabelais's book is at once very simple and infinitely deep. To maintain that he used his extravagant humour as a mere mask to placate authority and "get," as the saying is, "his message over," is to misunderstand the nature of his genius. His humour is *in itself* a complete philosophy. It is the essence of his doctrine diffused through his style, not a disguise to hide his thought. And it is humour of a very special and peculiar kind. It is not a mere playing with the comic or the ludicrous. It is more than merry fooling. Its scale is too stupendous. The laughter in it sinks down too deep. It is mystic humour, thaumaturgic humour, revolutionary humour. It is erotic and excremental; but with something over and above. It is evangelical, superhuman, cosmogonic; but its orgiastic revelry in the atrocious whimsies of life is not soured because of the enormous reformations it suggests, nor debased into mere satire because of the monstrous rascalities it exposes.

The genius of Rabelais is more critical, more militant, more, if I may say so, *evolutionary*, than the genius of Walt Whitman; because, for all the colossal gusto and relish with which it accepts life, it never seeks to force itself to accept the evil in life.

Rabelais could never have said, "Evil propels me and the reform of evil propels me. I stand indifferent. I moisten the roots of all that has grown."

What kind of a man was this Curé of Meudon in ordinary life? No stickler for formalities of approach at any rate, no rapper-out of carefully prepared aphorisms, or of pompous witticisms with a sting in their tails. You feel he would have talked easily, naturally, freely, to

anyone who came along, affecting no Socratic irony, no devastating Voltairean sarcasm, no gnomic oracles. A *penchant* for men of learning he must certainly have had, and an unwearied fondness for old wives' tales. But the chances are—as human character goes—that even in his cups this greatest of all humorists was of a shy, evasive, retiring disposition. Not perhaps looking on the ground as if to find a hare, as Chaucer says of himself, but prone to long brooding fits of amiable detachment from which his visitors had to rouse him.

What did he think and feel as he said his holy masses? Did he give more than evangelical comfort to the sick and dying? One is led on to dally with many curious speculations. What were the objects, for instance, that would arrest us in his house and kitchen? Did he plant shoots from his native vineyard in his vicarage garden? Did he, like Don Quixote, have a not-too-clever niece to make his bed? And during those final years of his life did he play the physician as well as the priest to his friends and neighbours?

Of one thing we may be certain; like all great men of genius, he must have gathered from the most unlikely quarters grist for his mill.

His revolutionary correspondence with the more daring men of learning of his day is an established fact, and the unfathomable impulse upon his mind of contact with the newly unearthed Greek classics.

In this matter of Rabelais's scholarship it is hard not to be struck by the crushing difference between his type of brain and that of so many later men of genius. Shakespeare's classical knowledge, comprehensive as it is, strikes nobody, except a few unimaginative pedants, as something out of reach of a lively, self-taught, alert intelligence. And how little of the true book-worm,

how little of the impassioned scholar, there is in Dickens, in Balzac, in Tolstoy! Nietzsche, it is true, was a formidable philologist; but to-day, among our writers of startling originality, I can only think of James Joyce as coming anywhere near the colossal bookishness of Rabelais.

But this insatiable and extravagant scholarship of his—every ancient classic he got hold of being like a magician's wand to roll back the walls of the cosmos—can obviously have been only one of the stimulating treasure-houses his imagination exploited.

Another must have been to him an even richer quarry of magic lore, to be heightened and transfigured. I refer to his contact with quacks, empirics, alchemists, pedlars of freakish talismans, hawkers of fake elixirs, vendors of hedge-mascots, wandering astrologers, aphrodisiac-mongers, herb-sellers, and fortune-tellers.

But beyond both professional and unprofessional abstractors of the quintessence, he must have fed his terr-aqueous fancy and nourished his planetary humour from the random discourses, overheard in tavern and kitchen, of thousands of country wiseacres and village oracles.

To this singular ex-monk, to this pious-impious priest-doctor of humanity, must have come the most motley pilgrims; all of them bringing or seeking some kind of medical or botanical knowledge, some kind of philological or mythological enlightenment, and all of them anxious to discuss pro-and-con, every new philosophical theory, every fresh antiquarian discovery, and every imaginable reform in morals, religion, education, statecraft, and medicine.

Great combustible heretics must have come by night to that curious personage, worldly prince-cardinals with an itch for the classics, sly atheist-humanists masquerading under every sort of shaven poll.

Matthew Arnold said that Catholics had the secret of Jesus and Protestants his method; but this colossal worshipper of the "Great Pan"—"for He is our All"—this disconcerting accomplice of that "Circle, whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere," seems to restore the "secret" of a lost Saturnian Golden Age and the "method" of a far-off Thelemic Millennium.

There is undoubtedly a super-evangelical, super-individualistic tone in Rabelais, a vein of huge, unctuous, homely piety that has something of the best of Protestantism in it. But, on the other hand, what can the Puritan make of him?

We immoral book-worms know only too well how this "Book of Books," as his friend the Cardinal called it, is driven forth from our libraries to rest with queer companions in second-hand book-shops.

It is certain that Rabelais would have been on the side of Ivan Karamazov's Christ as against his Grand Inquisitor; but how he must have been against that vein of sublime spiritual asceticism in the New Testament which culminates in St. Paul's perverse and frantic wish that all sex-pleasure—even that of the marriage-bed itself—might be abolished from the world!

It is just here—in this primordial matter of sex-delight—that Rabelais, for all his tender respect for the tragic "Sans-Culotte" of Galilee, ranges himself quite definitely against the fundamental doctrine of Christian Chastity.

And yet it would be a shallow judgment to class him in this respect with Voltaire, or even with Anatole France. In fact, it is impossible to class him, in regard to this basic matter of his attitude to Christianity, with any other writer. His whole genius is dominated by his Nature-inspired revolt against ascetic monasticism, but there is a thaumaturgical "lovingness"—it is hard

to use any other word, except perhaps the Homeric *Aganophrosune*: for it has a touch of *Agapē* in it, but an *Agapē* thickened out by something gayer and grosser—diffused throughout his work, a sort of mystical, apocalyptic camaraderie that has borrowed a great deal from the freemasonry of the "Communion of Saints."

I am thinking of some of the most characteristic elements in the tone of his cosmogonic life-worship when I say that it is this Christian tincture in his titanic humour which separates it so completely from the thinner, more sapless, less magical well-being of the purely pagan hedonists.

To cut out from Rabelais his evangelical "love of God," and his equally evangelical camaraderie, is to draw off, as it were, the very oil and unction of his spacious doctrine. The truth is, he has managed to retain the mystical quintessence of mediaeval piety, while making intransigent sport of its obvious abuses; nor does the colossal obscenity of his erotic jesting swamp or submerge the magnanimity of his sexuality, of the royal reciprocity—I had almost said the royal equality—of the relation he advocates between the sexes.

I am not ashamed to confess that I am not quite "hard-boiled" enough, or, if you must have it so, virile enough, to swallow with equanimity all those practical jokes of our friend Panurge. His street-gamin practices upon the lady of Paris, and the clodhopper way he scores off the rustic Ding-Dong, do not endear this honeysuckle rogue to my graver taste.

"We are not amused," as Queen Victoria would say, by these saucy games. But the less slap-stick and clownish Panurge, the Panurge of the debate with Thaumast, the Panurge of the pros-and-cons of Marriage, the Panurge of the Apology for Debtors, and, above all, the blubbering

Panurge of the later books in his wit-combats with Friar John, jumps entirely with my notion of what is the true Rabelaisian touch.

As with all the deepest cosmic secrets revealed by genius, it is wise to take a circuitous flight round the tree of Knowledge, hovering about the aromatic incense as it is diffused through the air, and dwelling in the atmosphere of its revelation; whereas if you try to swallow every pip and stone of the celestial fruit you are likely to have to pay for your conscientiousness.

The more closely you read Rabelais the more intimately it sinks into your mind that there is diffused throughout these pages the very thing we are all craving for in this hard world; I mean some clue, however dim, to a Way of enduring all the disgusting evils of life, to a Way of distilling all the magical wonder out of life, as the chaotic mingling of these things in the great stream of existence hums by.

And to me it is as if this clue, this way, this secret, came welling up somehow from the inmost centre of each person's being.

But to get this life-spring into working order, to get this unconquerable flow of immortal ichor into play, a peculiar manner of thinking of it, or regarding it in the depths of oneself, seems to be essential.

And it is just here that the Rabelaisian piling-up of excrement upon excrement, of sexuality upon sexuality, of wine and meat upon wine and meat, of book-learning upon book-learning, of magic upon magic, comes in to help us.

Everything is mental—everything is personal. Everything depends on the mind. And this whole mystery of *the Rabelaisian Way* depends on the mind's marriage with that irrational creative force we call the will. There is

no word—modern psychology totally fails us where we need it most—for that godlike energy in the central core of the ego, that fighting-erotic energy, wherewith we wrestle with the cosmos when the mystic nuptials of mind and will take place.

We cannot at our simple pleasure call forth the exultant mood that in ordinary parlance we call ecstasy. But we *have* the power of summoning up in ourselves that fighting-erotic spirit which is, so to speak, the ethereal laughing-gas of ecstasy, even though it does not automatically culminate in ecstasy. In other words, there is such a thing as a constant, unintermittent substitute for these momentary ecstasies which are beyond the mind's power of creating for itself. But it would appear that for many sensitive and imaginative natures one of the grand obstacles to this gallant substitute for momentary ecstasy is the huge down-drag of the excremental processes and of the thick miasmic, grotesque weight of chemical matter in its foulest forms!

But if the fighting-erotic energy in one's inmost being can only manage to take this excremental accompaniment to life in a particular mood, a gigantic impediment in its path is at once removed.

Nor is the way of taking it into which Rabelais can guide a devoted reader a *realistic* or what we now call a "hard-boiled" way. Such a way would be totally beyond the power of a morbidly sensitive person—as most book-worms are! And it is of book-worms, that is to say of imaginative book-lovers, leading more or less sedentary lives, that I am especially thinking; for sturdy, active, healthy-minded temperaments take the excremental basis of life "in their stride," and to such persons this artificial and premeditated substitute for life's ecstatic moments is not required.

Their own well-constituted good spirits are enough. To natures of this kind Rabelais's monstrous humour presents itself as a fantastic exaggeration of a mere schoolboy's love of grossness and obscenity.

This is the whole point. Active, hard-boiled men of the world, devoid of bookish imagination, regard Rabelais as a somewhat tedious and scholarly edition of their own lively Pullman Car relater of indecent tales.

These are the persons who, in their sabbatical disguise as pillars of society, thrust forth this world-genius as a mischievous scalliwag, into the "forbidden" shelves of their public libraries!

I visualize the real Rabelais as the extreme opposite of this boisterous bawdy jester vociferously relating smutty stories to groups of uproarious nit-wits. I suspect him of having been an extremely shy and extremely sensitive scholar. The quintessential Rabelaisian humour is a very profound, a very subtle, and a very difficult way of taking those monstrous aspects of life that make it hard for sensitive people to re-create this chaotic world in terms of a literary and philosophical imagination.

Rabelais's book is a kind of apostolic epistle to the weaker brothers, the more timid and sensitive souls, among our pantagruelian initiates, upon the subject of the soul's *evangelical ecstasy*, and how it can get the sexuality of the world, and the monstrous indecency of the world, and the bottomless disgustingness of the world, into harmony with the purer life of the spirit.

Like all great humour, the Rabelaisian way of taking the monstrous facetiousness of our fairy-like cosmos is a way of philosophical and poetical exaggeration. And it is a humour saturated with the therapeutic oil of evangelical bawdiness, mixed freely and abundantly with the candle-ends of old wives' wisdom, but heightened

throughout by an ethereal translunar ichor, impossible to be defined, but drawing its radiant and celestial quiddity from the very depths of the unconquerable spirit of man.

If it is optimistic, this Rabelaisian humour, like Charity overcoming the World, 'tis an optimism that shrinks from no loathsomeness, no atrociousness, no horribleness that ordinary people encounter as they go through life; and it is profoundly and most richly the humour of a great scholar.

Passages recur again and again that bring this rich bookish joviality down to the earth. And at such times it is replaced—and one longs for more of these incomparable interludes—by a huge and friendly rusticity, a homely and yet royal humanity, the like of which is nowhere to be found outside this great book! Shakespeare and Cervantes, even Homer himself, show, as it were, *diminished* and, in some indescribable way, *lessened*, both in bulk and weight, when compared with the gigantic and simple homeliness of these godlike passages.

It is when we give ourselves up to the torrent of rich-echoing, symbolic, gnomic, oracular bookishness in Rabelais that we feel how slight a part the obscenity, the profanity, and all the monastic satire, really play in this vast tide of tellurian humour.

If ever there was a great Physician of the faltering human body and soul it is Rabelais. Mere contact with the unfathomable buoyancy of his spirit is a pantagruelian medicine for the feeble heart. He himself hints as much in his comparatively serious dedicatory preface to the *Fourth Book*, where he refers, advancing into a mystery beyond even the wisdom of "our Father Hippocrates" to the occult effects of the mere presence of the Physician, suggesting that actual telepathic sensations are "produced by a transfusion of the serene, or gloomy, aerial or

terrestrial, joyful or melancholic Spirits of the Physician, into the person of the Patient, as is the opinion of Plato, Averroes and others."

It is characteristic of his unconquerable faith—a medical rather than a priestly faith but a no less *magical* one—in the efficacy of "the will to live" that Rabelais throws his titanic weight, along with that of Pythagoras and Socrates and Goethe and Walt Whitman, on the side of those formidable and by no means cowardly Masters, throughout the ages, who in confronting "le grand Peut-être" at the bottom of our darkness, hold by "le bon espoir" of a joyful Resurrection from the Dead.

And indeed, in reading Rabelais a curious feeling often comes over us, a feeling very hard to put into words, as if there really were some saving possibility, some redeeming dimension of super-planetary force, not quite beyond human attainment, from which if we could only tap its occult resources, a living assurance of immortality would flood our feeble and faltering lives.

But it must be noted that this underlying "bon espoir," that runs like a deep fresh-water current below the overpowering salt waves, is a personal and mystical, not an orthodox or traditional faith. It springs from some secret reservoir in the depths of the individual soul, and its *taste*, so to speak, is at once pagan and evangelical. And it is a significant and characteristic thing that this buoyant vein of mystical assurance adjusts itself so well to the huge homely, monstrously gross humour, whereby he enlarges, heightens, and ennobles, with a sweet and godlike magic, the basic simplicities of earthly life.

Perhaps it is natural enough in the philosophy of a great Physician that the ultimate essence of his attitude to the First Cause should be the joyousness of grateful well-being, of his attitude to morals the exuberance of abound-

ing health; and of his attitude to immortality the intuition of an overbrimming vitality.

It is the affirmation of health against disease, of wisdom against ignorance, of magnanimity against meanness, of mercy against malice, of indulgence against resentment, of a free sex-happiness against depraved suppression, that culminates, in the dark deep question of the final alternative, in his preference for the Positive over the Negative, for the *open* over the *closed* door!

What Rabelais really does is to take our world, just as it is, with all its abuses, atrocities, injustices, stupidities, and monstrous ironies, and dig beneath it, until he can heave it up, roots, refuse, dung, offscouring, filthy rubble and all, and, lifted so, to let in upon it a luminous ether, a huge suffusion of celestial radiance, under which the whole chaotic spectacle falls into gigantic and friendly *homeliness* no longer desolate and futile, but with all its piled-up abominations taking on a new significance. And as every human figure in his book grows more and more gnomic and mellow, he ends by convincing us with his Friar Johns and Carpalins and Epistemons and Trouillogons and Triboulets and Thaumasts and Gymnasts and Rondibilises, not to speak of Grangousier, Gargantua and his great Pantagruel, that beneath all our viciousness and folly, it is of tough rind and sweet sap, of unconquerable humour and kindly resilience that our poor much-abused, much-enduring human nature is essentially composed!

Behind all human religions, behind the symbols of all creeds, behind the babble of all mystics, there does exist still, in spite of the negations of dogmatic science, an immortal spring of living water. This is the water that the Son of Man turns for ever into wine; and this is the wine, *tasting differently to all*, that this Arch-Thaumaturge

and chief among Heretics offers to us in his Holy Bottle! And how wholesome is the manner in which, like the old and great poet Raminagrobis, Rabelais would have us dismiss from the chambers of our spirit the pestilential rake-hells of all bigoted and cocksure orthodoxies, whether theological or scientific!

Keep all doors open, of this mystery of life and death, is his free motto. And, like Raminagrobis, he would turn these bigots and dogmatists—of both sides—out of the fortress of his sweet thoughts and immortal contemplations! And to his bookish and book-loving readers his voice still comes, warning us against these same arrogant orthodoxies—of both camps—with their waspish stingings. "Keep out of their courses, and eschew them, step forth of their ways and do not resemble them; and meanwhile let me be no more troubled by any of you, but leave me now in silence, I beseech you."

DICKENS

IF some Saturnian Micromegas were to visit our earth to make a study of the various types of human genius represented by our different nations and races and languages, what would he set down in his planetary notebook as the supreme contribution of the English? Surely he would only hesitate between two grand qualities that throw all others into the shade; *magical poetry* and *idiosyncratic humour.*

By "magical poetry" Micromegas would have to explain, when he returned to his Saturnian Academy, that he meant poetry *in its purest quintessence*, whether in ballads and songs, or in particular passages from longer poems.

And by "idiosyncratic humour" he would have to explain to his learned colleagues that he meant humour that was neither wit, nor satire, nor comedy, nor sarcasm, nor irony, nor farce, but a humour entirely and absolutely *dependent upon character*, that is to say upon the whimsical effect produced by every mortal thought, gesture, word, and *even silence*, of a person of either sex who could be described as a character.

"But for Heaven's sake inform us," the Saturnian Academy would enquire of their ambassador, "what you mean by a 'character.' Are we characters? Could this high quality of the planetary tribe to which you allude be said to emanate from *us*?"

But at that point, like other intellectual explorers returning home, our traveller would be forced to change the subject; for the probability is that in that august

assembly there would be more Wilhelm Meisters than Dick Swivellers, and more Jean Christophs than Falstaffs.

But Micromegas, to make a diversion, would proceed to illustrate what he meant by this *humour of character* by passages from the English geniuses who possessed it, brief passages from Scott and Jane Austen, and much longer ones from Shakespeare and Sterne. He would even read a few excerpts from Charles Lamb, to show how this *humour of character* could be diffused through the most random sallies of discursive fancy, and remain unspoilt by the most bookish wit.

And then to illustrate the nature of "magical poetry" as distinct from other sorts, he would quote from Shakespeare and Keats and Coleridge and Matthew Arnold and from the old ballads.

"But I beg you to note," he would say, "that while the special English humour to which I refer appears at its best in Shakespeare and Sterne and Dickens, it does not appear in complete isolation. In Shakespeare it is mixed with tragedy, in Sterne with sentiment, and in Dickens with melodrama; but since there is a larger and a more exuberant mass of it in Dickens than in these two others, I must announce to you," Micromegas would conclude, "that as Keats represents one of the two supreme gifts of this tribe, the most irrational and unphilosophical tribe to be found on this mad globe, from whose Bedlam—and not without relief—I returned yesterday, Dickens represents the other."

Passing from the analysis of Micromegas to our own attempt to get into focus something of what this name "Charles Dickens" represents, it seems as though to do the man full justice we have to consider the extraordinary handicaps under which he laboured.

In the first place, unlike Shakespeare, he had no "Uni-

versity Extension" culture to fall back upon, no Mermaid Tavern frequented by learned wits, no encounters with rich young bloods fresh from a Renaissance Court or from "swimming in gondolas."

In the second place, it was London, and not the country, upon which his imagination had to feed. Think of the implications of this! The whole trend of British literature from Shakespeare to Hardy has been country-ward rather than city-ward. Practically all the great novels before Dickens have either country towns or country villages as their background. This is partly, of course, because cities as we know them now, and even as Dickens knew them, are things of recent growth, creations of the Industrial Revolution; but London was there, London with her streets, her river, her docks, her bridges, her squares, her markets, her churches, her shops, her offices, her slums; but how seldom—and then only incidentally—did our earlier novelists make any real imaginative use of her!

No one has caught the spirit of London like Dickens; foreign writers, describing great foreign cities, none can touch him except Dostoievsky. Balzac himself is not *quite* at his best when dealing with Paris. In his Paris scenes, through all the smouldering and dusky magnificence, through all the intricate contrasts of the sumptuous and the sordid, through all the passion-drugged procession of sweet innocents and fuliginous devils we seem to miss, at least so it appears to me, something of that unequalled street-magic, so rich, so thick, so convincing, that we get from his provincial towns. The smoky trail of his Arabian-Nights demons, the super-gangster "Treize," is enough in itself to blight with its fabulous brimstone the homely truth of the "Cousin Pons" and "Cousine Bette" element; while round the thunder-scarred brows of the

tremendous Vautrin hover mephitic flames sufficient to reduce to a neutral pallor the shrinking tapers of reality.

No, in the whole of human fiction there are, from my point of view, only two novelists who give us the real ineffable magic of a vast metropolitan city. Zola deliberately sought to do it, but he lacked the imagination; and if, as I have hinted, Balzac was always being side-tracked by his passion for superhuman rascals, Victor Hugo was too deafened by his own grandiose virtue to catch those whimsical oracles that like elfin half-wits drift with the dust about the doors. Dostoievsky and Dickens alone, to my thinking, hold the clue to the mystery of a great city, of *any* great city; and they achieved this by the possession of a certain imaginative power that suggests, as only the most magical poetry can do, the real relation of the animate to the inanimate.

Neither of these writers troubles greatly about style, neither of them bothers much about "documented" realism, neither of them is afraid of the wildest melodrama. It is true that on one occasion Dickens goes out of his way to prove the literal truth, from historic evidence, of the phenomenon known as "spontaneous combustion"; but as the higher truth of the imagination absolutely demanded this unusual event, such an excursion was quite supererogatory. What Dostoievsky and Dickens have in common is a quality singularly difficult to define, as are all great imaginative essences, but it is a quality at all events that has to do with the porousness of human souls to inanimate objects, and it is as richly charged with the magic of streets and houses as is the poetry of Keats and Shakespeare with that of land and sea.

It is, I think, no far-fetched fancy to note yet another resemblance between these two—the fact that they are so ensorcerized by the sayings of Jesus. Here they differ

from both Shakespeare and Hardy; and is it fantastic, considering the derivation of the word "pagan," to look upon this as the natural result of the kind of "sorrow" that is "barricaded evermore," as Wordsworth says, "within the walls of cities"?

It is ever in the country that the old gods linger, ever through the crowded towns that the new religions—Communism among them—carry their spiritual flames; and there is little enough of the heathen worship of the earth in either Dostoievsky or Dickens. Over the Nevsky Prospect of the one, over the Whitechapel of the other, hover the outraged lineaments of "Le Bon Sans-Culotte": and whether it is done with Russian mysticism or with English radicalism, every aspect of religion, except the desperate paradoxes of Jesus, is torn to shreds with the sound of the tearing of many parchments.

The more you read Dickens—skipping, as a grown-up person, *some* of the tenth-rate sentiment—the more his resemblance to Dostoievsky expands and deepens. And his amazing genius is shown in the mere fact that this is the case *while he dodges every problem of sex.* To create a world of super-truth, whose roots are plunged in Nature while it goes beyond Nature in carrying out her most erratic ventures, and yet to dodge the quicksands of sex, is indeed an achievement.

But putting sex aside—and one feels that this ban was largely due to the umbilical cord of personal sympathy that bound him in such a glow of reciprocity to his huge audience—Dickens resembles Dostoievsky in his complete disregard of almost all the labours by which humanity lives! Office-work and needle-work are the only forms of human activity at which we are permitted to be present. Here we contemplate at their job, no carpenters, no plumbers, no weavers, no dairymen, no miners, no plough-

men, not even any fishermen, except the Peggotty family; and the plots turn, just as Dostoievsky's do, upon the arbitrary benevolence, or the arbitrary miserliness of people who in some unexplained manner have large sums of money in the bank. The activities of lawyers and of lawyers' clerks play a tremendous part, and the offices of old merchant-houses; but of the actual processes of business or of finance, such as Balzac and in our own day Dreiser, find such joy in describing, we hear little or nothing. We are led to assume that many specious rascals are occupied in many sinister enterprises, but the nature of these enterprises, except in the case of money-lenders and rent-collectors, is left obscure.

Dickens does indeed play two most rewarding cards, if I may put it so, neglected by the great Russian. I refer to his descriptions of various little shops, full of various fantastic objects, and to his absorbing passion for itinerant showmen. It is "Bread and the Circus" indeed—the poor man's intermittent paradises. And this mania for showmen which extends to every type of theatric entertainer, has no rival in his love except endless potations from the flowing bowl and feverish consumption of buttered toast. Certainly when you think of Dostoievsky's murderous vodka-orgies and deadly samovar-metaphysics, there is a Gargantuan reassurance about these harmless circus-people and their innocent collations.

But though in place of these Russian philosophers wrestling with God and the Devil over their stoves and their vodka we have the prodigals and the misers and the half-wits of London frying their bacon and buttering their toast, there is in both these writers the same dark, brooding, atmospheric tension, full of the creakings and shufflings of the padded feet of fate.

Take the chapter in *Bleak House* which introduces us to

Mr. Tulkinghorn, and at the same time gathers up the whole milieu of the Law Courts and their victims into a revolving cloud of smoke and dust and powdery papers out of the heart of which the old lawyer's ruby glass of solitary port gleams like a ubiquitous eye, and note how the transfusing imagination that gives these scenes their organic unity, answers to the watchful atmosphere that hangs about the Karamazov home, where the doomed old man is waiting, always waiting, for Grushenka to come to him!

When one considers how much easier it is—for an English novelist anyway—to blend the majestic processes of Nature with his narrative, than to give to the inanimate objects in a dust-begrimed city their apocalyptic significance, it indeed makes one feel that a master-thaumaturge is at work, to enter any of these Dickens habitations. In every pause of the action, in every lull of the talk, you are aware of the crowd of inanimate witnesses that surround these bizarre people, surround them with mockings and beckonings, with leerings and oglings, as though from a world of presences living a subhuman life parallel with ours.

Where he is far below Dostoievsky as a novelist, and even below Scott or Balzac, is in his unfortunate sentimentality. His is a sentimentality worse even than Sterne's, though it is more sincere; for Sterne's sentiment, as in the case of Maria and her goat, and the caged bird, and the ass with the macaroon, is a deliberate aesthetic cult, whereas with Dickens it is simply the popular warmth of an unsophisticated heart. It is, in fact, unmitigated bad taste—parallel with the lapses of the popular cinema; and at its worst it assumes a sanctimonious religious form, as when Agnes at the death of Dora raises a saintly finger and points upwards at the ceiling.

The truth is that in reading Dickens an ordinary intelligent person has to do what he does when reading Wordsworth, unless he has a malicious relish for the lapses of genius—discreetly hurry on. For in Dickens we are faced—and there is, I think, no parallel example among great novelists—with two collaborating authors, one of whom is, after Rabelais, the supreme humorous genius of the human race, and the other a tenth-rate, I might say a twentieth-rate composer of newspaper serials for young ladies.

Of course there has always been a mysterious psychological link between humour and sentimentality. We find it in Hans Andersen; we find it in Heine; we find plenty of it in such an admirable modern author as Neil Lyons. And above all, we find it in Charlie Chaplin. But this is an utterly different thing from the Sunday School clap-trap in Dickens. Dickens *can* be touchingly poignant with the old immortal catch in the throat of the undying clown, and here he is often at his very best, as when Dick Swiveller plays cards *à deux*:

"Tell upon you!" said Dick. "Do you mean to say you were looking through the keyhole for company?"

"Yes, upon my word I was," replied the small servant.

"How long have you been cooling your eye there?" said Dick.

"Oh, ever since you first began to play them cards, and long before."

Vague recollections of several fantastic exercises with which he had refreshed himself after the fatigues of business, and to all of which, no doubt, the small servant was a party, rather disconcerted Mr. Swiveller; but he was not very sensitive on such points . . .

"Now," said Mr. Swiveller, putting two sixpences into a saucer, and trimming the wretched candle when the cards had been cut and dealt, "those are the stakes. If you win, you get

'em all. If I win I get 'em. To make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?"

The small servant nodded.

"Then, Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, "fire away!"

The Marchioness, holding her cards very tight in both hands, considered which to play; and Mr. Swiveller, assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required, took another pull at the tankard, and waited for her lead.

Passages of this kind—and there are a great many of them—are on a par with the famous "So am not I," of Sterne's dropsical scullion, and they form a sort of link between Shakespeare and Charlie Chaplin.

But there are utterances of Dickens's humorous characters all the way through his works that are beyond all dialogues in fiction: that are superior, because more spontaneous and less witty, to most of the humorous utterances in Shakespeare. And when these beyond-all-art sentences occur, what you might call a perfect smoke-ring of super-truth mounts up; and as far as humour is concerned the absolute is reached, as it is reached nowhere else save in Rabelais.

We students of human history—and especially we students of literature—are so conventional in the motions of our mind, that because neither Dickens nor Rabelais have composed thoughtful treatises on sociology we fancy that they have contributed little or nothing to the serious progress of the human race. On the contrary, they have contributed everything. They have contributed between them *the one single panacea* that goes to the root of our trouble; and not only so, but together they have indicated the one and only path by which humanity can become more and more itself—that is to say, more and more *humane*. The whole of Rabelais and the whole of Dickens is one vast *skit* upon the folly of our clever rulers, our clever bureaucrats, our clever lawyers, our clever generals

our clever scientists, our clever politicians, and our clever patriots. And it is a skit upon these as against the *men of good will.* It is a skit that contains the startling suggestion that only when the "men of good will," that is to say, men who refuse to do evil that good may come, *are in possession of the power,* will humanity be set upon its true path—the path not of science *or* religion, for both have failed us, but of *humanity*!

But not even yet have I arrived at what to most of his readers is the culmination of Dickens's genius—the livingness of his characters. Many of us feel, and not without reason, that the invention of living characters, of symbolic characters, of characters that gather into themselves whole avatars of eternal recurrence, is the proudest, if not the most godlike achievement of the human mind.

I have myself a malicious prejudice against the glib use of the word "creative" as applied to the lesser arts. I do not presume to be offended when a milliner uses it for a lady's dress, but it does annoy me when it is applied to pieces of dainty bric-à-brac. This is probably a rustic prejudice; for in Nature there are many tiny sea-shells as lovely if not as dramatic as the grandest cataract; but it is a prejudice that has a considerable human tradition behind it, and I have a suspicion that to the end of time, in our race's estimate of works of imagination, size, length, magnitude, quantity, as well as the weight of human significance, will continue to overawe the mind. Thus we surely must consider the invention of Don Quixote or Panurge or Falstaff or Hamlet or Uncle Toby or the Idiot as of greater importance than to compose even such a perfect sonnet as "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part," and equally we must regard the invention of this host of characters as a greater achievement than a perfectly written book like *Esmond* or *Madame Bovary.*

But let me hint at a certain doubt I feel just here. I would like to appeal to every reader of *The Pleasures of Literature*, when they reach this point, as to whether, deep in their hearts, they wouldn't sooner have invented Don Quixote than all the characters in Dickens put together? This categorical question is not, however, really a fair one; for there is no other human "creation"—and here, indeed, we have a right to use this godlike word—in the least comparable to Don Quixote. To keep *him* the human race might well offer up Falstaff and Panurge and Hamlet and Uncle Toby as well as all our Dickens puppets. Indeed, to find a counter-weight for Don Quixote you would have to leave the inventions of individual men altogether and pass into mythological regions where the anonymous genius of humanity itself has been at work.

Dickens is undoubtedly, for all his ban on sex, what Nietzsche would call a "Dionysian." Here he resembles Rabelais; and it is for this reason that one still encounters nervous and fastidious persons, devotees of Walter Pater or of Henry James, who "can't read Dickens." In Rabelais you have to put up with the mountains of excrement, with the colossal slaughterings, with the cosmic bawdiness, while in Dickens you have to endure, what is even harder to many, a great deal of boisterous bad taste and an exuberance that, in avoiding indecency, plunges into vulgarity.

And you have to endure so much unmitigated *ugliness*. If Doré's illustrations of Rabelais are sufficient to frighten away many timid spirits, what must be said of the veritable revel in human distortions that we encounter in the original illustrations of Dickens?

Gazing at these goblins—and I protest that sometimes they dehumanize our wretched mortality to a point of terrified disgust—we have the sensation of being present

at a "Walpurgis night" of domesticated Lemurs, whose swarming masks are far more shocking than any of the he-apes or she-apes of Goethe's fancy. Those burning eyes of Dickens missed nothing of the pantomime distortions of our mortal bodies, nothing of the devil-dance masks of our pitiful "mugs," but the illustrators of Dickens set out to imitate humanity still more abominably; caricaturing caricatures, till these wretched Images of God become like those revolting Valentines which superseded the tender missives of an earlier age.

There must be a vein of enjoyment of the monstrously vulgar in our national psychology, else how did those horrible Valentines—worse than anything that even Swift's race-loathing could conjure up—ever come into being? But one approaches the same thing, or used to when I was young, in some of the "Comics" that children love. And perhaps there, and there alone, lies the explanation! Children are not as sensitive to the hideously grotesque as some older people, especially those among us who purged our taste—or depraved it if you will—with the sinful line of beauty in Beardsley's delicate erotica! There certainly existed in Dickens a great deal of that strange immunity to the horror of ugliness that seems to be a characteristic of children; and is it possible that his suppression of sex, which his loving reciprocity with his Victorian public encouraged, helped to develop this childish immunity to disgust-phobia?

But against all this, have we not reason to be proud that the most English of all our men of letters surpasses all the writers of the world in his genius for describing children themselves? It is, indeed, impossible to exaggerate the child-element in Dickens's imagination. If it is this curious chastity in the driving-force of his demonic urge that accounts for his freedom from the *disgust-phobia*, it is

surely this same quality that endows all his Inanimates with such abounding life.

And I think, too, that all this must have a definite connection with the absence from Dickens's personal culture of any influence from the classical world. The smallest smattering of such an influence encourages in us a diffused erotic fastidiousness with regard to the human body. But Dickens's characters seem, if I may say so—and the deliberate grotesqueness of the old illustrations intensify this effect—*to have been born in their costumes.*

It is a shocking thought, an indecent thought, to imagine any of these vivacious, hilarious, fiendish, angelic, gesticulating puppets *without their clothes.* Nor is this merely that so many of them are elderly. The poor lean mortal frame of Don Quixote, do we not know it, in its crazy nakedness, as well as Sancho did, and reverence it more, just as we reverence a naked mediaeval saint? Scott's Baron Bradwardine could strip himself to the skin and none would wink an eyelid; so could Meg Merrilies, the old gipsy, or Flora MacIvor, the Highland beauty; but it is as inconceivable to think of a naked Agnes or Dora as it is revolting to think of a naked Micawber or Pecksniff or Quilp!

Every great original genius is a rock of offence, an incendiary's torch, a sword for the dividing of souls, and I know well that my particular reaction to Dickens must inevitably excite contempt as well as sympathy.

I am aware myself of the same antipodal emotions towards the instinctive reactions of others to him! How it used to outrage my feelings at school when certain literary masters amused themselves by composing examination questions upon Pickwick! How it annoys me still to hear a certain type of unctuous and jocular, and to my mind totally undiscriminating reader put this same

Pickwick on a par with Rabelais! To confess my own secret thought, I believe that all this fuss over *Pickwick* has done real harm to the appreciation of the far subtler and quite as characteristic excellences of Dickens's later books.

Oh, we have to go much deeper than this Merry Andrew vein, which for all its racy inventions offers us little beyond inspired farce, before we reach the Aladdin's cave of his extraordinary imagination!

For myself, I find him at his best, not in *David Copperfield*, and certainly not in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but in *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. It is in these books, to my notion, that we get a certain atmospheric feeling that has no parallel in literature.

If this impression is connected with the emotions of childhood, it is no more connected with any *particular* children than it is in his other books. In all his books there are children, and they serve him, as Puck and Ariel served Shakespeare, as mediums for this atmospheric secret. And it is curious that it should be in Dickens, where reign ugly and grotesque powers rather than beautiful ones, that children play such a dominant rôle; while with Shakespeare and the Greeks, where the ruling spirit is the spirit of beauty, they hardly appear at all!

There are singularly few children in Balzac, or in Scott either, and one feels that here again Dickens and Dostoievsky are together, and together as the only great novelists who in the profoundest sense of all have caught the secret of the spirit of Jesus. Yes, the grandeur of both Dickens and Dostoievsky is that they dare to make a frontal attack on exactly the same worldly and false "reality" that Jesus attacked. The tragic psychology of the one and the infinite humour of the other were both directed against, not the flesh or the devil, but *The World*, the world of logical cause-and-effect, the world of "efficient" work,

the world whose hard self-made Gods are the Gods of Knowledge and Power! Among Dostoievsky's drunkards, whores, degenerates, and madmen move his disturbing saints, such as the Idiot and Alyosha. Among Dickens's performers, entertainers, showmen, clowns, devils and misers, move his wistful all-enduring children. Over and over again in both their works there are gathered together queer groups of human oddities, with the all-levelling metaphysical samovar in the one case, and the all-levelling un-metaphysical punch-bowl in the other, unloosening hearts and tongues. And in both cases the reader grows aware of "something else," of "Somebody Else" present among these queer ones, creating a glow, a warmth, a melting together of the knotty husks of obstinate human selfishness! Again and again in both of them the reader has the sensation that a power beyond humanity is melting the isolation, the pride, the self-complacency, the proud efficiency of the righteous in the presence of some little accidental human gesture, some chance-blown natural light falling upon some negligible inanimate object. And then, and then, with a tragic burst of tears, à la Russe, and a wild and whirling jest, à la Londres, lo! the impossible happens, the fairy-story comes true, two and two make five, and the Kingdom of Heaven is among us!

No great pagan novelist brooding bitterly upon life's futility, or clinging passionately to the sweet anodynes of beauty and sex, can shake the walls of our solemn cause-and-effect Consistory, as Dostoievsky does when Rogojin flings a million roubles into the stove, or Captain Cuttle conjures up the lost Wal'r—"he's drownded, ain't he?"—into little Florence's arms. Something breaks in *from outside* in the work of both these prophets of the Millennium, disturbing our modern star, the star Worm-

wood, in its rational courses and interrupting the orderly sequence of the tragedy "Man." These two great Masks, in these "lonesome latter years," put the match to the gunpowder under our "brass-tacks" Reality, till the "world as it wags," which Lear told Gloucester you could see with the "case of eyes," begins to heave and crack.

There is around the work of all great geniuses a certain aura or emanation, made up of the winnowed essence of the writer's most characteristic vision; and I always feel this when I look at any volume of Dickens; and I remember feeling it at school in spite of that dubious fuss over *Pickwick*.

From the covers of any of Dickens's books emerges a cloud, like the cloud from the unsealed bottle where the genii was imprisoned; and to me this magic cloud has always represented a thick smoky mass of tall dark houses, narrow streets, dim alleys, winding stairways, dingy courts, under a forest of chimneys, alongside of a moaning, desolate, slippery river-wharf. And this smoky mass of lurid habitation always seems to me to be able to thicken itself, and deepen itself, within itself, so that there is no end to its occult and enchanted recesses. By its long contact with humanity the actual masonry and woodwork of this mystic mass has taken on an indescribable livingness of its own, so that as it is perfectly congruous for any member of its goblinish inmates to perish of spontaneous combustion, so it seems natural for any portion of its own fabric to fall into instantaneous dust; for between the inanimate body of this creaking and whispering masonry and the human elves and the human fiends and the more than human children that inhabit it there is an organic affiliation.

This particular vision of a Dickens book as a dusky fragment of a labyrinthine world of stone and slate and

brick, that recedes into a fairy-like infinitude, is what makes me so particularly attached to *Little Dorrit.* I always think of the weird house where Mrs. Clennam eats out her heart in self-torture, while her soul like a lapping cat licks its saucer of remorse, and where Mr. Flintwinch runs his Affery by the scruff of her neck up and down the creaky stairs, the house that finally falls into powder, as a perfect symbol of that almost physical porousness of human mortality to the bricks and mortar about it, which is like a recurrent strain in his vision of life.

But first and last, it is in *imagination,* that highest of all human gifts, that Dickens surpasses all competitors. It is real imagination, not just the play of fancy or invention, whereby he created, out of the casual hints and random strokes of chance encounters, this magic-lantern Metropolis. And returning to his pages from the novels of our own age, how lacking we seem in this magician's gift! Philosophy, psychology, sociology—our great writers abound in all of these, but where are the "dramatis personae," where are the *characters?*

In Joyce's great *Ulysses,* Daedalus and Bloom and Bloom's wife are all symbolic focuses of whirlpools within whirlpools of inspired psychic discoveries; but their very weight of mythological and cosmic suggestiveness detracts in some way from the clear-cut outlines of their personalities. There are so many irrepressible, questing, vulgar, lecherous, kindly Blooms, there are so many earthy, shameless, fecund, unfastidious, maternal Mrs. Blooms, that these particular specimens of these planetary types merge the lineaments of their single never-to-be-reproduced identity in the recurrent truth they represent. The universal, in other words, swallows up the particular!

And the same is true of D. H. Lawrence. The grotesque and pathetic and never-to-appear-again outlines of a

unique human creature, how completely swamped and absorbed and lost they are in these representative and symbolic sex-reactions! The new psychological science has done precisely what the old physical science is always doing. It has levelled out and drained away the mysterious uniqueness of all separate living persons.

If one of our chief "pleasures" in reading fiction—and it is a legitimate and very ancient one—consists in adding to our list of real acquaintances a vast array of *imagined* acquaintances, what a meagre satisfaction we get—putting the unequalled Proust aside—in present-day literature! They do not *stand out*, these dissected perambulatory pathoids. They puke and pine, they mime and mow at one another, they reveal to a wonder their "streams of consciousness"; but their loves and hates are like the loves and hates in fish-ponds and aquariums. The psychology of sex has dehumanized them. We do, indeed, feel ourselves into every amorous motion of these fishy universals, but when we have closed the book, we have forgotten their very names. They are ourselves, or rather they are that portion of ourselves which we share so widely—for we are all sadists and masochists and complex-bitten madmen—that the heart of the matter, every man in his unique humour, and every man expressing that unique humour in every unique gesture he makes, has melted away.

Were Dickens to come back from the dead and write to-day, think what he would gain from our greater freedom of speech in sexual and religious matters. But he would use that freedom to outline, to clarify, to emphasize, even further than he did, the abysmal gulf that divides personality from personality, the gulf that is the only true cause of the only true humour—the humour of differentiated character.

The social cruelties that this great Radical attacked have changed their form. The Bounderbys and Gradgrinds of our generation use new moral shibboleths to take the whims and the fancies, the vagaries and the wantonness, in a word *the heart*, out of the lives of men and women. But the solemn sanctimoniousness is the same. The unrelenting self-righteousness is the same, the cock-sure dogmatism is the same; and there is present in all these new "idealogies" the hard eye of Mr. Murdstone, whipping us into line.

It is the old puritan blasphemy, against which—and it is the one single place where he speaks sharply in person—Shakespeare himself protested, the blasphemy of sacrificing the sublime irresponsible mystery of being alive at all, to some damned ulterior purpose, a purpose which in its essential definition can never be more than a means to an end.

The one human spirit that in its divine "escapism" will always baffle these moral slave-drivers of the world is the spirit of humour. It is because the English beyond all others possess this gift—a gift which springs up spontaneously from the depths of their souls—that they "never, never will be slaves"! Slave-drivers can dragoon artists, make prophets recant, make philosophers prevaricate, make scientists serve them with blameless devotion. The one type of free soul that will baffle them and defy them to—well! as Rabelais would say—"to the fire exclusively," is the soul of the humorist.

All this goes far and deep. It is a spiritual secret, shared with that mysterious "love" and that equally mysterious "equality of all souls" taught by Jesus. Nor can I feel as if it is mere "miching mallecho" in me when I contend that after the Fifth Gospel of Dostoievsky our only real Evangelists have been Charles Dickens and Charlie

Chaplin. And both of these great geniuses excel in the little side-scenes and side-shows where the misfits and the derelicts and the dotty, all of them candidates for scientific liquidation, utter their inopportune sentiments.

These side-issue scenes, which have—as far as Dickens is concerned—very slight connection with the "classic unities," are often passages of the purest inspiration. After reading them a person feels an impulse to "shake his superflux," as Lear says, and "show the Heavens more just." Little Dorrit is relating a fairy-story to her friend:

> "Hospitals," interposed Maggy, still nursing her knees. "Let him have hospitals, because they're so comfortable. Hospitals with lots of chicking."
>
> "Yes, he had plenty of them and he had plenty of everything."
>
> "Plenty of baked potatoes, for instance," said Maggy.
>
> "Plenty of everything."
>
> "Lor!" chuckled Maggy, giving her knees a hug. "Wasn't it prime!"

Where Dickens, like Charlie Chaplin, is in an absolute sense the spokesman of the People against the Privileged is in the relish he expresses for the three grand "desiderata" of a destitute life—food and drink, warmth, and some rare and startling occurrence.

> Supper was not yet over, when there arrived at the Jolly Sandboys two more travellers. . . . One of these was the proprietor of a giant, and a little lady without legs or arms . . . the other, a silent gentleman who earned his living by showing tricks upon the cards and who had rather deranged the natural expression of his countenance by putting small leaden lozenges into his eyes and bringing them out at his mouth. . . . The name of the first of these newcomers was Vuffin; the other, probably as a pleasant satire upon his ugliness, was called Sweet William.
>
> "How's the Giant?" said Short when they all sat smoking round the fire.

"Rather weak upon his legs," returned Mr. Vuffin. "I begin to be afraid he going at the knees."

"That's a bad lookout," said Short.

"Ay! Bad indeed," replied Mr. Vuffin, contemplating the fire with a sigh. . . .

"What becomes of the old giants?" said Short, turning to him again after a little reflection.

"They're usually kept in carawans to wait upon the dwarfs," said Mr. Vuffin.

"The maintaining of 'em must come expensive when they can't be shown, eh?" remarked Short, eyeing him doubtfully.

"It's better *that* than letting 'em go upon the parish or about the streets," said Mr. Vuffin. "Once make a giant common, and giants will never draw again. Look at wooden legs. If there was only one man with a wooden leg what a property *he'd* be!"

"So he would!" observed the landlord and Short together. "That's very true."

"Instead of which," pursued Mr. Vuffin, "If you was to advertise Shakespeare played entirely by wooden legs, it's my belief you wouldn't draw a sixpence."

"I don't suppose you would," said Short. And the landlord said so too.

It is impossible to overestimate the part played in Dickens's work by his mania for the *theatre*. Like Dostoievsky, what delights him is to gather the most opposite types of character together, each with all his characteristic gestures and familiar tags of speech well-established, and then make them "act" in concerted contrast; but whereas in Dostoievsky this clash quickly becomes a spiritual and symbolic one, with Dickens it either tightens into extravagant melodrama, or dissolves into a delirious glow of pentecostal love.

But whether the tension is tightened into lurid drama, or relaxed into a melting love-feast, one is always aware of the huge personal relish with which the stage-management is being conducted; and this leads me to the gulf

there is between writers whose "art" is always being *felt* and writers whose creative energy is always carrying them away. For the catholic-minded there is a special pleasure in both; but I think the latter kind has this advantage, that you feel that the personality behind the work is larger and greater than any particular thing he does. The "artists" at this job seem indeed to have a clear motive behind their work. And they do what they want to do and have their reward. But Dickens was the opposite of an artist. His theatricality, his sentimentality, his reckless humour, were all used shamelessly and carelessly for propaganda purposes, propaganda on behalf of the irresponsible against the responsible, of the irrational against the rational, of the helpless against the competent, of the foolish against the wise. "A miracle! A miracle" we may cry, with Homenas, of this man; for if, like Don Quixote, he could turn wind-mills into giants, by God! he could turn water into wine.

GREEK TRAGEDY

THE best *Introibo ad altare* for a person approaching Greek Tragedy for the first time, or returning to it after a lapse of years, would be to read Walter Pater's *Greek Studies*; but better still would it be, without any such "Grace," to plunge boldly into the dark waters.

Second only to Homer in their influence over our Western nations, the three great tragic dramatists of Athens have come to dominate not only the Theatre, where even Shakespeare's magic has been unable to resist them, but the whole field of what might be called the imaginative culture of Europe.

In our own time this is still true. Greek Tragedy, and not Shakespeare, was in Hardy's mind when he wrote *The Dynasts*. Greek Tragedy, and not Shakespeare, looms up as the main aesthetic influence behind the plays of Eugene O'Neill; and when you turn from the modern stage to the modern novel, this same tremendous tradition, austere, sombre, ironic, naked, and stripped, will be still found, like a submerged spirit under the ship's keel of each powerful new book, dominating the particular dark course it ploughs.

It is not the influence of Shakespeare that we find in the architectonics of their work in such opposite talents as those of Ibsen and Strindberg, such different temperaments as those of Edgar Lee Masters and Theodore Dreiser. In such a strange, powerful, modern story as William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* the dark back-

ground, the underlying scaffolding of the subject is Sophoclean, not Shakespearean.

Nor is it without significance that the enormous tidal-wave of Psychoanalysis takes so much of its mysterious wine-dark pressure from this same source.

Listen to what Jocasta says to her husband-son in *Oedipus the King* :

> Why should a mortal man, the sport of chance,
> With no assured foreknowledge, be afraid ?
> But live a careless life, from hand to mouth.
> This wedlock with thy mother fear not thou.
> How oft it chances that in dreams a man
> Has wed his mother !

The terrifying poetry of the American Jeffers, the terrifying stories of our own James Hanley, carry on the same lurid *frisson*, the same dark shudder, purging still, as Aristotle said, our grosser, feebler passions, by means of the sublime *catharsis* of pity and terror.

And the curious thing is that so many of us whose actual knowledge of Greek Tragedy is extremely limited—in some cases *nil*—are found gravely making use of the House of Atreus, or the doom of Oedipus, or the fate of the prophetic Teiresias, in order to score some passing point in an aesthetic dispute, or to establish some dubious excellence in a favourite author.

To my mind, the two supreme influences over our modern imagination in all ultimate *intellectual passions* are Dostoievsky and Nietzsche ; and what could be more in the vein of Greek Tragedy than the murder of the father in the *Brothers Karamazov*, or more clairvoyant of the double-edged secret of their handling of life than Nietzsche's distinction between the "Apollonian" and the "Dionysian," and his tremendous paradox that the horror of these old plays was the result of the over-

brimming of a heroic happiness, that found relief in ritualistic atrocity, *not* a resentful pessimism, taking its revenge upon life?

The subject of the present volume being the enrichment of our pleasure in reading the great books of the world, a word at this point directed to such younger readers as have been, in Charles Lamb's phrase, "defrauded of the sweet food of academic institution" seems not out of place.

I would modestly suggest that any reader at present unacquainted, save from hearsay, with Greek Tragedy, in place of reading academic books about them, and in place of reading brilliant poetical reproductions of them, should get hold of the baldest, plainest, simplest *literal prose translation*—one or two plays of each of the three—and note his immediate personal reaction, his reaction to Aeschylus, to Sophocles, to Euripides, with all the preferences, predilections, and comparative responses excited by such successive encounters.

When one is young—I am pretty sure I am not only speaking for myself—one has a tendency to read with eager passion every subtle and penetrating appreciation one can come at of these tremendous works, enjoying the fascinating impressions of literary scholars rather than undertaking the harder mental effort, with the text on our hands, of analysing our own individual reactions.

In certain rare instances, such as in the case of Walter Pater's *Greek Studies* and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy out of Music*, this method *has* its justification; but these two critics are unique. They not only think, feel, and see for us, they compel us to think, feel, and see for ourselves; whereas the many other charming, plausible, and erudite books on the subject inform us without inspiring us, enlighten us without transporting us, and thicken out our

knowledge in place of giving us a living, growing, and organic experience of our own. There does remain, however, the quite legitimate pleasure of noting the favouritism shown by later poets for one or other of these three dramatists.

It would seem that both Milton and Goethe had a partiality for Euripides; while Matthew Arnold, on the other hand, is at pains to make clear his preference for Sophocles; and I like to think that the reference to Aeschylus at the end of his sacrifice of Tess may indicate the one among the three to whom Thomas Hardy most instinctively turned.

Homer was the inexhaustible quarry from which they all drew their inspiration; and coming to which of them you will, you cannot but be impressed by his inability to catch that incomparable chord of absolute human simplicity which that greatest of poets alone can strike.

Take these lines, for instance, describing the tears of Penelope while her husband, as yet unknown to her, gives her his unquestionable proof that he had really seen the lost hero.

> He spoke; and made the many falsehoods of his tale seem like the truth, and as she listened her tears flowed and her face melted as the snow melts on the lofty mountains, the snow which the East Wind thaws when the West Wind has strewn it, and as it melts the streams of the rivers flow full; so her fair cheeks melted as she wept and mourned for her husband, who even then was sitting by her side.

It is a tone like this that inevitably lifts the heightened simplicity of Homer, with its direct ballad-like poignance, into "an ampler ether, a diviner air" than can ever be attained by the more lurid tension of drama.

Let us begin by considering the greatest of all trilogies, the three closely-knit plays of Aeschylus dealing with the

deaths of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and the hunting of Orestes by the Furies.

And, by the way, isn't it significant of the absolute predominance of these old Greek poets that to-day, almost within a decade of the middle of the twentieth century, the highest ambition of a modern novelist should be to compose a "trilogy," reminiscent of this one, just as the highest praise a critic can give to any spiritual tale of adventure is to call it "epic"?

The "fragment from the Homeric feast" which Aeschylus expands into the greatest, as it is the earliest, trilogy of our human stage is still inferior to its fountain-source. Odysseus is telling them, in the halls of Alcinous, how across his trench of blood at the mouth of Hades he spoke to the outraged spirit of the dead king:

> When then Holy Persephone had scattered this way and that the spirits of the women, there came up the spirit of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, sorrowing. . . . He knew me straightway, when he had drunk the dark blood, and he wept aloud, and shed big tears, and stretched forth his hands toward me eager to reach me. But no longer had he aught of strength or might remaining such as of old was in his supple limbs . . . but he straightway made answer and said . . . Ere now thou hast been present at the slaying of many men . . . but in heart thou wouldst have felt most pity hadst thou seen that sight, how about the mixing bowl and the laden tables we lay in the hall and the floor swam with blood. And the most piteous cry that I heard was that of the daughter of Priam, Cassandra, whom the guileful Clytemnestra slew by my side. And I sought to raise my hands and smite down the murderess, dying though I was, pierced through with the sword. But she, the shameless one, turned her back upon me, and even though I was going down to the house of Hades deigned neither to draw down my eyelids with her fingers nor to close my mouth.

What one notices especially—and no doubt it is of the essence of dramatic as against epic poetry—is that in every

single point where horror can be increased by the particular twist given to the tale, it *is* increased, and where passion can be intensified to the breaking-point, it *is* intensified; although in both cases something—that strange redeeming sense of the normal world going on when it is all over, that sense of an indescribable peace out of storm which Shakespeare, dramatist though he was, aims at giving us in *his* greatest plays—is of necessity lost.

Yes, dramatist though he was, Shakespeare made an obvious effort at the end of all his great tragedies to catch something of the redeeming peace of the monotone of normal life as the last wail of passion dies down and the last crimson bubbles sink. But consider the close of all the greatest plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Oedipus at Colonus does, indeed, actually close with the words:

> Wail no more, let sorrow rest,
> All is ordered for the best.

And this tone is made possible by the nature of the protagonist's mysterious departure from the world. But the actual feeling with which we are left as the man's unhappy daughters depart for their besieged home is not so much expressed in this complacent tag as in those lines a little before, when the ill-starred Polyneices is about to make his unwanted appearance:

> Not to be born at all
> Is best, far best that can befall,
> Next best, when born, with least delay
> To trace the backward way.

In the same manner, by reason of its comparatively "happy ending," the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus closes on a serene tone. But this is something very different from that Shakespearean feeling of calm produced by the flow-

ing onwards of the long-drawn tide of normal human life.

The close of *Prometheus Bound* as well as of the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation-Bearers* is upon the note of unrelieved disaster; and as for the manner in which Euripides ends his *Bacchanals* and his *Medea*, one can only say that one hopes our grosser passions *are* purged by such piling up of frightfulness, for we have certainly no other comfort left!

Curiously enough, Euripides closes both the *Medea* and the *Bacchanals* with the same words, save that in the former the issue is attributed to the doom of Zeus, *tamias Zeus*, and in the latter to the works of the gods, *morphai tōn daimoniōn*:

> O the works of the Gods—in manifold wise they reveal them:
> Manifold things unhoped-for the Gods to accomplish bring.
> And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not to fulfil them;
> And the paths undiscerned of our eyes, the Gods unseal them.
> So fell this marvellous thing.

To grasp what Greek Tragedy really means, to grasp what of its mystic secret we can appropriate to ourselves in this modern age, what we can make our own for the benefit of that under-tide of our life that remains unaffected by outward occasion, it is necessary to recall its ecstatic, orgiastic origin.

Whenever any human being among us feels that particular mystic rapture which brings spirit and sex together, and religion and sex together, and nature and sex together, and life and death together, he is in musical harmony with the essence of Greek Tragedy!

Whether you are by the destiny of your character a worshipper of *Apollo*, that is to say, of creative order, of reasonable beauty, of self-control, of intellectual light;

or, on the other hand, a worshipper of *Dionysus*, that is to say, of losing yourself in the delirious darkness of those wild, torn, broken intimations that set beauty and reason and even decency at defiance, you can find underlying the austere traditional forms of Greek Tragedy certain mysterious channels, dug down deep into the passion-rock of your life, along which your strongest feelings can flow.

Few of us go through existence without being aware of intermittent emotions which seem to belong neither to what we call morality nor to what we call immorality, seem in fact to spring directly from some super-moral or sub-moral level of Being, where *these* distinctions disappear, but where others even deeper in their opposition rise up and manifest themselves. Religion and Irreligion, reverence for Zeus and defiant fellowship with Prometheus, alternate in these emotions like Turn and Counter-turn, Strophe and Anti-strophe, in an orgiastic dance of the opposing poles of the life-force.

Against the proud sun-smitten lute-strings of Apollo you will feel, rising and falling on the wind, the dark, ensorcerized flute-breathings of Dionysus. To each of them in mystic alternation responds the heart-beat of a universe at war with itself.

It is the ritual-dance of creation which is also the ritual-dance of the destruction of creation. It is the sex-dance of Destiny with Chance. "Om! Om! Om!" beat the tom-toms of the one. "Konx! Om! Pax!" clash the cymbals of the other. Greek tragedy may strike us to-day as something austere and wooden, and yet something monstrous and superhuman like the galvanic gestures of vast Cosmic Dolls, who, rising on the rim of our round world, nod and wail at one another, bow and bend to one another, and hurl at one another bleeding thunderbolts of meteoric malediction.

Out of spontaneous rural pantomime, out of fantastic mumming and miming, out of the wild dances of satyrish grotesques, out of what was half-ritual, half-orgy, out of what must have been touched from the beginning by the darker elements of this cult of the beautiful, cruel, womanish god, who was the perilous Life-Sap of Creation, was moulded at last, by one of the strangest metamorphoses in the history of art, what we now know as Greek Tragedy.

From ecstasy in the stirring of the sap, from ecstasy in the blood of the grape, and from ecstasy in the seminal pulse of sex rose Ritual, and from Ritual rose this mysterious and unique art, an art that could spiritualize and sublimate the wildest excesses of its phallic origin by the pity and terror of the Tragic Muse. It was the ritual of musical *orgia*—a Greek word that connoted much more than mere erotic excess—that led to the Tragedies performed in the Dionysian Festival; and running like a mystic undertone through all these plays is a sense of the undivulged Mysteries of Eleusis wherein the cult of Dionysus was mingled with that of the Earth-Mother and with that of her Daughter, the Bride of Hades.

Thus it comes about that at the heart of Greek Tragedy we recognize the abysmal contradictions of the world we know, the contradiction between Good and Evil, Mortality and Immortality, Fate and Free-Will, and remotely and dimly discerned behind even these—with the presence of the Eleusinian Mysteries always in the background—yet stranger oppositions, and "knots of contrariety," in the very workshop of Creation itself!

It is because these Tragedies were linked from the start with the equivocal figure of Dionysus, that suffering and wounded and yet cruelly-avenging Power, that so mystic an undertone slips again and again into their texts,

culminating in Aeschylus with the pacifying of the Furies, in Sophocles with the "passing" of Oedipus, and in Euripides with the blood-lust of the fatal god himself.

Stiff and formal as they may seem—with only the death-cries of their victims reaching us from behind the stage—they never quite lose their original erotic and orgiastic tension, never quite lose a certain un-Achaean, un-Dorian, un-Apollonian element, an element that suggests Asia *and even Africa*, an element Thaumaturgic, exotic, incestuous, barbaric.

It must always be something of a shock to come to one of these great Tragedies, to *Agamemnon*, or *Oedipus Rex*, or *Medea*, after reading Homer.

It is in Homer we get the pure Greek tone, unaffected by the "Sciences," as Taliessin would say, of "Asia and Africa"; and the curious thing is that in Homer we feel as though the very *physical stature* of the heroes were more human, more normal, more like ourselves.

Something has entered into the style of these plays from the enormity of the masks they put on, from the height of the buskins that supported them, perhaps even from the megaphonic contrivances within those masks that made it possible for their voices to reach that huge Dionysian audience, something that overpowers the lovely natural humanity that we know in Homer. In Homer the very gods are humanized. while the sun that "beholdest all things and hearest all things" is the natural sun with which we are all familiar. The elements are *our* elements, those we struggle with and instinctively worship in our common human experience. The sea is *our* sea, into which our own sailors still "go down in ships." The furrows made by Homeric ploughs through the "grain-bearing earth" are the furrows we see around us in the fields of our own childhood.

And in spite of all the lurid and blood-curdling situations in these plays we are never touched—no! not when Euripides makes Medea speak of the rose-petal breath of the children she is going to slaughter—by the real pity of life, as we are in Homer when Andromache's child is scared by Hector's helmet, or when the dog Argus knows its master before it dies. Shakespeare is twenty times more Homeric than Aeschylus or Sophocles or Euripides.

How often our reviewers cry: "like a Greek chorus!" But although this same chorus has grown to be, for our obsequious modern mind, the sharpest sting of dramatic contrast and the deepest bite of ironic emphasis, there is surely more real irony and far more human poignance in the crazy jesting of the nameless Fool in *Lear* than in any comment made by "Asian Bacchanals" or "Argive Elders" or "Ladies of Corinth."

"You are as good as a chorus, my lord," says Ophelia to Hamlet, and so he was; and indeed the whole method of Shakespeare, compared with Sophocles, is to bring this detached commentary upon the philosophy of events into the circle of a man's own consciousness.

"Duncan is in his grave: after life's fitful fever he sleeps well," might perhaps be murmured by a Sophoclean protagonist, but it would have to be left to a Sophoclean chorus to chant the words:

> —Man must abide
> His going hence, even as his coming hither;
> Ripeness is all.

But it is foolish to spend more than a moment in indicating what Greek Tragedy is not! Enough to note that to be what it is, to be as great and unique as it is, something had to be sacrificed; and what was sacrificed—

to leave Shakespeare out of it and return to Homer—was that lovely, magical, natural poetry of normal life that thrills us most when it brings down Zeus and Hera and Athene and Apollo and Priam and Helen and Penelope and Circe and Calypso and Achilles and Odysseus to our own human level.

Yes, in Homer the Sun is the Sun, and the Earth the Earth; and the gods are even as we ourselves are, save that death cannot touch them, whereas in the Tragedians—due in part, no doubt, to that narrow stage and that great altar-space and those masks and buskins and megaphonic devices—every event, every person, seems surrounded by a cloud of mysterious ritual, seems to carry an aura of supernatural significance that recedes into invisible regions.

Compare the dialogue between Odysseus and Penelope in Homer over the matter of the *bedstead* with that between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra over the matter of the *carpets*. Quite apart from the completely different situations, you feel that in the one case the question concerns a real bedstead in a real court made from a real olive bush; while you feel in the other that before some nebulous and windy portico to some vast royal Palace, "out of Space, out of Time," these imperial carpets, streaming blood-red in their blood-red extension, are unrolled before a chariot of vapour and a phantom king!

Take the Homeric scene first:

"—Nay come, nurse, strew me a couch that all alone I may lay me down, for verily the heart in her breast is of iron." . . .

"Come, Eurycleia, strew for him the stout bedstead which he made himself . . . thither do ye bring it. . . ."

"Woman, truly this is a bitter word that thou hast spoken! Who has set my bed elsewhere? Hard would it be . . . for a long-leafed olive was growing within the court . . . and from this I hewed out my bed . . . but I know not, woman, whether

my bedstead is still fast in its place or whether by now some man has cut from beneath it the olive stump and set the bedstead elsewhere."

So he spoke, and her knees were loosened where she sat, and her heart melted, as she knew the sure tokens which Odysseus told her. Then with a burst of tears she ran straight toward him and flung her arms about the neck of Odysseus and kissed his head and spoke saying:

"Be not vexed with me, Odysseus, for in all else thou wast ever the wisest of men. It is the gods that gave us sorrow, the gods who begrudged that we two should remain with each other and enjoy our youth and come to the threshold of old age. . . ."

And now would the rosy-fingered Dawn have arisen upon their weeping, had not the goddess glaucous-eyed Athene taken other counsel. The long night she held back at the end of its course, and likewise stayed the golden-throned Dawn at the streams of Oceanus and would not suffer her to yoke her swift-footed horses that bring light to men, Lampus and Phaethon, who are the colts that bear the Dawn.

Now let us come to Aeschylus and to Agamemnon's return home. Powerful and terrible indeed is the weight of the Aeschylean irony! More formidable to my mind is it than the neater, cleverer, more famous irony of Sophocles.

But this huge, crushing, sardonic sublimity of Aeschylus moves and has its being in "worlds not realized." Among pillars and porches and altar-stones of an Ideal Argos it gathers its "trailing clouds" of doom. A background of the symbolic traditions of a remote ritualistic art lies behind this Argos of fatal mysteries; whereas the "local habitation" of the house of Odysseus is as real and actual to us as are the colts of the Dawn, Lampus and Phaethon, whom the goddess holds back until that olive-tree bedstead has satisfied the longing that has been frustrated for twenty years.

But at this other home-coming let us hear the words of Clytemnestra:

> And now I pray thee, dear my lord, dismount from this thy car, but set not on common earth this foot of thine, my liege, that hath trampled upon Ilium. . . . Quick! With purple let his path be strewn, that justice may usher him to a home he ne'er hoped to see. . . . .

I am using the excellent prose translation of Dr. Herbert Weir Smyth in the Loeb Classics, with the original on the opposite page, and I cannot help wondering how many other unscholarly students will find it hard, after the large-rolling hexameters of Homer, to make the more jerky iambic metre fall as musically as doubtless it *should* fall, even upon our untrained ear.

Let me make an attempt to reproduce the difference between these two historic metres while the unlucky king is being persuaded to use these ill-omened carpets. He begins by uttering the following words, which in the original would sound something like this:

Ledas genethlon domatōn emōn phulax.

Dr. Weir Smyth translates this in his straightforward prose:

Offspring of Leda, guardian of my house.

But had the original been an Homeric hexameter in place of what it is, we might have Englished it thus, in the Longfellow manner:

> Lady, the daughter of Leda, who hast guarded my house in my absence.

While, as it is, we should be driven to content ourselves with this sort of spasmodic-sounding parallel:

Of Leda offspring, guarded hast thou well my house.

But the doomed monarch goes on:

> Pamper me not after woman's wise, nor, like some barbarian, grovel to me with wide-mouthed acclaim; and draw not down envy on my path by strewing it with tapestries. . . . I bid thee revere me not as a god, but as a man. Fame needs no carpetings and broideries to make her loud acclaim. . . .

But the murderess persuades him at last, though he insists on having his sandals removed:

> Since I have been overborne to hearken to thee in this, I will tread upon a purple pathway as I pass to my palace halls.

I cannot feel that either Sophocles or Euripides had the grandeur of imagination that was needed to conjure up with such overpowering and primeval simplicity the scene that follows. The porch of that megalithic palace in Argos begins to tower before our imagination like some prehistoric "Caer"; and when the king has vanished—and it is the last we see of him—it is Cassandra of Troy, his royal captive, cursed by her lover Apollo with the prophetic gift that none will credit, who now becomes the protagonist of the play.

Darkly does the Chorus of old men hint at the brooding horror that hovers over those unseen chambers with their bath of blood; but the wild-eyed captive girl, unwillingly persuaded by Clytemnestra to leave the chariot where she had been crouching, screams aloud, desperate and reckless, her wild "Hell is murky!"

> *Clytemnestra.* Nay, mad she is, and hearkens to her wild mood. . . . No, I will waste no more words upon her to be insulted thus.

And with that the murderess enters the palace; and Cassandra is left alone with the terrified old men.

Then the situation grows momently more tense. The

young exile's horrible clairvoyance rises in gasping, choking screams, and the genius of the first and grandest of the Greek Dramatists rises with it. It was a subject after his own heart. In his *Prometheus Bound* he went as far as his austere conscience allowed in his sympathy with the Titan's revolt; but he was caught—caught as fast as was his godlike hero in the iron rivets of his crucifixion on the Caucasus—by his sublime and terrible faith in the irremediable Cosmic Law!

There is indeed a grand and awful sense in Aeschylus of the utter hopelessness of meddling with the Categorical Imperative of the Universe. It is more than puritanism this feeling in him. In some strange way it gives you the impression that he had a prophetic inkling of a Moral Power behind the world that is less amenable to supplication or propitiation than even "La somma Sapienza" of Dante or the "Almighty Father" of Milton!

In reading the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus we experience something of that indignation with Zeus that we experience in our own life when the "President of the Immortals" behaves in an unpardonable manner; but it is clear that to the rugged and imperious soul of this Greek Prophet a great deal of ordinary human sentiment and tender natural sympathy has to be sacrificed *and ought to be sacrificed* if we are to make our will one with the implacable will of the universe.

And although in the end of this terrible Trilogy the Justice of Heaven, by the intervention of its own glaucus-eyed Daughter, consents to incarnate its verdict in that extremely human Consistory known to us as the Court of the Hill of Mars, the feeling we are left with, when these three closely-linked plays, the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoroi*, and the *Eumenides*, are brought to a close, is a fathomless sense of the horrible and devastating power of the human

conscience. Yes, in the plays of Aeschylus the earthquake-and-glacier compulsion of the Law of Retribution cracks and crashes its way through the tragic heart of man; whereas in the Drama of Job, where the Injustice of Life is chanted on a far wider scale than the Justice of the Areopagus, it is from Deep calling unto Deep beyond the reach of any moral order that the Lord answers His critics out of the whirlwind.

But on the other hand, Aeschylus has a genius for a certain piled-up, richly-charged, purple-stained *sumptuousness of horror* which strikes us with a more sinister shock than anything in the Drama of Job.

There is a touch, too, of something like Cyclopean humour at the end of the Watchman's speech, and in the ominous part played by those ghastly carpets and the praise of their purple dye by the blood-brooding queen; but to my mind by far the most powerful portion of the whole Trilogy is the dialogue between Cassandra and the Chorus. The horror of this really becomes almost intolerable, and the whole Aeschylean conception of the figure of this daughter of Priam is charged with a significance that descends to the very roots of life.

Rejecting Apollo's love after beguiling him of the gift of prophecy, the god cursed her by the fatal addition to his gift that her predictions should never be believed. Young and beautiful, and by the crowd held insane, she was the one of all the fair women of Troy that the leader of the Greeks chose for his prize, and the fact that Clytemnestra took for granted that she was his paramour as well as his captive was enough to involve her in his doom.

One cannot help being struck all through these Greek Dramas by the startling variations of quality in the choregic chants. And since so much depends upon the chorus I would be tempted to hazard the view that,

though a stronger chorus saves a weaker situation, a stronger situation does *not* save a weaker chorus.

In his grandest vein the choruses of Aeschylus, compared with those of Sophocles, resemble Pheidian sculpture compared with Praxitilean ; while as compared with those of Euripides they resemble any sculptured figures *in the round* compared with the stirring flow of a rich, romantic, processional *relief.*

The Argive Elders in the *Agamemnon* make their appearance upon the stage with a prelude worthy of some vast heathen *Good Friday Mass*: "Ailinon! Ailinon! But may the good prevail! Zeus whosoe'er he be—if by this name it pleaseth him to be invoked, by this name I call to him——"

It is interesting to note how closely in all these plays Zeus has come to represent what we moderns mean when we speak of God. This is a great revolution; for in Homer, though he *is* Sky-God and therefore the powerful All-Father of Gods and Men, Zeus remains a very clear-cut anthropomorphic figure, more so even than Milton's Jehovah, and he is not only invoked along with Apollo and Athene, but is very frequently roundly cursed and called *Sketlié*, "Obstinate devil!" by the angry heroes.

From a purely poetical and mythological point of view there is something a little sad about this sanctimonious and mystical change. It is true that in Homer he is not only the great Sky-God, more powerful—as he himself explains in extremely realistic fashion—than all the rest put together: he is also the God of Suppliants, Strangers, Beggars, and Tramps. Nevertheless in this simple stage of his development he left the profounder problems of good and evil to the less human and more mysterious workings of Fate.

But how fascinating it is—whether one likes this change

from the poetical to the spiritual or not—to note the dee intellectual disturbance that is going on in all three c these great Dramatists under the stress—Nietzsche woul call it the morbid and vicious stress—of this modernizin and mysticizing of Olympus, or more strictly speakin of this desertion of Olympus for Eleusis! For in trut they all reveal this trouble of mind; though it is the usu custom among scholars to confine such agitation to th one of the three who, as we gather from the foolery c Aristophanes, was hand-in-glove with Socrates.

But in most of these plays—putting aside *Prometheı Bound*, which has a freer, more elemental, more Homeri atmosphere—it is *the Mysteries*, these black-magical Cele brations and erotic-mystical Initiations that give, at leas to a lover of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a certain blood charged, sex-charged, and how shall I say it, dimly barbaric *shiver* to these Goat-Chants of Dionysus.

One begins to remember, as one gets more deepl involved in these tragedies, that Dionysus was worshippe in some of his favourite regions as the Devourer of Rav Flesh; and if we take, as Keats did, and as Walter Pate and Nietzsche did, all this significant mythology seriously it is impossible not to feel a certain satisfaction in recallin that this blood-drinking, vindictive, effeminate Divinit is only known to us in the Epic Poems as a terrifie fugitive among the Nereids of the Sea!

It is no petulant obliquity, however, for a devotee o the older poetry to stress the morbid and lurid elemen in Greek Drama, for we may be sure that whither th horror-compass of modern psychology points, *there* incest infanticide, and all the "ailinon! ailinon!" of the homi cidal nerves of our race will be found and heard.

The Choruses, in this great Aeschylean Trilogy, diffe from one another a good deal in the quality of thei

poetry; and the Furies are more passionate and moving than the Argive Elders or the Argive Slave-women.

One wonders a little, thinking of Keats's *Hyperion*, at the extremely calm way in which these pious citizens dispose of the great Cosmic Powers, Uranus and Cronos, who ruled the world before their spiritualized Zeus came into his own.

> He who aforetime was mighty, swelling with insolence for every fray, he shall not even be named as having ever been; and he who arose thereafter, he hath met his overthrower and is past and gone. But whosoe'er, heartily taking thought beforehand, giveth title of victory in triumphant shout to Zeus, he shall gain wisdom altogether—Zeus who leadeth mortals the way of understanding, Zeus who hath established as a fixed ordinance that wisdom cometh by suffering.

The Chorus of Furies in the *Eumenides* takes, as indeed is proper with such old, dark, chthonian divinities, a very different view; calling upon primeval Night, its Mother, in angry protest against the arrogant claims of these younger gods.

But the luckless Cassandra—to my mind, apart from Prometheus, the most moving of the Aeschylean characters—finds in these Zeus-loving Argive Elders a veritable crowd of well-meaning Poloniuses; and as, with her nostrils full of the smell of blood, and the cry "Faugh! Faugh!" upon her lips, she parries with her sublime despair their conventional platitudes, all they do is to enquire grossly, putting their questions into one terrible Greek word, "Why—do—you—*faugh*—like—that?"

And what a deep-biting woman's wit lies in the retort which I will now set down, and set it down phonetically, so as to emphasize once more the metre of these plays:

> *Oudeis akouei tauta tōn eudaimonōn!*
> None who is happy is commended thus.

But I will quote the context:

Cassandra. The day is come. Flight would profit me but little.

Chorus. Well, be assured, thou art patient and of a courageous spirit.

Cassandra. None who is happy is commended thus!

No, there is nothing in the *Libation-Bearers* or even in the *Eumenides* equal to the moment when Cassandra, recalling the unspeakable Thyestean banquet and the sacrificing of Iphigeneia and predicting the death of her murderess, passes through the gate into that House of Atrocity.

But the opening passages of the last of the three plays are as terrifying as anything in the whole literature of Horror. What a scene the Aeschylean imagination conjures up as taking place in that mystic Temple at Delphi!

The Erinyes, the Furies, for they are not as yet the Eumenides, are themselves made the Chorus here, which was in itself as bold a stroke as any in Greek drama.

Lying huddled about the shrine to which Orestes is clinging, these loathly Beings keep muttering an inarticulate gabble in their sleep, while the ghost of Clytemnestra stirs them up to make sure that her son, already half-mad from their long pursuit, shall not escape.

"*Mugmos! Oogmos!*" gibber these chthonian Abortions in their gradual awakening; and the grisly syllables are like the moan of Lemurs around the morgue of a madhouse.

Nor has there been any relaxing of the pursuit of their victim by these Erinyes when they overtake him at Athens clinging to Athene's shrine.

Chorus. Here he is again! In shelter, with arms twined round the image of the immortal goddess. . . . Nay thou art

bound in requital to suffer that I suck the red blood from thy living limbs. May I feed myself on thee—a gruesome draught!

I'll waste thy strength; I'll hale thee living to the world below, that thou mayest pay recompense for thy murdered mother! . . . For great is Hades who holds mortals to account beneath the earth; and he surveyeth all things with his recording mind. . . . Nay, be sure not Apollo nor Athene's might can save thee from perishing . . . knowing not where in thy soul is joy, a bloodless victim of the powers below, a shadow of thyself!

What! Dost thou not even answer, but scornest my words, thou victim fatted and consecrate to me? At no altar shalt thou be slain, but living shalt be my feast; and thou shalt now hearken to our song to bind thee with its spell!

Then follows the tremendous chant of the Remorse-Demons; and as they sing they clasp another's hands and dance; while among them clinging to the altar cowers Orestes.

Chorus. Come now, let us link the dance! O mother Night, mother who didst bear me to be a retribution unto the dead and the living, hearken unto me! . . . O'er our victim consecrate, this is our song, fraught with madness, fraught with frenzy, crazing the brain, the Furies' hymn—*hymnos ex Erinuōn*—withering the life of mortals!

As the Song of the Furies mounts up in intensity so do their leapings grow wilder; until so deeply does this whole conception of the Remorse-Dance of the Torturing Conscience obsess the imagination of Aeschylus that he is inspired at last to communicate to the syllables they chant something of the actual beat of their feet in "down-fall unendurable," as they proclaim themselves "separated from the gods by a light not of the sun!"

Sophocles is undoubtedly, to an average unscholarly mind, the most difficult to do justice to of these three great poets. Lacking the huge cosmic sweep of Aeschylus, lacking the obstinate questionings and voluptuous subtleties

of Euripides, he was in his own long prosperous life, and has been ever since, what might be called the ideal Greek artist.

Aeschylus, like the author of *Don Quixote*, was a veteran soldier "in a war to save" Western Civilization. He fought at Marathon, and a decade later at Salamis; and though he is rumoured to have been in philosophy a Pythagorean, it is in the imaginative grasp of great momentous crises of battle, murder, tyranny, revolt, both among mortals and immortals, that the huge dim-smouldering imperious grandeur of his inspiration found its natural expression. Chosen, on the contrary, for his unequalled beauty and his born sense of rhythm to lead as a boy the musical paean round the trophy for the victory over the East, a friend of Pericles and the favoured darling of the vast, wayward, critical audience at the open-air theatre, Sophocles was in every sense of the word a prize-winner in the lottery of life.

And it has been the same ever since! Lucky with his contemporaries, lucky with posterity, it is he our greatest critic selects in that sonnet we are weary of hearing quoted, as the one spirit of all time,

> Business could not make dull, nor passion wild,
> Who saw life steadily and saw it whole.

Does it not seem a little strange that this perfectly balanced dramatic artist, the flawless idol of Aristophanes, Aristotle, Virgil, Racine, Lessing, and all our university scholars, should have dominated the classic stage for so long, not, as in the case of the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, with a figure who deliberately defied God, nor, as in the case of the *Medea* of Euripides, with a figure who deliberately defied Man, but with this pious, well-meaning, human-too-human *Oedipus*, who, by pure chance, and in

complete ignorance of what he was doing, murdered his father and married his mother?

I suspect myself that those who have a predilection for the epical will always prefer Aeschylus, and that those who have a predilection for the romantic, the analytical, the magical, will always prefer Euripides, but that it is the adepts and virtuosos of the pure art of the theatre who hold—just as those great Dionysian audiences did—that Sophocles is the master. What we call *Sophoclean irony* is not in reality an intellectual thing, like the irony of Anatole France, not an emotional thing, like the irony of Thomas Hardy, it is a *technical* thing, the creation of a particular dramatic tension by the use of a particular theatric device.

And, indeed, for the flawless handling of this device, and for the breathless suspense while this device is gathering momentum, *Oedipus Rex* stands out as the most *perfect Tragedy* of the Greek Stage.

The manner in which the audience watches him—knowing perfectly well whither it is all drifting—while he takes in his eager haste measure after measure to hasten the fore-ordained conclusion, reaches, I suppose, the superb limit of polished craftsmanship. One can see why Sophocles was the idol of Racine; and one can see also, I suspect, why it is that geniuses like Milton and Goethe—whose imaginative reach transcended and often outraged the laws of beauty—turned rather to Aeschylus and Euripides.

Dark hints of an alluringly equivocal character have been thrown out that the whole story of "Swell-foot the Tyrant," as Shelley in his literalness calls him, is a pregnant psychological symbol, indicating that to answer the Riddle of the Cosmic Sphinx it is necessary to have plunged into depths below our traditional conceptions of good and evil; but one thing may be said with certainty;

that such was *never*, for one flickering second, the view taken by Sophocles. Sophocles has been praised—is *still* praised, and by others than Matthew Arnold—for his well-balanced religiosity and lovable piety, but it seems to me that such flawless craftsmanship and polished technique must in themselves, in the very nature of the case, tone down and smooth away those *desperate extremes* of deadly clairvoyance, that alone have enough "sacred madness," as Plato teaches, to reach the heart of things!

Sophocles was certainly of that balanced temper that sees life "steadily"; but when I recall the Aeschylean *Prometheus* and the Aeschylean *Hymn of the Fates*, I cannot agree with Matthew Arnold that he sees it "whole." In fact, one thinks of the fate of the mother of Dionysus who "saw it whole" for one blinding second and then became ashes, and of the experience of Faust who cried to the Life-Spirit he had himself raised, "*I endure not thee!*"

The truth is, that Sophocles was so absorbed in his political business and his perfect art that he was spared the frightfulness of "seeing life whole"; an experience, as both Aeschylus and Euripides knew, not "intended" for mortal man.

The stylistic perfection of this great artist, combined with the difficulty of translating this perfection into English, is what has enabled, I suspect, a certain scholarly tradition about him to become a little supercilious; but if the test of the greatness of a writer be neither his popularity with professional critics, nor the balanced charm of his personal life, but the troubling, disquieting, inspiring effect he has upon the men of genius of the remote future, I am tempted to feel—in spite of Racine and Sir Richard Jebb—that the author of *Prometheus Bound* was a greater genius than the author of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

But putting aside the technical perfection of the machinery of the play and the polished balance of its style, let us proceed to quote from *Oedipus the King* at the supreme crisis, and see how the Sophoclean sense of horror compares with the Aeschylean.

It is the Second Messenger speaking:

"Laius," she cried, and called her husband dead
Long, long ago; her thought was of that child
By him begot, the son by whom the sire
Was murdered, and the mother left to breed
With her own seed, a monstrous progeny.
. . . . . .
. . . With a shriek
Burst on us Oedipus; all eyes were fixed
On Oedipus, as up and down he strode.
. . . . . .
"A sword!" he cried,
"Where is the wife, no wife, the teeming womb
That bore a double harvest, me and mine?"

Then we beheld the woman hanging there,
A running noose entwined about her neck.
But when he saw her, with a maddened roar
He loosed the cord; and when her wretched corpse
Lay stretched on earth, what followed—O 'twas dread!
He tore the golden brooches that upheld
Her queenly robes, upraised them high and smote
Full on his eye-balls . . ."

It is, however, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where he can describe his own birthplace and increase the glory of that very sanctuary to which the Furies of Aeschylus had been led, that Sophocles is at his greatest.

We speak of it as a Tragedy; but it is in reality like those final plays of Shaespeare's, like the *Tempest*, for example, that you cannot attribute to any category. It lacks the dramatic poignancy of the passionate and heroic

Antigone—that play which so specially enthralled the huge Athenian audience—for Oedipus's brave daughter and her less heroic sister Ismene play a passive rôle here; but the vanishing of the blinded king in this sacred spot, apparently under the forgiveness of the gods and the protection of the now thoroughly propitiated Eumenides, has a wonderfully solemn and tender power.

It has, in fact, the same effect as have certain Catholic Masses for the Dead when the first despair is over. But if it is the nearest approach in Greek Tragedy to that feeling of a "redemption of all sorrows" that comes to most of us now and again in life, it is a somewhat remote approach. In truth, when those two luckless daughters and sisters leave the place of his passing, one hears still the echo of those Hardy-like words:

> Not to be born at all
> Is best, far best that can befall.

It is, I am afraid, almost impossible, unless one is at least as good a scholar as Shelley, to savour the peculiar quality of the famous Sophocles chorus in praise of his native village, which to our Dorsetshire ears is as if the folk of Stinsford and Bockhampton were to chant on Midsummer Eve a musically laconic and completely untranslatable lyric of Thomas Hardy's.

Not Shelley himself, or any other poet, can turn a Sophoclean chorus into real English poetry. No, our only hope, if we are not scholars, is a literal word by word translation, a translation into the baldest prose, leaving the polished perfection to the Muse of the Imagination. We can get a certain satisfaction, and perhaps a little more than that, from noting such familiar flowers' names as Crocus and Narcissus, and how the great playwright loves to linger over them, even as any of us,

recalling the home of our childhood, might linger over cowslips and cuckoo-flowers; but the sad thing is, that the more exquisite the Sophoclean perfection grows the harder it is to capture its special fragrance in the poetry of the Gothic North!

But now to turn to the one of the three about whose peculiar genius from the very start there has been anger and bitterness and controversy and dissension. Accused of championing women to a point of voluptuous nympholeptism, accused of hating women to a point of misogynistic mania, accused of an impious apologia for Man against God, accused of a recantation of this impiety so reckless and shameless as to make one think of a villain in Dostoievsky, Euripides certainly lends himself to the feelings of us moderns as does no other genius of the ancient world. And he has paid the penalty for his modernity by being most freely and eloquently Englished in verse.

But eloquent as these poetic renderings of Euripides are, I cannot but feel that they alter the very spirit of this great genius. The truth is that they soften, loosen, weaken his savage and subtle intensity. For one thing, they change the characteristic short, violent lines of the choruses into long, flowing, rippling lines.

I must not dwell upon this, but let me in passing make the most vigorous protest against the Englishing of the fixed epithet of Dionysus, *Bromius*, into the sentimental adjective "Clamour-King." This is indeed a perfect example of the sort of thing that our eloquent versifiers of Euripides tend to do, and it is as bad on the side of his modern lovers as Aristophanes's mockery of him was unfair on the side of his ancient enemies.

The thing to do is to get hold of a volume of the old Bohn Library, and then, in your own imagination, turn this literal prose into poetry resembling that of *Samson*

Agonistes, poetry which certainly cannot be accused of melodious fluidity!

And the *Bacchanals* is the play to read if you want to capture the spirit of Euripides in its strangest, subtlest, and, if I may say so, most Russian vein. A recantation, is it, of his daring championship of humanity against the Gods? A recantation, is it, of his Strindberg-like sex-morbidity?

I am by no means so sure! It certainly could lend itself, without much special pleading, to precisely the opposite interpretation. The unhappy Pentheus, who rules in place of the aged Cadmus, is certainly no pleasing figure; but the way he is mesmerized by the god of frenzied women and the way he is teleported to the wilds of Cithaeron to be torn in pieces by his own mother stirs up in us feelings of anything but a pious nature.

In her Maenad-madness the wretched woman takes his head for the head of a lion, till old Cadmus disabuses her, and lo! what she is carrying in her blood-stained arms has the features of the child of her womb!

The whole drama evokes such quivering pulses of pity for the house of Cadmus and such spasms of disgust at the vindictiveness of Dionysus that it is just as much propaganda for sober atheism as for the illumination of inspired belief.

The truth is that *both extremes*—a thaumaturgic ecstatic faith *and* a scepticism that corrodes the very navel of all religion—are instinctive with Euripides. A man of enormous nervous vitality, he was, if I may say so, like the fusion into one soul of the opposite souls of Nietzsche and Dostoievsky.

I confess it gives me a curious satisfaction to note how Euripides remains to-day the same stumbling-block to the conservative satirist, the same stumbling-block to the well-ordered scholarly mind, as he was in his own time!

But the great Amateurs of Scholarship, those who hold, as Milton and Goethe did, that inspiration is more important than either art or science, will always revert to Euripides.

Indeed, to my mind Euripides held a view of life similar to that of his friend Socrates, namely, that in all mythologies and religions there is some truth, and in none all the truth. Certainly our modern fiction has been making of late a bold and sometimes an almost successful attempt to revive this great aesthetic *genre*, and doing it, too, rather on Euripidean than on Sophoclean lines; and yet I am not ashamed to confess that I would like to see some formidable modern writer make a Nietzschean attack on the whole tradition of Greek Tragedy and thus prepare the way for a renaissance of the Homeric spirit. But this must be left to our descendants.

Meanwhile, what could be more modern in its delicate cerebral sadism than the way the atheist is handled in the *Bacchanals*? The dressing up of old Cadmus and Teiresias in that equivocal womanish garb has in it surely a vein of the subtlest "miching mallecho"; but when it comes to what I am now going to quote, how can it be that our scholars have not cried aloud with one voice: *This* is no apologia for religion: this is the subtlest attack on the religious spirit that has ever been written!

One is tempted, as one watches those noble and famous old heroes, the Homeric Teiresias, prophet for ever among the dead, and Cadmus, founder of the great city, leaving the stage in their skipping senility and pantaloon-piety, to quote those words of Oscar Wilde:

> And the damned Grotesques made arabesques,
> Like the wind upon the sand!

But the hypnotizing of Pentheus goes further still. It is as if Euripides had said to himself, "They have accused

me of being a misogynist; they have accused me of atheism. Now I will show them what the hysteria of women and the cruelty of religion can do between them."

And the extraordinary thing is that the wild choruses in the *Bacchanals* are as lovely as any in Greek Tragedy. But they are Bacchanals *from Asia*, and what Homer would have felt—not the false Homer of the *Hymns*, but the real Homer of the *Odyssey*—about such insidious delirium, is a question worth asking.

The thing Euripides was really doing was pressing the issue to the limit; and this was easy to him because temperamentally he was one who veered between reaction and revolution. But certainly, in the process of releasing both these great suppressions of his soul, very queer cerebral perversities come to light.

Dionysus. All Asians through these mystic dances tread.
Pentheus. Ay, far less wise be they than Hellene men.
Dionysus. Herein far wiser. Diverse wont is theirs.
Pentheus. By night or day dost thou perform the rites?
Dionysus. Chiefly by night; gloom lends solemnity.

Having completely mesmerized the unhappy man, Dionysus dresses him in women's clothes before leading him to his death; and at this point, with a magical power over the dark phenomena of the underworld of mythology, our poet makes Pentheus dimly aware that *the horns of the bull*, the god's *alter ego* in the Orgies, have sprouted from the forehead of this sinister seducer.

Pentheus. Whose semblance bear I? Have I not the mien
Of Ino or my mother?
Dionysus. Their very selves I seem to see in thee.
Yet what? This tress hath from his place escaped,
Not as I braided it beneath the coif.
Pentheus. Tossing it forth and back within, in whirls
Of Bacchic frenzy, I disordered it.

Dionysus. Nay I, who have taken thy tire-maiden's part
Will rearrange it. Come, hold up thine head.
Pentheus. Lo there—thou lay it smooth: I am in thy hands.
Dionysus. Now is thy girdle loose; thy garments' folds
Droop not below thine ankles evenly.

And then, when the Maenads have done their work and the mother of Pentheus has learnt from Cadmus that the bleeding head she carries is her son's, this strange play—with a long passage completely lost to us, destroyed perhaps, who can tell? by some pious scholiast who caught too well its blasphemous drift—reaches its conclusion in a hint as to the fate of Cadmus.

Perhaps after the *Bacchanals*, the *Medea* is the most characteristic play of Euripides; and if he let his dithyrambic psychology go to such lengths in celebrating the vengeance of the Women's God, he lets it go just as far in celebrating the vengeance of a woman.

Not for nothing does he make his heroine the granddaughter of the Sun and the niece of Circe; she who alone —when the voyage of Jason in the *Argo* would else have failed—wins for him the Golden Fleece!

But in this play we find Jason on the point of taking a new bride; and it is of the murderous fury of the woman, of her slaying her rival, of her killing her own children, of her robbing him even of the comfort of burying his dead, that the story tells.

One cannot help remembering, as one reads Medea's powerful defence, how Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* makes Apollo bring forward in his plea for Orestes the supremely masculine argument that it is the man who is the real parent of a child, while all the woman does is to be the bearer and the nurse of the man's seed.

Let us therefore hear how the misogynistic Euripides presents the woman's point of view.

Medea. Surely, of creatures that have life and wit,
We women are of all unhappiest,
Who, first, must buy, as buys the highest bidder,
A husband—nay, we do but win for our lives
A master! Deeper depth of wrong is this.
Here too is dire risk—will the lord we gain
Be evil or good? Divorce?—'Tis infamy
To us: we may not even reject a suitor!
. . . . . .
For the man, when the home-yoke galls his neck
Goes forth, to ease a weary sickened heart
By turning to some friend, some kindred soul;
We to one heart alone can look for comfort.
But we, say they, live an unperilled life
At home, while they do battle with the spear—
Unreasoning fools! Thrice would I under shield
Stand, rather than bear childbirth-peril once.

Thus does Greek Tragedy in these three great hands pass from the drama of "Crime and Punishment" with a cosmic background to the drama of heart-rending human situations with the Gods as accomplices, and from this move forward once again to the drama of lyrical psychology with the Gods under critical indictment!

And as we commenced our sketch with the Aeschylean Hymn to the triumph of Zeus over Cronos, "who is past and gone," and over Uranus, "who shall not even be named as having ever been," it seems only fair to close it with another great puritan's Hymn to the triumph of a yet younger Rebel.

The Oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
Runs thro' the arched roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance or breathed spell
Inspires the pale-eyed Priest from the prophetic cell.

SAINT PAUL

IT is possible, I suppose, that *some* religious system, more or less akin to Christianity, might have risen round the memory of Jesus of Nazareth if St. Paul had never been converted, but it is hard to believe that it would have lasted down to our own age, or been the Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, that we of the West confess, whether we like it or not, in the veins of our psychological consciousness.

And laying aside the supernatural aspects of this strange phenomenon, and regarding St. Paul as an astonishing personality upon whose imagination a yet more astonishing personality, addressing him from the dead, had acted like magic, it isn't easy to think of any human figure of greater importance.

But the crazy paradox in the whole business lies in the fact that it is the very religion he founded—for St. Paul much more than Jesus is responsible for Christianity —that hinders our human recognition of his human genius.

This upshot is most ironical and most curiously unfair; though its irony is precisely of the kind in which St. Paul himself, in his own favourite phrase, would "glory."

And it cuts two ways; both of them profoundly detrimental to our estimation of his unique figure. Let any ordinary person who is trying to shake off the sacred tedium of the conventional religious attitude, trying to vision this portentous protagonist freshly, naïvely, innocently, make an attempt to read the voluminous commentaries of even the most recent of pious scholars, and

he'll be bowed down in dejected weariness under the dullness, under the dustiness, under the conventional unction of what he reads! He'll get the *details* all right, the technical terms, the arguments pro and con with regard to the authenticity of this or that particular epistle; but there will rise out of the pages such a smell of pontifical and scholarly vestries, such a reek of learned propriety, such an aura of the special-pleading of wily professionals, that the last thing that will present itself to his mind will be the idea that he's dealing with the works of a great morbid and imaginative genius who has steered the emotions of the human race for nearly two thousand years. The *man* with whom he is concerned will be swallowed up in the *saint*; or, if the reader comes from an evangelical circle, in the whole solemn and sanctified amalgam of atonement, redemption, conversion and salvation.

When we read other great men such as Homer, Rabelais, Shakespeare, we approach them lightly, wantonly, and with a lawless joy. But when we read St. Paul—especially under the orderly guidance of an Anglican bishop—we feel, in spite of ourselves, that we ought to be grave and cautious and discreet, that we ought to press a muted and a pious pedal on both our pleasure and our irritation. And yet when we reverse the situation and approach St. Paul from the standpoint of the rationalists, no very different result is obtained!

Once more is the living and immortal genius of this extraordinary man defrauded of its startling value. One would almost suppose, as one reads the commentaries of the rationalistic school of thought and listens to their words, that the Church had simply invented the figure of St. Paul as a convenient peg whereon to hang its devious and consecrated obscurities. And even where St. Paul is

given the credit of the astounding invention of the Christian faith, his ideas are presented in such a way as completely to divorce them from any natural human psychology, while his character and temperament, his personal vision of life are blurred and obscured, if not totally forgotten, in attacks upon the unscientific and fantastic nature of his spiritual conclusions.

And as if this was not enough in the diluting, diminishing, disparaging and flattening-out this great genius, rationalistic exponents of his philosophy bring their presentation of the man to a close by exaggerating and isolating from the rest of his words his sexual hostility to women and his quietistic bias in favour of propitiating "the powers that be."

In addition to all this we are compelled to note, as unfortunate for St. Paul's prestige with all conscientious moralists, that his ideas on the subject of predestination and on the subject of Salvation by Faith have actually, in the long history of the Christian religion, proved a support to some of the most unpleasant aspects of puritanical bigotry, as well as to some of the wildest manias of antinomian mysticism.

In regard to these final points, in the accumulative case against him, those among us whose early life was spent in old-fashioned Protestant circles know only too well how many of his most original and characteristic turns of speech have been converted into the disgusting cant of the most unappealing and unattractive of all religious jargon. Admirers of the real St. Paul, lovers of his profound, startling, and comprehensive philosophy, are thus confronted by a thick cloud of prejudice and misunderstanding, in the evocation of which both the pious and the impious have played their pernicious part.

The problem reduces itself, therefore, to the question

of how best to clear out of the way all this weight of unjust and yet unavoidable disparagement, so that the surprising lineaments of this great man, and the original outlines of his startling philosophy, may appear unobscured and undistorted. And it has presented itself to my mind that the only way of achieving this desirable end is to attempt an appreciation of St. Paul as if his philosophy of life, based upon his attitude to Jesus and to the claims of Jesus, had been freshly put forth, now, to-day, in our own time; and put forth, too, for our modern consideration, as a real and possible *way of life*, independently of the other biblical writers. The manner in which in Protestant countries certain favourite expressions of St. Paul have passed into current use and become part of our quotidian conversation, while it has added a sort of hoary nimbus to his peculiar turn of mind, composed of sanctified reverence and infinite tedium, has also made us dull, stupid, impervious, to the magical daring of his thought.

But why should such overwhelming psychological insight as St. Paul possessed be debarred its fair place in the culture of humanity? Is it quite impossible for a lover of the gross, cosmic beatitude of Rabelais and the heightened elementalism of Homer to be subtle enough and fluid enough in his soul to get the secret of St. Paul freshly and freely in its essential nature, unburdened by the weight of sanctified tradition? Ferocious savages, as at bottom we still are, we have in the course of a couple of thousand years acquired a certain instinctive response to the new values introduced by Christianity.

In the nerves of even the most materialistic and scientific among us there *are* chords, though they may be muted, which answer—whether our reason approves of their doing so or not—to the peculiar appeal of St. Paul's vision of the world. And moreover, if we have enough interest

in these subtle matters we ought, I think, without having to make any patronizing allowance for the gulf of time that divides us, to be able to translate, as it were, into plain modern significance the basic assumptions of St. Paul's philosophy.

In doing so, we must of course be prepared for a few shocks. The worst of these will, I think, be felt on behalf of certain moral values in our modern conscience—particularly in regard to our attitude to the hypothetical Being St. Paul calls "God"—wherein, *largely by the evolution of the Christian idea itself*, we have, to speak boldly and bluntly, advanced in our spiritual judgment of such a Being's behaviour. In other words, we can no longer stomach certain apologies for the ways of the First Cause; apologies that St. Paul *was* prepared to make; though clearly not without a few qualms! Especially is this true in regard to the matter of predestination.

Here, to do him justice, St. Paul doesn't mince matters, or beat about the bush, but drives, honestly and shamelessly and with some distress of mind, straight back through the gulfs of time to the one dark and terrible danger-point of the whole problem.

Personally I find St. Paul a much more congenial thinker on this most questionable and sinister point than the loving author of the Fourth Gospel.

That famous prayer for "those that thou hast given me," put into the mouth of Jesus at the crucial moment of his life by the St. John of the last Gospel, has in it a certain hot-house unction of restricted "lovingness"—love between the Father and the Son and the blessed Elect—that strikes the conscience within us, the *Christian* conscience, I think, as well as the heathen, as much too small and too hermetically-sealed a salvation for this tragical world. We find nothing in the poetical St. Luke, for instance—by

far the greatest of the chroniclers of Jesus—corresponding to this unhealthy and morbidly-enclosed eternity of reciprocal and exclusive love.

But St. Paul's tone on this dark and tragic point is entirely free from hot-house unction. It is, indeed, by no means lacking in a certain desperate uneasiness. St. Paul was clearly a far greater and more sensitive spirit than the author of the Fourth Gospel, and a far nobler one. He was an honest philosopher as well as an ardent prophet of the Mystery; and there is a strain, a tension, a desperation —not unlike that of Nietzsche speaking of the Eternal Recurrence—when he talks of this appalling problem.

The author of the Fourth Gospel, basking beatifically in the dazzling rainbow-light of his hermetically-sealed lovingness—the love of the Father for the Son and the love of Them both for Their Predestined Elect—has no thoughts to spare, and not a grain of pity, for the cold, dark, unregenerate cosmos left outside this warm and privileged fold.

But St. Paul's was a totally different kind of soul. The fate of the whole universe was his perpetual concern. He is more than bothered by the dark perdition of the unbelieving. He would himself be prepared to face damnation if only the stiff necks of his obstinate compatriots would bend before the secret of Jesus! What a difference there is between this grand figure and all the other authors of the New Testament! One must make an exception in favour of St. Luke, however, who stuck to him through thick and thin, and with gentle tolerance and Shakespearean indulgence put up with his morbid manias.

But let us try to visualize this whole problem from the point of view of some visitor to our earth from Venus or Mars; at any rate some heathen planet where the idea of the Creator of the World as the most exacting and

revengeful of all capricious lovers has so far been confined to the fairy-stories about Zeus. Such a visitor reading the New Testament for the first time would be struck—in spite of the words of Jesus about his Father—by the huge and monstrous moral difficulty implicit in the unlimited all-power of this Christian First Cause. If only it had been possible to regard him as a weak God, a pathetically struggling God, a perpetually hampered and hindered God, this scruple of conscience, that surely must stick in the gullet of every generous man, would never have materialized. It is the *power* of God combined with the atrocities and cruelties of life that creates, as Dostoievsky saw, the supreme stumbling-block; nor can the closest identification of the First Cause with Jesus, whether mystically or metaphysically conceived, destroy a certain rooted uneasiness in honest breasts. One can bear the violences of the Old Testament Jehovah easily enough, just as one bears the waywardness of Zeus. It is the questionable morality of the Father of Jesus that leaves the sting. The God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of Isaac and Jacob, is a Personage much more easy to reconcile with the way things go upon the earth.

Indeed, in a certain sense, since he displays the "mighty hand" of human weakness, one feels as if the old Jehovah were far less responsible for life's atrocities than the appalling All-Powerful of the Fourth Gospel whose circle of "everlasting love" is so much smaller than his corresponding Inferno.

No one can read St. Paul with any care without recognizing that he alone of the New Testament writers is conscious of this dark and terrible background to the tenderness and sweetness of the new dispensation. Indeed, in his stark integrity he encourages us to pierce through the fragrant magian cloud of gnostic incense in which the

Outer Darkness and the predestinating Will of God are covered up by the loving St. John.

A Pharisee of the Pharisees, St. Paul had been accustomed from childhood to envisage as the inescapable background to all salvation the wayward absolution of the God of Moses; and I confess that to my mind the inscrutable alternations between wrath and benignity of this terrifying Being come nearer to representing the actual mysteries of chance in this chaotic world than any metaphysical love-circle with the elect inside and the lost outside.

At any rate St. Paul was an honest and uncompromising philosopher, and what he found in the depths of life is very much what many people find there to-day, the irrational dictates of "crass casualty" and the irresponsible whimsies of pure chance. That this wayward Destiny, this arbitrary Fate, this frightful Predestination, presented itself to his profoundly Jewish mind as the inescapable Will of the Almighty doesn't alter the situation.

"*It* is stronger than we," as Homer is always sighing; and mortal men must fain adapt themselves to a world and take the wisest course they can in a world that is of *Its* making and not of theirs.

It is all very well for those who prefer to drug themselves with the heady Byzantine love-fumes of the Fourth Gospel and there to forget the Outer Darkness that was so frequently on the lips of Jesus, to make attempts to soften the arbitrary fiat of God. St. Paul rushes resolutely upon the horns of the great dilemma, and comes to the same conclusion as the Book of Job, a conclusion which liberal commentators are bound to find more crushing than consoling.

> Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou

made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

St. Paul is not only a Jew of the Jews; he is also a very subtle logician after the Greek manner; and to the clever theological apologists who make so much of man's entire freedom of choice he is prepared to retort, in his demonic determination to face the worst, "therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

The truth is that the attempts of the Fourth Gospel to reconcile the love of the Father with the atrocities of this world and with the fate of the damned are swept aside by the uncompromising intellect of St. Paul. Like Dostoievsky's Idiot before that Picture of Pain in the house of Rogojin, he recognizes that there are aspects of life that make it hard to believe in the goodness of God. Willing, as he says, to be a "castaway" himself if only his stubborn fellow-Israelites could be saved, and accepting the dark background of God's arbitrary Will as a System of Things from which there is no escape, he turns away from this ultimate tragic riddle to make all he can of the mercy and pity of "the Christ" in his own heart.

He becomes, to all practical purpose, a worshipper of Jesus in place of the arbitrary and incalculable Father.

He becomes, in fact, as many of us are driven to become, a devotee of Prometheus against a pitiless Heaven. After dropping his plummet into the obscure ways of the Ultimate Being, he sums it all up in a sigh of resignation, and concludes on the note of hope left him, "But we have the mind of Christ."

Reading St. Paul in the new and independent spirit I am trying to capture, as if he were some freshly discovered oracle of our human destiny, I find I can concentrate upon

his cult of Christ without suffering the qualms of conscience that the usual tricky special pleading about "the love of God" stirs up within me.

There are passages, indeed, in his writings where his trust in his crucified Prometheus mounts up to such an ecstasy of victory that the dark horrors of that ultimate arbitrary will are swept away, and a huge wave of universal reconciliation tosses up the very silt of the abyss into the light, and Christ *with the whole creation in his heart* loses himself in the cosmic mystery into which he is diffused; till "God"—but a very different "God" from the one who "has mercy on whom he will have mercy and hardeneth whom he will harden," and a still more different "God" from the Johannine Love-Circle floating on the black waters of the Abyss—"becomes all in all."

Such is, I think, what an ordinary reader from Venus or Mars would feel if presented with our New Testament. He would, if he were a moral Being, be horrified by the kind of Deity indicated in this book, especially when the ferocities of the Wrath of God are vividly contrasted with such a hot-house of metaphysical love as we get in the Fourth Gospel. It would strike this planetary sense of right and wrong as a monstrous obliquity that a Being should wilfully create such a wretched thing as humanity, endow it with a miserable simulacrum of free will and then savagely proceed to foredoom the whole of it save for a favoured remnant, a remnant which itself must receive this unfair gift *in the spirit in which it is given.*

And our reader from Mars, or his earthly representative, if he is an ordinarily intelligent individual, will find the "wailing and gnashing of teeth" of this New Testament far more obnoxious than anything in the Old. He will loathe it in the parables of Jesus, with these Lords of Banquets and Vineyards doling out their rewards and

punishments, *since all is their own to do with what they will*, and when he finds it in the neo-Platonic Fourth Gospel, like those old pictures of Hell underlying the glory of the Saints, he will suffer a bitter reaction against the whole system. The magical beauty and mysterious truth of Christ's spiritual revolution—the human values of twenty thousand years blown sky-high—will be found to consort very badly, indeed not at all, with this background of vengeance.

"But," it may be said, "if our sins *don't* lead to unquenchable fire, why this world-shaking scheme of salvation? If we take away the wailing and gnashing of teeth, what is this huge apparatus of redemption *for*?"

It is into the heart of all these tenebrous and poisonous paradoxes that St. Paul—and St. Paul alone of all the New Testament writers—plunges up to the neck. The aesthetic instinct of St. Luke, with its power of turning everything into ritual and romance, manages on the whole, in both his great works, to dodge these logical atrocities.

But the mind of St. Paul was as savagely honest as Nietzsche's. Nothing of the moral monstrousness of the behaviour of the Creator escaped him; but he was caught in a trap of living and burning teeth. The Lucifer in him was for ever confronting the Apostle in him; and the desperate attempts he is always making to "justify the ways of God to Man" are contorted by an inflexible integrity that faces God's conduct to the bottom and finds it, as William Cowper did, so dark and horrible, that "that way madness lies." With a demonic and demiurgic mind like St. Paul's, it was impossible that he should not make half-unconscious changes in all he touched. He changed the nature of Jesus. He changed the nature of the Gospel of Jesus. He changed—I speak in the deepest reverence—the nature of the Holy Ghost.

It is no use mincing matters in a thing that affects the unseen roots of our whole psychological and pathological life. St. Paul, and St. Paul alone, created the Christian religion.

And when you consider how all we Western nations are, willy-nilly, *soaked* in the undertones and overtones of his thought—unbelievers often more completely than believers—it does seem queer that so many intelligent people can bring themselves to pass him by as a neurotic fanatic, temperamentally unfair to women, and a slavish advocate of blind submission to "the powers that be."

To get the true perspective on the greatness of this man, we must grasp his terribly uncompromising and realistic attitude to the God of Jesus, compared with the metaphysical Trinity of St. John. How close to the actual life we know, how close to the pluralistic cosmos of living things around us, all so tragically subject to chance and change, are the passionate utterances of St. Paul compared with the abstract remoteness to earth-life of the famous beginning of the Fourth Gospel!

And if there hangs about his conception of the Creator a sense of sinister arbitrariness absent from St. John's thin-blown airy bubble of divine Emanation, we must remember that his feeling for "the whole creation, groaning and travailing in pain together until now," is a truer response to terrestrial life as we know it. For what, after all, in our experience of life, is more constant than the pressure of inscrutable and arbitrary Chance? Substitute for the predestinating God of St. Paul, creating some to salvation, some to perdition, the actual godless universe around us, and what do we find? We find the dark fates of heredity, the dark fates of environment, the dark waywardnesses of circumstance and accident tossing us here and there, dividing the lucky ones from the unlucky ones,

the well-constituted from the ill-constituted, with just the same unfairness, just the same abysmal "pathos of difference," as if we were in the hands of Him "who can do what he pleases with his own."

We have, indeed, only to substitute for St. Paul's "Hand of the Potter" the equally wanton vagaries of Chance, to find the whole condition of affairs, the whole System of Things, to be the same in both cases.

St. Paul's vision of the inherent and eternal injustice of life reached beyond the death of the body, whereas, Heaven be thanked, our modern view of this colossal unfairness refuses to look beyond the grave.

But if Chance damns us and saves us at her despotic pleasure while we live, why shouldn't she—or her brother the Deity—damn us and save us with the same arbitrariness when we are dead? This proud-humble Roman citizen, with his Jewish traditions and his Greek culture, got hold of the sayings and claims of Jesus long before they were neo-platonized unto the rounded circle of metaphysic that inspired Dante and anticipated Hegel.

And for that very reason what we get in St. Paul is no nebulous metaphysic of redemption, but something much more real and living and moving. Coming fresh to the personality of Jesus on the open highway, so to speak, of this huge and troubled world, St. Paul took the mad chaos as he found it and nailed his desperate soul to the cross of a Christ who was in a large measure his own invention. For St. Paul's Christ is not the fairy Christ of the mediaeval ballads. For *that* Christ we have St. Luke to thank, who was the poet of the new faith. St. Paul's Christ is the Christ in our hearts.

Neither St. Luke nor St. Paul invented Jesus, the son of Mary. His sayings, his gestures, his contradictions, paradoxes, tendernesses, angers, carry the unmistakable

stamp of a real and living person. But when we come to the Christ of the Ages of Faith, when we come to that enchanted figure, whose form like a fairy king glimpsed through rose-stained glass still walks, barefoot and bleeding, over the bitter wasteland of the world, it is to St. Luke our thanks are due.

But while St. Luke surrounded that human form with a glamour that can never die, the *divine* form of Jesus, the Christ who has become the "God within our breast," his way of life, his inmost spirit, his power of changing the heart, this is the gift of St. Paul alone.

What a destiny, to have created the object of the worship of nearly two thousand years and the God from the essence of whose spirit, as Goethe said, the human race, having once attained it, can never sink back!

People talk glibly of the Christian religion; but the truth is there are many Christian religions. The Jesus of the first two Gospels has been as the magic clay out of which these varied gods of our Western world have been moulded.

From St. Luke's poetic genius there did undoubtedly flow around the Lord's figure an unequalled grace and charm, a ballad-like simplicity, which is beyond the touch, as it was outside the temperament, of St. Paul; but it was St. Paul and not St. Luke who made possible that passionate *psychology* of our faith, by which the fairy-tale Christ of the miracles and the sayings can be appropriated by our inmost spirit, can "live in us," and seduce our will to his will.

And how different is that other Christ, the Christ of the neo-platonic Fourth Gospel! Here, in place of a psychological infiltration, adapted realistically and in rich detail to the mad chaos of our troubled earth-life, we have a mystical metaphysic, large and cool and detached,

a divine iridescent bubble of magian "love," that floats serene above the pain and the tumult.

What makes St. Paul's Christ the true Christ for a wounded world is the fact that he is, above everything else, a *psychological experience*. He can obsess a man's soul, he can take possession of a man's spirit, he can dominate a man's mind and will and heart. St. Paul's Christ is not only a Christ for saints and mystics. He is a Christ for all perplexed and troubled minds who have sensitive consciences and a bewildered nostalgia for a larger life. But he is, none the less for that, a Christ for those who understand the meaning of the significant phrase "cosmic emotion."

St. Paul's Christ is so real a Presence that in our planetary sense-impressions, in our consciousness of the dumb pain of Nature, of the dumb yearnings of the lower creatures, of the tragic burden of the desolate astronomical spaces, he becomes a living figure-head of the actual stream of evolution. The cruel Manichaeism of Puritanism has, it is true, by a distortion of St. Paul's desperate struggles with his rebellious nerves, turned his heroic psychology into a bleak pathology, and made a gloomy parody of his self-control.

But the distance such Puritanism has moved from St. Paul's real spirit can be proved by the absence from its cult of the very centre of St. Paul's life; I mean his definition of *agapē*. Puritanism has always been a reversion to St. Paul's avenging God, and a recession from his "mind of Christ."

Let us come boldly to the real point. What St. Paul has actually done is to use the God of predestinating arbitrariness and unpardonable wrath as a representation of our real background, those blind motions of chance and of pitiless fate against which humanity has to struggle.

To put it bluntly, what St. Paul has done is to substitute for the worship of the dark irresistible God of the ultimate unfairness of existence, a new Promethean god of magical heroism and infinite hope. Here, then, is the importance of St. Paul to us moderns. For though some may find the idea of the Trinity a thrilling metaphysical speculation, a speculation with an appealing Hegelian "secret" in it, in the face of the atrocious insanity of so much of our earth-life it has become hard to take it seriously.

It is, of course, the height of silliness and ignorance to make vulgar sport of the Trinity, as some rationalists do. The Trinity is nothing if not rational. It is a triumph of subtle reasoning. Few human speculations have a livelier philosophical interest. It has, no doubt, deep metaphysical significance. But in our actual struggle with pain and weariness, in our desperate moral tensions, in our crucial contests to attain some kind of psychic harmony within ourselves, such a logical abstraction, however mathematically correct, is too remote to be of practical use.

The pressing need of all of us in our lives is some kind of living redemption, some wellspring of vital power, some fount of spiritual resilience, some secret of endurance; and this can be no more afforded by a metaphysical theory than it can be supplied by an algebraical equation. There have always been mystical natures for whom this emanation-theory of the origin of the cosmos has a provocative appeal; and when such a theory came to be quickened, as it is in St. John, by an apotheosis of Christian love, this appeal was naturally heightened.

But it is only for the few, only for a special type of refined intelligence remote from the mass of men, that such an appeal is overwhelming. To come to the realistic psychology of St. Paul, to come to his magical penetration

into the secrets of life and the secrets of the cosmos, after these metaphysical orgies, is like coming to the writings of Dostoievsky or Nietzsche after those of Plato or Plotinus. The greatness of St. Paul is seen in his constant awareness of the world-pain. His Christ is the redeemer not only of the human race but of the whole creation.

Looking round him at that crucial epoch in our race's history, his pessimism and his pity extended to the sufferings of all living things, yes! to the long-endurance and dumb patience of the whole conscious and sub-conscious universe.

> For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

In melancholy contrast with these grand and universal words—for St. Paul was, of all men, the most subject to moods of narrowness, blindness, gracelessness, vicious lapses from "benevolence and righteousness"—I am compelled to make mention of that unworthy passage when he is insisting upon his official right, as a professional agitator for Jesus, of being spared the necessity of working with his hands, a formal privilege of which, as he constantly reminds us, *he has never taken advantage*; any more than he has taken advantage of "the power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the other apostles."

It must have been in the forensic urge of this boasttul vein that he blundered into the following graceless remark:

> For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God

take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt.

While I am upon the subject of St. Paul's lapses it is impossible to forget the ferocious and narrow orthodoxy in which we first encounter him, a devilish orthodoxy from which only the shock of a blinding supernatural vision seemed able to deliver him. His savage Pharisaism was, however, of a very different temper from the conventional hypocrisy that so maddened Jesus, and in his self-lacerating integrity he is perpetually dragging the shame of it into his letters. There was, however, apart from his morbid shrinking from what to-day we call sex-equality, and apart from his extremely perverse attitude to women, one occasion—at least so it looks on the face of it, though the thing has been differently explained—when there was something like a recrudescence of the old hot-headed violence. The occasion was, it is true, a moral rather than a doctrinal one, and the guilt in question was of the sort that, in the laws of Moses, is punishable with death.

It is commonly reported [he writes to the Corinthians] that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife . . . For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now I confess it is difficult for me not to catch in these words the sinister tone of a mediaeval ecclesiastic, handing a culprit over to the secular arm and possibly even to the stake. This "destruction of the flesh that the spirit may

be saved" is about as dangerous a precedent as could well have been inaugurated; and I daresay many a torturer of sex-criminals and heretics has salved his conscience with these wicked words.

To give our passionate letter-writer, however, the full benefit of the doubt, it would be unfair not to quote a very striking passage that comes later, in the Second Epistle to these same immoral Corinthians. Here—and it is hard not to use that indignant and yet endearing expletive addressed so often in Homer to a god-like personage behaving queerly, and incontinently cry out to him "Daimonié!"—he utters these curious words:

> For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears. . . . Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch grief.

Now doesn't it rather look as if this command to forgive were written in reference to the man who was to be "delivered unto Satan"? And what a dramatic story of those queer times in that unstable Corinthian society does this singular incident suggest; some elderly convert, maybe, taking to himself a beautiful young wife, possibly some Aphrodite-worshipping Greek maid, between whom and his grown-up Christian son an irresistible attraction springs up! Let's hope that it *was* this same son who is now to be forgiven, and let's hope, too, that there weren't as many *feminine* tears shed over this transaction as were shed by the anxious and troubled onlooker in Rome! His praise of the "powers that be" is, I confess, a little disturbing too; but he must have met *some* Roman officials more honest than Felix and Festus; and, after all, he had the authority of Jesus for separating religion and politics.

My graver readers must pardon these digressions, which are not as irrelevant and wanton as they appear, for I am, as St. Paul would himself say, "straitened" in my conscience to gather together the very worst that can be said against him, so that his grand demonic genius may stand out in due proportion from a thoroughly realistic foundation. I confess that when I came to that passage about the ox treading out the corn and to this other one about the amorist who was to be handed over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, I had a strong reaction against St. Paul. I must also admit to something of the same feeling, though in a much less degree, when, in trying to read him with as much detachment as my imaginary Martian, I came upon the remarks about "foolish jesting" and the recommendations to "teach and admonish each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

I think it must be certain memories from the Waverley Novels that these words bring back, that peculiar "jargon of edification," as one might call it, in the wild preachings of the old Covenanters; for of a truth that particular kind of puritanical eloquence, especially in the lowland dialect, seems to parody the exact tone of St. Paul!

And the psalm-singing "saints" of Cromwell's armies, too, who made England into a theocratic dictatorship, quote St. Paul when they're not appealing to "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

But there is another side to all this. St. Paul is always passionately advocating a particular way of life; and when one thinks how easy it is for any of us who are serious in our desire to live what the Greeks called "the Good Life"—to live, that is to say, as Goethe taught, *im ganzen, guten, schönen*—to fall into priggish and "highbrow" intellectualism, it seems unfair to blame this

desperate advocate of an ecstatic spiritual cult for his dislike of empty frivolity, and his placing "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" over the jaded sports and bawdy futilities of the passing show.

To reach a fairer perspective in regard to the man's intense seriousness, we must forget its unhappy connection with the puritan tricks of speech, which, after all, is a surface-resemblance, and link it with other, more gracious schools of "the Good Life," such as the initiation into the classic "Mysteries," or the cults—no doubt equally liable to fall into preciousness and priggishness—of the followers of Pythagoras in ancient days, or of Goethe, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater, in more recent times. I know it is a far cry from St. Paul to Goethe and Walter Pater; but there is no doubt that in the man's passion—and he was a true follower of Socrates as well as of Jesus there—for the cleansing of the inside rather than of the outside of the cup he anticipates the *aesthetic catharsis* of which these great advocates of personal culture make so much. If he avoids becoming what the Hindus call a "guru," that is to say a teacher of mental yogi, he indicates in no half-tones the wisdom of acquiring a power over one's most casual thoughts.

In regard to the simpler pleasures of the senses—take his constant references to "meat and drink"—he regarded the liberty of "the mind of Christ" as a plenary absolution from all ascetic scruples. But if *other* men were fussy about such matters, he was all for humouring them, propitiating them, being indulgent to their weak consciences, to the furthest limit.

> I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. . . . It is good

> neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

In fact, St. Paul's philosophy in its immense inward liberation is the extreme opposite to anything puritanical; but he is far too subtle in his spiritual charity to be intolerant even to the intolerant. With the most malleable *agapē* he is prepared to flow like water, like air, into all men's souls, and with a demonic detachment to become "all things to all men."

At the same time, over his own thoughts, when he is not propitiating others, he practises continual vigilance. Like Goethe, when he first crossed the Alps, he feels that "earnestness alone makes life eternity" and that the *malice of negation* is a mere waste of time. What our habitual thoughts are when we are alone, *that*, and nothing less than that, is what *we* are.

> Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things.

And how magnanimously he frees himself from professional jealousy of other *gurus* in the great Tao! "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's . . ."

It is the puritans who have ruined the influence of this great free spirit, this teacher of the magical power of *agapē* over the cosmos. As with Walt Whitman, St. Paul's philosophy is entirely a thing of tone, temper, mood, and spirit, not a system of negative rules and regulations. So much is this the case that a large part of his letters is full of desperate implorings that this "liberty" of his should not be turned, by ill-balanced minds, into an excuse for wild debauchery.

The Pharisee in his temperament is indeed constantly put to it to rake up all manner of specious arguments—arguments that by no means always hold water—to find any justification at all for ordinary morality in the rush and torrent and tempest of this disturbing Christ in his soul.

If only it were possible to detach one's mind from both the orthodox and the rationalist attitude towards him one could move easily enough from the secret of St. Paul to the secret of Homer.

All the supremely great writers of the world have much in common. St. Paul is the most subjective of them all, Homer the most objective; and yet what poet more definitely than Homer conveys to us that aesthetic *selectiveness* advocated by St. Paul in that passage about concentrating our mind on "lovely" things in place of things base, mean and vulgar? Why, it's the whole Homeric way of regarding life, this trick of forcing the mind to concentrate on the unique and miraculous grandeur of the simplest objects, events, and people.

Take that magical passage where Proteus tells Menelaus his future fate—the happiest fate of any individual in the whole *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—and the poet describes the son of Atreus walking back to his ship along the sands, "pondering darkly many things in my heart as I went," and note how those heightened Homeric epithets for everything he sees and does fall exactly into the vein that St. Paul tells us his *agapē* follows, that is to say into a concentration upon the "lovely" aspects of our experience rather than upon the base, the frivolous, the malicious. The night that falls upon him is "ambrosial," the dawn is "rosy-fingered," the sea is "divine," the ships are "shapely," and the river is "heaven-fed."

To say that these "honest and lovely" descriptions are what we call "fixed" epithets only proves my point.

Why are they fixed? They are fixed in an unconquerable will *to heighten life to the very end*; to heighten it through every misery and every disaster, to heighten it, in other words, to the tune of this very same *aesthetic catharsis* recommended by St. Paul.

Nor is the huge and heroic spirit of the pantagruelian philosophy so very different, though the things there that are "honest and lovely" extend, I admit, to a somewhat wider circle. But if you want proof of how all the world's supremely great writers *say the same thing*, glance, I beseech you, at Rabelais's prologue to his First Book, and observe how his praise of Socrates would apply to St. Paul! "With the countenance of a fool, boorish in his apparel, in fortune poor, unhappy in his women, unfit for all offices in the State . . . merrily carousing with all men . . . with matchless learning, invincible courage, inimitable sobriety, certain contentment of mind . . . and an incredible disregard of all that for what men commonly do so much watch, run, sail, fight, travel, toil and turmoil themselves."

The subject of this present book is the greatness and power of certain books; and I think it is not irrelevant to consider for a moment the significant fact that all the greatest books of the world—*securus judicat orbis terrarum* —are books, as William Blake would say, of Imagination rather than of reason or knowledge. The books of knowledge, that is to say of Science, serve merely as steps to other, newer books of knowledge, which in *their* turn are superseded. But nothing can supersede the books of Imagination, because they partake of the original life-force that is for ever re-creating the human soul from the eternal centre of the System of Things.

In our conventional, hypnotic, and slavish worship of Science we are to-day licking the dust, as originals like

Charles Fort and Benjamin de Casseres hesitate not to remind us, in front of a new Juggernaut Car, while the new orthodoxy is just as malignantly inert as the old in its attempts to sidetrack the creative force.

Bow down before the Outward, bow down before the Real, bow down before the logic of "Facts," the new orthodoxy commands. But those of us who still read the books wherein the mystery of life speaks to the children of life refuse to bow down. Instead of this we turn back to Homer, to Rabelais, to Goethe, to Dostoievsky, to St. Paul.

And the truth of the philosophy of St. Paul, when you return to it freely and freshly, is found to be based upon his own very deep and very subtle adjustments to an astounding psychological discovery; and what I would like to suggest here is that the essential secret of his view of the universe and of human happiness in the universe would hold good, even supposing we could know for certain *what, of course, we never shall know,* namely that there is no life at all for us after death.

St. Paul *himself* declares roundly that if there is no rising from the dead "Christ died in vain and our faith is vain"; but as has happened so often in the history of human thought, a great spiritual genius is driven to open up immortal vistas of mental and emotional life from the urge of personal convictions which later generations cannot share. Such an exploded conviction in this man's case was his unwavering belief in the near approach of Christ's Second Coming; while another was his absolute certainty with regard to our survival of death. The idea of the resurrection of the body and the faith that we shall share in the resurrection of Jesus were beyond doubt the urge that made it possible for him to endure what he endured and preach what he preached; but the marvel of his

insight into human psychology lies in the fact that even were he mistaken *in the second* of these assumptions, as he has been proved by the lapse of time to have been mistaken *in the first*—for Christ has not yet come back to establish his kingdom—it still remains that the main drift of his way of life, his grand secret as to how to get the best out of life, is as vital and potent as ever.

What I am now saying would, I admit, excite St. Paul himself to furious indignation; he would cry "Anathema!" and lay his curse upon my head. But even as he himself, upon a not-so-very different point—that is to say upon changing the emphasis of his Christ—withstood St. Peter, so it may be necessary for a modern believer in these mysteries to withstand *him*.

"If in this life only we have faith in Christ we are of all men the most miserable."

Not so miserable, O passionate apostle, as we should have been if thou hadst not discovered the Christ at the bottom of every living soul!

Far be it from me to close the sky-light of "hope against hope" in regard to another life, that "other life" in which Homer, Rabelais, Wordsworth, Dostoievsky, not to speak of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Goethe, all believed; but I think a detached reader from Mars, surveying the situation from a calm distance, would see no reason why those among us who *have* chosen to close that sky-light should be debarred from a psychological secret that illuminates this present life. I would even go further, and maintain that it is unfair to Jesus himself to make the magic spell of his spiritual power depend on our certainty of another life.

We touch here, indeed, the bed-rock of the whole matter; and I believe one of the chief reasons why the startling philosophy of St. Paul is so grossly neglected by

what are supposed to be philosophical minds, is the fact that people have got into their heads the idea that it is impossible to separate him as a thinker from the rest of the Bible. This is one of those curious cases when so-called free-thinkers are as much under the power of convention as the most dogmatic believer.

Certainly we can separate St. Paul from the other writers of the Bible! To feel that an intelligent person cannot appropriate to himself *the most subtle psychological philosophy* that has ever been projected by a human brain —a psychological philosophy that provided the living sap of all Dostoievsky's thought, and through him, *by the law of opposites*, of all Nietzsche's—just because the Church has petrified it and Nonconformity has perverted it, is as absurd as to turn from Homer because the price of his women was twenty oxen, or to turn from Shakespeare because he makes Jack Cade a bullying clown.

Let us freely admit that St. Paul believed that Jesus might come down from heaven at any moment to right the wrongs of the world. He had every excuse for believing it, since Jesus evidently believed it himself. And let us admit that this belief in the imminence of the Second Coming gave an added poignancy to his thought. The urge behind any great human activity can surely be separated from the lasting value of that activity? Because the poet Schiller couldn't get his fullest inspiration unless he had a drawerful of rotten apples under his desk, no one feels that only through the inspiration of rotten apples can we get the good of Schiller's genius.

And what applies to St. Paul's belief in the Second Coming applies also to his belief in the Resurrection. St. Paul was a medium all his days. He was once "caught up, whether in the body or out of the body," into "the Third Heaven," where, as Rabelais puts it, he heard things

"rather to be concealed than revealed"; and it would, as he passionately cries, have made him feel as if both he and his master were unpardonable deceivers, if people were converted on the strength of God "having raised up Christ, *whom he raised not up.*" But in this sense every great poet and soothsayer since the world began has been an unpardonable deceiver: for the personal urge that hurled them into speech, and the particular craving behind that urge, have always overshot their unassailable spiritual discovery. It is the great creative Nature herself, as Goethe says, it is the unfathomable and mysterious Power behind the whole cosmogonic spectacle, who encourage in us these fruitful, these redeeming, these godlike illusions, and "woe to the man"—I still quote Goethe—"who seeks," even from the highest motives, "to destroy them!"

Science to-day has broken loose from all morality, all humanity, all pity. It has become like Baal-Peor; and before its Sacred Groves of vivisection, and before its bombing and its gassing, all flesh must bow.

Science, of course, is a deadly enemy to the whole philosophy of St. Paul, just as it was—under the influence, as he says, of the star Wormwood—a deadly enemy to the philosophy of Dostoievsky. And as we know it to-day, in its complete divorce from mercy and pity, it has set itself against the creative movement by which the spirit of man alone evolves. The torturers and the burners of the Inquisition were, as Dostoievsky points out, far-sighted *scientific statesmen*, beginning the standardizing methods by which the erratic Spirit of Life is regimented and enslaved.

The only evolution on earth worth considering is the evolution of the human soul, that is to say of goodness and mercy, things in which, I need hardly remind you, science is totally uninterested. It was against all the

cience of Egypt that the God of Moses brought the sraelites out of captivity; and this captivity and this elease is a symbol of the whole human drama.

It does seem a fact that the mass of men are a little more itiful and merciful than they were in the earlier stages of uman history. Has science produced this improvement ı man's character, this faint beginning of the most nportant thing in human life, *a change of heart*? I cannot ıink so. What *has* worked it then? Nothing less than /hatever Power it may be, whose voice speaks in the uman conscience; a voice that is accompanied—as Kant :cognized—*by the feeling* that it comes from outside the /hole astronomical universe!

Not science, then, but the inspiration of individual great rophets, the inspiration of Jesus, the inspiration of St. aul, has worked this change, appealing to the "stream of :ndency that makes for righteousness," in the conscience f the average man and the average woman.

But though most of these individual soothsayers, whose ıagic influence, working upon the conscience of our race, as begun to evoke this evolutionary movement in the irection of mercy and pity, have themselves unquestion- ɔly believed in another life, is it not in full accordance ıith the ways of Nature and the ways of the unknown ower behind Nature that such prophets should have nked up their message with many limited and traditional eliefs, with many optimistic certainties, that are not really f the essence of the matter?

A great spirit, roused in the depths of his soul, stirred p in his creative imagination, feeling within him an verpowering sense of "Something far more deeply ıterfused," can hardly be expected to tone down and ıodify and prune and tame to the lowest terms of rational :obability, his terrific and dominating vision.

Jesus interprets the spirit within him as the voice of a divine Father, St. Paul as the presence of a living Redeemer; but the soil they sow with their seed is simply the predisposed consciences of all the humble and unknown multitudes in whose hearts "the stream of tendency," making for mercy and pity, already dumbly exists. And this tendency to be merciful and pitiful in a cruel world is not an abstract thing, it is a *personal* thing; and if those who experience it choose to link it up with some high, strange element of personality in the power behind the System of Things, who can contradict them?

For myself, I find it far more difficult to conceive of the human conscience being produced by the casual rattling of electrons in a cosmic dice-box than to conceive of the unknown power behind the universe containing within it something corresponding to personality.

But though the facts of the case suggest *some* psychic interplay of values between the conscience of man and the unknown power behind the universe, this is a very different thing from a certainty that we, as human individuals, will survive death, or that a God exists who will reward us for our pity and mercy. It is a very different thing from conceiving of the unknown power as a personal Father as Jesus did, or as the cosmic begetter of an Eternal Saviour as St. Paul did.

Every Western soul that has not been hypnotized by some passing intellectual fashion, or some personal prejudice due to puritanical upbringing, feels, I believe, an instinctive sympathetic response to the inspiration of St. Paul and the inspiration of the Christ whom St. Paul half-discovered and half-created; but the response he feels is essentially a response to a fluctuating mystery, a vague emotional hope, not any optimistic certainty.

As Goethe says, we Western races *can never be quite the*

same again after so many centuries of saturation in the words and feelings and emotions of this mysterious Christ-cult. It is indeed doubtful if we should have the faint sense of mercy and pity that we have got now, and the faint conscience that we have got now about the wickedness of such things as slavery and vivisection, if St. Paul had never invented the religion of Christ.

Save for St. Paul, it seems probable that only advanced students of what Spengler calls "the Magian Culture" would so much as even have heard of Jesus of Nazareth. But we *have* heard of him; and the personality of Jesus, transmuted by St. Paul into the Figure of Christ, has in a tiny measure, but still perceptibly—still with enough difference to be unmistakably noted in the delicate scales of historical psychology—*changed our hearts.* That miracle, which prophets have always said can alone bring relief to the misery of the world, that miracle for which trillions of starry nebulae whirling in gulfs of ghastly space have prepared the way, *has already*, although in a faint, frail, wavering measure, *actually been worked.* And a change has occurred, embryotic so far and dim as a shadow caused by a crescent moon, but a change so pregnant that all the wonders of science compared with it are like the turrets of the Tower of Babel.

Christianity existed before Jesus. It existed before St. Paul. But it existed in broken facets and isolated aspects of its central revelation. I think myself that there is more of the essence of Christianity in the Tao of Lao-Tze and of Kwang-Tze than in the more pessimistic and metaphysical teachings of Buddha; but there are unmistakable elements of it in the mystical religions of all ages; notably, judging from the dim traditions that have come down to us, in the Mysteries of Eleusis and those of the ancient Druids.

It is hard to believe that the psychic energy in Christianity which seems to tap some inexhaustible fountain of cosmic consciousness has ossified and petrified for ever in the conventional orthodoxy of the day. It seems much more likely that so deep a force, so luminous and inspired a secret, will take new and startling forms. Indeed, as far as our economic order is concerned, the Christian passion for justice and mercy is already driving us to what looks like a complete reorganization of human society.

We have, of course, to face the fact that in the personal temperament of St. Paul there existed elements of an almost insane ascetism. Temperamentally this extraordinary being had in him something that approached a ferocious Manichaeism. The piercing psychological insight of Jesus, manifested in such a sentence as, "Whoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart," working upon some congenital sex-aberration in St. Paul's excited nerves, and strained to the breaking-point by his grand illusion as to the imminence of the Millennium, reaches a desperate culmination in that wild anti-sexual howl of neurotic loathing: "It is better for a man not to touch a woman!" This vein in St. Paul, carried to its logical extreme, would amount to an impassioned advocacy of race-suicide; but he is such an honest thinker, and so resolutely self-analytical, that he almost always qualifies these extreme sex-pronouncements by the humble admission that he is *not* speaking from the Christ in his soul, but rather from a rooted prejudice of a private nature.

The first return to the actual text of the New Testament —kept, and for a sufficient reason kept, from the hands of the masses—was under the aegis of the Greek scholars of the Renaissance. The Reformation itself was mingled at the start with a revival, in writers like Luther and

Rabelais, of a huge and cosmic enjoyment of the senses. The morbid abuse of ascetism as well as the monstrous hypocrisy that followed in its train were mocked at by both Luther and Rabelais. It was later, with the fanatical and militant puritans, that this anti-sex sex-aberration obsessed the nerves of evangelical Christianity.

But the terribly searching psychology of Jesus lies behind it, and St. Paul's personal prejudices, though he himself was too honest to give them an *ex cathedra* weight, *are* there to support it. Orthodox Christians are perfectly right when they accuse free-thinkers of being hostile to Christianity *because it interferes with their sensual pleasures*; but I believe myself that these anxious free-thinkers are as one-sided in their alarm as the orthodox are one-sided in giving them so good a cause for alarm.

I have a secret notion that the next great religious prophet dealing with this mystery will, while tapping the spiritual genius of both St. Paul and of Dostoievsky, revert in a startling measure to the triumphant life-affirmation of Rabelais and Goethe and William Blake.

After all, there is no word more often on St. Paul's lips than the word "liberty"; and if, in the tragic essentials, his own nerves were so desperately ascetic, he is prepared to free his followers from every sort of meticulous and fussy scruple.

The man's organizing and inspiring power must have been terrific. The mystical Pythagorean circles he established—for his fraternities must have curiously resembled that ancient sage's School—were certainly not pestered by too many rules and regulations. It is always to the spirit that he appeals rather than to the letter; and he evidently combined such infinite "yield" and "give" on unessential points with such impregnable integrity on essential ones, that the occasions when his authority was

defied by these neophyte-groups must have been very rare.

A man who had subdued the most famous sorcerers and magicians of the Near East with a power more formidable than their own, a man who had fascinated King Herod and proved an insoluble problem to the craftiest of Imperial Governors, a man who had challenged the Jerusalem mob and had rebuked St. Peter, a man who—"whether in the body or out of the body God knoweth"—had learnt the secrets of the cosmos in paradise, a man who had been taken for a god from Olympus, a man who had bandied Socratic dialectic with the intellectuals of Athens, a man that Jesus himself had returned to earth to convert, a man whose own biographer was the best biographer of Jesus, must have been well able, for all his loathing of his own appearance and voice and manner and ways, to cope triumphantly with these new fraternities in these old Greek towns.

Considering everything, the unseen playwright of our destiny couldn't have chosen, as an inventor of the most progressive of human religions, a more perfectly adapted person than St. Paul. And how well, from his self-exposing, self-lacerating, self-mocking spasms of sardonic "boasting" do we get his unique credentials as a superman directing the course of history for thousands of years!

This was one of his subtlest psychological tricks; to let himself go to the limit "as a fool" in his boasting, and then suddenly to turn on himself, and with a quivering vibrancy in his tone which makes all suspicion of puritan hypocrisy unthinkable, denounce himself as the lowest off-scouring of the earth!

But ironical as this "glorying in the flesh," as he calls it, is, it is evidently a part of his deepest self-consciousness. With what a tone he speaks of his native Tarsus as "no

mean city"! With what a tone he boasts of being *born* a Roman citizen, with what deep pride he declares himself a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee!

Nothing in a man of genius is more evocative of world-shaking thoughts than the internal clash within his soul of diverse *cultures*, each with its own deep roots in the past; and it is clear that in the soul of St. Paul an impassioned zeal for the most reactionary of Judaic traditions contended with a deep philosophic attraction to all the subtle mystical innovations of Greek thought.

As a Roman citizen he possessed the political free-masonry of the whole civilized world, a thing that in itself must have given him the kind of inner assurance in dealing with dangerous situations that a certain class of cosmopolitan Englishmen are supposed to possess.

It certainly gave him an incalculable advantage in dealing with the extremely detached and legal-minded officials he was always encountering. St. Luke in the Acts, which is practically a Pauline Odyssey, closes his lively narrative with reassuring hints as to the freedom the apostle was given as a privileged prisoner in Rome; and indeed the epistles themselves bear this out, forwarding, as they so constantly do, "salutations" from many members, sometimes very high-placed members, of "Caesar's household."

But Greek as he was in his culture, and Roman as he was, not only in his social status but in the habit that grew upon him of drawing so much of his spiritual imagery from the martial accoutrements of the Imperial Guard, St. Paul remained, first and last, a passionately patriotic Jew. His zealous inborn Pharisaism is continually cropping up. Indeed, the master-key to his emotional life is the tremendous struggle that went on in his soul to sublimate the restrictions of the Mosaic law and resolve their

negations, in harmony with his exalted liberty as Christ-Bearer to the world.

It seems nothing short of insane stupidity to refuse to appropriate to ourselves the fathomless spiritual subtleties of this man's philosophy on the ground that we cannot share, and have no wish to share, his belief in the Trinity, or his faith in the Second Coming. In all these things it is surely possible to get the benefit of the spiritual emotion and the spiritual method, without accepting *the objective actuality* of the supernatural events round which this great Mystery-Play is played.

Taking William Blake's hint—and *he* was certainly no querulous agnostic—that the whole mythology of religion lies within the circle of the human soul, may we not make a deliberate separation of the Christ within us from the historic Jesus of the Gospels?

And following this up in regard to the First Person of the orthodox Trinity, may we not regard the ultimate Deity of St. Paul's restitution of all things, into whose universal Being Christ himself is to be finally absorbed, as simply the unknown power behind the whole System of Things?

Some rudimentary experience of what has been called "Cosmic Consciousness" has fallen to the lot of most men and women all the way down the ages; and it is surely no far-fetched conception to think of our individual identities as sharing in some small degree the universal life-consciousness of this Wordsworthian oversoul.

Thinking of it in this way, does it not become legitimate to discover both the living Christ of St. Paul's philosophy and the unknown mystery behind the universe *as both present*, in their varying degrees, in the depths of our individual soul? We thus in our noblest moments respond to St. Paul's Christ, because we *are*—even the basest and

most contemptible of us—nothing less, in our wretched measure, than this very same Christ! And we respond to St. Paul's inspired words about the final absorption of all lives in God because we are dimly conscious that in the depths of us *we are already part of that ultimate Being.*

In times of stress, in moments of bitter endurance, have we not the power of deliberately sinking down into this Christ, into this God, in the depths of our being?

Something of this sort Emily Bronte must have felt when she wrote:

> O God within my breast,
> Almighty, ever-present Deity!
> Life—that in me has rest,
> As I—undying Life—have power in Thee!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There is not room for Death,
> Nor atom that his might could render void;
> Thou—thou art Being and Breath,
> And what thou art may never be destroyed.

St. Paul is constantly using the word "spiritual" not only as opposed to the "carnal," which is a most dangerous and tricky antithesis, but as a spacious breath of liberty from legal restrictions.

Why, then, cannot we take his *Christ within us* as synonymous with Emily Brontë's "God within my breast"? St. Paul, we must remember, had never seen Jesus. All he had experienced on that road to Damascus was a blinding light and the sound of a supernatural voice; so that while it would have been impossible for St. Peter, for instance, to transmute the human personality of the Jesus he had known so well into the "God within his breast," such a transmutation was not only natural to St. Paul but inevitable.

It was, of course, only a partial transmutation, for St. Paul himself believed whole-heartedly that the Christ he felt in the depths of his soul was the spiritual presence of the actual palpable risen Jesus; but after the lapse of nearly two thousand years isn't it possible for us to take the one step further and apply the magical name Christ to the mysterious stirring of something in us which seems, as we experience it, to spring from outside the astronomical universe?

It seems quite impossible for us now to do as the old-fashioned rationalists used to do and deny roundly that Jesus ever existed. The personality of the man, as St. Luke at any rate describes it, has the unmistakable marks of a real human character; but it is a character full of wild contradictions, beautiful, bewildering, heart-breaking, and rather frightening, and so much the extreme opposite of that "sweet reasonableness" Matthew Arnold absurdly attributes to it, that it is hard to say in any detail what you would have to do if you came under its spell. It is true it is much more easy to imagine St. Luke's Jesus as a Son of God than it is to imagine St. Paul in so mystic a rôle, but *for that very reason* St. Paul is a safer guide for the perplexed human conscience. He has such a genius for penetrating self-analysis—indeed no one but Dostoievsky has approached him in this—that it becomes easy in reading his letters to detect the precise moral qualities in every spiritual particular of this Christ within us, this "God within our breast," whereas in the case of Jesus we are troubled by our inability to reconcile one thing with another thing; our inability, for instance, to reconcile the loving character of Jesus himself with the arbitrary despotism of his Father in Heaven.

The truth is that the spiritual Christ, as St. Paul felt it in his soul, utters clearer oracles than the historic Jesus.

We learn exactly how it would act under the shocks of life, and how it would respond to certain moral situations and to certain human encounters, and with what verdicts, upon certain bewildering questions, it would clear our minds. That this Christ in St. Paul's soul is a much more useful cosmic oracle and arbiter of conscience than the more wayward Jesus of the Gospels is undeniable; but it is also undeniable that if Jesus had never lived St. Paul would have never made his discovery of the Christ in his soul.

And though it is the magical Fairy-Christ of St. Luke's poetic picture who became the Ballad-Christ of the Middle Ages, the troubled and bewildered heart of man turned, even in the Ages of Faith, and has turned ever since, to the psychological Christ of St. Paul. And what is it that has made St. Paul the greatest god-maker who has ever lived? Firstly his genius for psychology, and secondly his creative imagination. What in St. Paul our old-fashioned rationalists would call illusion—and it *is* illusion—is nothing less than the uttermost crest of the evolutionary power that created man, feeling its way to create superman.

And the path along which it is fumbling and groping, the path it has taken with such a drive of evolutionary force that it looks as if nothing could eventually resist it, is the last path in the world *that the world would have expected*; for it is the path of pity rather than the path of power, the path of yielding rather than the path of contending, the path of renouncing rather than the path of acquiring, the path of becoming nothing so as to become everything!

Such and not otherwise was the creative "illusion" of St. Paul; such and not otherwise was the spirit within him that he called Christ.

And when, with our pseudo-scientific catch-words and

our belittling modern jargon, we seek by the tricky process of renaming his emotions to discredit his conclusions, we forget the sound pragmatic doctrine that the test of things is that they should *work*.

Now St. Paul's inspired idea that in all human souls there dwells a Christ *has* worked, and worked in a way no other imaginative hypothesis invented by the brain of man has ever worked! To it, more than to anything else, is due the only real progress that our Western humanity has made, a faintly-perceptible advance in pity and sympathy; and this has been recognized all over the world; so that the human gesture of yielding in place of contending, of diffusing our egoism in place of asserting it, has taken to itself for all time the appellation of Christian. A Buddhist, a Confucian, a Mahommedan, a free-thinker, a positivist, an atheist, if he desired to define this particular human gesture, would be hard put to it to find a definition more concise, more expressive, than the word Christian; though he would certainly feel in the face of the atrocities and hypocritical crimes committed by Christians that the word was somewhat elastic.

And it is to this Christ in all human souls, whether we be noble Mahommedans or hypocritical Christians—for in this sense all souls are equal—that we owe what little evolutionary progress has been in the last twenty-five thousand years. But before the appearance of St. Paul this mystery in the human soul remained nameless. Jesus says, "If you do this or this for the weak and helpless you do it unto me." But St. Paul carries this much further; St. Paul carries it to the point of saying that when we do this particular thing it *is not we who are doing it but "the Christ" in us.*

Analysing this difference to the very bottom, we cannot escape the issue that a merciful action done for the sake of

one who claimed that he would return *to judge the world* is a less Christian action in the profoundest spiritual sense than an action done simply and solely because something in our own soul couldn't do otherwise.

It is of the utmost importance to follow St. Paul into the very depths of our souls, analysing all we find, and I think one of our most curious discoveries will be *the part played still by fear of Hell* in our modern reversions to orthodox Christianity. But any acquaintance with St. Paul's definition of *agapē* will make it clear that such god-fearing people are further from the "mind of Christ" than the most lively fornicators. What we must therefore do is separate the spiritual psychology of St. Paul from what one might call his official creed.

There has, of course, been plenty of vague rhetorical and ethical moralizing on the subject of undoctrinal and undogmatic Christianity such as leaves our aesthetic sense and our imagination deadly cold. Certain eloquent preachers have for many years been endeavouring to substitute for the mystical and sacramental traditions of the Church a kind of ghostly and not very moving humanism, a humanism that uses such expressions as "the Fatherhood of God" and "the Brotherhood of Man."

Why is it that this sort of thing kills the fire of the spirit far more effectively than any Pharasaic "letter"? Simply because it is even further removed from the *concrete truth of things*. It fills us with tedium because it is too ideal to touch the imagination. The idea of God being a loving Father plays very little part in St. Paul's spiritual passion; and all ideal talk about the Brotherhood of Man is burnt up in an *agapē* that includes the cosmic brotherhood of beasts and birds and fishes and angels and demons! The first form in which God presented himself to St. Paul was

that of an arbitrary creative despot—a more formidable God than even that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who did what he liked "with his own," predestinating some "vessels" to eternal glory and others to everlasting perdition; and whose "wrath" with the weak creatures of earth was only to be mollified by the crucifixion of the righteous Jesus.

The second and totally different part played by St. Paul's God is the purely cosmic one, according to which, in the final restitution of all things, he is the universal oversoul in whom the Christ in us is destined to be absorbed. But the true difference between St. Paul's philosophy and the benevolent latitudinarian rhetoric to which I referred is the concrete reality, the electric and quivering reality, so close to the quick, of the circumstantial *agapē* of which he is the prophet.

The world we live in is so full of appalling cruelties and oppressions, some due to human wickedness, some to the development of science without a corresponding development of character, many, like the treatment of rabbits by weasels, inherent in Nature herself, that the idea of a loving Father being behind all this and responsible for all this strikes an unobsequious and healthy mind as a horrible and evil mockery.

When you drop your mental plummet to the bottom of things and judge the Power responsible for so shocking a world according to our highest human values, it is hard to regard such a Power in any other light than as partly good and partly evil. Logically we must allow that it is to it we owe the surprising evolution of mercy and justice in our hearts, while it is also to it we owe the things which outrage that same conscience at every turn.

The only other possible view, it seems to me, is to assume an extremely hidden, though entirely well-meaning

Power, struggling with infinite slowness against terrible opposition, and for some mysterious reason reluctant to meddle with the ways of weasels, or the ways of science, or the ways of wicked and foolish men. I say "reluctant," because if it *cannot* meddle, or is *forbidden* to meddle, it obviously isn't the supreme power; or, if it *be* such, we are driven back to our first supposition of a primal cause divided against itself.

The excuse for God usually put up by believers is the excuse used by Zeus in Homer, namely that all the evil in the world is due to the free will of man. But this excuse hardly applies to the abominable sufferings of the animal world or even to the decidedly unpleasant things that go on in the vegetable world, so that even if the loving Father is to be acquitted over man's misdeeds, he is still responsible for the clutch of the ivy round the tree and for the look the rabbit turns to the sky before the weasel has finished with him.

Beautiful though the words are of the *Paternoster* taught us by the Jesus of the Gospels, we cannot forget the arbitrary and despotic tone of all those parables, nor "the wailing and gnashing of teeth" reserved for the enemies of the Father in Heaven. But where Jesus shows no uneasiness about the ways of God, St. Paul shows extreme uneasiness, going so far as to ask the pertinent question, "Is God then unrighteous?" And though he answers himself with his familiar "God forbid!" the doubt remains; and we are spared the ironic mockery of a loving Father dooming half his creation. The God of St. Paul is the mysterious and arbitrary Potter, not *quite* as evil as he is good, or no man could live, but darkening his purposes at any moment in the despotism of revenge. St. Paul's God, in fact, though following his master he calls him Father, is really the God of the Book of Job,

whose apologia, when he is finally driven to utter it, is the simple and primitive one of thunder and lightning.

It was against this despotic Power and against no other that both Lucifer and Prometheus revolted. Jesus, on the contrary, accepted him fully and attributed to him his own qualities; but, as we have already remarked, the background of all the Gospel parables is the assumption of an irresponsible lord of banquets and vineyards and bridal feasts, who, like St. Paul's Potter with his "vessels of wrath," does what he pleases with his own.

The Homeric heroes are much less obsequious to their Zeus than we are—or at least than our orthodox grandparents were—to this terrifying Potter of the New Testament. "*Sketlié!*" which apparently means "wicked one!" is the curse hurled constantly against Zeus by the proud adventurers in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

But after all, Zeus, though powerful, was not *all*-powerful. There were definite limits to his despotism; whereas the Father of Jesus was omnipotent. If such had been his pleasure he could have thrown his whole creation into the place of "wailing and gnashing of teeth."

It is Jesus himself who declares that such is the fate of the enemies of God; and though as the merciful Son of Man he did put a hook into the jaws of this Leviathan, the idea of such an appalling revenge upon unbelievers never seems to have shocked his own conscience.

It is, as a matter of fact, the Christ of St. Paul's god-inventing genius, the Christ that St. Paul discovered in the human heart, and who *does exist* in the human heart, who, in us to-day, rejects as unworthy and immoral this arbitrary "Father" of the parables. What the human race —as St. Paul's Christ in its heart grows more Christ-like through the ages—has really done, is to *expurgate the sayings of Jesus* till the fear of "the wailing and the gnash-

ing" becomes a negligible motive compared with a certain deep planetary urge to enlarge your ego by yielding and sacrificing and diffusing its cruder self-assertion.

Jesus struck the rock of man's selfishness, and the living waters poured forth; but it was St. Paul whose Christ, that living fountain of mystery in the human heart, keeps the eternal channel clear.

It is, of course, open to the advocates of the cosmic power as a "loving Father" to ask the staggering question, "Whence comes this fountain of mercy and justice in the human heart, this mystery deified as the Christ by St. Paul?" Did the whirling electrons evolve it? Did the space-time of Einsteinian relativity produce it? Does our vivisecting and bombing science know its secret? Should we find it if we took the wings of the dove and flew to the last star of the Milky Way? No, there is only one place to look for it, a place which, as Kant hinted, lies outside the categories of the senses, outside the circle of the whole astronomical universe—namely the depths of the ordinary human soul!

But how did it get there? From what power, beyond the System of Things as science knows it, does this Christ in the heart proceed? Well! Once more we are back again at the old dilemma; for human reason can do nothing but assume that this magic of mercy and justice, so totally alien to the ways of Nature, can only come from the same source as Nature herself, can only come from the same unknown Cause, who is responsible for all the evil and all the pain.

This being so, is it not the wiser course, is it not indeed the only course, to give up all attempts to worship the unknown power behind this good and evil cosmos and concentrate our religious devotion solely upon the Christ, the God, as Emily Brontë says, in "our own breast"?

The arbitrary, predestinating, master-potter God of St. Paul is certainly more representative of the crass casualty of life as we know it than the loving Father of modernistic preaching. We are all confronted by the horrible "tragedy of difference" between one human destiny and another.

That is how, as Shakespeare says, "the world wags." Our forefathers recognized this *basic unfairness* and named it the Will of God and bowed down before it.

Nor is it very easy to blame them for so doing! What they saw around them was precisely what was revealed to them in the parables of Jesus, a Lord of the planetary Vineyard who could do, and *did* do, what he liked with his own. Who could blame them for cringing? Who can wonder that William Cowper, and thousands of others with the same tender heart, went mad?

If from the lips of the Saviour himself we are warned about "the wailing and gnashing of teeth" and about "the many called and the few chosen," what are we to think? St. Paul himself turns in bewilderment from the dark despotism of the Father and comforts himself with the thought, "But we have the mind of Christ." Yes; but the mind of Christ, the mind full of infinite mercy and justice, *where is it*? Is it in the words and parables of Jesus? Only as one wild note among many other notes of the directly opposite sort.

The mind of Christ, as St. Paul imagined it, was in his own heart, and from its lodgment there it condemns as immoral and unpardonable the arbitrary despotism of that lord of the vineyards and the banquets.

When I use the expression the "spiritual psychology" of St. Paul, I mean this inspired urge in him, in "the mind of Christ" in him, to reverse—just as the great Taoist

teachers do—all the well-constituted and rational judgments of the world.

> For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. . . . But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, *and things which are not,* to bring to nought things that are.

Where, except in the Taoist writers, and in the *esprit souterrain* of Dostoievsky, can you find anything like that?

"Things which are not!" What a demonic, what a vibrant, what a beautiful and holy and supernatural *malice* there is in that last word! Well, "malice" is not exactly the name for this particular vein of philosophizing. There is no name for it! How should there be, when it is a completely new emotional discovery? The beautiful and equivocal word *agapē* is a parallel case. This magic word was adopted by St. Paul from his Greek authors and then applied, as we all know, to every aspect of actual human life. St. Paul is not content to use the word in the mystical-metaphysical sense in which it is used—and to many of us so movingly and seductively used—in St. John's Gospel. In his terrifying honesty and realism—qualities that must have been peculiarly disturbing to his neo-platonic friends—St. Paul drives his Nietzschean dagger-point straight into the heart of the matter and defines clearly to what in *his* opinion this ambiguous, apocalyptic *agapē* really amounts; and what it actually means in real life to be dominated by it!

If in our spiritual psychologizing, *à la* Dostoievsky and Nietzsche, we could get to the innermost secret of these

two extraordinary moods, moods which, except for that induced by martyrdom, seem the deepest within the whole range of human emotion, we should be in a better position to understand what kind of a thing this Christian religion, invented by St. Paul, really was!

I think it only obscures the issue to drag in words like *Sadism* and *Masochism* in this connection. Our sex-feelings are of course at the bottom of everything; and anything that is exciting, provoking, tantalizing, quivering with love-hate and with nervous tension, naturally rouses some sort of sex-feeling. But whether we are sexually excited in a yielding, submissive, abandoned way, or in an ecstatic dominating way, does not make any difference to the spiritual result.

The great thing is to feel so sexually excited by the abnormality of our defeat of "the world the flesh and the devil," that one can, as it were, dance a wild dervish-dance in the interior of one's soul in this weird triumph over natural self-assertion.

Of course St. Paul had the huge and unparalleled advantage of believing that it was by the magical power of God that he brought about the triumph of the things that *are not* over the things *that are*; and in feeling this he was a true apostle of Jesus. Carrying certain moods of Jesus to the extreme limit—as he carried everything to its limit—this extraordinary man struggled to *change the actual nature of God.*

It had been the nature of the God of Moses to demand strange sacrifices of his worshippers, but the God of St. Paul, after a few hints from Jesus, comes to demand a complete reversal of all normal human values. Confronted by the tragic injustice and wanton waywardness of life, with only the impenetrably Unknown behind it all, the human race has never been able to do any better

than to mould this Unknown according to its own highest ideal of what is great and wonderful.

It was great and wonderful in the days of Samson to kill your thousands—"heaps upon heaps"—with the jaw-bone of an ass; but it seemed greater and more wonderful to St. Paul to toss aside all glorying in "benevolence and righteousness," as Kwang-Tze would put it, and to take "the foolishness of God," that is to say the apparent weakness of mercy and pity, and the *diffusion* instead of the *assertion* of the human ego, and to make of this the ultimate cosmic secret.

That the demonic urge in his own character that led him to this had some strange sex-instinct behind it matters nothing, nor does it matter if, as he was driven on, he changed not only the nature of the unknown power behind the System of Things but even the nature of Jesus himself. What we are concerned with is his discovery of certain psychological secrets in the deep heart of man.

It all comes from that source. Out of the soul of man comes the mind of Christ. Out of the soul of man comes this new revelation of the purpose of the Absolute. Out of the soul of man comes the wild ecstatic pleasure of reversing the old values, of changing the body of the old corruptible Adam, as our apostle would put it, into the new spiritual body of immortality and truth. What we are concerned with is this great writer's discovery of a new way of taking life, a way, though apparently weak and foolish, that is in reality stronger and more formidable than any other.

And not only more formidable. More evocative, too, of those thrilling wave-crests of mysterious happiness that seem to jet forth from the great cosmic sea. What matter if, in the supernatural malice with which the man turns

upon his own "glorying in the flesh," our modern pathologists can find what they call masochism?

We need no pathologist to tell us that sex-emotion of *some* kind is behind every great philosophy in the world. The question is simply, as William James would remind us, *does the thing work?* To bring up against it all the horrible distortions and revolting hypocrisies of historic puritanism doesn't alter its inherent value. The abuses of the *best*—are we not for ever being reminded of that?—are the devil's own *worst.*

And when we turn from this demonic and supernatural malice, directed against the well-constituted things of life as compared with their opposite, and come to consider all that St. Paul implies in his famous dithyramb upon *agapē*, or "charity," as our Authorized Version has it, we are confronted by something that is so concrete, so realistic, so saturated with the dew of life, that it makes the gnostic declaration of St. John that "God is love" seem an extremely remote and metaphysical echo.

And what appalling insight into the limitations of the heroic is shown in that startling and disturbing conclusion: "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"!

The power of the mind over the body has been manifested not unfrequently in the long and tragic history of our race; but in St. Paul's case we have something even deeper and more mysterious than this; for we have the power *over both mind and body* of a spiritual force in the depths of the soul that seems to come straight from a reservoir of *similar force* behind the whole astronomical world.

And so terrific, so irresistible is this force, that it renders the soul completely indifferent to all the ordinary values, standards, superiorities of our normal life. And not only

indifferent; it gives it the power of revelling in a strange exultation in the utmost ignominy, the utmost contempt, the utmost humiliation.

> Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

In other words, in the strength of this mysterious cosmic force in the depths of his soul, our gentlemanly Roman citizen felt able to go through the precise experiences which are the common lot of the extremely poor all over our civilized world.

St. Paul himself undoubtedly lived, as we say, "on his nerves," rather than on any impressive qualities of mind or body, and this he never let himself forget.

> That I may not seem [he writes] as if I would terrify you by letters. For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

And what a magnificent blow to all pharisaic moralists and self-righteous ones is St. Paul's absolutely true doctrine of the desperate evil that exists in all of us! And how deeply does this Dostoievskian discovery justify the sublime notion of the basic equality of all souls; all equal in essence because all are—human!

There is something of the same mystery about this great man's own especial nervous trouble, that there is about the terrifying malady that afflicted Swift. After letting himself go to the limit on the subject of his mystical trances, he pulls himself up with a desperate personal confession that must have cost him not a little to make.

> For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool, for I will say the truth; but now I forbear, lest any man should think

of me above that which he seeth me to be or that he heareth of me.

Thus he catches himself up, thus he grows incoherent; and indeed we feel that his Corinthian converts must have been as embarrassed and uncomfortable under such self-exposure as Turgeniev became when Dostoievsky began pouring out to him some terrifying Stavrogin-like confession.

> And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

It is hard to feel much doubt as to the general nature of this "thorn in the flesh." It must surely have been some nervous aberration, quite possibly of a sexual kind, that it was impossible for the man to conceal for very long, and the nature of which may have been of a kind to contrast disgracefully, shamefully, even shockingly, with the spiritual trances in which he desired to "glory."

There is a passage in his letter to the Galatians that seems to me to refer to this "thorn in the flesh"; and it is such a wild and extraordinary passage that if it doesn't refer to a sexual aberration the mystery of it is indeed insoluble.

> Ye know [he writes] how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And *my temptation which was in my flesh* ye despised not, nor rejected; but received as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

What, in heaven's name, are we to make of these wild and singular words, and how could any "temptation" be received "as Jesus Christ"?

All I can presume to suggest is that some erotic peculiarity in him became, when sublimated by his psychic intensity, one of the most urgent of the demonic driving-

forces that gave him the power to "become all things to all men" for the sake of "the mind of Christ."

I feel it is a great mistake to disparage the value of St. Paul's psychological discoveries as to this mind of Christ, this secret cosmic force in every human soul, which can sublimate the most abnormal "temptations in the flesh" simply because the whole thing is connected with his personal faith in a life after death. But altogether apart from his belief in immortality, there is another intimation of his which is to me of profound significance. I refer to his constant awareness of vast, unknown, spiritual powers about us, many of which are evil rather than good; and not only evil, but evil in an appallingly powerful and majestical sense.

We Westerners who have got rid of our ancestors' belief in hell-fire and its population of damned souls and fallen angels, are, I think, inclined to underrate the possibility in so mysterious a cosmos, of invisible forces at work, call them what you please, that are powerful ministers of evil, and upon whom men of evil-will can draw just as those of good-will can draw upon the mind of Christ.

Older races than ours, less "scientific" no doubt, but with a far longer experience in the possibilities of life upon earth, have never lost their sense of vast spiritual conflicts going on about us, in which willy-nilly we have to share.

To Dostoievsky this awareness was as vivid as to any white magician in the monasteries of Tibet; and St. Paul, whose personal encounters with several black magicians St. Luke has described so dramatically, lived at an epoch of the world's history when all the invisible Powers, good and bad, seemed to be boring holes in the "flaming ramparts of the world" and inserting whispering-tubes

full of voices and portents wherewith to disconcert and discomfort the Lucians and Voltaires of that time. It was, in Dostoievsky's own phrase, the grand age of the *Possessed.* Rosicrucian societies, Egyptian cults, Byzantine Mysteries, Gnosticisms, Spiritualisms, Theosophies, were springing up in every direction.

The "thick rotundity of the earth" was splitting. The world's roof was leaking. The heavens were spilling secrets that had been concealed "from the foundation of the world." It seems natural enough and entirely in accordance with common sense that ages of faith should come and go in periodic cycles. The miraculous and the magical have always needed an atmospheric concentration of the emotion of masses of believers.

Faith, like science and like materialism, and probably with no less and no more justification, is a thing of fashion. A completely wise man would allow both his faith and his un-faith to alternate freely in his soul. He would recognize, as Goethe did, that there is *room for all.* To catch the living dew of life's actual and concrete reality you need imagination as well as reason. It leads nowhither to confuse the two facets of the System of Things as our philosophizing physicists confuse them. Let matter remain matter and the soul remain the soul. It is possible enough that St. Paul is completely justified in his clairvoyant awareness of vast unseen forces about us, warring amongst themselves and using human nations as pawns on a planetary chess-board; and though our modern conscience boggles at the God of Moses with his slaughterings and burnt-offerings, and at the God of Jesus with his despotic favouritisms and his Outer Darkness, there is no reason why we shouldn't respond most feelingly to words like these: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against

the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritua wickedness in super-mundane places."

Indeed, the truth of these words is proved again anc again both in life and in literature. Compare the terri- fying subtlety of Dostoievsky's idea of evil with the crud violence of Balzac's wicked characters, the latter behaving like crocodiles and tigers, whereas the former are as subtl in their devilry as any satanic superman. It is when we use enough intellectual imagination to recognize ourselves in such persons as Peter Stepanovitch and Stavrogin and Svidrigailov, that we realize what an oracle of the convolutions of the soul St. Paul was.

But I have not yet touched upon the grand secret of this philosopher that makes it possible for us to use his method of life to-day. I refer to what he is perpetually calling "the liberty of Christ."

Now there are many forms of liberty in this world, but none of them can give the individual human soul what this "liberty of Christ" can give it. Every great spiritual experience has its corresponding danger. The moment you dig deep into any human heart the black ooze of stagnant malice gushes forth, mingled with the waters of life! No need to go to Blake or to Nietzsche for the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. This runaway match takes place every day in every human heart.

As with all deep thought, the grand peril of the Christian religion is the peril of a desperate logic that leads to insanity. I don't mean that there is any danger of our Anglican bishops losing their wits or of our popular Nonconformist preachers rushing to hang themselves. But when imaginative and highstrung spirits, tuned to frantic integrity, attempt to bring St. Paul's religion into their lives, there is a terrible danger. A kind of auto-sadism springs up that uses the ideals of humility and

purity to poison the life-force at its root. To be a wise disciple of St. Paul one needs a natural, healthy and incorrigible sense of humour, one needs a profane and unconquerable zest for life. I would almost go as far as to say one should be a reader of Rabelais. The thing to do is to keep in mind St. Paul's definition of *agapē*, and to remember what he says about that "profitless" giving of your body "to be burned."

St. Paul's religion is nothing if not a secret of abysmal exultation. If your diseased conscience, in its mania for "purity" and "humility," makes you unhappy instead of happy, if your religion is based upon a tragic feeling of being perpetually under the eye of an exacting God, you may be sure that you are not in touch with the great cosmic well-spring of joy that St. Paul calls "the liberty of Christ."

St. Paul's religion is a religion of secret ecstasy, not of auto-sadistic humility. There *is* humility in it, but it is the humility of losing yourself in an outrushing cosmic sympathy, the humility of diffusing your ego, not of cruelly beating it down.

It is not a religion of being pure and humble so as to get to heaven. It is a religion of finding your heaven here and now in the deepest secret of the cosmos. This difference between the morbid and auto-sadistic humility of the false Christianity, the Christianity that is clerical and ecclesiastical—and, one fears, sometimes monastical and conventual too—and the humility that is really saintly, can be tested by one infallible test.

The humility and purity of these false Christians—and they are instinctively hostile to St. Paul and his unswerving integrity—is a humility and purity pursued *from the Fear of God*. Those wicked parables of Jesus, with their background of a wayward and irresponsible dictator, are

the sort of food upon which these false Christians nourish their gloomy self-torment.

St. Paul alone among the New Testament writers *has found out God*, and along with his exposure of the waywardness of God has completely exposed the insane morbidity of these unhappy God-fearers.

"If thou wouldst only save my fellow-Israelites," he cries, "let me be a castaway!" Is that the tone of the humble pure ones who think of their personal end and of their personal future to the exclusion of all else? The whole idea—as William Blake is always repeating—of the eye of the loving Father watching our thoughts so as to catch us out in pride and impurity is about the most dangerous idea for human sanity that has ever entered the brain of man.

And what effect has it had in human history? It has turned away the minds of pious men from the true business of real saints, which is, of course, giving up one's money and one's comforts and one's prejudices and one's worldly success, and in place of this has substituted an insane, abortive, self-cruel attempt to cut into cowardly little pieces "before the Lord" the two brave, gallant, reckless, natural, healthy, earthy impulses to which Life itself gives birth—self-respect and sex-desire!

Think of the disgraceful way our grandparents cultivated purity while they doled out shillings to the poor they were robbing all the time! This whole temptation to purity and humility is due to the notion that the eyes of God keep watch over our thoughts and that at death we shall fall into God's avenging hands. But a true Christian who, with St. Paul, has overcome, as St. Paul did, St. Paul's own temptation to deify purity and humility and is prepared, as St. Paul was prepared, to risk being a castaway for his tribe is a bird, as we say, of a completely

different feather. Self-controlled he will be, and probably ascetic in many secret ways—for a guzzling and whoremongering saint would certainly be a paradox—but one feels he would take this humility-purity cult in a very free and humorous spirit, while his *agapē*—which is an "enduring of all things" in an ecstasy of joy—would be a positive rather than a negative virtue.

> Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. . . . For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Doesn't this outburst of stoical pride smack rather of Epictetus or Walt Whitman than of Thomas à Kempis? One very subtle test by which a person could discover whether his temptation to beat himself down into humility and purity is of Christ or the Devil, is to ask himself how he would feel about it if he knew for certain that there was no God and no life after death.

It seems to me that though St. Paul would have uttered passionate protests about the misery of such desolation, he would have still gone on obeying the mind of Christ in his own soul; obeying it in defiance of a bombing and vivisecting science, in defiance of the triumph of "the star Wormwood," in defiance of "wickedness in super-mundane places"; but I fancy the self-flagellators of "purity and humility" would incontinently burst out into an orgy of lechery and pride.

If orthodox believers cry out upon me for my presumption in thus expurgating the doctrines of St. Paul and giving them a scope beyond his intention, it must be remembered that St. Paul himself is guilty of doing that

very thing to the Laws of Moses. If St. Paul's doctrines have their root, as I think they have, in the System of Things itself, they are bound to develop and grow, just as the human conscience beneath their influence develops and grows.

But there is a most significant passage in the Epistle to the Colossians which entirely supports my view of the danger to sensitive consciences of this overstress upon purity and humility.

That particular age was full of weird spiritualisms and morbid gnostic asceticisms. There must have been many sophisticated intellects in those semi-Greek Alexandrian circles who, in their reaction from the brutal and jaded grossness of Roman manners and in their contempt for the crude indulgences of the crowd, gave themselves up to a fussy and finicking moral preciousness that had in it nothing of the great cosmic breath of life springing from the Christ in all human souls. These dainty and fastidious devotees of humility and purity must have been as repulsive to the inspired and impassioned nature of our author as certain cults of our own day would be to a revivified Walt Whitman.

Indeed, in his recognition of their portentous morbidity St. Paul coined an admirable word wherewith to dub them. He calls them "will-worshippers." They were clearly *false Christians* of the sort one knows only too well, full of a craving to separate themselves from the common herd, full of a puffed-up purity of their own, and seeking, in spiritualistic communion with "angels," for some kind of a short-cut to salvation that would save them from the difficult path of charity.

But let St. Paul speak for himself of the Christ in all souls as compared with these "will-worshippers" of humility and purity.

> Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind . . . which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, *and neglecting of the body*; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

This liberty of Christ in St. Paul's sense is really a kind of spiritual magic. It certainly is no optimistic excuse for casual drifting or for luxury and excess.

It is a deep intellectual detachment from all the rules, customs, habits, traditions, ceremonies, avoidances, which the instinct of race-preservation has allowed to petrify into a hard accumulated lava of god-fearing superstition. It is a moral temper that needs an inspired balance of mind. It is an extension of the principle, "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life" to such an extreme point that it becomes a self-controlled antinomianism.

Like all profound spiritual discoveries, St. Paul's liberty of Christ—and here beyond doubt he is nearer the temper of the historic Jesus than in any other point—has lent itself to the maddest abuses and the craftiest hypocrisies. The man's magnetic intensity in the most opposite directions was so terrific that out of his doctrines—though in the spirit he himself followed them they reach an incredible synthesis—there have arisen diametrically opposite abuses.

From his furious reactions of passionate hatred for his own flesh, from his wild neurotic outbursts of loathing

for all sexual pleasure, *even for sex itself*, have come no doubt some of our most desperate aberrations of puritanical cruelty. And on the other hand his impassioned advocacy of liberty from all traditional moral restraint has resulted in the vocation of characters like that of the recently murdered Rasputin.

And yet what a thing this liberty of Christ could be, as you catch the hints and glimpses of it in these amazing letters! It is, as a matter of fact, a strange return, through the medium of this great "inventor" of Christianity, to the prehistoric doctrines of the Chinese Tao, as Lao-Tze delineated them before he retired into the wilderness. Only an intellect of profound and almost Olympian detachment from the moral traditions of our race, only an intellect capable of dealing with religious prejudice in the startling way Goethe, for instance, dealt with it, could have made practical use of this liberty of Christ in the manner St. Paul did.

For it was on the strength of this that he became, in his own characteristic phrase, "all things to all men." It was on the strength of this that with what I call his "supernatural malice" he habitually exaggerated his infirmities, his weaknesses, his manias, his foolishnesses, while flattering the virtues of his disciples to an extreme degree of fantastical subtlety. He speaks of his letters being "terrifying"; but they were never terrifying unless he was confronted by something that stove in the very bottom of his new religion.

Short of that, he seems to have propitiated everyone he met in a manner that must have been almost bewildering, and no doubt did lead to all manner of fatal misunderstandings. His own absolute detachment from normal human codes—all the more complete because of his reaction from the extremest form of Pharisaic legalism—

gives an appearance of abysmal irony to some of his passionate appeals. But it is not irony in the ordinary sense, any more than what I have called his "supernatural malice" is malice in the ordinary sense.

What he really managed to do—this Roman citizen of an Hellenized Tarsus who was yet a Jew of Jews—was to take his natural self, his individual self, his personal self, and turn it into an obedient appanage to this spirit of Christ within him, a thing that we are compelled to think of as an immortal and undying portion of whatever Power it is that lies behind the whole astronomical universe.

No wonder he was so desperately certain of a life after death! More than any man who has ever lived—for we know the bloody sweat that it cost the more human Jesus to identify His will with the will of the Father—this gladiator of eternity put off *in his life-time* his corruptible body and forced his mortal consciousness into obedience to an immortal principle in the universe. Proust, at the close of his great work, defines what he calls "the Immortal Being" in all of us in terms of accidental moments of conscious sense-ecstasy; but for St. Paul this Immortal Being is identified with the spirit of Christ.

From behind the majestic totality of the stellar universe this spirit of Christ enters every individual soul, bringing with it its own intimation of immortality, and bringing with it too a power so unfathomable that a person recognizing it within him, and subordinating his normal individuality to it, as if to a deeper personality within his ordinary personality, can be as foolish and weak *and as nearly nothing* as he likes, and yet can feel himself stronger than all the Thrones, Dominations, Principalities and Powers of the invisible world!

Here we reach the crux of the whole philosophy of

St. Paul. This is with him what the doctrine of "Becoming" is with Hegel, and what the mysterious "Ideas" are with Plato. But the superiority of St. Paul's "Christ within us" over the Platonic or Hegelian theories is that it is an emotional, practical, pragmatic, active thing. It is the Goethean "In the Beginning *was the Act*," as against the Platonic "In the Beginning *was the Word*."

And though it is an active emotion rather than a state of Being, this Christ within us, as a unique way of taking life, closely resembles the Chinese Tao. Its strength is cosmogonic; and yet it is weak and flowing and yielding. It resembles water as compared with the more solid and aggressive elements.

As I try to saturate myself in the precise spiritual *nuance* of what the man means by this mind of Christ, I find that there does unmistakably arise from his extraordinary expressions a vein of emotion hard for me to define except in the phrase "supernatural malice"; and if you press me to explain what I have in mind when I use this queer phrase, I can only answer you by a quotation from his own words. In these words no intelligent person, it seems to me, can miss the quiver of an intensely personal emotion, an emotion that isn't exactly sadism or masochism, and that isn't exactly irony, yet is certainly something that St. Paul's correspondents, if they had any subtlety, must have deciphered with considerable embarrassment!

But one thing I want to remark upon before giving my example, and that is, the indescribable help in analysing this "beyond-good-and-evil" emotion of St. Paul's we get from the fact that when he talks of his mysterious *agapē* we *do* know what he is talking about, for he has defined it to the last ingredient!

Personally, I do not share the warm super-amorous glow which the mere sound of the syllable "love" calls up in

many breasts. I deeply regret the Revised Version's use of this word in place of the Authorized Version's "charity." I hold that this sentimental substitution completely destroys the creative magical quality that St. Paul gives to *agapē*, a quality that makes it so perceptibly different from its metaphysical parallel in St. John.

Both St. Paul's celestial malice and his pragmatic *agapē* quiver so intensely that it is hard to catch the moral colours of such tense bowstrings of the spirit. An elaborate history of "love," introducing the different meanings of *amor*, *amicitia*, *caritas*, as we meet them in life and religion, would be a help here.

When people use the expression "the Love of the Saints," for instance, do they mean the living *agapē* of St. Paul, or do they mean the remote and metaphysical *agapē* of the Fourth Gospel? We are forced to admit that the magical power in St. Paul's *agapē* extends a good deal beyond our ordinary ideas of "benevolence and righteousness"; else he could never have written "If I give my body to be burned. . . ." Shall we be going too far if we identify this *agapē* with nothing less than *the feeling we experience* when we grow aware of the Christ in our souls? Is it not possible that mingled with the potency of a feeling so subtle that you could sacrifice your life in the most horrible manner and yet *not* possess it, there is *of necessity*, as its inverse side, as the defect of its peculiar quality, or, if you like, as the demonic aspect of its sublime energy, a certain tendency to a malicious exultation in the bewilderment, embarrassment, awkwardness, and misunderstanding it sometimes excites? Anyway, it is from this particular quiver of the tight-drawn bowstring of the mind of Christ that I deduce the startling expression "supernatural malice."

But the reader shall have the promised quotation and

judge for himself; but as he judges let him remember once more both the fatal danger of regarding St. Paul as so sacrosanct that his holy and revered words must not be understood in any ordinary way; and of regarding him as so false, so tricky, so perfidious a cleric, that the whole thing becomes abracadabra and hocus-pocus.

Try to imagine, reader, what you yourself would feel if your *guru* or spiritual director were to write to you after this fashion.

> Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us; and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

And again he writes:

> Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold (I speak foolishly), I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I . . .

but all readers of the Bible will remember the wild catalogue of sufferings with which, almost hysterically and certainly in a most un-Nordic manner, he concludes his "glorying."

There was certainly no mock modesty in this extraordinary person; and one fancies that if it had not been for the influence of that great physician-poet, St. Luke,

these nervous swingings of the electric pendulum, between what he was by nature and what the mind of Christ made him, might have completely upset his brain. It was not, as the Roman Governor said, "much learning," it was the struggle of an immense ego with an ego yet more immense that "made him mad."

When, indeed, he comes to his confession about "sin," and his sense of "sin" and his escape from "sin," we are reminded of William James's profound psychological analysis of the way the soul has to descend to the depths before it can become "twice-born."

But before quoting from his despairing outcries when he was struggling, without being able to tap the sacred fount within him, against all the evil in his nature and against all that he so loathed in his neurotic flesh and blood, I am anxious to justify out of his own mouth my substitution of the *subjective* Christ in the human soul for the *objective* Christ of the Gospels.

A change of nature, a change of heart, *that* was what he cried out for, both in himself and in all mankind; and it is what, in these menacing days, we cry out for still! How often must he have gazed at the reflection of his strange physiognomy and loathed the sight of it!

So, and not otherwise, as Rabelais reminds us, did Socrates admit that *his* countenance carried upon it the traces of the grossest vices. Yes, it was out of St. Paul's loathing for himself, out of his reaction against the evil in him, evil that the burden of the moral law only made worse, that he was driven to dig down to this self below the self, this ego beneath the ego.

Here, indeed, was a passionate super-humility, but how heroic, how healthy, how entirely the kind of contempt for oneself likely to prove the perfect soil of a real *vita nuova*! Certain it is that those pure and humble "will-

worshippers" he talks of never loathed *their* features, as Socrates and St. Paul—both of them, I daresay, in the language of Paley, "more than suspected of the foulest impurities"—so desperately did!

But listen to "the comfortable words" of our author's bold indication as to where our escape from this Neitzschean loathing of the human-too-human in us is to be found.

> Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. . . . For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above): Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.*

Here, then, is the secret of the whole matter. That change of heart, that *vita nuova*, for which our human flesh born of women yearns, can only be attained from the "God within our own breast."

This is the great "open secret" that St. Paul disclosed to the world; and any psychologist who wants to realize the huge increase in spiritual subtlety that made it possible for Dostoievsky to drop his plummet into a deeper level of good and evil than was revealed, say, to Shakespeare, ought to ponder on the passage in which this great "medium" of the opposing forces shows how the mere weight of traditional morality—or of "the law," as he calls it—intensifies the possibilities of wickedness.

> I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin,

taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. . . . For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not: but what I hate, that do I. . . . For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

What would such a self-controlled sage as Confucius make of this mad cry? But does it not ring out with the veritable howl of the birth-pangs of spiritual evolution? One thing alone proved strong enough to deliver him from the "body of this death," and to this he certainly clung, as you might say, by the hair of its head.

And by degrees the neurotic body of Saul of Tarsus became an obedient medium for the secret cosmic magic he called the mind of Christ. And when this miracle had happened, how different was his tone! He went about like a man drunk with some incredible secret happiness. To be outraged, humiliated, derided, made to look an idiot, made to feel he was nothing—such things became part of a wild exultant game. He could afford to let the moral conventions go. All things were lawful for him. He could rally his overwise converts in the divine ecstasy of his "foolishness." An abysmal security took possession of him. He seemed to feel already the eternal return of all living things to the cosmic reservoir of the "mind of Christ."

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And when we remember that, unlike the other apostles, St. Paul had never seen Jesus, and when we remember how different is this Christ in the soul, which was his own psychological discovery, both from the personal Jesus of the first three Gospels and from the mystical Jesus of the neo-platonic Fourth, we are in a position to take this objective, historic "love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," out of the hands of the theologians and put it in the place where it belongs, that is to say in the depths of every human heart! This is indeed the open secret of all "men of good-will" from the beginning until now. This is, in St. Paul's own language, "the mystery that was concealed from the foundation of the world."

Not that the old troublesome, insoluble problem of the origin of evil, the old dark necessity that the God of a world like this must be evil as well as good, is settled by this conclusion. All we can do is to accept our intuitive feeling that this "God in our own breast" is in direct contact with *something of a kindred nature* behind the astronomical universe. This is what William James maintains to be the accompanying feeling that invariably follows the glow of *agapē* in our hearts, and in the strength of this feeling we can, I think, endure somehow, for it brings an intimation that at least there is war "in heaven," just as St. Paul hints, and that the evil force is no more omnipotent than the good. Yes, it is no trifle, it is indeed a great deal, that this God within us, this Christ in the soul, is in touch with something *kindred to it* in the unknown background of all things, even if this "something" is only the good mood of a Being who, as my brother Theodore says, is nothing if not changeable.

But after all, it is something; and it does seem to be *behind* the tumult of this difficult world, not merely a part of its Heraclitean flowing away. Indeed, when you come down to the final issue—that is, when you are confronted by the question, Upon what should the soul depend when it has its back to the ultimate wall?—it seems to me that if you follow St. Paul *as he followed Jesus*, that is to say in the spirit rather than in the letter, you will find yourself assuming a dualism at the bottom of things, find yourself depending indeed *not* upon the power that most men call God, for this power is anything but purely good, but upon *something else*, out there in the impenetrable darkness, that is made of the same stuff, as the Christ in our own soul!

It seems as if it were because, much more than with the other primitive gods, the god of Moses contained in his erratic and wayward nature a touch, a grain, a sprinkling of this "something" kindred to St. Paul's spiritual Christ, that the Jews rather than the Romans or the Greeks have given us our religion. There must, one feels, be a kind of "natural selection" among religions; and it would seem that the religion which is most active in mercy and pity and charity and all yieldingness will be in the end the most formidable.

After all, the God of Moses did get a little further than Odin or Zeus or Jove in these directions. At least he told the Israelites that as they had known what it was to be oppressed in Egypt, they ought in their turn to have pity upon the poor and miserable and upon the stranger within their gates.

It is true that in Homer we have Zeus appealed to as the god of suppliants, but this falls far short of the feeling expressed once and again amid the hideous barbarities of Jehovah's ways. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, for

instance, sings a song of exultation in the triumph of the weak that anticipates the Magnificat.

> The Lord killeth and the Lord quickeneth; he bringeth down to the tomb and he lifteth up. . . . The Lord raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill. . . . He keepeth the feet of his saints, and putteth to silence the ungodly in darkness; *because not through power shall a man conquer.*

Zeus might avenge the suppliant at his altar; but that the deepest place in the whole workshop of the cosmos should be kept for mercy and pity, *this* apparently demanded the inspired moral sense of the house of Israel. But granting St. Paul his doctrine that our normal human nature is abysmally evil and that the urge to goodness in us has a supernatural origin, and granting further that this mysterious Christ in all human souls is connected with some kindred "Christ-quality" behind the whole astronomical universe, the ticklish question arises, What is this thing's "categorical imperative" here and now, in our brief human lives? What, in fact, does it call upon our conscience to *do*?

If we were followers of the Neoplatonic St. John, we should merely murmur, "Ama et fac quod vis"—"Love and do what thou wilt," and let the rest go; but being converts, however poor ones, of the less metaphysical St. Paul, we can only reply that the business of attaining this unfathomable *agapē* is nothing compared with the difficulty of living up to it when we *have* attained it! Over and over again St. Paul assures us that the one and only test as to whether we have the Christ in our soul is whether or not we display this mysterious *agapē*. Well! what were the signs of this mystery? One of its signs, at least in the eyes of the world, is that you will look a fool, an idiot, an imbecile, a weakling, and a crazy ass.

But being a fool in the eyes of the world is only an outward aspect of it, just as that curious exulting in your folly to which I presumed to give the name of "supernatural malice" is only a by-product of it.

As St. Paul defines it, this *agapé* in the soul, which is the only proof we have that the Christ is there, is an extremely positive quality; and a quality of which particular men and women quite definitely possess more or less. The passage is well known, but since it is the essence of the Christ in us, and since the Christ in us appears to be in touch with "something" behind the whole astronomical cosmos, I may perhaps be forgiven for quoting a little from it.

Of course St. Paul isn't the only founder of a religion in this world; but I cannot resist a shrewd inkling that where Confucius or where Buddha or where Zoroaster or where Mahommed differ from his conclusions as to how to live in harmony with the Secret of the cosmos—that Secret which is to be found neither in the atoms of Democritus nor in the Space-Time of Einstein—it is they and not he who fall short.

As Shakespeare hints, it is fatally easy to set the words of Jesus against the words of Jesus—"As thus, 'Come little ones!' and then again . . ." but when St. Paul rouses himself to define the nature of the Christ at the bottom of the human soul there is no ambiguity or self-contradiction.

> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. . . . Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth

> not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Now what is remarkable in this startling passage is the fact that this definition of the Christ within us is almost entirely positive. Save in the avoidance of envy, malice, and conceit, and of that gaping and brutal interest in "iniquity," which is really, of course, a vicarious indulgence in it, this "white magic" of St. Paul's is completely positive.

And how striking that there isn't a word in it about sex or asceticism! Nothing indeed proves the man's own possession of this *agapē* more than the fact that when it comes to sexual matters he is perpetually reminding us that he speaks from a personal bias and *not* from the Christ within him.

It is clear that the grand revolution produced in his own soul by what he calls "the liberty of Christ" is the shaking off of the sense of *sin*, and, as he never fails to remind us, it was the "Thou shalt not" of the moral law that brought the sense of sin into the world.

I want to imitate St. Paul in his Quixotic psychological honesty and avoid any tricks of special pleading; but it does seem to me that his definition of this ultimate cosmic secret leaves a modern person as free from the *guilt-sense of sex-pleasure* as any heathen heart could wish! It is clear that St. Paul himself was one of those neurotic anti-narcissists who have a curious loathing of their own flesh. He was a morbid Manichean in his ascetic hatred of all sex-pleasure, and I think he was specially abnormal in his shrinking from what he takes a lurid pleasure in calling "fornication."

But it is the man himself who makes it clear that his

frantic struggles to escape from "the body of this death" fell away like contorted vapours when once he began really to live according to the liberty of Christ.

It is true that in the exultation of this escape he is perpetually catching himself up to remind his followers that such liberty doesn't mean a *carte blanche* to live a life of debauchery; but none of these negative exhortations —and after all he *was* a Pharisee of the Pharisees—come to us with that ecstatic blast of trumpets with which he announces his grand Discovery.

And it must always be remembered that St. Paul, and St. Paul alone—in spite of that ugly rhetorical passage about the ox—connects, as the Jesus of the Gospels never does, man's redemption by Christ with the "groaning and travailing" of the whole sentient creation.

The human passion for personal immortality from which so many of us suffer, and which some great modern writers, like Unamuno, have made the centre of their faith, is not the centre of the liberty of Christ that St. Paul advocates.

He suffered from it himself. He makes that clear enough in many passionate outcries! He may even have felt, in his savage honesty, and under the encouragement he got from that spirit-possessed age of sorcerers and mediums, that this *was* his chief motive. But motive or not, it is certainly not the dominant atmosphere, it is not the prevailing overtone, of the cosmic secret he disclosed. That atmosphere, that diffused hint, that pervading intimation, is what comes now and again to all of us in our lives, and when it comes it is greater, it is larger, it is more mysterious, it is far more generous, than any desperate craving of our frantic ego to live for ever.

No one can define it, this intermittent breath of a strange impossible revelation that touches the soul as it

struggles on, "bearing all things, enduring all things"; but, whatever its nature, one thing about it is certain, it extends beyond the circle of those precious elect for whom Jesus prayed. It extends far beyond that kingdom of heaven from the ramparts of which, as in the parable of Lazarus, the ransomed look down upon the eternal torment of the damned. It extends beyond any New Jerusalem, beyond any Millennium, beyond any Second Coming! It has to do with a cosmogonic struggle between Powers whose reach includes the rocks and stones, the planets and stars, as well as "the poor creatures of earth."

And how does this intimation of something larger and more mysterious than personal immortality reach our human soul, so cabin'd and confined within the senses? Comes it by instinct? Is it an intuition? Is it of the nature of that shock St. Paul himself received on the road to Damascus? Or is it—and this seems a simpler explanation—the response of the Christ within us to the Christ without us? St. Paul has a tendency, doubtless drawn from his studies of Greek Gnosticism, to employ in this connection the dangerous word "spiritual," and in no aspect of his philosophy does he grow unsounder than in his use of this fatal word. "Carnal" *versus* "spiritual"—ay! how much tricky humbug, how much evangelical hypocrisy, how much odious obscurantism, has been covered up under the protection of this unlucky antithesis!

How salutary to meditate on Spinoza's austere *intellectual love of God* after the orgies of loose thinking that this "carnal" versus "spiritual" has disgorged on the world! This is the tone to which I refer.

> While we look [he writes] not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal.

This sentence fills one, somehow, with a queer misgiving; and yet it would be precisely correct as applied to the conclusions of modern physics and mathematics; and one recalls the lines—

> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind.

"Carnal" and "spiritual," "spiritual" and "carnal." Alas! through neither the one nor the other can we solve the problem of the evil of the world, or offer to its beyond-good-and-evil Creator His creature's intelligent forgiveness!

None can read the dark inhuman mind of the Power behind the cosmos. Does good and evil struggle in *its* heart, as in our own? For all we can see, it is totally inhuman, totally without pity or mercy, and yet, from somewhere out there, this Christ in our conscience must have come.

But I am afraid it solves nothing to attribute these passing feelings we all have—feelings to which Tennyson, to my brother Llewelyn's sturdy disgust, gives the tender appellation of "the larger hope"—to the insight of "spiritual" people as compared with "carnal" people—Tennyson and myself, for instance, as against Lucretius and John Morley and brother Llewelyn—for the truth is, as Shakespeare could have told the apostle, the least of the real things we touch and see is as mysterious as all the Elementals of Paracelsus.

The death-pangs of a fly on a pane are no less occult than the philosophical yearnings of Plato's shadows upon the world-wall. Neither the one nor the other offers the least clue to the unhearing, unapproachable ultimate.

The ways of God are dark and evil. The ways of God are clear and just. He is no different now than He was when He brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt.

But in spite of His love for the fatal antithesis, "carnal" *versus* "spiritual," St. Paul sums up our human destiny and its relation to the cosmos as well as it could be summed up.

Our prayers cannot move God. Our reasonings cannot reach Him. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord that He may instruct him? *But we have the mind of Christ.*" What then remains, unaffected by any argument, of the way of life, of the mystic Tao, taught by St. Paul?

But let us decide first of all what, under the pressure of our modern conscience—I speak of our *conscience*, not of our reason—must be expurgated from St. Paul's philosophy as we possess ourselves of its main trend. Surely in the first place all that blind and cringing worship of God which condones the atrocities of God's world must certainly be rejected. Here, as Ivan Karamazov says, our conscience compels us to *return Him the ticket* to such a dastardly show.

Then, it seems to *my* conscience, still apart from reason, that there is something wicked and perverse in St. Paul's maniacal revulsion from sex and from all sex-pleasure. Our poor humanity surely needs every little "bonus" it can get from Nature to keep going at all in this bitter world. Well! These are the two main aspects of this great prophet's teaching which our modern conscience, aided enormously in its evolution by St. Paul himself, feels it imperative to renounce: first an uncritical acceptance of the questionable ways of God; and then the iniquitous idea that sex-pleasure, apart from the procreation of children, must be regarded as sin.

But these two things, you will say, are the heart of the

matter. I refuse to believe it; and isn't it an outrage to St. Paul's grand discovery of the magical power of the mind of Christ in us that we should regard anything as the heart of the matter except this mysterious *agapē*, this inspiration from the "God within my breast," of Emily Brontë's poem?

It surely only remains to bring out, as he himself has so eloquently done, the full implication of this inspiring presence. It is a natural presence, for it exists in every human soul; but it is also a supernatural presence, for it carries with it, as a universal feeling, the sense of there being *something more of the same kind* behind the whole astronomical world. This "something more of the same kind" was, as I have said, the precise expression of William James, by far the most realistic of all modern thinkers; and it covers the facts of the case without landing us in the fatal dilemma of a beyond-good-and-evil God.

What may be the relation, behind the cosmos, between this "something" which answers to the "God within our breast" and the ultimate First Cause can well be left an insoluble mystery. All we are aware of, as St. Paul well puts it—"for who can know the mind of the Lord to instruct him?"—is an unfathomable reciprocity between "the mind of Christ" in us and *something*, of the same nature, behind the electrons and the void. But the greatest implication, certainly the most important one at the present moment, is *the equality of all souls* in the face of this presence.

Where science has not merely failed the human race at the turning-point in its history, but has given it the power to rush effectively down the road to ruin, St. Paul's mind of Christ in all souls comes to our rescue, and it is the only thing that does come to our rescue.

It needs little imagination to extend the race-divisions

and the class-divisions of his epoch to those of our own time.

Having achieved the most difficult of all psychological liberations in his own soul, the liberation from a race-morale to a human morale, he boldly proceeds to make this liberty of Christ the supreme test in the struggle between good and evil. He was always uneasy in his mind about the waywardness of God in regard to the lucky Elect compared with the rest of humanity.

> For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) . . . as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have compassion. . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thus does this honest thinker torment himself over the mystery of those arbitrary ways of Fate or Chance against which one force alone in the visible and invisible world, one Prometheus alone, stands up and refuses to be "squared." And with what an outrush of inspired conviction does he proclaim the Secret that sweeps away all these distinctions, all these unfair differences!

For him there is only one thing that matters, one word, one power, one magic touch, that ends the intolerance of men and defies the unfairness of God.

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Surely as one reads this passage it becomes possible to catch a high penetrating overtone, which, in St. Paul's own words, belongs to the spirit rather than the letter. Matthew Arnold's famous "stream of tendency," and

the sort of thing in Confucius that Kwang-Tze calls his "benevolence and righteousness," stops short—who among men doesn't know *that*?—at a certain familiar point. It is goodness, and it isn't ecstasy—it is righteousness, and it isn't rapture.

But there are passages in all the supreme writers—such as when Alyosha Karamazov kissed the earth and wept in indescribable joy even though the corpse of his saint *stank*—which describe moments, sometimes in the midst of tragedy, sometimes in the midst of peace, when an awareness comes over us, penetrating the tough matter of the world, of a breath, of a rain, of a dew, of a relaxing and dissolving, under which the hard familiar contours of people and objects melt, change, and transform themselves.

Is not this the feeling caused by the rising to the surface of the Christ in our souls, as it finds, or feels as if it found, a nameless reciprocity, somewhere out there behind the harshness of things and the opacity of things?

There are passages of this kind amid the cosmic buffoonery of Rabelais. There are passages of this kind amid the tedious moralizing of Wordsworth. There are passages of this kind amid the wildest terrors of Dostoievsky. It is at once the apex-point of the whole long striving of evolution, and a reversion to the beginning of all things. It is what St. Paul calls "the expectation of the creature," caught for a moment in a premonitory fulfilment.

And St. Paul is surely sound in his psychology when he says that this "melting mood," in its eternal recurrence in all souls, this finding of the beginning and of the end of all things in a single moment of time, never comes to us when we are full of malice or obsessed with erotic desire. Erotic sensuality has its own raptures, and lucky are they who can enjoy them, but they are very different from

the rapture of this fulfilment of all things, as St. Paul divines it.

But, as Spinoza hints, between two desires it is better to follow the one that goes deepest and furthest, and it would seem as if the ecstasy that Alyosha experienced when he wept with joy and kissed the earth, even though the corpse of his master stank, could never have been his had he been that day, like his father and his brother, desperately itching to dally with the irresistible Grushenka. To dally with Grushenka is a fine palliative to the burden of life, and an entirely legitimate one, but it is not life's consummation.

The value of these impassioned letters of St. Paul is no different from the value of those great inspired passages in Homer and Rabelais and Shakespeare and Goethe that lift up the whole life of man, whether death ends him not, to a dimension beyond the normal; but where St. Paul has the advantage of all these others is that his appeal is not to our intellect, or to our reason, or to our aesthetic sense, or to our blood, or to our race, but to what we share with every child of man "that openeth the womb," that mysterious "something," coming—for whence else *can* it come?—from behind the whole System of Things, that finds in forgiveness and mercy and pity and magnanimity an exultation larger than space, older than time, and able to melt the very bones within us in a feeling for which there is no name.

DANTE

WHAT a huge and bleeding gap—like the extraction of an eye-tooth from the Figure of Time—would be left by the removal of Dante from the Literature of the World!

Speaking in Spenglerian terms, though not to Spenglerian effect, if Goethe is the supreme poet of the epoch that is now passing away, and Homer of the Spring-time of all that we call Classical, Dante is the perfect culmination of the Middle Ages.

It would be of curious interest if it were possible to apply a psychological questionnaire to the more intelligent among our Western youth of both sexes as to the precise and exact reaction of which they are individually aware, to these various world-geniuses.

One singular thing would, I believe, emerge, namely, that neither Rabelais nor Shakespeare seem as profoundly dated as these others.

And the way we use the adjective "Quixotic" would suggest that the same power of seeing life *sub specie eternitatis*, that is to say, beyond all boundaries of any historic culture, belongs to Cervantes too.

But Milton with his Protestantism, and Dante with his Mediaevalism, *are* dated; though the miraculous vitality of the Catholic Church and her genius for adapting the Old to the New, not to speak of her subtler metaphysic, gives the latter a tremendous advantage over the former. Passionate moralists like Carlyle, as well as most typical academic students, love to assure us that Dante's spiritual

attitude to our human situation, his tragic recognition of the difference between good and evil, and of the infinite results of this difference, are things totally unaffected by the passing of time, totally unaffected by scholastic philosophy, and as essentially true to-day as they ever were; but I believe myself that this, like so many resounding moral and academic generalizations, is a treacherous fallacy, *in fact a lie*.

Catholics, at any rate, can hardly put their seal to this separation of Dante the moralist from Dante the believer, holding, as they are bound to hold, that his view of the nature of good and evil are inextricably bound up with his whole system of thought, a system which, with a few scientific and historic modifications, or, let us say, a few *changes of emphasis*, remains the Catholic Faith of to-day.

What does remain unaffected by his mediaeval philosophy and his Catholic Faith is his imaginative genius, his original and special way of reacting to sense-impressions, to the drama of history, to the phenomena of nature, to the mortal psychology of love and hate, and to that dangerous sex-nerve in human beings that is excited by cruelty. What would, in fact, remain the same had he been a free-thinker like Lucretius, with a philosophy completely hostile to all religion, is his unique personality, with all its peculiar attributes of deadly insight, exquisite tenderness, ferocious realism, savage disdain, imaginative intensity, sadistic cruelty, and above all, an ecstatic power of ideal love. In other words, you cannot become a disciple of Dante in the metaphysical sense without becoming a Catholic; but you *can* become a disciple of Dante as a poet and lover, and as the representative of a particular kind of imaginative response to life.

For, though both the metaphysical and the ethical elements in the *Divine Comedy* are in their profound

philosophical implications much more complicated and elaborate than the simple mingling of Platonism with Puritanism that inspired Milton; and though they revert, through the subtle medium of the great scholastic thinkers, to Plato's antithesis, Aristotle, who was to Dante as much "the master of those who know," *il maestro di color che sanno*, as he has been, from Chaucer down to quite recent times, to the scholars of Oxford, few of us laymen can use them for our cruder and more casual culture.

Except for men who have been trained for the priesthood in Catholic institutions, ordinary book-lovers are neither learned enough, nor unaffected enough by Goethe and Dostoievsky and Nietzsche, to draw the inspiration of their secret life from Saint Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle.

To speak personally, I confess to being much more influenced by the impassioned psychology of St. Paul than by any "maestro di color che sanno" in either classical or modern times.

But putting aside not only what Dante himself derived through the Mediaeval Schools from Aristotle, but all that may have come our way in more recent revivals of such subtle methods of thinking, it still would seem that for non-Catholic readers—and indeed for both Catholic and Protestant readers who have not had a metaphysical training—the best approach to Dante is to concentrate on those original characteristics of his vision from which we can gather plenty of weapons for an attack upon life and a resistance to life, such as would serve our turn if we were a Turk, an Infidel, or a Heretic. Try the experiment, then, reader—for you can easily slip back into your orthodoxy—of regarding Dante's religious convictions, together with his whole elaborate cosmology, as a fascinating, if painful and shocking *mythology*.

Regard the victims of the "vendetta di Dio" as if they were merely the victims—as the classical Capaneus, who so infuriated Virgil by his blasphemous defiance, actually supposed he was—of the thunderbolts of a ferocious Zeus.

Homer and Virgil have, both of them, given us descriptions of Hades, descriptions of which Dante is quick to take advantage whenever he gets the chance; so that it is only a fair return, since he christianizes our mythology, that we should *mythologize* his Christianity!

The truth is, there is a grievous inadequacy about what might be called "the psycho-poetical" appreciation of Dante, by which I mean the analysis of his genius in connection with his psychological temperament.

Digging down into the elements of his unequalled style —this "bello stilo" which in a fit of passionate humility he swears quite erroneously, for it is entirely his own, he learnt from Virgil—it becomes possible to be so deeply influenced by his peculiar life-illusion that we can actually appropriate it to ourselves, and indeed make it our own, to such a tune that the humblest of book-worms may acquire the right to utter the passionate words:

> May the long zeal avail me, and the great
> love, that made me search thy volume!

But this secret of Dante, as applied to our ordinary and secular handling of life, is the thing that has been most of all neglected. To concentrate upon it and to absorb it, we have to clear our minds of a deplorable burden of ambiguous moralizing by the Dante commentators, in fact, one might say, of pernicious moralizing.

And of the worst and most dangerous form that this sort of thing has assumed, it is not so much Dante's fellow-Catholics who have been guilty, as our own well-meaning Puritans.

John Bunyan believed in a material Hell, and no doubt the unhappy Cowper did, quite as definitely, if not *more* definitely, than Dante, and believed in it, too, without the enormous mitigation of Purgatory.

Indeed, one cannot help thinking that it is because of Purgatory, combined with a medicinal and casuistical metaphysic, that one seems more often to hear of Protestants than of Catholics going raving mad from fear of Hell.

Our mid-Victorian exponents of Dante, led by Carlyle, fell into the unfortunate habit of referring to him in a solemn tone of sanctimonious awe, to clear the air from which it is certainly most salutary to turn to Voltaire, Goethe, Nietzsche, and above all, Rabelais. To every "well-created spirit"—it is Dante's own expression—there is more magnanimous, humane, and, in the deepest sense, *evangelical* charity in any of the graver utterances of Gargantua or Pantagruel than in the whole *Divine Comedy*.

But on the other hand, how poor a wisdom to refuse to saturate oneself in Dante's "bello stilo" with its purged, clarified, and trenchant beauty, because this astounding poet's response to the most exquisite refinements is balanced by such a diabolical mixture of pride and cruelty!

In one aspect of this poetic vision, and in a certain sense it is the most important of all, he remains the supreme poet of the human race. Homer, Shakespeare, Milton are all inferior to him when it comes to this; to the condensation, namely, in a single line, of a huge volume of pity, of loveliness, of grandeur, of dramatic poignance.

Shakespeare *has* his magical, his tragical effects in this kind; but they come most often in gasping, desperate, broken half-lines. Milton requires a whole paragraph of eagle-like hoverings before he can reach his periodic,

culminating flight, that goes soaring away over the coasts of time and the margins of space till it is lost in the infinite.

It is Shakespeare's own genius for giving imaginative and palpable form to the most complicated feelings that tosses him sometimes into such a conflicting sea of images that the sharp directness of the thought is almost lost in the waves of overlapping metaphor. Think of that famous soliloquy of Hamlet, for instance, about suicide, which closes with the words:

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.

Or think of Macbeth's torrential speech at a crisis even more pregnant:

> And pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself . . .

And then consider the horrible clarity and appalling brevity of Dante's two verses describing the destiny, after their decease, of the easy-going harmless individuals that in England we call "gentlemen of private means" and in America "stuffed shirts":

> These have no hope of death and their blind life is so base that they envy every other lot. Report of them the world permits not to exist; Mercy and Justice disdains them; let us not speak of them; but look and pass.

Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
e la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa,
che invidiosi son d' ogni altra sorte,
fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa,
misericordia e giustizia gli sdegna:
non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa.

Compared with the feverish, tumultuous, and fanciful embellishment of human feeling that we get in Shakespeare, and get, too, as we have just seen, even at a dramatic crisis, how terrible, how startling is this simple directness!

And what a perfect example of the Dantesque spirit, here at the very entrance to his infernal journey, are these beautiful and abominable lines denouncing all cautious and retiring adherents of the Via Media!

With this wholesale condemnation, not only would Montaigne, and Shakespeare, and Charles Lamb, and Emerson, and Walter Pater have been damned, but the innumerable anonymous multitude of easy-going, helpless, indolent, drifting harmless human nondescripts, such as Gogol loved to depict and for whom Tchekov had such tenderness, would certainly at this moment be lifting up their voices in—

Strange tongues, horrible outcries, words of pain, tones of anger, voices deep and harsh, and tumult of hands amongst them.

Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
parole di dolore, accenti d' ira
voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle.

But with what a terrible and wonderful beauty—a beauty of pride, a beauty of contemptuous rejection, a beauty of sublime anger, a beauty of pity and terror, a beauty of the finality of brevity—is this wicked judgment uttered!

All that we have learnt from St. Paul as to the spiritual

secret of the universe, whereby the weak and the foolish and the unresisting, yea! the things *that are not*, are dearest to the heart of great Tao is contradicted and gainsaid here from beginning to end.

Indeed, the largest element of the lofty spirit of the whole *Divine Comedy* lies in its Nietzschean loathing of the commonplace. His favourite word among all words is the word *disdain*. Disdain is clearly, to Dante's mind, the most marked characteristic of the Emperor of the Universe as it is of his angels.

It is, also, the most marked characteristic of the noblest of his damned. And this emphasis upon the terrible beauty of pride and disdain is *not* balanced—as Carlyle craftily suggested on behalf of his kindred spirit—by any *real* correspondent humility. He is humble before Virgil; he is humble before Beatrice; and he allows *some* purgatorial penance for the monstrously proud; but there his humility ends: and it is difficult not to link this complete absence from his deepest spiritual culture of the least trace of what Dostoievsky accepts as the essential Christian secret with the absence from the *Divine Comedy* of that quiver of personal emotion in the presence of the figure of Christ that many great writers display. He introduces Christ, of course; but where he does so his piety is conventional and theological rather than personal.

We are, indeed, forcibly reminded of the warlike Messiah in *Paradise Lost* when Virgil alludes in passing to the "harrowing" of Hell by the Virgin's Son:

> I was new in this condition when I saw a Powerful One coming, crowned with the sign of victory.
>
> rispose: "Io era nuovo in questo stato,
> quando ci vidi venire un possente
> con segno di vittoria coronato."

But when once we have made the single necessary mental gesture without which the horrors of the Inferno are insufferable, I mean the gesture of detaching all this cruelty from the will of any Deity but a mythological one, whose vengeance need trouble us no more than that of Zeus upon Tantalus or Sisyphus, the scoriated and savage sublimity of these tremendous inventions, the stripped intensity of these fuliginous vignettes, which follow one another as if upon a Tartarean Film-Screen, attain in their cumulative effect such a pitch of appalling beauty that we feel the like will never appear again.

The *Inferno* is an abominable vision, it is a shocking vision, it is a wicked vision, but it is a vision of overpowering beauty; and may it not be that all such extreme beauty in this chaotic world can only be attained by a measurable sacrifice both of the Good and of the True? May it not be that the greatest lie ever uttered was uttered by the most perfect of poets when he wrote:

> Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty; that is all
> We know on earth, and all we need to know.

Incredibly arresting is the picture Dante gives us of the great spirits of antiquity moving sedately across their meadow of fresh verdure:

> On it were people with eyes slow and grave, of great authority in their appearance; they spoke seldom, with mild voices.

> Genti v' eran con occhi tardi e gravi,
> di grande autorità ne' lor sembianti;
> parlavan rado, con voci soavi.

It is, indeed, all in keeping with his huge disdain for the commonplace and for those "who have lost the good of the intellect," *ch' hanno perduto il ben dello intelletto*, that he communicates to us the glorious awe

he felt in this exalted company who made him one of themselves.

And what a grand touch it is, that line which alludes to the proud adversary of the Crusaders!

> and by himself, apart, alone, I saw the Saladin.
>
> e solo in parte vidi il Saladino.

But not Shakespeare himself, no! nor Sappho *herself*, could write of the shivering symptoms of love as this poet of God's vengeance.

Having summoned the wind-tossed souls of Francesca and her lover to his side, and having listened to the girl's words, Dante bows his head and holds it so low that his guide asks him what he is thinking.

> When I answered, I began "Ah me! what sweet thoughts, what longing led them to the woeful pass!"
>
> Quando risposi, cominciai: "O lasso,
> quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
> menô costoro al doloroso passo!"

And then, in response to a human sympathy such as she would never meet again throughout eternity the girl utters the words that tell for all time the ever-recurring tale:

> One day, for pastime, we read of Lancelot, how love constrained him; we were alone and without all suspicion.
>
> Several times that reading urged our eyes to meet, and changed the colour of our faces; but one moment alone it was that overcame us.
>
> Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
> di Lancillotto, come amor lo strinse;
> soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.
>
> Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
> quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
> ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

When we read how the fond smile was kissed by such a lover, he. who shall never be divided from me,

Kissed my mouth all trembling: the book, and he who wrote it, was a Galeotto; that day we read in it no further.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante:
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse;
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

Whilst the one spirit thus spake, the other wept so, that I fainted with pity, as if I had been dying; and fell, as a dead body falls.

Mentre che l' uno spirto questo disse,
l' altro piangeva sì, che di pietade
io venni men così com' io morisse;
e caddi, come corpo morto cade.

When we revert after this to any of the other great love-passages in literature we are conscious of the loss of a certain mystery of romantic feeling, wherein the metal of love has been passed through a crucible of such burning intensity that it has grown, in its white heat, into an element that not only no waters can drown or flame devour, but no Emperor of the Universe can cut in two. The nearest approach to this passage that I am able to bring to mind is that awe-inspiring sentence of Cathie's in *Wuthering Heights*, where she confesses that though she "loves" her charming betrothed, *she is* the desperado Heathcliff.

The whole passage does indeed show what Christianity has done, in its mad life-and-death wrestle with sex, in the way of purging, refining, winnowing, but at the same time infusing with a tenfold charge of deadly

magnetism, the sweet enemy with whose burning limbs it is entwined.

Not the most lavish celebration of Eros in classical poetry moves us like this, for the simple reason that between them and Dante lie the Middle Ages, where the phenomenon of the love of women, both in its idealization and in its renunciation, has become the chief miracle of life.

Everything is in the human mind; that is what is borne in upon us more strongly than anything else in reading Dante. The cruel First Cause, the everlasting torments, the quivering Mountain of Purgation, the rapturous orbits of the God-intoxicated saints, together with this twi-natured human love-lute twisting and twitching in the wind as if strung with Eve's hair before Cain was born, all, *all* are to be found within the narrow bounds—and yet it is wider than the whole astronomical world!—of a man's or a woman's skull.

And when you come to think of it, how touching is the moral instinct in humanity which insists that all the motives, causes, urges, and impulses that lie behind every part of a great genius's work must be *good.*

Very often, on the contrary, they are extremely evil. A curious example of this is the eager haste we are in to assure ourselves that Filippo Argenti "of the old Adimari family" is for his snobbish insolence to be well soused in the infernal bog. It was humanity's universal love of punishing and revenging that created this same livid marsh, beyond the confines of whose reedy expanse glimmer the crimson pinnacles of the City of Dis.

Yes, humanity's are Dante's aggravated and twitching nerves; humanity's his righteous indignation yielding to this sadistic quiver. And it is because of this more poignant human psychology running all the way through

it that the *Inferno* is so much greater a poem than the *Purgatorio* or the *Paradiso*. It is more human; and *therefore* it contains more delight in cruelty, more malice, more revenge, more relish for excitement, for drama, for horror!

A supreme imagination, an incomparable style, if these are to be used to the best effect in the evocation of what we call beauty, must deal, it seems, with something in the world that is a little different from Goodness, and not altogether the same as what we usually mean by "Truth."

Any attempt to get all we can for our personal life from the *Divine Comedy* forces us, indeed, to come to terms with Goethe's great saying: "Live in the Whole, in the Good and in the Beautiful." And, in fact, it was with deep significance that Goethe used the word "the Whole" in place of "the True," and by thus balancing all three things side by side indicated clearly enough that in his view *they were by no means the same.*

Dante's terrific aesthetic vision when directed by the urge of savage anger is a very different thing from the "lacerated heart," the mad loathing of the disgusting and the base, which characterized the tortured soul of Swift.

What we can learn from Dante is the profound spiritual device of sublimating our natural human savagery till it becomes a medium for beautiful aesthetic vision.

But we must not deceive ourselves by any treacherous Carlylean moralizing into taking the position that because there is a terrible beauty in all these Dantesque horrors they are therefore propaganda for good against evil. They are the reverse of that! Their beauty is an *evil beauty*; and Dante, who is the most tremendous realist in all literature, uses the diabolic beauty of his realism to brand the Emperor of the Universe with the savage cruelty that was one of his own chief characteristics.

Listen to the details of the Filippo Argenti episode:

Whilst we were running through the dead channel, there rose before me one full of mud, and said: "Who art thou, that comest before thy time?"

Mentre noi corravam la morta gora,
dinanzi mi si fece un pien di fango,
e disse: "Chi se' tu, che vieni anzi ora?"

And I to him: "If I come, I remain not; but thou, who art thou, who hast become so foul?" He answered: "Thou seest that I am one who weeps."

Ed io a lui: "S' io vegno, non rimango:
ma tu chi sei, che sei sì fatto brutto?"
Rispose: "Vedi che son un che piango."

Pondering upon this passage, it is impossible to miss the sublime beauty of these last words; and to the spirit of Carlyle, protesting that I am underrating the enormity of the sin that brought this wretch to this pass, I can only reply that for a sin committed in Time a punishment throughout Eternity, however it may lend itself to the beauty of poetic horror, is a contemplation for devils rather than for men.

But there is worse to follow; for the wretch who is now paying for the crime of what Shakespeare calls "the proud man's contumely," clings desperately to the side of their boat.

And he put his arms round my neck, kissed my face, and said: "Indignant soul! blessed be she that bore thee."

Lo collo poi con le braccia mi cinse,
baciommi il volto, e disse: "Alma sdegnosa,
benedetta colei che in te s' incinse."

And the response to this horrible fawning, which must

have been wickedly sweet to the poet's excited nerves, is not long in coming:

> And I: "Master, I should be glad to see him dipped in this swill, ere we quit the lake."
>
> Ed io: "Maestro, molto sarei vago
> di vederlo attuffare in questa broda,
> prima che noi uscissimo del lago."

Fortunately for us, by some sublime law of compensation in this beauty of frightfulness, Dante is compelled to transfer some of his "disdegno" and "dispitto" to the victims themselves; and what a relief it is to our profaner mind when the great Farinata, the Ghibelline, lifts his torso out of his burning sarcophagus and gives us an example of the power of the mind not only over the sufferings of the body, but even over the sufferings of what our Theosophists would call the "etheric" body.

> Already I had fixed my look on his; and he rose upright with breast and countenance; as if he entertained great scorn of Hell.
>
> Io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto;
> ed ei s' ergea col petto e colla fronte,
> come avesse lo inferno in gran dispitto.

While we are comforting ourselves with this contrary side of Dante's mania for the emotion of "dispitto," we find in the person of Capaneus, one of the victims of a former "Emperor of the Universe," a splendid justification for our mythological attitude to the *Divine Comedy*.

> Who is that great spirit, who seems to care not for the fire, and lies disdainful and contorted, so that the rain seems not to ripen him?
>
> Chi è quel grande, che non par che curi
> l'incendio, e giace dispettoso e torto
> sì che la pioggia non par che il maturi?

Could it be possible to find a better example of Dante's sadistic manner of gloating over these punishments, than the monstrous humour of the phrase about the rain—*di foco dilatate falde*, "of dilated flakes of fire"—not "ripening" him?

But after all we mustn't forget—and it is something to be the supreme realist of all literature, so that Petronius and de Maupassant are rude school-boys compared with him—that it is Dante's own genius that evokes the pity and indignation we feel. We are, I suppose—at least I fancy myself to be so—like simple rustics at the play who take what they see as if it were *really* happening.

I know that for my own part, such is this man's appalling genius, I have continually to say to myself, "It is all mythological fancy!" lest my blasphemous fury against the First Cause should out-rail even Dante's damned.

And again, we rustics at this terrifying play must remember that it is Dante himself who invents the retorts of these tremendous rebels whom Eternity's cat-o'-nine-tails *cannot* "ripen" though it fall never so lively:

> Ever restless was the dance of miserable hands, now here, now there, shaking off the fresh burning.
>
> Senza riposo mai era la tresca
> delle misere mani, or quindi or quinci
> iscotendo da sè l' arsura fresca.

But not a motion of any kind could this divine lashing draw from the incorrigible Capaneus. He had defied the heavenly tyrant of Olympus and he was prepared to defy this new master of thunderbolts.

"What I was living," he declares, in the very tone of Milton's Lucifer, "*that* I am dead!"—*Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto!*"

The two poets' descent into the ultimate pit, the terrible *Malebolge*, on the back of the monster Geryon, is most convincingly told, and after they have once landed and are slowly encircling the rocky ledges that surround the hollow cone of the torment of Judas—*tutto di pietra e di color ferrigno* "all of stone and of an iron colour"—they make the acquaintance of far more unpleasant devils than those classical Furies of Dis who needed an angel absolutely composed of pride to quell them. Both Milton and Dante are proud men and they both enjoy describing pride; but it must be noted that it is Milton's *fallen* angels who show this peculiarity at its best, while with Dante it is the *unfallen*. Dante's devils are indeed the reverse of proud. They are as completely devoid of all dignity as they are of all decency; and they scrabble together and play scurvy tricks upon each other just like those "cart-loads of horned devils," the thought of which, in Rabelais, so obsessed the mind of the naughty yet extremely orthodox Panurge.

Like a horde of hideous gargoyles, leaping into monstrous life out of the indecent fancies of the ribald decorators of our cathedrals, are these Malacodas and Scarmigliones and Graffiacanes and Rubicantes; and it is a relief to think that it is only when Dante and Virgil have left the chasm of the great Sorcerers and have arrived at that of the official swindlers and grafters that this hellish gang appears.

Over the fate of these sorcerers—one of whom is Teiresias himself, who for Homer retains his full power and authority even among the dead, and another our old childhood's friend the Wizard of Scott's *Lay*—Dante cannot restrain his tears. What especially troubles him, and it is a touch of sublime anatomical horror worthy of an insane sculptor, is that these images of God are so con-

torted that *their* tears are compelled to roll down their "hinder parts at their division."

> Certainly I wept, leaning on one of the rocks of the hard cliff, so that my Escort said to me: "Art thou, too, like the other fools? Here pity lives when it is altogether dead. Who more impious than he who sorrows at God's judgment?"

For devoted book-worms, whose conscience may refuse to allow them to dwell on the sort of spectacle that Dante loves to invent, it is a comfort to remember what splendid confusion reigns among our greatest literary guides, Nature pouring forth her multiple inspiration through so many masks that no man can say, "Lo! this is the Only Way!" Think what salutary and refreshing differences of view we encounter in this high sphere! The supremest of sages according to Homer is doomed by Dante to move and to weep with his face towards his rump.

Brutus, Caesar's virtuous assassin, is made a hero by Shakespeare; while his place in the *Inferno* is along with Judas in the very jaws of Satan!

And contrasted with Dante's proud contempt for the inglorious anonymity of the world's easy-going "honest cods," think of how Rabelais in his magnanimous and evangelical humour "puts down the mighty" in *his* next world!

> "Their estate and condition of living," said Epistemon, "is but only changed after a very strange manner: for I saw Alexander the Great patching on clowts upon our breeches and stockins, whereby he got but a very poor living.
>
> Aeneas was a miller.
>
> Trajan was a fisher of frogs.
>
> Hector a snap-sauce scullion.
>
> Julius Caesar and Pompey were boat-wrights and tighters of ships.
>
> Pope Julius was a Crier of puddings, but he left off wearing his great buggarly beard.

Lucretia was an ale-house keeper.
Semiramis the beggar's lice-killer.
After this manner they that had been great Lords and Ladies here got but a poor scurvie wretched living there below. And on the contrary, the Philosophers and others, who in this world had been altogether wanting, were great lords there in their turne. I saw Epictetus there, most gallantly apparelled after the French fashion, sitting under a pleasant Arbour with a store of handsome Gentlewomen, frolicking, drinking, dancing, and making good cheere . . ."

It was in the Eighth Circle of Hell and in the Seventh Chasm of the Malebolge that the poets, in their gradual descent, encountered the sacrilegious thief, Vanni Fucci of Pistoia.

Power of God! Oh how severe, that showers such blows in vengeance!

O potenzia di Dio, quant' è severa,
Che cotai colpi per vendetta croscia!

This poor wretch is punished bv devilish serpents to such a tune that—as my English commentator observes—'he rises into a boundless pale rage, such as is hardly known in Northern countries."

For myself, however, for all my northern blood, I must confess to sharing something of this Pistoian's pale rage with the "President of the Immortals."

"At the conclusion of his words, the thief raised up his hands with both the figs—*con ambedue le fiche*—shouting:

Take them, God, for at thee I aim them!

Togli, Dio, chè a te le squadro!

With a marvellous beauty, however, before which all animadversion sinks abashed, does our poet, a little further on, bring it about that Ulysses, who is damned among the Evil Counsellors, should relate the manner of his death.

What a thing to note, the way this ideal adventurer has reincarnated himself! From Homer to Shakespeare, from Shakespeare to Cowper, from Cowper to Tennyson, from Tennyson to Lawrence of Arabia and James Joyce, he has mesmerized every type of human mind. We deal here with his mediaeval avatar in the *Inferno* of Dante; and Dante certainly rises magnificently and triumphantly to the occasion.

Like Shakespeare, whose Welsh friends claimed to be descended from the Trojans, Dante as an Italian is much more friendly to the Trojans than to the Greeks; but unlike Shakespeare, he does heroic justice to those who "made the door,"

> by which the noble seed of the Romans came forth.
> ond' uscì de' Romani il gentil seme.

Ulysses and Diomed are entirely concealed in a pillar of moving fire; but addressing this rushing double-pointed flame in hurried fear lest it might dislike Dante's modern tongue, Virgil makes a courteous prayer to it to pause.

> The greater horn of the ancient flame began to shake itself, murmuring, just like a flame that struggles with the wind.
>
> Lo maggior corno della fiamma antica
> cominciò a crollarsi mormorando,
> pur come quella cui vento affatica.

How one realizes at this point Dante's peculiar genius for condensing great events, great feelings, great dramatic issues, in a few bare, stripped, heel-upon-rock phrases, phrases that suggest hammer and chisel rather than the pages of a dictionary! Or, to change the metaphor, what could be harder than to convey in a dozen three-lined verses, each of them rolling forward on the swell and fall

of recurrent waves of triple rhymes, as if on a tide that neither tires nor turns, the living spirit of the hero of the *Odyssey*?

Yet this is what he does; and indeed we are compelled to admit that, in spite of the huge differences between Homer, Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Dante—differences so great that it seems sometimes as if they were writing for different planets—there are certain things in common between them.

Take the speech to his companions in his final adventure that Dante puts into Ulysses's mouth. Would not this—with some faint hint thrown in as to the amount of fair-girdled women and wide-browed oxen and beautifully-worked vessels of gold and silver that the gods might incidentally add—fall aptly from the mouth of the Much-enduring?

> Consider your origin: ye were not formed to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.
>
> Considerate la vostra semenza:
> fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
> ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.

And here, not to speak of Shakespeare, who uses almost identical words, or of Goethe, who calls upon us by our earnestness to "make life eternity," we find even Rabelais devoting page after page on these exact lines to the education of his great little giants.

Some of us, however—and I am not referring to the wilful sad ones whose voices gurgle to eternity in bubbles out of the mud—will turn to Walt Whitman to escape this strenuous life, and Walt Whitman, countering both the Classical and the Mediaeval dogma, will tell us to imitate these same "bruti" in their undisturbed nonchalance, and to loaf and take our ease, "observing a spear

of summer grass," or a strip of sea-sand, and giving both culture and ambition to the devil!

There comes a point now, however, as the two poets reach the Tenth Chasm of the Eighth Circle, when a very interesting episode occurs, nothing less than an indignant rebuke administered to Dante by Virgil for his too lively interest in the grosser aspects of human nature.

This occurs in connection with the ferocious back-chat between Master Adam of Brescia, who was burnt alive in 1281 for counterfeiting the precious golden florins of Florence, and Sinon the Greek, who, according to Virgil, gave the Trojans, as a prisoner of war, counterfeit advice in the matter of the wooden horse.

Under Virgil's disgust at seeing him lap up with such eagerness every word of this repulsive broil, Dante becomes so speechless with shame and blushes so scarlet that he has to be forgiven. But his friend tells him he must always in future *count him by his side* when he's tempted to listen to such filthy abuse; "for the wish to hear it is a vulgar wish"; *chè voler ciò udire è bassa voglia.*

One does, indeed, I think, detect a deep psychological, if not a deep aesthetic, difference between gloating over a base quarrel and gloating over scenes of torture, but whether the former peculiarity is as likely to increase the pain and evil in the world as the latter is a very different question. Virgil praised Dante warmly for the pleasure he took in seeing Filippo Argenti "well soused"; and it must be remarked that on this occasion he doesn't blame him for gloating over the ingenuity of God's vendetta, but only for listening to the gross quarrel between its victims which must at least have distracted their wretched minds for a space.

The conclusion that a puzzled Hyperborean is compelled to reach, therefore, as he ponders on this significant

blush between these two "Great Latins," is that cruelty can be embraced with joy by the aesthetic sense while vulgarity must not be touched; and this will be a conclusion which, remembering all the "country matters" in Shakespeare and all the tavern brawls in Dickens, he will have some difficulty in accepting.

But our poets have now reached the terrible Ninth and Last Circle, and the absorbed reader who feels as if, like a phantom third, he has been following them all the way down, becomes aware of the frozen foundations of this mythological universe. Certainly, for a mathematical and realistic materialization of the Next World there is nothing in literature like the *Divine Comedy*. Using all the science, all the scholarship, all the faith, all the philosophy of his time, using all the history of humanity *up* to his time, selecting from among the dialects of his Italy the particular one out of which he could best create *the Italian Language*, Dante has branded upon the perilous stuff of the world's consciousness, I will not say an everlasting vision of Truth, but an unsurpassable picture of the last *complete unification* of the fathomless mysteries that will probably be attempted!

What a thrill of weird exultation quivers through us when we hear the horn of Nimrod, in this abyss! It makes us think of those terrific lines in the *Odyssey* about the great hunter, Orion. "Enormous," *pelorion*, is the Homeric epithet for him who has given his name to our grandest Constellation; and with the weight of those huge syllables to help us we must struggle to imagine the vast primeval shape and the cosmogonic inarticulateness of this Hebraic Titan.

Like a veritable howl from all the aboriginal creatures who have been engineered away, and pioneered away, and improved away, and vivisected away, comes Nimrod's

cry: *Rafel mai amech Zabi almi!* And for myself, I find great relief in repeating this defiant gibberish when in the presence of certain animal trainers.

But Virgil now makes of himself and Dante "one bundle," *un fascio er' egli ed io*, and lifted up by the Giant Antaeus the two poets are set down in Cocytus, the ice-bottom of the world.

To describe this ultimate *fondo* of the universe is certainly not, as the poet well says, an enterprise for being taken up in sport, nor for a tongue that cries "Ma and Pop," *che chiami mamma e babbo*; but it is characteristic of Dante that it is for the reception of *traitors*, traitors to their kin, their country, their friends, their lords, and, above all, to their God, that this frozen pit has been reserved for eternity.

Oh, how characteristic it is of the fanaticism of human nature, and how completely in harmony with the savage hypocrisy of Carlyle's praise of a religion he didn't believe, for the sake of the violence he loved, that it should be for the heretics called "traitors," the predestined gaol-birds and hell-birds of all arbitrary régimes, that this frozen torture-chamber should have been designed! How characteristic of humanity that Dante should place in the lowest depths of all a person like Brutus, whose character is the subject of *political* rather than moral controversy!

But the poet's own savagery in this icy Cocytus passes all bounds. He seizes one of the Inmates by the scalp to satisfy his curiosity as to his name.

> I had already had his hair coiled on my hand and had plucked off more than one tuft of it, he barking and keeping down his eyes.
>
> latrando lui con gli occhi giù raccolti.

Another implores the visitor to remove the icicles into which his tears have hardened, so that he "may vent the

grief which stuffs his heart"; and Dante swears by the fate of his own soul that he *will* do this for him if only he admits his identity. But no sooner has the wretch given him the required knowledge and demanded the performance of this vow—"but reach hither thy hand: open my eyes"—than Dante, all his nerves twitching with the ardour of his pious cruelty, breaks his oath:

> And I opened them not for him; and to be rude to him was courtesy.
>
> . . . ed io non gliele apersi,
> e cortesia fu in lui esser villano.

What a quaint example it is of that *sancta simplicitas* that so struck John Huss when he was being burnt, that all our English deans and prelates, and all our refined sensitive gentlewomen, should have followed Carlyle in their praise of Dante as a *great moral force for good*! Oscar Wilde, however, took the right view when *he* praised this horrible scene for its *beauty*. That's what it is. It is at once abominable and beautiful!

And is it not a sad and a startling mystery that a thing as monstrous as this *should* be beautiful? I suppose it is beautiful—though the beauty of the appalling is a great mystery—because it lays clear and bare the tragic clash between the extremes of a merciless Ideal and natural human Pity.

But doesn't it show how right Goethe was in telling us to resolve to live in "the Good" and in "the Whole," *as well as* in this treacherous and beyond-good-and-evil "beauty"?

> Livid, up to where the hue of shame appears, the doleful shades were in the ice sounding with their teeth like storks.
>
> livide, insin là dove appar vergogna,
> eran l' ombre dolenti nella ghiaccia,
> mettendo i denti in nota di cicogna.

Half of the beauty of this is in its peculiar expression, so compressed and yet so imaginative, but the other half lies in the very monstrosity of the scene called up, the uncracked ice, in the tenebrous glimmering light, sown thick with livid gibbering human faces like the windrow of the sand with shells, or, as Dante himself says, like a village pond when the frogs hold their muzzles out of the water.

It is, in fact, the beauty of a stripped, super-intense style, a style that throws into imaginative relief all that is conveyed by the most piercing, excavating, scooping, harrowing, disinterring *eye* that has ever been turned upon physical atrocity.

Oh, how often, when we hear in this our own day of crimes resembling what we learn in this frozen pit to have been committed against Ugolino and his children, are we tempted to wish that Dante *was* in the right of it about the vengeance of God!

But these wishes are evil wishes, and when a person has watched how "the world wags," as King Lear says, for a score or two of years, he will have found that evil for evil is only a vicious circle.

The moralists may tell us that "wherewithal a man sinneth by the same shall he be punished," but something inexplicable in us, deeper than any judgment or justice, goes on muttering in its throat: *Rafel mai amech Zabi almi!*

It is, indeed, strange enough, and sad enough too, that unless we are passionate students of theological symbolism it is hard to retain our concentration of vision as fixedly on the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* as upon the *Inferno*.

And I fancy it is not only the simplicity of our novitiate in metaphysics and ethics and the limits of our initiation into Catholic mysteries that produce this result. I think

it is the old fate of average human intelligence, for which Nature herself is responsible, that the tragic, the pitiful, the terrible aspect of Beauty arrests us more, and holds us more, than her peaceful, her ideal, her happy expression. But let us steady and purify our disturbed nerves for a space, anyway, in the *Purgatorio*. Full of a delicate symbolism that leaves a reader with the sense of having moved among the figures of some enchanted tapestry in an air scented with lilies or among the colours in some Fra Angelico fresco, where the gold and the green and the blue of the flowers in the grass are touched by the garments of lovely creatures who themselves have the faces of flowers, the Earthly Paradise at the top of this Sacred Mount seems to transfigure the burden of existence into all the day-dreams of all the young girls in the world!

This particular kind of intense ideal romance, like the lattice-casement thoughts on a May morning, of a maid who has read *Morte d'Arthur* before she slept and has left a jasmin-spray between the pages at the place where Lancelot first meets the Queen, is the most opposite human mood that could be imagined to the sadistic ferocity and deadly disdain of the *Inferno*. But who among men knows not how true to the most secret and most hidden psychology of our nature these opposites are! Everything to do with the woman he loves in this tremendous Amorist's mind, every detail of what she wears, of how she smiles—and no one but Leonardo has made so much of a woman's smile—every nuance in the way she lifts her hand or lowers her head, every flicker of the proud or shy or tender mood she is in, is registered as if in an illuminated Breviary.

We certainly realize, as we read the *Purgatorio*, all that women owe to the Middle Ages in intensifying the ideal-

ism, the subtlety, and the romance of love. It is conceivable, however, that we have among us to-day many damsels who would prefer the perilous life of the laughing, white-armed, classic maidens who attended Penelope and slept with her suitors rather than fulfil the high rôle which Dante demands!

But to sound the depths of this poet's own nature it is essential that we should put the moment in the *Purgatorio* when he recognizes "the tokens of the ancient flame," *i segni dell' antica fiamma*, and beholds his lady, "olive-crowned over a white veil, clad, under a green mantle, with hue of living flame," side by side with that other moment when he tugs at the scalp-hairs of Bocca degli Abbati in the frozen Cocytus till he makes him bark like a dog.

Is it because of this very contrast that our delicately-nurtured great-grandmothers would copy whole pages of this poet in their albums? Has the possibility of ferocity in a great man as much attraction for the feminine imagination as the possibility of reckless infidelity?

Certainly, in reading the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* an ordinary book-lover who has not been trained in philosophy, must feel, especially if he has a learned commentator to help him, astounded at the mental grasp not only of the poet who used them, but of the great Schoolmen he used. Any intelligent layman confronted by the metaphysical and moral subtleties of these mediaeval thinkers, must be *awed* by the genius they possessed—must wish indeed that our modern philosophers, with a hundred times more help from the exact sciences, had a tithe of this sheer intellectual power!

Any shallow modern person who takes upon himself to cast aspersions upon the Middle Ages, using the very epithet mediaeval as a term of reproach, betrays a level of

culture, and indeed a level of mentality, not a bit higher than that of the sly Pardoner laughed at by Chaucer.

At the same time, I'm not ashamed of confessing that in the midst of the ecstatic raptures of the Divine Pageant at the end of the *Purgatorio* I find myself wondering, when Dante turns for help, as was ever his custom, to his heathen Guide—turns to him even from Beatrice herself —and realizes with tears that he has gone back to his place among those "who live in desire without hope," how exactly that *anima cortese Mantovana* made his return journey, and what mental consolation he derived from hearing again that welcoming cry:

> Honour to the supreme poet! His shade, which has left us, returns again!
>
> Onerate l' altissimo poeta;
> l' ombra sua torna, ch' era dipartita!

And I find myself wondering, too, even at the very close of the *Paradiso*, even while our author dissolves in adoration before those three-fold circles of light that seemed to him "to be painted with our effigy"—*mi parve pinta della nostra effige*—how, after all, that "Love that moves the sun and the other stars" is to be reconciled with that other "primo Amore" whose decree carved the "*eternal I endure*" over the gate of Hell.

Reconciled? Squared, as they say, by the squaring of *such* a circle? Better a thousand times "return Him the ticket," with Ivan Karamazov!

And what, following the pragmatic method we have tried to sustain throughout these studies, is the value of Dante's appeal in the pressure of a modern person's life? What, apart from the Catholic Faith, would a disciple of Dante's tend to aim at in moulding his mental culture?

I think he would, in the first place, destroy from his

life-illusion that particular kind of vague, pompous idealism, which it is so easily shattered by any shock to one's moral and physical dignity! From this proud-humble egoist of realism he would learn to accept, and even exult in, as an essential part of the game, those bitter rebuffs to personal vanity that come to us all and make us wince and blush, even in the very thought of them! He would, I think, learn to accept without any of that morbid weakness, for which our catchword to-day is "the inferiority complex," every characteristic limitation, even the most grotesque, of his power, his courage, his appearance, his intelligence, nor allow these failings, however ridiculous, to abate one jot of his dramatic exultation at the contact of his poor battered, blundering, unlucky envelope of a living soul with the majestic panorama of the cosmos! Oh, how greatly most of us need some grain of that hard, indissoluble Dantesque core kept intact under our fluctuations!

And a reader of Dante would also, I fancy, acquire a certain mental trick of linking up his consciousness of the unfathomable Macrocosm with every smallest episode and incident of his mortal day; and this would apply not only to his fortunate moments, but to those moments when he is completely routed and put to shame, and reduced purely and simply to the condition of "one who weeps."

And what about that inert misery, that disintegrating sense of fretful futility, which is the special curse of the Hamlets of our age, and which takes the heart out of tragedy, the spirit out of comedy, and by un-dramatizing the whole drama kills our basic response to life?

A reader of Dante—even if only by being roused to indignant rejection—would, one fancies, be "finely touched" to *some* sort of noble issue! And certainly a person who is prepared to go down those terrible circles

again and again, will be a person who is unlikely to throw up his hands over his own minor miseries.

But—and this is a very important point—I do not believe we can get one-twentieth part of the secret *virtù* emanating from Dante's style without at least having the original Italian *before our eyes.*

For my own part, I find *all* poetical versions of the Divine Comedy intolerable; and I would strongly advise anyone who, like myself, is no scholar, to get hold of the *Temple Classics* Edition, which is a series of three small compact volumes with the Italian on one side of the page and a first-rate prose translation on the other.

Fortified with something—I am not prepared to define exactly what—that emanates from Dante's style, like the steam from the boiling blood where divine justice "to eternity milks tears"—*ed in eterno munge le lagrime*—any human being, struggling through the pain and pleasure and indifference of one single ordinary day, will find the central core of his soul more solitary and more independent. He will also, I think, acquire a peculiar anti-narcissistic awareness of his own particular skeleton, such as a tramp or a pilgrim might have, as he moves about his business, with only a thin Time-Screen between himself and Eternity!

And this awareness of our skeleton as the soul propels its body about its ordinary affairs, generally hides below the surface, if we have caught the real Dantesque Secret, some Ideal Love or some Secret Cult of which we alone, in our unguessed-at pride, are the passionate repository.

And this hidden Ideal brings us in secret—always in secret!—an exultant sense of mystical romance, totally independent of the commonplace conditions of our life, totally independent of the shame and humiliations to which we are subjected. Yes, there is no doubt that any

sensitive reader who acquires a mania for Dante's formidable destiny-charged style gathers a power to retain the sort of inviolable inner life that results from making a secret Ideal or a secret Romance, *or even a secret Revelation*, something round which, unknown to the world, his whole existence centres. He acquires the power to hold this Secret in the face of abominations that make him faint and sick with indignation, to hold it in the face of all God's ways to men, and in the face of all men's ways to one another!

I am, as the reader has already perceived, struggling with an intimation that is very hard to express; but there is no doubt that a great many men and women in middle life, *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, as Dante himself was when, supposedly in the year 1300, he visited Hell, find the romance of their youth gone, the companions of their youth gone, the hopes of their youth gone, the strength and beauty of their youth gone. And then comes the moment for reading the *Inferno*!

And is it not strange? What remains in our mind, as the final summary of it all, is neither the cruelty of God nor the crimes of men. It is the staggering, awe-inspiring *endurance* of any ordinary human soul, whether such a soul be good or evil, whether it be in Heaven or Hell! Yes, whatever Dante's *doctrines* may say, the far subtler, the far truer emanation that proceeds from his *style* indicates endurance as the supreme human virtue.

> Therefore let fortune turn her wheel as she likes and the labourer his mattock.
>
> Però giri fortuna la sua rota,
> come le piace, e il villan la sua marra.

For terrible and beautiful invention, for intensity of passion, for pure intellect and power, no poet who has

lived can surpass Dante; but to praise him as a moral guide for those who are outside the Church is the most treacherous betrayal of the human spirit into which the academic mind has ever led us. Had the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* been ten times more lovely, the mere fact that he could write as he has written in the *Inferno* would prove him to have condoned cruelty, justified cruelty, exulted in cruelty, gloated over cruelty, under the excuse that it was the Will of Omnipotence.

All the horrible pain he describes as triumphantly inflicted by God upon His enemies *does* happen in this world, though not for ever; and the reading of the *Inferno* has at least this, that it makes us ashamed of our petulant pusillanimity when other human beings, equally sensitive with ourselves, have endured and are still enduring what, while it lasts, partakes of the nature of eternity.

If, therefore, you say to me, "Why read the *Inferno*?" I answer, "I read it because I get power from its power. I read it because the image of what pain *can be at the worst* is the best method of enduring it when it is far short of the worst. In other words, I read it so that I can compel the cruel spirit of its poet to do for me what Virgil, before he went back to Hell, did for him:

> Wherefore I do crown and mitre thee over thyself!"
>
> Perch' io te sopra te corono e mitrio.

SHAKESPEARE

THERE is surely something significant in the fact that the personalities of the most universally human of all poets—Homer and Shakespeare—should be so completely lost in their work.

In Homer's case the huge gulf of time must, of course, count for much, and the fact that a poet, unlike an Egyptian king, has no power to build monuments in everlasting stone, and have them inscribed with his glories.

To Achilles, to Hector, to Odysseus, the poet himself—acting like a god—could give a life as lasting as the hardest granite; but his own personality—save in the tone and temper and scope of his art—*that* he could not save; *that* he had to leave to a few rumours of legendary ambiguity and a few tags of popular gossip!

But in Shakespeare's case there is no such gulf. In Shakespeare's case we are confronted by a phenomenal obscurity that presents itself as a psychological rather than a historic riddle.

Far earlier, far remoter writers are clear, definite, unmistakable personalities. Dante, Rabelais, Chaucer, we know well; and the identities of his own contemporaries, Spenser, Marlowe, Sidney, Ben Jonson, stand out in unquestionable outline.

Does it not seem likely that, just as, with the aid of the "iniquity of oblivion" and the "scattering" of time's "poppies," the very genius of Homer aided the dissolution of his personality, so the very genius of Shakespeare has assisted in this blurring of his mortal lineaments?

Poets who are able, as Keats said of himself—and they are the greatest of all—so to lose their identity in the thing they are contemplating that they cease to possess the contours of personal character, do they not, for that very cause, become the clearest-sounding reeds, the most transparent mediums, for our universal humanity?

In other words, is not the obscurity of Homer's and Shakespeare's personality the inevitable result of the quality of their particular greatness?

For what, when you consider it, is the nature of the emphatic personality which stands out so formidably in Dante and Milton? Precisely that towering and belligerent egoism whose urge in writing is what we now would call self-expression or even propaganda, whereas the words of Hamlet to the players, about holding the mirror up to nature and showing "virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure," are a shrewd hint of a completely different urge, the urge, namely, I will not say to justify life, but to *present* life, and to present it rather as an aesthetic spectacle than as any sort of personal problem.

Both Homer and Shakespeare have suffered from a curious subterranean *jealousy* in intellectual critics which is the counterpart to the equally untrustworthy *idolatry* among the masses. For these extremes of opinion spring really from the same source, namely, humanity's inability to believe in the *natural power* of supreme genius; the critics attributing Homer's work to a crowd of anonymous minstrels and Shakespeare's to anybody rather than the unlearned actor-manager from Stratford, while the vulgar are tempted to turn them both into legendary figures of supernatural inspiration and fairy-story prowess.

Between the jealous critical view, getting its curious

and morbid pleasure in a devastating iconoclasm and the idolatrous popular view, piling up legend on legend, it seems that the latter is, on the face of it, likely to be nearer the truth.

The quarrel of so many intelligent people with the accepted Shakespearean legend has, at the bottom of it, the clever person's instinctive distrust of the miracle of genius.

How could the son of a small-town butcher, even if he *did* pick up a smattering of law in a small-town law-office, who certainly never went to the University and who joined a play-acting troupe when the social position of actors was anything but respectable, how could such a man acquire the knowledge of the world and the knowledge of the classics, and of court, and camp, and law-courts, such as is revealed in the Plays?

And then, once assuming that the player from Stratford *couldn't* have been the man, what more adapted to the robust intelligence of truth-seeking critics than to hunt about for someone who *was* experienced in all these high matters, and to light first on my lord of Verulam, and then on the earl of this or the earl of that, who would be, or might be, or could conceivably be, just the person, if he had the mind, to throw off in his leisure moments such trifles as *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Julius Cæsar*, *The Tempest* and so forth?

Nothing is more beautifully illustrative of that mixture of jealous scepticism as to what genius can do, and an infinite credulity as to what cryptograms and counterfeits and cozening conspiracies can do, than the history of what is called the Baconian Theory. I love the mental image—who wouldn't?—of a mysterious bastard of Queen Elizabeth, whose power of dramatic creation was only equalled by his power of legal chicanery and his scientific originality

only surpassed by his passion for cryptograms; but to the humblest book-worm with any respect for the mystery of style it is simply impossible, notwithstanding the evidence of mountains of cryptograms, that out of the same spiritual workshop, even if the playwright lifted whole passages from the latter, should have come the Plays *and* the Essays.

The psychological truth is, that when once you cut yourself adrift from the homely wonders of common tradition and let your astute rational logic go to the limit, you find yourself landed in far wilder possibilities than that a man could write *Hamlet* without going to Oxford or the *Merchant of Venice* without being Lord Chancellor.

Ben Jonson would have had to have been in the plot, and the whole elaborate conspiracy against posterity would have to be attributed to the snobbish desire of the great Personage not to be known as anything so gross, so vulgar, so ungentlemanly, as the supreme dramatist of his time.

The literary rival who in his own day derisively sneered at this "Shake-scene" must have been as much fooled as we are; and it is certain that John Milton—no mean judge of stylistic subtleties—when he wrote:

> If Jonson's learned sock be on.
> Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
> Warble his native wood-notes wild,

would have been astonished, if not extremely angry, to learn that his favourite poet was not an honest commoner from the Warwickshire woods at all, but a titled "Malignant" of a sycophantic Court!

The enemies of our Stratford Shakespeare evidently differ from Milton as to wherein consists the essential

quality of the poetry of the plays. Milton—and I cordially agree with him, though I boggle at the word "warble"—evidently thinks that the essence of Shakespeare's style lies in the way his images are drawn from the countryside and the way his imagination is steeped in the sounds and sights of English earth and water; whereas it is clear that what these opponents hold to be the important element is the number of allusions it contains to the Classics, to Jurisprudence and Geography, to International State-Craft, and to the political History of the World.

The things, in fact, that our literary Sherlock Holmeses in their exposure of this actor-poacher of the wild woods who signed his name anyhow, care nothing for and understand nothing of, are the mysteries of poetry.

That there should be words and even whole phrases in common between Shakespeare and Bacon is little to Milton or to Keats or to any other poet who knows the depth of the spiritual and literary gulf that divides the Plays from the Essays.

The appeal in this matter is from the detective-school of criticism to what might be called the school of poetic tradition; but the final issue as to whether the vagabond-actor from Warwickshire, with his "wood-notes wild," could write what we know as the *Plays of Shakespeare* depends on one's faith in the sheer power of genius to override all handicaps.

There is one argument, however, on the Stratford actor's side that seems to me of no mean weight; and that is an argument concerning the technical structure of the Plays.

Putting aside their rhetorical and poetical seductiveness, no one will be found to deny the unique effectiveness of this vast mass of plays as extraordinarily artful theatre-work. This is proved by the successful experiments that

have recently been made of playing them in modern dress, and it has been proved again and again during the last three hundred years, by their professional popularity, not only with "stage-stars," but with the rank and file of the entertainers of the people. Nor can we discount in this connection what might crudely be called their box-office success.

Now, one is continually being reminded of the difficulties encountered by poets who try to write for the stage without a working knowledge of stage-craft; and it seems, on the face of it, more unlikely that some young Elizabethan nobleman, not to speak of a busy statesman-lawyer, could acquire this intimate stage-craft, and acquire it as none other has ever done, than that a country-born actor of unexampled genius could pick up from his aristocratic cronies and scholarly patrons enough classical and historical material to body forth his inspired imaginations.

Listen, reader, to our actor-poet's own words:

> Alas! 'tis true I have gone here and there
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
> Made old offences of affections new;
> Most true it is that I have looked on truth
> Askance and strangely . . .

Does not this sonnet most perfectly suggest the early years of one who before he put off his "motley" was destined to "look on truth" through the eyes of the greatest number of impassioned "masks" ever brought upon a human stage?

Surely it is the most natural of all things that the greatest of playwrights should have been an actor; and indeed, all the most characteristic touches in the plays are not only an actor's touches but those of an actor who has come from the country.

We get the impression from the Sonnets, and it is fully borne out in the Plays, of a man swayed by every wind of erotic passion, a man tormented, ravaged, scoriated by love, and also of a man who inevitably uses country sights and sounds to express these feelings.

We are made aware of an ideal passion for some lovely youth of the poet's own sex, and of a far more dangerous and less exalted feeling for some very seductive, very witty, and very treacherous woman.

All this falls in naturally with the life of a daring adventurer from Warwickshire, *saturated*—as we cannot conceive a fashionable young nobleman or an ambitious law-student to have been—*with country things.* His favourite books, too, seem to have been just the ones that an adventurous young actor would naturally prefer. Plutarch's *Lives*, the Works of Rabelais—for the reference to the "mouth of Gargantua" in *As You Like It* is far more suggestive of a real intimacy with this Book of Books than the rather contemptuous and stupid reference made to it by Montaigne—the Essays of Montaigne himself, and the works of his own contemporary, Christopher Marlowe.

It might have been better for him if he'd read Rabelais with even greater care; for he might in that way have gone deeper than he does in *Love's Labour Lost* into the "bettering of the mind," and have come to recognize even more than he does in *Hamlet*, the philosophical absurdity of national wars. He might also, incidentally, have come to see the intellectual superiority of the Greeks over the Romans!

Granting him, then, to be the actor-manager going up to town from Stratford and returning to Stratford to buy the New Place, and to plant mulberry-trees, and to sue "Old Double" for fourpence halfpenny, and to play backgammon in the tavern, and to pet his daughter, and

to leave his lady the bed on which we may suppose, thinking of Venus and Adonis, she seduced him as a young lad, it is easy to see how his lack of Greek—and, indeed, I think some queer accidental prejudice that could only have grown up in a self-educated man was the result of this—limited his response to Homer to an idealization of that "sweet war-man" Hector and a rooted, almost rustic hostility to Helen, whose "lips sucked forth the soul" from Marlowe's Faust.

And it is still easier to see how inevitably it happened that while his poetry is so often entangled in the elaborate flights of an over-clever verbal wit, he should instinctively resort, when his feelings are most deeply stirred, to snatches from old country ballads, things that few great court noblemen and few learned university wits would naturally pick up, a traditional vein that is different from the familiar Border Ballads, and seems to carry with it the rural atmosphere of the more purely English shires. The mellow humour of those Gloucestershire scenes, too, when Falstaff goes recruiting and we are introduced to Justice Shallow and Master Silence, leave a taste in the mouth hard to regard as the evocation of anyone not steeped in country ways; and the same applies to this:

Rochester, An Inn Yard.

Enter Carrier *with a lantern in his hand.*

First Car. Heigh-ho! An't be not four by the day I'll be hanged; Charles' Wain is over the new chimney, and yet our horse not packed. What, ostler!

Ost. (*within*). Anon, anon.

First Car. I prithee, Tom, beat Cut's saddle, put a few flocks in the point: the poor jade is wrung in the withers out of all cess.

Enter another Carrier.

Sec. Car. Peas and beans are as dank here as a dog, and that

is the next way to give poor jades the bots: this house is turned upside down since Robin Ostler died.

First Car. Poor fellow! never joyed since the price of oats rose, it was the death of him.

But leaving this defence of Shakespeare as an actor-manager come up from the country, we now find ourselves confronted by one especially vague and unsatisfactory spot in all the huge mass, the ever-increasing mass, of Shakespearean interpretation.

It seems to me that every conceivable aspect of Shakespeare's art has been intimately discussed except what is surely the most important of all; I mean that mental and emotional reaction to human life, which in unsophisticated circles is called a writer's "message."

And that this essence of the whole matter has been so thinly and vaguely interpreted is not merely due to the fact that our impassioned reformers of society fail to find in him the sort of rounded-off system for improving our mortal lot that seems to them alone worthy of the name of "philosophy"; it is also due to the fact that, as with Homer, Shakespeare's philosophic "message" is so diffused throughout his poetic rhetoric and throughout the humours, dilemmas, fancies, and poignancies of his "wood-notes wild," that it requires a spellbound intimacy not only with the temper of his style and the accents of his voice but with the spiritual implications of his habitual stresses, silences, reserves, and avoidances to catch the drift of the tide.

To my mind, the most illuminating interpretations of Shakespeare's "philosophy" are to be found in certain careless and casual remarks scattered through the essays of Lamb and the letters of Keats; while among more pretentious works I confess to having found the audacious and lively study by Hamlet's fellow-national, George Brandes, the most rewarding.

The vast shelves of books upon Shakespeare in our own tongue are, as I have presumed to hint, at their weakest in this most important aspect of the subject. His characters have been discussed to a point of weariness, his allusions to every mortal subject have been catalogued, his sources collated, his dramatic art explained, and here and there—though much more rarely—a poet like Coleridge, or a critic like Hazlitt, has thrown light upon the technical secrets of his actual poetry; but the mere fact that such a simple expression as "the philosophy of Shakespeare" is calculated to give a scholarly student no slight shock is a proof of what little headway has been made in the essence of the matter.

In the few cases where such an attempt has been undertaken one is conscious of a moral idealization that leaves, if I may coin such an expression, a hollow sweetness in the mouth, and not only this, but an uncomfortable feeling that the man has been made so completely "everything," that, like the Deity in a logical pantheistic system, he hovers on the brink of the antinomic "nothing."

What I would like to suggest in this place is that it is just as possible to be a disciple of the philosophy of Shakespeare as to be a disciple of the philosophy of St. Paul or Dante or Rabelais or Goethe; nor do I think that the fact of his being a playwright need throw any insurmountable difficulties in the way.

Surely, a reader of the plays endowed with any degree of intelligence can catch through the seductive clamour of opposing voices a clear drift of the author's personal reaction to life, a drift revealed not only by the thousand floating straws and bubbles and foam-wisps and revolving eddies upon the surface of the tide, but by the unrevealing nature of the "murmurs and scents" of the unknown sea towards which it is moving.

And how would a person who, in the company of Platonists, and Epicureans, and Stoics, and Christians, declared himself to be of "the School of Shakespeare," define his emotional and intellectual attitude?

In the first place he would, I think, declare himself an individualist; one, that is to say, who finds in the character of the individual, rather than in any collective or standardized "ideology" as we call it now, the chief redeeming element in the world and the best hope for the well-being of humanity.

And when we enquired what particular aspects of personal character are to be regarded as fundamental, it seems to me that even the most modest of Shakespeare's disciples would be forced to reply, "Courage, magnanimity, and an open mind." Carrying our presumptuous inquisition from the social into the metaphysical sphere and enquiring of our reserved Shakespearean disciple about the existence of God and of a life after death, we should merely be answered in a final and absolute "Nobody knows!"

Nothing, in fact, emerges more unmistakably as the attitude of Shakespeare to these crucial questions—Has the Universe an underlying purpose? Does man's soul survive death? Is there an overruling conscious Intelligence?—than an undeviating agnosticism. And this agnosticism, as it gradually takes possession of us in reading the plays, turns out to be no more than a heightened poetic emphasis upon the average individual's normal instinct.

Talk to any ordinary person, lucky or unlucky, the first comfortable citizen you meet, or the first tramp you meet, and you will soon catch them referring to God in the precise Shakespearean tone, that is to say, in a tone that blends natural superstition, conventional reverence, egotistical emotion, with complete agnosticism.

Talk to them about the mystery of evil, and their tone will be the same, a combination of universal human superstition, traditional morality, individual passion, and a wistful incorrigible feeling that *nobody really knows.*

And then, finally, bring up the subject of death; and behold, with one universal sigh and shrug of the shoulders, from the Hebrides to Land's End you'll get the true Shakespearean answer; "He's out of his troubles," or "She's safe from it all now," and "The rest is silence."

But you will protest at this point: "How can you call it philosophy when Shakespeare goes no further about God, and Immortality, and Good and Evil than the average well-meaning citizen and the average much-enduring tramp? Isn't it precisely to enlighten this primitive ignorance, to purge these traditional superstitions, to make logical these irrational hopes, that the Great Thinkers have rounded off their vast Systems, and that Plato and Aristotle and Kant and Hegel have received so much honour?"

Ah! but that is the whole point! The philosophy of Shakespeare is of such great value just because, with an originality that is the more startling the more you realize what it means, he *does* catch the common accent, the common tone, the universal mingling of superstition with agnosticism, which is the average man's instinctive response to the mystery of the universe.

Shakespeare, in fact, held in sober earnest what the Catholic Church claims in dogmatic theory—*securus judicat orbis terrarum*, "the whole world's opinion is a safe guide." Did he hold this philosophical brief for the common man's philosophy, as some have claimed, in order with subtle equivocations to wheedle us back into the arms of Mother Church?

Was Shakespeare, in other words, the inspired inventor

of the fascinating conjuring-trick of Mr. Chesterton? I cannot think so. Indeed, it seems to me that there is as much difference between using the average man's instinct as a jumping-off board for submission to the Church and using them as an Aeternum Organum in themselves, as there is between the monastical piety of St. Thomas à Kempis and the evangelical piety of Rabelais.

It has been inevitable that, having poetized with an unequalled glamour the philosophy of the man in the street, Shakespeare should receive some shrewd buffets from the more daring among our modern intelligentsia. Tolstoy regarded him as an unholy supporter of a degenerate aristocracy and as a hot champion of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and in our own day his individualistic—one might almost say his anarchistic—indifference both to political reform and political standardization would clap him into gaol in any other country than ours.

But luckily his philosophy is so widely shared in Great Britain, and we have got so much of his distrust of "Great Thinkers" and their rational conclusions, that this humorous agnostic attitude of his, combined with his reverence for tradition, strikes us all as *so natural* that we tend to just take it for granted, without bothering our heads about its somewhat startling implications.

And startling indeed these implications are!

Here we have a mass of plays, comical, historical, historical-tragical, greater in bulk, higher in quality, more appealing in poignance, more seductive in style than those of any other dramatist; a mass of plays to find a counterpoise for which from the classical world you would have to add Sophocles to Euripides and both to Aristophanes. And what is their subject-matter? From first to last the palpable, visible, secular, human, too-human spectacle!

No wrestling with the cosmological problem, no reiterated and obstinate delving into the problem of good and evil, no desperate fathoming of the social problem, no introduction of Gods or Devils or Messiahs, or Demigods or Prophets or Saints; and finally, as Ruskin says, not one single hero whose character is not weakened and thwarted by obvious and most disastrous faults!

At the same time, and this is of the very essence of the matter, none of our stout rationalists, positivists, materialists, determinists, atheists have ever thought of claiming Shakespeare as a kindred spirit.

In some extraordinary way the man has become an inspired medium, an undistorted, untwisted human reed, through whom the Natural Man—an entity rarely found, perhaps never found in actual life, but of whose nature we all have something—can express his spontaneous reverence, his recurrent scepticism, his undying hopes, his fluctuating despairs, his intermittent faith, his treacheries, and his loyalties.

One frequently hears a person say, "I couldn't stand it, if it weren't for my sense of humour."

Now, I am tempted to think that what these people mean by their "sense of humour" is not exactly that they see themselves as ludicrous or comical in their predicament, still less that they see their persecutors or persecutions as something funny. What I think they mean is that they "couldn't stand it" if they hadn't, by some lucky mental device, the power of detaching themselves from the painful situation, and contemplating it as *drama*. It is, indeed, I suspect, by our dramatic instinct, the mysterious comfort we get from seeing ourselves, and those who make us suffer, from the vantage-ground of a certain interior balcony-seat, that enables us to endure. In other words, as long as we don't know what is going

to happen next, as long as the play of our life remains a play, we can stick it out.

It is when it ceases to present itself to us in the likeness of a play, with unknown Acts and Scenes before us, and we looking on, and watching ourselves behaving like ourselves and the others behaving like *themselves*, that we commit suicide.

It has ceased to be a play. We have lost "our sense of humour." It has become reality. And no man can face reality and live.

As Ibsen so beautifully hinted in the *Wild Duck*, we must hang on to our Life Illusion by the hair of its head. We all must save our face to ourselves. And this "sense of humour," which is in reality a sense of drama, is one of the means by which we save our face.

Falstaff saved his face by his life-illusion of being "not only witty but the cause why wit is in other men"; and it is a device that all shrewd people learn, to dodge the shame of their cowardice by what they would call "humorously" admitting it.

Now the whole mass of Shakespeare's Plays is an impassioned chorus of eloquent life-illusions and humorous admissions. He is the supreme dramatist because he found in this clashing discord of multitudinous life-illusions a mystic harmony, a strange and abysmal beauty. His genius was of that particular nature which enables a person to *become* other people, and become several other people at the same time.

This power of becoming a medium, a reed, a wind-harp, an unblemished mirror, approaches the extremely ambiguous power of yielding ourselves up to obsession or possession, or, as the spiritualists say, to being "controlled."

And one feels this "control" of the poet by the anony-

mous generations of common men and women more than anything else in the plays. Shakespeare *becomes* all his hapless and desperate and eloquent characters. *They* possess him. Not *he* them. He becomes Lear. He becomes the Fool in Lear. He becomes Prospero. He also becomes Caliban. He becomes Hamlet. He also becomes Ophelia. He becomes Falstaff. He also becomes Harry the Fifth condemning Falstaff. He becomes Cæsar. He also becomes Brutus killing Cæsar. His genius is that it can be obsessed by the simple equally with the subtle, by the feelings of a woman equally with the feelings of a man.

And it seems as if this in itself throws more light than a thousand anecdotes could do on the personality of the man. He *couldn't* have had the preoccupations of a scientist or a statesman. He *couldn't* have had the dignity and egoism of a poet like Dante or Milton.

He may very well have been—in fact I suspect he certainly was—of a weaker, airier, more emotional, less compact, more flexible nature than Montaigne or Cervantes.

It is George Brandes who shrewdly remarks that his genius itself gives one the impression of being composed of a stuff of *lighter weight* than that which composed the genius of Rabelais; and no one, I think, can read the Sonnets without being aware of a nervous, high-strung, quicksilver temperament behind this impassioned sequence, that is the reverse of everything strong, steady, well-poised and calm, the reverse, in fact, of all that Matthew Arnold calls him—"self-scanned, self-schooled, self-honoured, self-secure!"

But returning to what a person would aim at who decided to become a disciple of Shakespeare rather than of Dante, say, or of Milton, or of Goethe, or of Dostoievsky.

In the first place, such an one would be what you might call a fluid and malleable individualist; that is to say, an individualist whose egoism is tempered by such simple virtues as generosity, mercy, loyalty, courage, and gentleness.

In the second place, such an one would retain an unwavering agnosticism towards all the great ultimate questions, such as whether there is a life after death, whether the universe has a purpose, whether such a purpose takes cognizance of man, whether evil is a positive or a negative power, whether matter is eternal, whether God is a Person who thinks and loves or a blind creative Force.

In the third place, such an one would hold the view that the usage and customs and traditions and conventions of ordinary humanity contain more wisdom than the most logical systems of the profoundest philosophers.

In the fourth place, such an one would avoid every kind of extravagant, violent, Quixotic, fanatic virtue; remaining infinitely indulgent both to his own lapses, weaknesses, and indolences, and to the lapses, weaknesses, and indolences of others.

"Be not over-righteous, nor take upon thyself to be over-wise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" is the Shakespearean attitude; and like all other great mental attitudes, it can be deliberately and consciously cultivated; and the more a person cultivates it the more he will limit his faith, limit his trust, limit his confidence amid all the contradictions and paradoxes of life to the basic human qualities of Courage, Magnanimity, and an open Mind.

It is impossible to saturate yourself with the plays of Shakespeare as a few great actors and a good many impassioned book-worms have done without acquiring a sort of—what shall I call it?—a sort of interior *emotional*

bias which beneath all personal cowardice, meanness, and bigotry points like compass-needle to Courage, Magnanimity, and an Open Mind!

And this generous open mind, which is the dominant emotional result of reading these plays, takes to itself, the more a person's private experience thickens, some extremely startling and revolutionary aspects.

It becomes, in fact, a mental method, beyond all logical definition, of dispensing with all philosophical systems, yes, by heaven! and I might almost say, of *dispensing with philosophy itself!*

The secret we learn from Shakespeare is, in fact, the magical and wanton gift—like the note of a fairy horn sounding in the brain of a witless younger son—of catching the spirit of life upon the wing, by means of a brave heart, a naughty fancy, and an irresponsible generosity, rather than of running it to earth by studying Tao-ism or Buddhism or Catholicism, or by making a cult of Hedonism. It is, of course, by means of a mixture of good health and a certain blessed stupidity that so many dare-devil rogues of both sexes scramble through life with a minimum of insanity.

Well! What the sophisticated and the sensitive among us can get from soaking ourselves in these plays is the crafty and celestial trick of making a certain fanciful humour and a certain airy imagination—as these are born like wanton elves in the detached intelligence—serve just as well as the good digestion, the hard heart, and the thick-skinned callousness of these honey-suckle rake-hells.

Now the substitution of poetic fancy and wanton humour *for philosophy* is the supreme gift of the mixed race inhabiting our British Isles; and what Shakespeare has really done, in thus substituting humour for philosophy, and the imagination for reason, as the ultimate

weapons of the soul, is merely to make an unlimited human universal out of a limited insular particular.

He is only doing here in the moral sphere what he does in regard to Nature in the material sphere; for although he rarely mentions a flower, a tree, a plant, and still more rarely a beast or a bird, that couldn't be found within a few miles of Stratford, this provinciality of flora and fauna, and of the changing expressions of earth and sky and land and sea, becomes so universal in his hands that it seems perfectly natural for Antony to pursue Cleopatra up the Nile like a "doting mallard" from Squire Lucy's great pond, or for Ophelia to sink to her muddy death at Elsinore with the "long purples" of Avon-bank loose-strife in her arms.

All through these plays the greatest philosophical dilemmas, the profoundest philosophical antinomies are just fancifully *played with*; and almost always, when matters get intolerably tragic, it is with a word like the "ripeness is all" in *Lear*, or "the rest is silence" in *Hamlet*, or "this parting is well made" in *Julius Cæsar*, or "rounded with a sleep" in the *Tempest*, or "then I defy you, stars!" in *Romeo and Juliet*, or "all our yesterdays have lighted fools" in *Macbeth*, that the open door and the magnanimity and the courage of his Message are preserved.

What Shakespeare does in all his ultimate tragic moments is to indicate the whole burden of human life in a brief or a broken sentence, a sentence that is like a sigh or a cry or a start or a sob or a spasm or a groan; but is anything rather than the sort of philosophical summary of the situation we get with the Greeks or the sort of rounded ethical apologue we get with the French.

Tolstoy attacked Shakespeare on the ground that he was a propagandist for the aristocracy against the masses; and it is impossible to deny that, over and over again, he seems

to do his utmost to make the crowd, the mob, the multitude, the *hoi polloi* appear fickle, cruel, changeable, gross, and ridiculous.

We feel this about the mob in *Julius Cæsar*, about the mob in *Coriolanus*, and, above all, about poor Jack Cade's motley followers in *Henry VI.*

But though we have just to accept this dislike of the mob, a dislike which almost appears, judging from the tone he habitually uses, to amount to a nervous mania, the fact remains that the moment he dramatizes any *individual member* of this same mob, his genius for throwing himself into the heart and inwards of any living human creature, and of reacting to the whole gamut of life from that creature's mood, forces him to come to terms with what his personal mania heartily dislikes. Thus, in spite of a fastidiousness that would strike Rabelais as shameful and totally unworthy of a noble intellect, the moment any of these gross-mouthed "honest cods" from the labouring classes come to life under his touch, they become not only witty and entertaining, but most formidably humorous at the expense of his fine ladies and gentlemen!

This whole attitude of his is summed up in the contrast between Caliban and Prospero, but it is diffused throughout a hundred scenes; and in the figure of the Homeric Thersites, through whose bitter tongue he delights to make these famous Greeks, of whom he was probably weary of hearing learned men talk, look like hulking bully-boys, he lets himself go in a vein of farcical rustic profanity.

The truth is, that his reckless wit was continually, as Ben Jonson protested, bursting all bounds. He is the supreme example of genius with the bit in its teeth, with the bridle flung down on its neck, of genius knowing no law but its own humours; and when, as in all the

supremely tragic moments, the whirlwind of passion begets its own "temperance and smoothness," one feels that this is not due to any consciously restraining art but to the inherent nature of passion itself, made simple and direct by its own intensity.

Nothing controlled his imagination but those technical necessities of the theatre itself in which he was both a practised master and a daring experimenter; and it is clear to-day from the way his plays are cut that no age but his own, and no audiences but the audiences he must have had, would have endured the licences he allowed himself. His imagination, his fancy, his flickering, serpentine, convoluted wit, his towering rhetoric, were ready to burst out at any moment and on all occasions; and over the tumultuous chaos of the hoarse, rasping, bewildering performance whereof Providence itself is the stage-manager, he was forever flinging, from an inexhaustible fount within himself, the seductive music of a unifying orchestration. How well one comes to know the peculiar Shakespearean literary devices, some absolute in their perfection, like his passion for broken tags from old songs, old saws, old proverbs, old Mother-Goose oracles and nursery-rhymes, introduced when the emotional tension is so extreme that only wild, mad, babbled nonsense could give it its true expression, but others most curiously confusing, like the extravagant fantasies and punning fribbles of his early comedies, and the tortuous intellectual convolutions of his later romantic melodramas.

These latter are, indeed, so packed with image upon image and thought upon thought that they make Henry James and Meredith seem simple and obvious in comparison. And as for the themes of his plays, he snatched at them from every direction; but he always gave them his own peculiar twist, his own tone and over-tone.

Upon English and Roman history—known to him from our own Chroniclers and from Plutarch—he played as if upon the virginals, stressing what notes he pleased and exaggerating all manner of original predilections.

What, for instance, put it into his head to make the abused Glendower into such a hero? What put it into his head to turn the heroic and learned Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle, into Sir John Falstaff?

One of his most interesting plays from a psychological point of view, though in dramatic construction it is one of his worst, is that same farcical *Troilus and Cressida.* Here he gives vent not only to a violent reaction against his own attitude to women, but to a reaction against one of the chief poetic cults of his time. Surely this market-tavern treatment of the Homeric Greeks is a sufficient proof that he was anything but a learned and courtly aristocrat!

In an age when Chapman was translating Homer, what earthly excuse, save some savage Swift-like laceration of his own feelings, and possibly a humorous desire to please his Welsh friends by praising their reputed ancestors the Trojans, had he got for the wayward, mischievous, cynical, and ribald tone he took in this play?

But it is, for all that, one of the most fascinating of his works; and not only from the point of view of its personal revelation and its incorrigible pessimism. Just consider the reactionary and scandalous conservatism in that startling speech of Ulysses about class and place and degree, and observe how he carries it off!

And what man-satisfying cynicism in making Cressid into a really flagrant whore! In no other play does he allow his curious passion for convolutions of verbal wit to carry him quite so far. He lets himself go, as we say, with complete moral, emotional, and aesthetic irresponsi-

bility; and few of his real lovers will begrudge him this one single, sweet, dark plunge into the less magnanimous, the less courageous, the less indulgent portion of his heart!

Troilus and Cressida represents, indeed, that "one touch of nature"—and we must remember that this famous line itself comes from this queer play—which "makes the whole world kin," by giving to the woman-hating, culture-hating element that exists in most men's natures, at any rate in most Englishmen's natures, a gross, cynical, stable-yard expression after its own heart!

As I have hinted, it hardly seems conceivable that it was only to please his Welsh friends—though he undoubtedly *does* hold a brief for both the Welsh and their Trojan ancestors—that he turns Achilles into a mean and spiteful ruffian, Patroclus into an effeminate minion, and Ajax into a clown.

Yes, it must have been that he had suddenly become irritated by some overweening group of young university aesthetes, with Homer for ever in their mouths, and that this singular production, championing the "sweet warman" Hector, is his retort.

One thing is clear. We certainly shouldn't be shocked if any other dramatist had turned so savagely upon women in the portrait of Cressid; and this itself is significant.

Think of the number of women that play a dominant part in these plays; and save for Regan and Goneril, where are the wicked deceivers, the cruel intriguers, the shameless whores, the treacherous light-of-loves?

Outside a few termagants and the desperate and heroic Lady Macbeth, and the Queen in *Cymbeline*—for one feels only sympathy for Gertrude of Denmark and poor Doll Tearsheet, while Cleopatra is simply Cleopatra—the women in Shakespeare are undoubtedly the noblest,

sweetest, wittiest, cleverest, loyalest, and most entirely lovable women in all literature.

And what does this mean? Why does he feel so tenderly for, and believe so wholeheartedly in, all the daughters of Eve?

Had he more of the woman in him than other writers? Is it a usual characteristic of a man who can idealize a youth of his own sex to the tune he does in the Sonnets to feel for women like this? Is it not rather the very thing in him which I have attempted so fumblingly to hint at as the quintessence of his peculiar genius, his rooted distrust of logic and of all that is usually called philosophy?

Is it not, in fact, his open mind towards intimations, intuitions, and instincts, *as against reason*? In any case, his personal cult of magnanimity and courage must have enabled him to handle women rather in the spirit of Hardy than in the spirit of Strindberg. Nor was his humour of the kind—as was the humour of Rabelais and Cervantes and Sterne—that puts women at a disadvantage. His humour was composed, in almost equal parts, of poetry and wit. It was the kind of humour that lends itself to the presence of women and that goes well with women.

Doll upon Falstaff's knee feels an authentic pang of pure grief when the old reprobate has to go to the wars. Between Cordelia and the Fool there was a most tender and romantic link. His humour is, indeed, as closely linked with that quality in him that got him the appellation of the "gentle Shakespeare" as it is linked with the airy, wanton, village-fair tone in which he alludes to "country-matters."

And just because of this gentleness in its grossness, and this poetry in its realism, the Shakespearean humour lends itself, above all other kinds, to the presence of tragedy.

This is not the case with Rabelais's humour. Think of the death of the noble Badebec, the mother of Pantagruel! Had Shakespeare had the handling of that great scene there would have been, I admit, less unequalled unction of homely gusto over the giant's lusty progeny, but there would have been something else—a touch of we all know what—in the good old drinker's eulogy on his lost lady!

But after all has been said of the nearness of this stirrup-cup humour to this mounting tragedy—which is only a return to the cosmic-comic Goat-Song at the beginning of the theatric art—it remains that what overwhelms all readers of Shakespeare, what drugs us into such beatitude, what magics us and medicines us into such oblivious felicity, what carries us away to such a tune that all criticism seems a pimping and paltry irrelevance, is his poetry itself, the cumulative music of the style in which he writes. The style of Shakespeare is, indeed, one of the three, or is it seven, artistic wonders of the world.

And you can, with easy infallibility, discriminate it from the other Elizabethans. I don't say it is always better than these others. It is sometimes worse. But it's always different and recognizable. There's a certain ringing, blood-stained, shivering cry in some of Marlowe's lines that Shakespeare never reaches. There's a majestic and rolling reverberation, like the echoes of celestial thunder-bolts on satanic shields, in some of Milton's lines that he never reaches. There's a melting absorption of syllabic sound into ecstasies of taste and touch and scent, into subtle intimacies of atmosphere, in some of the poems of Keats that he never reaches.

But for headlong plunges into the wild heart of things, for airy swallow-flights over the magical surface of things, for the fusing and the melting together of image with image, emotion with emotion, memory with memory,

till the beat of life's wings, the pulse of reality's blood, the shock of all that our race's nerves have ever recorded, catches us up and whirls us away, there is nothing in literature like Shakespeare at his best!

And he can work his charm with the fewest of simple words:

> In such a night
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand,
> Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love
> To come again to Carthage:

or with a veritable hurricane and tempest of piled-up words, words drowning and swallowing each other in the fury of their onset:

> Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge
> And in the visitation of the winds,
> Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
> Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them
> With deafening clamours in the slippery clouds,
> That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?

No poet can be simpler, or more direct; no poet can be more elaborate and more indirect. Simile follows simile like hand-clasped nymphs on the dancing-lawns of the dawn.

Metaphor follows metaphor like wind-spirits melting into fire-spirits on the sunken shore-reefs of the sunset. The scattered armouries tossed on the tidal-waves of his language, the towering avalanches of his vocalization of mortal feelings, impressions, thoughts, imaginations, are constantly being intermitted by brief, laconic, pregnant sentences that fall to the rainy earth like shot birds.

And the supreme use to which we can put this multitudinous many-sounding ocean of feeling, this mounting, sinking, ebbing, flowing, racing, lingering river of human

passion, is to have sailed on it, and swum in it, and drifted with it so long, that at every crisis in our life there shall reach our ears, with a living smack of that deep tide, a rich Shakespearean echo, consonant with, or at least contiguous to, the perilous stuff of our particular occasion.

And it is the rounded firmament of the ultimate doubt, it is the huge convexity of the overhanging "perhaps," that gives to the radiant-dark secularity of the Shakespearean stage its heart-strung poignance. Courage, magnanimity, and an open mind towards a dark sky—such is the burden of this mighty fog-horn from the coasts of Albion, while the hurricanes "drench the steeples," and "night's black agents to their preys do rouse."

Were some young person to ask you, reader, from which of all Shakespeare's plays can we get the rarest essence of his genius, which one would you name?

I suppose most people would at once say *Hamlet*, but for myself I should say *King Lear*.

Hamlet is a subjective tragedy, the whole poignance of which—with Ophelia as its victim—depends on the character of the protagonist. For this very reason it is the play towards which our disillusioned modern intellects instinctively turn, finding in it their anger, their bitterness, their sardonic humour, their cynical futility, their sophisticated pessimism, their bursts of "miching mallecho," their sick weariness of the whole game of living.

How natural, how inevitable, on such lips sound these wild and whirling words, these tags and snatches of tormented pride, these mocking bubbles of the heart's blood-stained foam!

> Why let the stricken deer go weep,
> The hart ungalled play;
> For some must watch, while some must sleep:
> So runs the world away.

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me, with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?

Hor. Half a share.

Ham. A whole one, I.

For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very—pajock.

But in *King Lear* we are swept away, out of our private, self-lacerating, procrastinating, anti-social morbidities, into the vast pity and terror of the whole world's grief, the whole world's wrongs.

What a gloss upon the wily Ulysses's praise of "degree" in this chance-ruled life are the bed-rock commentaries upon the "pathos of difference" between man and man in *Lear*!

Ha! Here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings!

I cannot feel that for the depths of tragic human emotion anything in literature can touch certain passages in *Lear*, except perhaps that unbearable scene in Dostoievsky's *Idiot* when the two talk together over the body of Nastasia, or that other occasion in his *Possessed* when Shatov is lured away to be murdered just as his returned wife is in the pains of childbirth.

Cor. How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

Lear. You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave;
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

And even Homer, when Odysseus is known by his dog and his nurse, and even Hardy, when Tess and Angel are

together at the last in that shuttered room, do not approach, no! not by a fathom of salt tears, the scene where father and daughter are led away to prison.

Cor. We are not the first
Who, with best meaning, have incurred the worst.
. . . . . .
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?
Lear. No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask my blessing I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies; and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies, and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.
Edm. Take them away.
Lear. Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense—Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The goujeres shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep; we'll see 'em starve first.
Come.

No, there has never been, and it is hard to believe that there ever will be, a mimic representation of human life equal to the Plays of Shakespeare. To get an effect similar to the effect of reading this volume you would have, in some impossible way, to roll together all the great novelists of the world; and *then* you wouldn't get it, because over this tossing sea of kings and clowns and warriors and honeysuckle rogues and Bedlam fools and lovely women the very firmament seems to melt in such

a starry ether of magical poetry that all this pathos and passion, nay! all these conspiracies and crimes, seem played out to the music of the spheres for the delight of the "young-eyed cherubims."

And since courage and magnanimity, tossing on a "sea of troubles," touched by a poetry that "redeems all sorrows," and at the last "rounded by a sleep," is Shakespeare's reaction to our human predicament, it is natural enough that his genius should gather itself together in its most inspired force in the attempt to portray the opposite of courage, the opposite of magnanimity: and thus we get those two overpowering figures, Falstaff, the philosopher of irresistible and bewitching cowardice, and Iago, the incarnation of fathomless malignity.

It is curious to note, in spite of the Sonnets, how deep what we nowadays call sex-normality goes with Shakespeare. When you come to consider his whole conception of these opposites to courage and magnanimity, you touch not some morbid and perverted twist of the nerves as with so many writers, but a universal weakness, a universal wickedness.

To the former he is tender, with an infinity of humorous relish for an old sensualist's incorrigible wit, but, as we remember that, "I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers!" he cannot exactly be accused of condoning such behaviour.

And in Iago's case it is the same. That "motiveless malignity" in him, noted by Coleridge, is no abnormal neurosis. Is it not what, if we were honest—like "honest, honest Iago!"—we would have to confess we all, I say *all*, in some degree and measure, share?

I would go so far as to suggest that in a sublimated form it is what some of our most characteristic modern writers are tempted to betray.

"I will set down the pegs that make this music, as honest as I am." Does not a stir, a motion, a flicker of this *revenge upon life*, by undermining the sweet raptures of its happy innocents, give the devil's own tone now and again to the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts?

Yes, we all have the Iago in us, as when we say: "Drown thyself? Drown cats and blind puppies. Put money in thy purse": just as we all have the Hamlet in us, when the whole visible world seems to us a "pestilent congregation of vapours."

But the best of all instances of what I might call Shakespeare's *abnormal normality*, the thing in him that made him such a perfect medium for "all weakness that impairs, all griefs that bow," is his treatment of lust.

He dealt with this aspect of universal human nature very early in his life. In *Venus and Adonis* we have a woman's lust; in *The Rape of Lucrece* a man's, while one of the most effective of his Sonnets is entirely devoted to the thing's normal psycho-physiological accompaniments.

And how does he deal with it? Exactly as he does later with jealousy, with ambition, with revenge, with cowardice. He gives it its full reach of seductive, eloquent, irresistible apologia, and then, coming full circle with a "dying fall" of poetic realism, he indicates the character of the mortal "wisdom" that follows such mortal "excess."

It seems to me that without having recourse to anything outside the plays themselves we can form a pretty adequate idea of Shakespeare's personality. There are certain characters among the rest that seem to have the very trick and favour of their begetter about them, so exquisitely, so delicately, and with such a seductive and beguiling sympathy are they described.

The man must surely have had something in him of

the melancholy Jacques, of the incorrigible Mercutio, of the desperate Timon, of the betrayed Troilus, of the "mad" Hamlet, of the detached and remote Prospero. He must have been swayed by his passions, precisely as his "good Horatio" and his upright Brutus were *never* swayed; and he must have suffered from the "rack of this tough world" exactly as the weakest and most unphilosophic among us suffer.

Yes, among the great writers of the world, for all his love of kings and warriors and fair women, none but Gogol and Dickens give you such a sense of reverence for that "quintessence of dust," unaccommodated man, just as he is, with all his faults thick upon his head.

Dead or alive it is the same. "Beat not the bones of the buried; when he breathed he was a man."

Is there not a curious comfort after listening to the well-constituted preachers and the bragging optimists and the inviolable stoics to turn to so different a voice?

"With a heart of furious fancies" he had followed, if ever man had, those fatal enchantments of beauty and wit that are to be found, in this world, as Walter Pater says, "in small measure or not at all"; and it is because he is the voice of the reckless and the passionate rather than of the wise and the prudent, the poet of lovers rather than of philosophers, that he is nearer to the heart of humanity than any other.

"Think of living!" says the greatest of our modern sages; but when in less lucky quarters we catch the sigh, "I wish I were dead!" is there no significance in recognizing this as a *natural wish* of Shakespeare's?

> Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
> As to behold desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
> And purest faith unhappily forsworn.

And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly—doctor-like—controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill;
  Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone,
  Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

MONTAIGNE

IT is of a peculiar interest to me as an elderly man to note exactly how I react to Montaigne now that, numbering the years of my life, I have managed to outlive the years of the great essayist.

I think he is, for all his gallant praise of youth as the heyday of our intellect, a writer peculiarly and especially adapted to old age. I had almost said to infirm old age; for though he fought stubbornly against it, and went on just the same, he suffered so abominably and for so many years from the anguish of the stone, that we feel, as we read him, that his long contest with this wicked complaint must have played a considerable part in the conditions under which he expressed his maturest genius.

Certainly it seems to me that his work grows in interest the older *he* grows.

And how curious it is the way each great book of the world has its own special history with us, the successive stages of our own private life running parallel to our reactions to this particular mirror of the general life!

My own first acquaintance with Montaigne goes back to that profoundly subtle picture of the man and his ideas introduced by Walter Pater into the pages of *Gaston de Latour*.

But as I read him now, after this lapse of years, I feel as if I were encountering quite a different Montaigne from that image of him which so kindled the imagination of young Gaston.

The Montaigne who arrests me now arrests me no

more as a universal sceptic whose second thoughts, turning to the homely wisdom of the piety of the generations, subtly undermine his first, and by means of scepticism extract the sting of scepticism, and by doubting dull the edge of doubt.

He arrests me now as one whose chief wisdom has to do rather with the art of life and with the art of integrating one's essential personality than with any final conclusions of philosophic thought, whether sceptical or otherwise.

The secret I get from him now, as I brood over his words and seek to catch the dominant element in the floating solution of his drifting ruminations, is of far greater day-by-day value to me at my present age than the precise reasons why he could or could not accept the Athanasian Creed.

But let me refer at once to the element in Montaigne that I find myself instinctively dodging or hurrying past, so as to reach something more germane to the matter. He himself severely condemns all summarized, expurgated, condensed, abridged versions of great books.

Yet he confesses very frankly that in his own reading he skimmed and dallied with them, taking this, leaving that, and treating them all in an easy, capricious, lazy manner, digesting what suited his taste, what served his turn, and letting the rest go. He was, indeed, what Rabelais would call a great "abstractor of the quintessence," one who read for use rather than learning, and for life rather than knowledge; and this makes it legitimate to treat his own works in a similar way.

And for myself, though I have never seen such a volume and would only trust its compilation to a real lover of the Essays and one who had a temper of mind akin to their author's, I can well conceive that for the less dyed-in-the-grain devotees—not to speak of the entirely un-

initiated—a version that deliberately eliminated the whole mass of historic anecdotes and classical quotations, and concentrated upon his personal habits, peculiarities, opinions, and above all upon his egoistic and philosophical whimsies, would make things much easier.

I suppose the idea that most English-speaking book-lovers have of Montaigne, unless they themselves possess an edition of Cotton's splendid translation, is that of the self-portrait of a magnanimous egoist, whose shrewd, kindly, earth-bound views upon our wrestling with the world are casually set down with an epicurean lavishness.

But if such a book-lover whom the accidents and chances of life have hitherto debarred from actually reading the essays in Cotton's translation *does* get hold of a copy, or even of an odd volume or two, and, bringing it home with that peculiar thrill of pleasurable anticipation so beautifully described by Charles Lamb, *does* begin seriously to read it, I am prepared to wager he will suffer a grievous disappointment.

For in place of what he has been led to expect by such deep Montaigne-experts as Walter Pater, or my own brother Llewelyn—whose whole tone of writing, even to his use of that Montaignesque expression, "the instinct of a well-descended spirit," is riddled with his influence—what our novice will stumble upon, unless he opens at the Essay entitled "Of Presumption," or "Of Repentance," or "Of Vanity," or "Of Experience," will be page after page of historic anecdotes and of quotations from classical writers.

Of course, the use of quotation *can* become a fantastical and artful adjunct to the living style of an author, as we note in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* and in the *Essays of Elia*, but Montaigne uses *his* quotations to quite other than stylistic effect. He uses them purely and simply for

the curious—and to his own mind fascinating—nature of their contents.

Now, to any intelligence resembling Montaigne's with a passion for the classical authors, especially the Latin ones, and a mania for curious and monstrous human happenings wherever and whenever occurring, every page of the Essays must be full of salt and tang; but I profoundly suspect that Pascal and Walter Pater, both of whom saturated themselves in Montaigne's *philosophy*, were wont to skim over at great speed the bulk of these anecdotes!

Voltaire probably read every one of them with infinite relish; and so, I dare say, did Anatole France; but I have an inkling that William Hazlitt, our own egoistical Essayist, was as wont to skip, in following the great Gascon's circumambulatory strolls round his circular bookshelf, as shamelessly as I do myself.

However! Even if there does not yet exist a version of the *Essays* shorn of the anecdotes, and I suppose most Montaigne-lovers would scorn such a pimping concession, it is not, after all, so very difficult to turn over the pages till we come to some pungent opinion of his own that will pull us up short.

And as to the quarrel I have now with that incomparable summary of Montaigne's philosophy in *Gaston de Latour*, I only feel that it makes him a little too deliberate and purposeful in his particular kind of scepticism. Judging from the general drift of his work, and putting one inconsistency against another, it seems to me that there was much less of calculated metaphysic and much more of temperamental conservatism in those fluctuating *after-thoughts* of his, about which Walter Pater, assimilating, as we all will in such cases, Montaigne's attitude to his own, makes such an elaborate coil.

What a difference just a little shift of emphasis in these delicate psychological matters can make!

What Pater's young Gaston got from his host's epicurean discourse in that tower-library looking over the Perigord orchards was a system of thought far more deliberately rounded-off than what I, at least, am able to find.

And though I do dodge on my road, even as Bunyan's Christian might dodge a number of circus-caravans, all these classical fables and gossiping scandals, I cannot be persuaded that I lose the essence of his wisdom by this avoidance.

Pater's Montaigne, with his notorious *que sçais-je?* becomes, indeed, in ultimate matters as absolute a sceptic as Pascal was, apart from his desperate act of faith, and as Anatole France was, apart from nothing.

But on the basis, if basis it can be called, of this absolute scepticism, Pater's Montaigne is prepared to accept as a conceivable "second-thought" all the old traditions of the Catholic Church, finding support for this attitude in the wise obedience of simple people and in the unreliability of the Reformers with their "appeal to reason."

Certainly Pascal himself couldn't go further in his conviction of the weakness, helplessness, short-sightedness and incompetence of human reason as a medium for truth, but on the other hand, Montaigne declares over and over again that neither the fact that multitudes of people have believed a thing, or the fact that a thing has been believed for an enormous number of years, is able to make a thing true!

For all his passion for the classical Latin writers—and he is never weary of praising his father for having made Latin more natural to him than his mother-tongue—I cannot find in the Essays the least sign that he wavered at any point in his simple, earthy, old-fashioned Catholic

piety. He never, that I can find, speaks of God save with grave old-fashioned homely reverence, and his perpetually reiterated preference for old-established customs and old-established habits of thought suggests that his adherence to the Catholic faith was much more a matter of an instinctive inborn conservatism than of any nice and subtle calculations as to the metaphysical wisdom of "second thoughts."

The idea that it was in some sort of Euripidean reaction to the religion of his fathers, after a long excursion into absolute agnosticism, that he made his wife send for the priest to celebrate Mass as he lay dying, has, as I read the Essays, no foundation at all. The old-fashioned piety of his death was, it seems to me, only the natural culmination of the old-fashioned piety of his life. He never erred, as he confesses his father did, in the direction of superstition, but his profoundest instincts—and he was one who always followed his instincts—were so massively and simply conservative that it does not seem as if in real philosophical scepticism he ever approached those depths of metaphysical doubt so familiar to Pascal.

Let the word be frankly spoken, Montaigne's wisdom is not a metaphysical wisdom or a wisdom concerned with what in Nietzsche's phrase, we call "First and Last Things." It is a practical, moral wisdom, primarily concerned, as was that of Confucius, with the conduct of life rather than with its purpose or its remote cause.

The conduct of life and pre-eminently of his own personal life is the subject-matter of the Essays; and like Socrates whom he cannot praise too highly, and who, Greek though he was, was evidently dearer to him than any other classical thinker, his grand starting-point—and not only starting-point for he is never weary of returning

to it—is self-knowledge, the everlasting analysing of himself and his moods.

But even here we must advance cautiously and shrewdly in our estimate of Montaigne's everlasting pre-occupation with himself. He takes advantage of the attitude of Socrates, both in regard to his oracle's "Know Thyself," and in regard to his "I know nothing," but the longer you read the Essays the clearer it becomes that this ceaseless absorption in himself was a profound psychological, or if you are averse to such a tendency you can even use the word pathological, peculiarity of his whole nervous organization.

With what a gusto of life-deep relief, a relief that is spiritual, physical and mental, does he speak of these felicitous escapes from his duties to others, from his duties to his country, from his duties to posterity, as he sinks back into himself!

It must be remembered he was a man of an extremely responsible conscience in all these things; but when he returns to himself in reaction from them it is as if he returned to the embraces of an adored lover.

Over and over again he celebrates these sinkings back into himself, making it clear from the variety of his descriptions of these self-orgies that they were an indulgence in a physical, mental and spiritual Narcissism so well constituted, so integral, so balanced, that, as a human phenomenon, it must be very rare.

For there wasn't a trace of vanity in the Narcissism of Montaigne. He loved his old "grizzled face" not because it was handsome but simply because it was *his*. He emphasizes in his descriptions the purely physical enjoyment of himself, as when he broods lovingly over his bodily appearance, his physical peculiarities, his favourite processes of mastication, digestion, ablution, copulation;

but he by no means rejects the pleasures of those "to whom to live is to think," *quibus vivere est cogitare*, in the intellectual "entertaining," as he calls it, of his wandering thoughts.

> Meditation is a powerful and full study to such as can effectually taste and employ themselves; I had rather fashion my soul than furnish it. . . . Nature has favoured it with this privilege, that there is nothing we can do so long nor any action to which we more frequently and with greater facility addict ourselves.
>
> 'Tis the business of the gods, says Aristotle, and from which both their beatitude and ours proceed.

In order to keep our strength, or energy, our real spiritual force for these heavenly moments when we make love to ourselves and fondle ourselves and chew the end of our contemplation of ourselves, it is best, he assures us, to be extremely lethargic and stupid, nay! even drowsy, in ordinary conversation, and above all avoid like the devil any attempts to show off and lay down the law, or parade our pedantry, or subtlety or cleverness.

I am afraid the impression he leaves is the un-Shakespearean one that the average persons we meet are not worth the effort of agitating ourselves!

> 'Tis in my opinion egregiously to play the fool to put on the grave airs of a man of lofty mind amongst those who are nothing of the sort; to speak by the book:—*Favellare in punta di forchetta* "to talk with the point of a fork." You must let yourself down to those with whom you converse; and sometimes affect ignorance: lay aside power and subtlety in common conversation; to preserve decorum and order 'tis enough—nay crawl on the earth if they so desire it.

It is impossible to suppress a wanton curiosity as to what Mademoiselle Françoise de Chassaigne, whom he married when he was thirty-three, what their only surviving offspring, a girl called Eleonore, felt in their

feminine hearts when Montaigne, in the year 1588, when he was fifty-five, entered into his close platonic relations with Mademoiselle Le Jars de Gournay, then in her twentieth year, who from that time forward became not only his literary editor but his adopted child.

Whatever it was they may have felt, this mother and this daughter, they seemed to have kept it to themselves as far as we are concerned and very likely as far as the world was concerned; for, after his death in his sixtieth year, they forwarded from their Chateau to this clever young lady in Paris all his final revisions for her special edition of his work.

Montaigne's attitude to women is entirely of a piece with the rest of his nature. It was a conservative masculine attitude. In the library we want wisdom, at the table wit, but in bed only beauty. He mentions as the best device to avoid the danger of being carried out of ourselves by a too violent infatuation for a lady the pleasant and simple trick of making love to another one.

And I dare say nothing would be easier or more agreeable than to follow this prudent method if a person were possessed of the cool heart, steady nerves, and lively senses of Montaigne. But for a different type of lover, of a more intense and passionate complexion, such a palliative would be of no more avail than striking a match upon a window through which we're staring at an eclipse of the sun.

But if Montaigne's attitude to women and to the love of women may not be altogether satisfactory to an intelligent lady of our epoch, there are passages in the Essays where he goes surprisingly far in the modern direction and deserts the gross masculine humour of those old days.

The Essay in which we get both the two opposite tones in this matter is the one entitled "Upon some Verses of

Virgil." Here, following with approval a recorded hint of Socrates, he says bluntly:

> Women are not to blame at all when they refuse the rules of life that are introduced into the world, forasmuch as the men make them without their help. There is naturally contention and brawling betwixt them and us; and the strictest friendship we have with them is yet mixed with tumult and tempest.

Both these remarks fall congruously upon a modern ear, especially the suggestion that this "brawling" between the sexes is inherent in the "love-hate" of sex itself.

But how far Montaigne's feminine readers of to-day can approve of the length to which, in his classical roguery, he is prepared to go in offering judicial support to the famous decision of Teiresias in regard to the act of love, is a lively and debatable question.

> My daughter [he remarks in this Essay], is now of an age that forward young women are allowed to be married at; she is of a slow, thin, and tender complexion, and has accordingly been brought up by her mother after a retired and particular manner. . . .

And he goes on to tell how he caught the girl's governess hurrying her with a too-obvious anxiety and solicitude past a word they stumbled on in their book that had a double meaning. Commenting upon this, he declares it was his fortune once to overhear such talk between a party of young women as was too outrageous for him to repeat.

> "By'rlady," said I, "we had need go study the phrases of *Amadis* and the tales of Boccaccio and Aretin, to be able to discourse with them: we employ our time to much purpose indeed. There is neither word, example, nor step they are not more perfect in than our books: 'tis a discipline that springs with their blood:
>
> "Venus herself made them what they are."
> *Et mentem ipsa Venus dedit.*

But with all his broad talk about the relation between the sexes, and for all his classical scholar's humour, Montaigne informs us that, as a matter of fact, he was more scrupulous under the covenant of marriage than he ever expected to be when he entered that condition.

Indeed, in the whole problem of morals, and the whole question as to what makes the difference between a good man and a bad man, there emanates from the Essays, for all their easy-going indulgence, a very definite "stream of tendency" in the direction of honourable behaviour, kindly consideration and solid probity.

And this vein of simple goodness in the man reaches us quite independently of his reliance on Custom or his scepticism about Custom. And it is independent, too, of his Christian piety. Nor does it depend on outward opinion, as does the goodness described in those remarkable words of Penelope to her disguised husband, in Homer:

> Men are but short-lived. If one be himself hard, and have a hard heart, on him do all mortal men invoke woes for the time to come, while he still lives, and when he is dead all men mock at him. But if one be blameless, and have a blameless heart, his fame do strangers bear far and wide among men, and many call him a true man.

The grand passion of Montaigne's life was for his friend Etienne de la Boetie; but I cannot find the faintest trace of any homosexual feeling in his attitude to this grave and happily-married young man. It was a pure, unmitigated friendship between two original men—for they were no longer boys when they met—of kindred tastes, kindred opinions, kindred interests, kindred souls; and it certainly does seem as if the survivor were justified in his feeling that it was a unique and monumental bond,

and worthy to take its place in the history of memorable human relations.

It was eminently characteristic of Montaigne's habit of putting friendship above love that he should have actually printed, as a preface to "Plutarch's consolation to his Wife," which his friend had translated, a letter which he himself wrote to Françoise to console her, or to remind her that Plutarch could console her, for the loss of a child of theirs who died in its second year.

One's inquisitive mind is tempted again to delve in imagination into the feelings of Françoise de Montaigne, both when she first received this blunt but not unfeeling letter, and when she was called upon to produce it to serve as a preface to the learned tract of her husband's dead paragon.

To Mademoiselle de Montaigne.

MY WIFE,—You understand well that it is not the part of a man of the world, according to the rules of this time, still to court and caress you; for they say that a sensible man may well take a wife, but that to espouse her is to act like a fool. Let them talk; I adhere for my part to the custom of the elder age; I also wear my hair in that fashion. . . .

Nothing could be more characteristic than this whole incident, showing the man's desire to link together the two important emotions of his life by connecting Françoise with his everlasting love for his lost friend, and incidentally proclaiming to the world his detestation of new-fangled ways, both in matters of the heart and in matters of the toilet!

It is amazing how his refusal to sacrifice his independence and integrity to either party in those murderous wars between Catholics and Huguenots didn't lead to his ruin. But there was evidently something so honest, so frank, so downright and simple about the stand he took, keep-

ng open house to both sides, and even acting as a confi-
lential intermediary between the Duke of Guise and
Henry of Navarre, that disarmed the most frantic zealots
of that ferocious struggle. Twice, as he tells us in the
Essays, he was in imminent personal danger. On one
of these occasions his chateau was actually entered by a
roop of armed men, whose leader had planned his
lestruction. But, as he relates with justifiable pride, his
bsolute unsuspiciousness and easy friendliness of demean-
our made these rascals thoroughly ashamed of themselves
nd speedily reduced them to good behaviour.

It is, indeed, hard to overrate the moral and philo-
ophical importance of the particular kind of egoism
dvocated by Montaigne.

It is *the Ego and Its Own* of Max Stirner; only in
Montaigne's case this super-individualism is mitigated by
his reverence for the Laws of his Country, by his love of
he old traditions, by his hatred of innovation, and by his
profound distrust of the insane logic of that dangerous
yrant, the human reason. His scepticism takes refuge
rom its own corrosive undermining of all philosophical
heories in a deep instinctive piety, according to the dictates
f which he prefers to keep God and "His Holy Word"
vell out of reach of the wild antics of the human intellect.

> As life renders itself by simplicity more pleasant, so, also, more innocent and better, as I was saying before. The simple and ignorant, says St. Paul, raise themselves up to heaven, and take possession of it; and we, with all our knowledge, plunge ourselves into the infernal abyss.

And again:

> Whatever we undertake without His assistance, whatever we see without the lamp of His grace, is but vanity and folly; we corrupt and debase by our weakness the very essence of truth, which is uniform and constant, when fortune puts it into our possession.

And once more:

> Now from the knowledge of this volubility of mine, I have accidentally begot in myself a certain constancy of opinion . . . and since I am not capable of choosing, I take other men's choice, and keep myself in the state wherein God has placed me; I could not otherwise prevent myself from perpetually rolling. Thus have I, by the grace of God, preserved myself entire, without anxiety or trouble of conscience, in the ancient belief of our religion, amidst so many sects and divisions as our age has produced.

But, as I have hinted, though Montaigne's scepticism, by its undermining of the pride of reason, landed him on the bed-rock of old-fashioned Faith, he apparently found nothing in this basic Faith to conflict with his cult of self-realization. To shut himself up "like a tortoise in his shell" in the study of himself and in the enjoyment of himself was the supreme aim and purpose of his life.

His nature was so luckily constituted that no agitations of conscience, no qualms of superstitious fear, no spiritual wrestlings ever troubled his serene happiness, when once, retired within that shell of which his library tower was the outward symbol, he caressed the most fleeting of his sensations and ideas as if they had been so many soft-furred pets.

He dared, in fact, in the midst of that ferocious struggle between Catholics and Protestants, to give himself up to the sensuous deliciousness of a life-long series of egocentric contemplations, stroking himself, tickling himself, stretching himself, making love to himself, while murder and fanaticism and treachery and massacre tore at his country's bowels.

It would be, however, to do Montaigne a grave injustice to accuse him of neglecting any of his public duties. It is true he registered a vow in his middle-

thirties, and went so far as to have it inscribed on his tower, that henceforth he would give himself up to study and the bettering of his mind; but this didn't prevent him in later life from becoming an indulgent, easy-going, but by no means incompetent Mayor of Bordeaux; nor did it prevent him from playing a wise, honourable and free-spoken part in the pacification of the kingdom.

But the Essays were the expression of his real life all the while, and not only the expression; for, as he says, this constant painting of his own portrait compelled him *to live up to* the lineaments he painted, while to the very last he was always adding some new and yet more revealing touch to the picture.

It would be possible, I suppose, to put forward a claim that Montaigne's constant expressions of faith in a God whose ways are not our ways and indeed are altogether beyond the soundings of our presumptuous, private judgment, was a crafty sop to Cerberus. But the longer I read the Essays the more strongly it comes over me that this faith in something "eternal in the Heavens," something unaffected by the tossings and "rollings" of human reason, was the thing that saved him from a sense of futility, and enabled him to present such a shrewd, earthy, solid front to this confused world.

It is not in regard to God but in regard to human custom that his feeling varies according to his mood; and in the endless examples he loves to give us of the grotesque and monstrous nature of custom he hesitates not to indicate his own corrective to that instinctive preference for old ways over new ways into which his ingrained conservatism led him.

In his opinion, all the dictates of our conscience come from this too-human and often preposterous adherence to custom, and not at all from any Categorical Imperative

n Nature; but just at the point where we nihilistic noderns would, for this very reason, be tempted to relax ›ur moral harness Montaigne invariably pulls himself ıp, and by some allusion to "God and His Holy Word" ›rings back his toppling and shaky conscience to its true oundation, a foundation entirelv outside the shifty ›henomena of Time and Space.

> This way of speaking in a Christian man [he remarks in his lengthy study of that discourse of Raimond de Sebonde on "Natural Religion" which he translated to please his father] has ever seemed to me very indiscreet and irreverent: "God cannot die: God cannot contradict Himself: God cannot do this or that," I do not like to have the divine power so limited by the laws of men's mouths; and the idea that presents itself to us in these propositions ought to be more religiously and reverently expressed.

Like Charles Lamb, and indeed like many another ›himsical and antic confessor of his limitations, Mon- ıigne loves to describe with a proud-humble relish and ›ith that subtle self-justification which comes from being ıamelessly frank, how helpless he is in most ordinary ndertakings.

> In music or singing for which I have a very unfit voice, or to play on any sort of instrument, they could never teach me anything. In dancing, tennis or wrestling I could never arrive to more than an ordinary pitch; in swimming, fencing, vaulting or leaping, to none at all. My hands are so clumsy that I cannot even write so as to read it myself. . . . I do not read much better than I write. . . .
>
> I cannot decently fold up a letter, nor could I ever make a pen, nor carve at table worth a pin, nor saddle a horse, nor carry a hawk and fly her, nor hunt the dogs, nor lure a hawk, nor speak to a horse. . . . I am good for nothing: for I am of a humour that, life and health excepted, there is nothing for which I will bite my nails, and that I will purchase at the price of torment of mind and constraint. . . . I have a soul free and

entirely its own, and accustomed to guide itself after its own fashion.

There have been few famous writers, and still fewer men of the great world, who have had, and have been at pains to express, such a loathing of cruelty. Montaigne seems to have felt as much repulsion at seeing animals suffer, even in the normal processes of what we call "sport," as any sympathetic person of our own day; and in the education of children he would have us cease once and for all our curst attempts to cudgel them into learning and virtue. He goes out of his way to reprobate the burnings and torturings of his time, and no more vigorous protest has ever been raised by a great European writer against persecution for matters of opinion. Thorough Frenchman as he was, and great devotee of Paris "the glory of France and one of the most noble ornaments of the world," Montaigne may be regarded as among the founders of a magnanimous internationalism.

Not because Socrates has said so, but because it is in truth my own humour, and peradventure not without some excess, I look upon all men as my compatriots and embrace a Polander as a Frenchman, preferring the universal and common tie to all national ties whatever. . . . Nature has placed us in the world free and unbound.

I have wondered, considering what a family of bookworms my own family is, which of all the great profane works of the world would lend itself best to be made into our secular family Bible; and I am tempted to think that Montaigne's *Essays* might be this book.

Certainly in following the subtle moods of my brother Theodore, as he wavers in his own peculiar way between piety and scepticism, I am often led to think of Montaigne; and I am continually being reminded, as I enjoy Cotton's robust turns of speech in this noble rendering,

of my brother Llewelyn's deep-rooted hedge-parsley wayside chat.

In the Essay called "Vanity" I light upon a passage where Montaigne plausibly defends—though for myself I am not converted—his inconsequential ramblings and everlasting anecdotes.

> I go out of my way; but 'tis rather by licence than oversight; my fancies follow one another but sometimes at a great distance, and look towards one another but 'tis with an oblique glance. . . . The titles of my chapters do not always comprehend the whole matter. . . . I love a poetic progress, by leaps and skips; 'tis an art, as Plato says, light, nimble, demoniac. . . . 'Tis the intelligent reader who loses the subject and not I; there will always be found some word or other in a corner that is to the purpose, though it lie very close. I ramble indiscreetly and tumultuously; my style and my wit wander at the same rate. . . . A thousand poets flag and languish after a prosaic manner; but the best old prose (and I strew it here up and down, indifferently for verse) shines throughout with the lustre, vigour, and boldness of poetry, and not without some air of its fury.

In what always seems to me to be his instinctive conservatism, though I can conceive of any reader—with an eye upon our human love of torture as the best of all arguments—regarding it as a perfectly legitimate and proper caution, Montaigne defends the supreme Miracles of our Faith as outside the realm of discussion; but when it comes to the lesser miracles, miracles not mentioned in the Apostles' Creed, he is the opposite of credulous. He is indeed heavily and obstinately sluggish of belief.

> To this very hour, all these miracles and strange events have concealed themselves from me; I have never seen a greater monster or miracle in the world than myself.

Well, upon this "miracle," Montaigne certainly fixed the chief love, interest, delight, curiosity, and solicitude of his well-spent days.

There are many kinds of Narcissism in the world and it is possible to be an intense *self-lover* without being anything of a self-admirer or having the least personal vanity.

Montaigne undoubtedly must have stared long and tenderly at his "grizzled face," as he calls it, in the mirror, but he felt towards every detail of his appearance as those really devoted lovers do who derive a voluptuous joy from the very defects of the loved object.

Indeed, I regard it as one of his most endearing as well as one of the wisest of his characteristics that his sturdy egoism was not easily to be disturbed by a pretty face. If he himself was no great beau, though his portraits *are* better-looking than his idea of himself, it is hard to imagine Mademoiselle Francoise as a very provocative belle; and I have an inkling that the learned Etienne de la Boetie was an excessively plain youth.

But plain or not, he was to his friend that sacred miracle, a really kindred spirit, and as such Montaigne was ready to risk cracking his "shell of a tortoise," risk being dragged from his circular tower, risk forgetting his habits, customs, ways, observances; in a word, risk losing himself.

And he was richly rewarded for this act of daring; for so completely was this cautious solid, thoughtful, young student his *alter ego*, that he became, from loving him, twice as much himself as he was before.

But it is clear that neither his wife Françoise nor his daughter Eleonora—and I doubt that it was really different with Mademoiselle Le Jars de Gournay—had the power to make him "risk all for love" as he did in the case of his masculine friend.

> Wives, children, and goods [he says calmly in the Essay "Of Solitude"] must be had, and especially health, by him that can get it; but we are not so to set our hearts upon them that our

> happiness must have its dependence upon them; we must reserve a back-shop, wholly our own and entirely free, wherein to settle our true liberty, our principal solitude and retreat. And in this we must for the most part entertain ourselves with ourselves, and so privately that no exotic knowledge or communication be admitted there; there to laugh and to talk as if without wife, children, goods, train, or attendance, to the end that when it shall fall out that we must love any or all of these, it may be no new thing to be without them.

With our inquisitive modern presumption and our mania for facile pathological catch-words, the temptation, as I have hinted, to find a homosexual element in Montaigne's feeling for his friend is hard to resist. Our tendency is to think that only an urge of that kind could explain this intensity of emotion in so balanced a gentleman.

But the long and minute account of La Boetie's death which the Essayist writes to the elder Montaigne to my mind disposes of this completely. The relations between La Boetie and his wife—his pet name for her was "my Image"—were clearly much more intimate than those between our author and his Françoise; and, indeed, were of a kind to render the supposition to which I have referred wholly inconceivable.

And this letter to his father, whom, second to his dead friend, Montaigne loved best in the world, is of the most revealing interest in connection with the high, grave, moral, classical key in which this famous friendship was pitched. It was a friendship of passionate intellectual reciprocity, a friendship that strikes us at its close, judging from the atmosphere of the final scene and La Boetie's constant use of Latin, as tuned to the dignity of a Roman deathbed.

The loss of La Boetie was the most disturbing event in the Essayist's whole life; and the pathetic reality of the

man's death, in these lines to his father, reach us still across the centuries with a vivid poignance.

A terrible sense of nothingness seems to have disturbed the grave young philosopher at the last.

> At this stage [says our author] he proceeded, among other things, to pray me again and again, in a most affectionate manner, to give him a place; so that I was apprehensive that his reason might be impaired . . . but he redoubled his outcry, saying, "My brother, my brother! dost thou then refuse to give me a place?" insomuch that he constrained me to demonstrate to him that, as he breathed and spoke, and had his physical being, therefore he had his place. "Yes, yes," he responded, "I have; but it is not that which I need; and besides, when all is said, I have no longer any existence." "God," I replied, "will grant you a better one soon." "Would it were now, my brother," was his answer.

One thing is certainly clear about Montaigne's attitude to these Essays of his. It was—considering the extravagant extremes of feeling into which most writers fall about their work—incredibly cautious, guarded, and shrewd.

> Were these Essays of mine [he writes in the one entitled "Vain Subtleties"] considerable enough to deserve a critical judgment, it might then, I think, fall out that they would not much take with common and vulgar capacities, nor be very acceptable to the singular and excellent sort of men; the first would not understand them enough, and the last too much; and so they may hover in the middle region.

After reading this it is pleasant to be in a position to remind ourselves that among the intellects in this "middle region" who exploited his wisdom to the limit, such names as Shakespeare and Voltaire are to be found. I believe, as I have hinted, that Montaigne's Essays are more adapted—by reason of the particular nature of their philosophy—to middle age than to youth. Certainly I am enjoying them now to an extent I have never done

at any earlier period of my life; and yet, according to Montaigne's own estimate of these things, I am more than forty years declined from the zenith of my intelligence!

Most curious indeed is the great Essayist's idea of when old age begins: he writes of himself at forty as if he were sixty, and at fifty as if he were eighty! And listen to this:

> For my part, I believe our souls are adult at twenty as much as they are ever like to be and as capable then as ever. A soul that has not by that time given evident earnest of its force and virtue will never after come to proof. The natural qualities and virtues produce what they have of vigorous and fine within that term or never.

Montaigne didn't live to read *Don Quixote*; but it does show, I think, a very serious lacuna in his imaginative power, if in nothing else, that he could dismiss Rabelais in so casual a manner.

> Among books [he says] that are simply pleasant of the moderns, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Rabelais, and the *Basia* of Johannes, Secundus, if those may be ranged under the title, are worth reading for amusement.

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, the editor of my brother's huge edition of the Cotton translation, privately printed for the Navarre Society, remarks very pertinently upon this astonishing lapse:

> From the uncritical manner in which Montaigne has placed in juxtaposition three books so disproportionate and incongruous, it is almost to be inferred that he had not attentively considered any of them, and that, as to Rabelais, he merely knew him from the common report, that he was a facetious and agreeable writer. His alleged occult moral would hardly have been revealed to Montaigne, and by his obscenity the latter would not have been gravely scandalized.

Putting aside his classical anecdotes, which far outnumber the rest, what we cannot help noticing in the

occurrences that strike him most shrewdly in his own day is their kinship to the kind of grotesque, exceptional, and gross playfulness of Nature that would appeal to the interest of a not very squeamish rustic. They have, in fact, these objects of our sage's curiosity; I will not say the shockingness of the "freaks" at which we gape, in our bucolic wonder, among the booths of a country fair, but certainly a good deal of that physical repulsiveness from which Goethe, for example, or Emerson, or even Nietzsche, would avert their eyes, and, if they could, their mind and memory.

Close to the capacious breast of the daedal earth, undismayed by the spawning irrationality and monstrous shamelessness with which she pours forth her freaks and abortions from her multitudinous womb, Montaigne was certainly blest with nerves as tough and with curiosity as vivid as any notable jester who, as Rabelais would say, has ever drunk neat and eaten salt meat.

He whose piety consisted in keeping God "and His Holy Word" safe out of reach of our logical presumption had a stomach that was not easily turned by the obscene and pitiful curiosities that fall now and again from the Hand of the Potter. He may have been no expert at hunting, but he certainly had, as Pater's young Gaston discovered, a most primitive and earth-bound affiliation with the habits and instincts of what we call "the lower animals," domestic or otherwise.

How feelingly he describes his games with his cat, who doubtless, as he says, fancied *she* was playing with him and not *he* with her, and whose conception of Providence would have taken, we may presume to add, a form still further removed than even his own from the proud features limned by human reason!

But it isn't his love of freaks, it isn't his sympathy with

animals, it isn't even his loathing of the cruelties of fanatics, that has made the Essays such a creative force in the direction of the life of a humanity as yet unborn. It is his love of himself. When one turns the calm gaze of what might be called humanity's unsanctified *common sense* upon the world spread out before us to-day, with its bombings and shootings and murderous "ideologies" and its ferocious hatred of all unregimented, unhypnotized free souls, it begins to appear as if Montaigne's sensuous-psychic *love of himself* and obstinate concern with himself were quite possibly going to prove the chief oracular word for the next great psychological reaction.

Dante put this self-centred type of person in Hell, along with a group of Montaignesque angels, who were neither "for God" nor "for the enemies of God" but *were for themselves*; and the great Erasmus would have suffered the same doom; and so most certainly would Walt Whitman, who refused to "take off his hat" to any spiritual authority or to find any sweeter flesh "than stuck to his own bones."

But the whole issue, raised thus boldly by Montaigne, goes deeper and further than almost any other human problem; and in estimating exactly to what this self-love, about which he makes such a clatter, really amounts, we must remember that egoism *à la Montaigne* is prepared to give to others all the privileges it claims for itself. His father brought him up to be able to rough it with working-people and to rate all his advantages of wealth and birth as a mere accident of chance. He needed no one to teach him to be hostile to every sort of cruelty, hostile above all to the exercise of violence and torture where private opinions, whether religious or moral or political, were concerned.

That he was so opposed to innovation did not mean

that he was blind to the unfairness of old customs; it only meant that he saw so many innovators become tyrants and so many innovations do more harm than good, that it seemed to him that the path of prudence, both in religion and politics, was "to let sleeping dogs lie."

Against this, if you jerk the hands of Time's clock forward a little and imagine Montaigne, with his shrewd merchant-squire sympathies, confronted by a starving people, a frivolous aristocracy, and so extremely different a King from Henri Quatre, is it not likely that even *his* rooted conservatism would have moved in its socket?

But the point for us now is not what he would have done in another age but what he did in his own; and *that* was to trim his sails to the wind, to cut his coat to his cloth, and though not exactly to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, at least to keep his doors so wide open that if the hunt came in at the front the hare could slip out at the back. And all the while to "loafe and invite his soul," to stroke, pet, fondle, caress, and hug his identity, first for himself and then, in the Essays, for all of us who come after, so that, if we belong to that "middle region" not too stupid and not too subtle, our laudable and righteous egoism can get the comfort and support it needs.

For myself, who had managed in my skimble-skamble way to hug and cherish myself even before I read Montaigne—for Nature hesitates not to give us all a push in this direction—I think this whole question of the individual against State, Society, Government, Religion, is of the most sharp and stinging importance. My own private feeling, if under the aegis of a Mayor of Bordeaux I can gather up enough courage to express it, is that of all our political and economic theories the Anarchist one is the one that will eventually prevail.

If our descendants have any libraries left, circular or otherwise, from which to collect anecdotes of our day and age, surely there will be, as they study the murderousness of our present national spirit, a reversion to Montaigne's self-centred cult.

Will not that remote and happy age feel that in the wise selfishness of the individual rather than in the ferocious and fanatical unselfishness of the public-spirited, the will of Heaven is revealed?

How curious it is that in our multiple form as nations, states, and governments, we are so much less scrupulous and so much more merciless than as individuals! Is this solely for want of a World-Police? Or is it because *en masse* we are subject to the influence of the Devil, whereas as individuals we are subject to the influence of God?

But granting Montaigne's plea for this concentrated "living to oneself," as Hazlitt calls it, what tantalizes me as a travelling journeyman in this craft is the absence from the Essays—but I suppose I am demanding too much of that epoch—of the subtler undertones and overtones of our sensuous-psychic life. In his sturdy "skin for skin" encounters, in his unaffected humours, in his magnanimous indulgences, I confess I miss something very important, something that I might even contend is the most important of all! I speak of those obscure moods and intimations so feelingly described by Wordsworth, but not completely absent from earlier writers, where we come into contact with certain magical earth-memories such as I suspect are the experience of all men.

Now, although Montaigne is always describing the *conditions* of his happy ecstasies of self-love, I cannot say I find him very illuminating as to their sensuous-mental *contents*.

And surely upon the quality of what they contain, of magical and thrilling feelings, half at least of their worth depends. I would find it, I confess, somewhat hard to defend this cult of the "moi" against all the thunders of Religion and Government if it couldn't "supply us," as Walt Whitman would put it, with spiritual, imaginative, and intellectual emotion equal to those bestowed on us by Custom and by our service of State and Church.

I wonder if it can! In deep matters of this kind we have, I think, to consider the flickering across our mental landscape, like seagulls on the wing, of certain exceptional and unusual moods. After all, these *may* be more important than our ordinary ones.

For myself, for all my love of our secular family Bible, I note very clearly down at the bottom of my heart an irradicable tendency to admire Don Quixote, even though he never did anyone any good, a good deal more than I admire Montaigne, who has done us all so much good.

Now why is this? What we really need to help us clear up this nice point—perhaps the most delicate point in the whole of life's casuistry—is some tremendous modern Socrates, who would have the tolerance and the intelligence to analyse to the very bottom this inarticulate preference which we feel, at least which I feel, for the glow experienced when we read *Don Quixote* over the glow experienced when we fortify ourselves in our wise and humble egoism by reading the Essays!

But then Don Quixote is himself, as was Jesus Christ the most reckless of Anarchists. When he set the galley-slaves free he was certainly on the opposite side from all Religious and all Governments; and it is difficult to imagine how a community of tolerant Montaignes, contemplating the world from their libraries, could uphold the freedom of the soul without the help of a few desperate

knights-errant. Or, alas, even *with* their help, unless some of them were shrewder in their valour than the Knight of the Rueful Countenance.

The truth is, this whole question of the amount of time, energy, and concentration we are justified in spending on "living to ourselves" is a very proper subject for one of those Platonic Dialogues in which, question by question, Socrates leads us on, and in which the fluctuating *que sçais-je?* of the Socratic "ignorance" guards us from any cock-sure conclusion.

After all, it was only because, thanks to his thrifty father and to *his* thrifty father, Montaigne was a well-to-do gentleman that he was able to live as he did; and it is life itself that with most of us sees to it that this cult of the self and its sensations and ideas takes a place of due proportion.

What we get from Montaigne is really a series of hints, and they are as shrewd as any to be found in the whole history of human culture, as to the way to use this precious margin of our existence wherein we live to ourselves, and enjoy our Classics and our Classical Histories, our philosophers and our philosophizing, so as to be fuller, happier, riper, wiser, and more tolerant human beings.

His grand open secret—and it is a secret revealed to most of us only after the most troublesome mental disturbances and miseries—is the importance of starting "from the ground up" and never losing touch with the ground. The spiritual trick of lying back upon our ignorance, of accepting our limitations, of taking mentally, as well as physically, the lower seats in the Synagogue, of ceasing to lie awake in the night repining about our sins, of creating a life-illusion of ourselves that shall follow the curves of all our weaknesses as the tide follows the hollows of its estuaries, is a trick not easily acquired.

Still harder is it to us to overcome that undue pressure of the race-conscience which makes us afraid of hugging ourselves to ourselves, in all our deformity, against the background of the Cosmos, lest the jealousy of the gods smite us with a thunder-bolt.

Every living creature has a divine right, as Goethe says, to those special and peculiar pleasures, uninjurious to its fellows, which its unique temperament *must* have, if it is to bear up under the common burden with any spontaneous resilience; and if for us the greatest of such pleasures is to make a cult of the half-mental, half-physical sensations that solitude invites, even as the windrow between sea and sand invites the gulls, the reading of Montaigne will certainly assist in keeping clear from conscientious invasion that narrow strip of spiritual independence which, just because it is free to all, can be made more entirely our own than anything else in the world.

WORDSWORTH

MORE criticial energy has been lavished on Wordsworth than upon any other modern poet. And yet how clear it is that nothing approaching the final word about him has yet been said!

No one is to blame for this but himself. His work is like the multifarious impressions, the sluggish half-physical thoughts, the monotonous unappealing objects, together with the transporting thoughts and the divinely magical objects, of which any of us might grow aware during a long tiring walking-tour through town and country.

There is something hard and tough, cold and self-centred, at the core of the man's nature, something isolated, selfish, and stiff, the sort of thing we are accustomed to call "unsympathetic," something that would make a neighbour say to himself as he heard that cottage-door close, or that drive-gate click, "There goes Mr. Wordsworth, off for one of his walks. I don't think I'll bother him to-day."

Stirred to the depths by the French Revolution, a natural emotion that was, as we now grow weary of being reminded, intensified by a still more natural emotion, his passion for a French girl, it is plain enough that at bottom Wordsworth was a born and instinctive conservative.

Browning's well-known arraignment of him is patently unfair—there are plenty of "handfuls of silver" to be got in the opposite camp, and "ribbons to stick in our coats"

too! There is indeed abroad at the present hour a curious conscientious fear of not being on the side of Progress and of being caught with old-fashioned moral prejudices, that makes many a timid, well-meaning soul hide his natural god-fearing simplicity as uneasily as if it were an anarchist's bomb.

And if to our Radical nerves there is something infuriating about what we feel to be his stupid piety, tedious morality, irrational optimism, to our equally tense mediaeval-reaction nerves his idealism seems easy, obvious, vague, windy, lacking aesthetic subtlety, lacking that desperate "I believe because it *is* impossible," which has so strong an appeal to our recondite perversities.

Ah! Browning, Browning, if your psychological insight had been a little deeper you would have had the wit to see that thanking God for Legacies and Controllorships and Poet Laureateships is not the only hypocrisy in the world, any more than the composing of Ecclesiastical Sonnets, and Sonnets advocating Capital Punishment, are the only literary crimes.

The way to get at the earth-rooted rock-bottom of Wordsworth's best poetry is to analyse the nature of his particular kind of simplicity.

We have our "simple" poets on both sides of the Atlantic, such as A. E. Housman and Robert Frost, but how sophisticated, how premeditated, these poets' artlessness is, compared with Wordsworth's when he was really driven to let himself go! It was in him to be spontaneously grandiose and diffuse and rhetorical, just as it was in him to elaborate the most complicated and metaphysical reasons for being puerile and dull; but when the breath of the spirit touched him, and that emotion "remembered in tranquillity" was stirred within him, his simplicity is like the water of life flowing from the eternal hills! It

is not only "simple"; it is majestic, inevitable, unalterable. It has the magical directness of the gods of the early world talking to another from mountain to mountain, in the silence before the dawn.

To reach the essence of a great poet's work it is necessary to consider his physical nature, his normal character, his average being, independently of his peculiar type of intellect and imagination.

Wordsworth had a solid weight of healthy physical being. He had, too, a solid weight of stubborn, obstinate, massive character, that, like the cloud to which he compares his reserved old leech-gatherer, "moveth altogether if it moves at all."

The neurotic, the quick-witted, the morbidly sensitized temperament with which we are only too familiar to-day, as the dominant stuff out of which genius is made, how is it possible for such electric waywardness to do justice to the massive single-hearted impulses of a poet as normal, as tough, as unconciliatory in his conservatism, as Wordsworth?

But just as the great winds of night and day can make a more majestic music when they bend the branches of a rock-rooted Scotch fir than when they rustle the foliage of poplars or willows, so, when the Spirit does take hold of this man and his sluggish nature vibrates under its touch, we get an inspiration beyond all beauty of artifice or even of art; and the winds and the waves and the water-brooks respond to what is akin to them in ourselves.

It goes deeply against the grain with me to listen to glib aspersions upon what is called the "optimism" of Wordsworth. However much you may sympathize with attacks upon his tedious old-fashioned piety, it would seem that a man who regarded suffering as a deeper and more perdurable thing than pleasure is a somewhat grim

and austere optimist. You might as well call Dante an optimist! I do not know any writer except Hardy who indicates more tenaciously and with a sterner hand what you might call the "bend-sinister" of the boughs of the tree of life, and the contortion of rigid endurance that binds animate and inanimate together, in the long travail of the world.

For good or evil Wordsworth regarded the business of being a poet as something very different from the composition of "pretty pieces of paganism." He set out to convey in poetry a philosophy of human happiness that was of necessity a philosophy of human endurance; and he deliberately based it upon the senses. From the senses came all those overtones and undertones that transported him so constantly to that region, to that dimension rather, where we feel the presence of the Something else, the "Something far more deeply interfused" that lies "too deep for tears," too deep for words, too deep for reason.

It was Shelley, I believe, who said that in Wordsworth *the senses think.* And this is true. But they not only think, they become ministers of grace in the sternest endurances of the spirit. This is where Wordsworth is indeed unique among poets.

In Keats, the magical and immortal loveliness of Nature where "youth grows pale and spectre thin and dies, where but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs," is *contrasted* with the tragedy of human life; whereas in Wordsworth there are always the simpler, austerer, lonelier presences of Nature which, like a shadow on a wayside stone, or a raven crossing a mountain chasm, or the cuckoo's cry "breaking the silence of the seas," or a twisted thorn on a desolate moor, or a tuft of feathered grass stirred by the wind upon a ruined wall, blend themselves with the refusal of the stoical heart to abate

one jot of resolution and independence under the shocks of untoward fortune.

It is not necessary to journey to the Lake Country, where he was born and lived, to catch the essence of his revelation. Many of his most characteristic poems were written elsewhere. Wherever a wave breaks or a wind blows, wherever the sun rises or sets, wherever a highway crosses an upland unto the wide unknown, wherever the moonlight falls on the works of men's hands, wherever a roadside ditch reveals a flowering weed, or the smoke mounts from a human hearth, or a girl sings at her work, or a child "leaps up on his mother's arm," or "a single field, of many, one" arrests us with its mysterious shock of obscure memory, the spirit of Wordsworth's poetry abides.

What he communicates is deeper than the potency of the picturesque, or even, in the ordinary sense, of the beautiful. It is of those mysterious feelings that come to us all now and then, and lift us out of ourselves and out of our sorrows, with vague intimations of something in the mere experience of life, beyond luck, beyond ill-luck, that his poetry keeps hinting; and it is for this reason that he is at his best in writing of the very old and the very young. What he is for ever fumbling and groping towards is nothing less than what, in another medium, is the main preoccupation of Proust's convoluted prose, the secret of existence caught, so to speak, on the wing among the most casual, accidental, and fleeting of our sense-impressions. The fever of the world, rather than any suffering or loss, is what dulls our inner sense to these rare feelings; and though to make much of them no leisured detachment from the burden and the heat of the day is required, they do seem to arrive most naturally to the especial sensibility of feminine youth and masculine old age.

Certainly with Wordsworth—and this is deeply involved with his peculiar temperament—it is from the brooding receptivity of girlhood and from the outward-gazing contemplation of aged men, that the most powerful elements in his inspiration are drawn.

On the other hand, no poet has written as poignantly as he has done of the tragic intensity of the maternal passion. "Women labouring of child" and women with infants at the breast play a part in his poems second only to that of young girls and old men; and the noticeable thing is that in all these cases it is upon what one might call *the passive state of being* rather than upon any state of action that the emphasis is of necessity laid.

Clever analytical natures, as well as those in whose existence the aesthetic element dominates, will never be naturally attracted to Wordsworth; for the whole drift of his poetry concerns those simple but fleeting and mysterious sensations that are beyond analysis and have to do with the normal continuity of ordinary life.

One might, indeed, say that the abiding subject of Wordsworth's poetry is the most difficult of all subjects, as well as the most important; for it is nothing less than an attempt to put into words those obscure feelings of half-physical, half-mystic happiness that come to all of us in ordinary life, and come from quite casual impressions, and yet when they come sweep us away into strange vistas of unearthly exultation.

And the miracle is that whenever he does succeed in catching these vague, subtle, fleeting feelings, his language takes on a magical directness, an unaccommodating austerity, a simplicity like that of polished pebbles under moonlit water. What we must remember is that the same honesty, the same grave realism, the same absence of the affected or the artificial, that accounts for his

grandest poetical effects, also accounts for those things in his work that strike the un-Wordsworthian mind as dull, puerile, ridiculous, grotesque, and idiotic. What really confronts us in Wordsworth is a strong, hard, self-centred, unsociable temperament that has the power of responding to the inanimate and the elemental as if it were itself tough as a gnarled tree, hard as a weather-beaten stone, majestic in its inhuman aloofness as the motions of dawn and noon and night.

The way to get at his real value, his abiding quality, is not to draw back from the mass of moralistic tedium and ponderous sermonizing, but to wander over the surface of all this with a sensitized divining-rod; for through all of it runs, like an underground river, that startling intimacy with the voices and the silences of the inanimate that brings us close to the cosmic secret.

We need no unusual cleverness, no particular gift of taste, no especial luck in our chance-given abode, no favour from the gods in our fate-chosen companions, no exceptional power of mind or spirit, to saturate ourselves in Wordsworth's way of life. Surrounded by dullness, we can touch the eternal. Surrounded by the commonplace, we can feel the infinite. All that we need is a certain stoical self-centredness, a certain aloofness from the world, a certain sacred stupidity, a certain consecrated and crafty detachment from the lively interests of the hour, and a tendency, I might almost say, to share the sub-humanity of rocks and stones and trees, to watch the grass growing till we grow with it, the wayside stones waiting till we wait with them, to walk with the morning as with a companion, with the night as with a friend, to catch the pathos of the human generations from the rain on the roof, and the burden of the mystery that rounds it all from the wind that voyages past the threshold.

Yes, the thing to do with Wordsworth is simply to disregard his conventional virtue, his conventional piety, his ponderous moralizings, and to treat all these as a wholesome and reassuring proof that his inspiration, when it does arrive, is unique in its integrity; for with him it is not the premeditated originality of a poet trying hard to say something that has been never said before, but the voice—against the grain of his own conventionality—"of what was and is and is to come."

Every great genius makes use, either positively or negatively, of what might be called the defects of his character. It is for this reason that the faults of a man of genius are of the utmost interest and worthy of the closest scrutiny. Now Wordsworth's most obvious fault is a certain hard, stupid, wooden imperviousness implying a lack of porous human sympathy. But when one comes to analyse this limitation down to the depths one finds that it is this very hardness, as though some nervous fibre in him had turned into stone, that helps him to give a clear, pure echo to the overtones and undertones of the sense-feelings of the generations.

It is difficult enough for the individual to put aside the distractions of action so as to yield himself to the purer sensuous impressions of diurnal existence; but it is more difficult still to put aside, along with the distractions of action, those personal, emotional, subjective reactions which prevent us from being a perfectly detached medium for the primal feelings of life, as such feelings have been repeated for countless centuries.

Now it is the very hardness and imperviousness in this great poet's character that saved him from all those nervous susceptibilities, both physical and metaphysical, such as proved so deadly to his friend Coleridge. But it did more than that. It made it easy for him to echo back—as if

from the surface of a hard mountain rock—all those primeval murmurs of our normal responses to life, overtones of the universal senses of man, which the distractions of more sensitized individual nerves, as well as the obvious distractions of action, prevent our hearing. To isolate, in other words, "the still small voice" of the universal sense-feelings of the generations amid the uproar of the world it is necessary to be as tough as wood or as hard as stone.

But there is often brought against Wordsworth by people whose sense of humour is no more than a cheap awareness of the ludicrous, the charge of being outrageously ridiculous. This, among the critical wags of his own day, must have been the prevalent "clever" reaction to such curious poems as *Peter Bell*, *The Idiot Boy*, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, and even to *The Last of the Flock* and *The Thorn*; all of which are poems wherein a certain tragic intensity is combined with a grotesque childishness.

Now anyone who has known country life in England until it has grown into his bones knows that there is a grim bedrock humour there, such as might be called "the humour of the human skeleton," something which lurks in the very ground-element of rural intercourse, something which must inevitably strike a jocular outsider as grotesquely childish and a sensitive outsider as crazily repulsive.

The element I am thinking of is indeed the aesthetic inverse of that stark realism of the country which undoubtedly does have an aspect that is hard and pitiless, if not actually brutal and terrible.

As I have hinted above, the groundwork of Wordsworth's own psychology was the extreme opposite of the sentimental or the "artistic." It was essentially tough,

austere, stoical; possessing the terrible patience, under one's own *and others'* suffering, of old trees, old animals, old men and old women.

And what in these grotesque lyrical vignettes of tragic endurance attains its grandest utterance in poems like *Michael* and *Ruth* and *The Affliction of Margaret*, and in the noble verses about the aged Leech-gatherer, whose "head and feet," so bent he was, were "coming together in life's pilgrimage," finds a diffused and long-winded expression in those lengthy productions that only the real initiate in the Wordsworthian secret is able to get through. I refer to the *Prelude* and the *Excursion*, where the poet's own lumbering and egoistic evolution is revealed—not without a north-countryman's crafty reserve—in all its instinctive earth-bound sagacity, its integral debouchings, its tough and hard-sinewed piety.

Most poetry-lovers are content to enjoy Wordsworth's poetry, when from a purely *poetic* point of view it is at its best, as in *Intimations* and *Tintern Abbey*, and in so many of the Sonnets, and in such magical outbursts as the *Highland Reaper*; but my own feeling is that, quite apart from these grander heights, apart even from his cosmic intuitions with regard to the "Something far more deeply interfused," there can be discovered, scattered amid the incredible tedium, banality, and sheer silliness, of so much of his work, hints and suggestions towards a way of taking life which can prove of unspeakable value even to minds that are forced to reject with indignant aversion the traditional foundation of his old-fashioned piety.

To have made our senses not only *think* for us, but supply us with vistas of strange feeling, down which, like gossamer-galleons charged with the after-thoughts of a thousand generations, the long broodings of our race can drift, was no negligible achievement. It was to open

the door, it was to lift the sluice, it was to roll back the horizon a little further, for every child of man; so that without idealism or romanticism or any affectations or novelties of art, a simple unintellectual man or woman, however closely bound to the wheel of matter and the iron of circumstance, may catch sometimes from the least promising aspects of our earth-life and the least engaging aspects of the inanimate around us, a breath of what, if it is neither ecstasy nor hope, is at least a reciprocity of endurance. A plain man or woman, bearing up under a monotonous and weary existence, can get small comfort from being told "to live in the Beautiful, the Good and the True," but concealed beneath the weight of Wordsworth's too frequent tediousness lies a secret that can bring to such burdened spirits a startling and masterful release, a trick of tapping, in the response of our senses to life on its barest level, a well-spring of inscrutable strength, in the power of which—just as if, only a little way below our barest sense of being alive, there flowed, along its own mysterious channel-bed, an unfathomable stream of formidable life-force—our soul can dispense with what love and art and cleverness add to life, and can touch in its stripped and lonely integrity what might be called "the Thing in Itself," that primal energy of creation, of which the common inanimate and the common elements are the simplest embodiment, and in contact with which we grow aware of something in ourselves whose power of endurance is at once subhuman and superhuman.

The essence of Wordsworth's inmost teaching is totally apart from his traditional piety. It is a stoicism that draws its strength from forces outside humanity. It is a stoicism that endures as rocks and trees and plants and animals endure; but inasmuch as it is an inhuman stoicism, it endures as in the presence of something beyond the

categories of human thought. It endures, like the sleepless eye of the whole astronomical world, in a cosmic expectation as undisturbed by hope as it is untroubled by despair.

Casually turning the pages of any complete edition of Wordsworth's poems, the heart of even the most devoted adherent must often sink in weariness, if not in actual indignation. Never was there so much dullness, so much convention and tedium, so much sluggishness, so much uninspired wordiness.

Expurgated indeed he must be, unless you are a reader for whom it is enough if words rhyme; enough if some kind of a metre reminding us of poetry is kept going.

And, Heaven help us, it is an expurgation from the dull, not the indecent, that is required! "He who uttered nothing base" wrote the good Tennyson of him in fatuous praise. As if the most blasphemous scurrility would not be a relief after such heavy purity.

And yet for a reader who has once got on the track of the Wordsworthian secret no selection is really quite satisfying. In some queer way it seems a sort of homely reassurance against the kind of artistic premeditation and forced originality one has come so deeply to distrust that the man should remain so sublimely, so obstinately, so stupidly *natural*! The best way is to regard all this mass of pontifical meandering as the only soil, thick enough, heavy enough, weedy enough, clayey enough, *unconscious enough*, to produce the particular kind of enchanted root which the immortal gods called *Moly*, and which the Messenger gave to the much-enduring Odysseus, so that he might enjoy unbetrayed the perilous embraces of the daughter of the sun, and learn from her how to bear without losing heart "the still sad music" of the unnumbered nations of the dead, who shall see that sun no more.

MILTON

ONE wonders how many people there are who have it in them to be more thrilled by the poetry of Milton than by any other poetry in our language, but who for one reason and another have never made any real effort to do him justice?

I fancy there are more sensitive and receptive persons in this condition—a condition of *accidental* ignorance—than anyone would believe possible; and I fancy, too, that the chief cause why such people dodge, avoid, and instinctively sheer off any attempt to read for pure pleasure poems that I suppose most of them were forced into some acquaintance with at school, is an absurdly simple one, the fact that they link his genius with everything that has been most unpleasant to them in the Christian religion.

This feeling would not apply so much to Catholics; though I daresay *they* are tempted to regard the cruder elements of Milton's creed as a perfect example of the disastrous effect of heresy upon a noble mind.

Certainly it is astonishing what violent and scandalous lapses from any discreet tolerance of his orthodox opponents this great "combustible" heretic allows himself!

Not only Roman Catholics, but every brand of traditionalist, ritualist, sacramentalist, prelatist and sacerdotalist must feel in every line of Milton's work that they touch here their arch-enemy! And he *is* their arch-enemy. But on the other hand, he is certainly no favourite of rationalists. His position would be indeed rather like that of Spinoza, save that an unfortunate vein of rather gross materialism in him betrayed him now and then into a grotesque anthropomorphism.

But I suppose there are few congenital haters of ritualism in religion who have not been entertained by the ferocious iconoclasm of Milton's Limbo. It is not a retort in kind to Dante's treatment of heretics. It shows more easy-going contempt than inquisitorial mercilessness. But I will quote the passage, for it really is extraordinarily effective; and the desolate rondure and shivering convexity which he imagines to exist *at the back of the stellar world* is a wonderful locale for a Limbo of this sort. In this and in all future quotations I will use the Oxford edition taken from the old texts so that the reader can get the poet's own particular spelling.

> All th' unaccomplisht works of Natures hand
> Abortive, monstrous, or unkindly mixt,
> Dissolv'd on earth, fleet hither, and in vain
> Till final dissolution, wander here;
>
> . . . . .
>
> Embryos, and Idiots, Eremits and Friers
> White, Black and Grey, with all thir trumperie.
> Here Pilgrims roam, that stray'd so farr to seek
> In Golgotha him dead, who lives in Heav'n:
> And they who to be sure of Paradise
> Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,
> Or in Franciscan think to pass disguis'd;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And now Saint Peter at Heaven's Wicket seems
> To wait them with his keys, and now at foot
> Of Heav'ns ascent they lift their feet, when lo
> A violent cross wind from either coast
> Blows them transverse ten thousand leagues awry
> Into the devious air; then might ye see
> Cowles, Hoods and Habits with their wearers tost
> And fluttered into Raggs, then Reliques, Beads,
> Indulgences, Dispenses, Pardons, Bulls,
> The sport of Winds: all these upwhirl'd aloft
> Fly o're the backside of the world . . .

But it is undoubtedly because the word "Milton," instead of reminding us, as perhaps it ought, of his lovely early poems, or even of his "Titan angels, Gabriel, Abdiel," calls up a harsh and unsympathetic theology, which it is distressing to think our ancestors accepted, that so many of us sheer off. It is almost as if there were some sinister kind of bruise at the back of our inherited consciousness upon which the particular tone he adopts seems to press with painful severity.

All this may be, and I think in a large measure it is, unfair to him. The "sublime notion and high mystery" of the "sun-clad" Chastity he praises in *Comus* is much more a Platonic than a Puritan attribute, and the infant Christ-god of the *Nativity Hymn* is celebrated in a mythological rather than a scriptural manner. But the fact remains that what our humanity, our civilization, our life has suffered, both in Great Britain and in the United States, from Puritanism has left such a deep hurt, that, as the paramount puritan poet, Milton pays the penalty.

Devoted readers of Milton however cannot, it is clear, dismiss the whole subject of his religion with the weary sigh with which we dismiss the cruder and more repulsive aspects of the creed of our Protestant ancestors. An intelligence as powerful, a genius as commanding as his, must, we feel, have had some inner light to live by, true enough, real enough, inspired enough to feed his deeper soul, and not as incommunicable to us, or as totally unacceptable by us, in our present perplexities, as are those grosser aspects of the puritan creed.

One thing stands out clearly enough. Both Milton's personal temperament—something proud, cold, and translunar in the noblest part of his nature—and his indignant vision of the evil in the world, militated against his stressing that tender love of the Father of which Jesus

speaks. Nor did the orthodox doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption mean very much to him. He was, to speak plainly, what Panurge would call "a resolute formal Heretic, a rooted and combustible Heretic."

But though his solitary pride and his ungullible recognition of the prosperity of evil rendered him cold to the doctrine of God's fatherly love, he did, one feels, from the very bottom of his soul *believe in God.* But the God he believed in, and held by heroically to the very last, was never the God of Jesus nor of Paul nor of John. He was the God of Milton; and in many respects resembles Allah rather than Jehovah. Where, however, he differs from both Allah and Jehovah is that while remaining a "God of Hosts," never quite forgetful of his lonely champions in a world given over to Baal and Dagon, he is also the great ultimate Spirit of life, the Creator Spiritus, the nameless, mysterious eternal Tao behind the whole astronomical universe.

But as with many another solitary God-fearing sage, this high, cold, heroic, inhuman faith in the First Cause is not a faith calculated to be popular with normal men and women.

Another obstacle, if I am not mistaken, to the pure pleasure that *can* be derived from his poetry springs from its inherent nature, from the subtle and recondite character of the particular harmonies he creates. But what poetry can be called superior to Milton's at his best? Simply as a poetical artist, overcoming, in a way that seems as miraculous as it is beyond all imitation, the obstinate resistance of words, his only rivals on our tongue are Keats and Shakespeare.

When it comes to descriptions of Nature, to what Matthew Arnold so aptly calls *natural magic,* Keats is at the top of all. Even Shakespeare cannot equal him.

There is a rich vegetative intricately-flowing life-sap in the slow cadences of his music. The evening rains soften his rhymes and his words melt into the dew of the morning. They cease to be words. They become odours and touches and tastes. They become presences felt through the pores of the skin and upon the palate of the mouth. The flowing of his syllables conveys the very life of green-growing things, the hush, the inheld breath, the atmosphere around them, the ineffable bloom upon them, the long patience of their "cool-rooted" vigils.

The quivering expectances of his forest trees, "branch-charmed by the earnest stars," the "embalm'd darkness" of his "verdurous glooms," holds a magic that even Shakespeare cannot invoke. Passages like the latter's—

> O Proserpina!
> For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
> From Dis's waggon: daffodils,
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; . . .

have a lighter, airier, freer, more dramatic, more ballad-like freshness, but they are surpassed by the younger poet's power of communicating to us what the shy indwelling Genius of each of these living things *actually feels itself* in its leafy seclusion as the wandering airs caress its sap-warmed growth. The great dramatist, in his reckless and arbitrary inspirations, and his wanton Elizabethan fantasy, will fling off his classical allusions and snatch his easy human metaphors, and then must needs on with the passions of his tale; and thus his

> . . . violets dim
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> Bright Phoebus in his strength—a malady
> Most incident to maids;

do not measure up, lovely as they are, to Keats's

> Fast-fading violets, covered-up in leaves.

For the particular feelings evoked in us by winter and spring, Shakespeare, I admit, comes very near to him; but for the peculiar sensations of autumn, for that rich-swooning indescribable hush, for instance, when

> . . . in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
> Among the river sallows, borne aloft
> Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies.

I think Keats leaves him some distance behind.

But this kind of earth-brooding realism, this rare sensitivity to natural magic, is not the only form great poetry can take; and Milton in his own special sphere is as unsurpassed as Shakespeare and Keats in theirs.

And what is his special sphere? Alas! it is only in the first two books of *Paradise Lost* that we learn what it is; and here all poets except Homer take a second place. It is the invention of what you can only call *cosmic scenery*, and it is the peopling of these huge and monstrous regions with superhuman presences, awe-inspiring and terrific as their boundless background. Michelangelo had something of this power. It is a totally different thing from what Dante did. It requires a *larger* imagination than Dante's but a much less intellectual one, and apparently one with less power of being protracted and drawn out.

But over this latter point one hesitates! Dante certainly *seems* to have more unwearied creative intensity, as he certainly has more architectural realism; but, after all, Dante's invention lacks the enormous horizons of Milton's, and his more philosophical scholasticism saved him from the appalling handicap of Milton's anthropomorphic theology. On the other hand, the *terza rima* of the Italian could never in its inherent nature carry its rider across

the "wasteful deep" with those cumulative soarings and sinkings, those condor-winged hoverings and towerings of the Miltonic Pegasus.

Nor had Dante—though he had a good deal—as much power of conjuring up, by the thaumaturgic *names* of mythic-historic persons and places, such vistas of old romance as Milton possessed.

Let us cling to the wings of Lucifer in two of his flights—

> . . . som times
> He scours the right hand coast, som times the left.
> Now shaves with level wing the Deep, then soares
> Up to the fiery concave towering high.
> As when farr off at Sea a fleet descri'd
> Hangs in the clouds, by Aquinoctial Wind
> Close sailing from Bengala, or the Iles
> Of Ternate and Tidore, whence Merchants bring
> This spicie drugs; they on the trading flood
> Through the wide Ethiopian to Cape
> Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . all unawares
> Fluttering his pennons vain plumb down he drops
> Ten thousand fadom deep, and to this hour
> Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
> The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud
> Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him
> As many miles aloft; that furie stay'd
> Quench't in a boggie Syrtis, neither Sea
> Nor good dry Land; nigh foundered on he fares
> Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,
> Half flying: behoves him now both Oare and Saile.

The truth is, Milton's technique is such that although there is never the least obscurity in what he writes or any doubt about his meaning, the secret of his style is so recondite, so remote, so unusual that it requires a different ear from that

which most of us possess before its supreme quality can have justice done to it.

This supreme quality lies undoubtedly in a far-reaching complicated harmony, which displays itself to fullest advantage in long organ-diapasons and vast aerial flights, but which *can* concentrate itself with surprising artfulness in short lines and short poems.

No poet who has ever lived, not Homer or Dante or any other, has such genius for suggesting unlimited horizons, horizons either in space or in time; and the curious thing is that he can create the *effect* of such unlimited horizons in what you might call the reverberating echoes of lines that in themselves are brief, concise, laconic. This is an inspired trick of his, and one that must always return upon the ear of a poetic connoisseur with a fresh and startling thrill. He changes his style consciously and deliberately as he grows older; and it is curious to note what elements of harmony are preserved from beginning to end and what are deliberately dropped.

Let me set down a specimen of his earliest religious-mythological poetry and of his latest.

From the *Nativity Hymn*

> Such Musick (as 'tis said)
> Before was never made.
> But when of old the sons of morning sung,
> While the Creator Great
> His constellations set
> And the well-ballanc't world on hinges hung.
> And cast the dark foundations deep,
> And bid the weltring waves their oozy channel keep.

From *Samson Agonistes*

> But he though blind of sight
> Despised, and thought extinguish't quite,
> With inward eyes illuminated

His fierie vertue rouz'd
From under ashes into sudden flame
And as an ev'ning Dragon came
Assailant on the perched roosts,
And nests in order rang'd
Of tame villatic Fowl; but as an Eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on thir heads
So vertue giv'n for lost,
Deprest, and overthrown, as seem'd
Like that self-begotten bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay e're while a Holocaust
From out her ashie womb now teem'd
Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deem'd,
And though her body die, her fame survives
A secular bird ages of lives.

Since both these fragments contain rhyme and alliteration and assonance, it is interesting to note how, with the years of furious controversy intervening between them, the sound of their rhythm differs.

In both cases, and this alone suggests some special musical quality in them, you find your lips instinctively moving as you read; but this *silent reading aloud* is not the same. The first fragment has such an undulating, swinging, reef-bell rhythm that it calls for a monotonous chanting intonation, whereas the other lines are so full of artful turns and abrupt condensations of dramatic intensity, such as "cloudless thunder bolted on their heads," that it is hard not to imagine yourself some great Hebraic herald with the star of David upon your tabard as you declaim them.

But apart from the style of his poems, there is something about Milton's dominant tone that is so lonely, so defiant, so contemptuous of common opinion, so self-

absorbed and self-sufficing, that the reader has always to advance a considerable distance to meet him; whereas in the case of Shakespeare and Keats, *they*, so to speak, advance that same distance towards their reader.

Milton's ego is constantly narrowing, hardening, and intensifying itself *against* fate or chance or God or Satan or the Crowd or against Life or against Death; while Keats and Shakespeare are constantly resolving themselves into all these things and many more, losing their identities in what they contemplate, becoming what they write of, merging themselves in the huge pluralism of the world.

Milton stands away from humanity like some great pharos-tower mocking the huge sea with its search-light, whereas Keats and Shakespeare seem to slip out of the circle of all personal consciousness and to enjoy—as many of us *can* at various moments—a large diffusion of their individual being in response to the common glamour, the common romance, the common tragedy of life.

Milton's poetry tends when it is most characteristic to monumentalize itself into certain great negative gestures; the gestures, for example, of some planetary hero-God, Devil, or Poet, defying legions of stupid, contemptible, but implacable foes! Shakespeare's poetry, on the contrary, resembles the careless commentary of some vast impersonal Being, brooding on the ways of a world too pitiful to be damned, and too mad and wicked to be saved.

And unless we can identify ourselves with the negative heroism of the Miltonic superman, it is natural that we should find the many-sounding blessings and cursings of Shakespeare's multitudinous chorus easier to appropriate and to absorb.

Milton's poetry divides itself, as his life did, into his thoughts, feelings, and ideals *before* Cromwell's death, and his thoughts, feelings, and ideals *after* Cromwell's death.

Before the Civil War he was a late Elizabethan, a Platonic reformer, a Spenserian puritan, full of lyrical hope for the world. After the Civil War he was the blind Prophet of a lost cause, plunged in despair about the world, with nothing left but his proud individual conscience, his unconquerable faith in a God made after his own image, and his undefeated will.

The whole process was a process of tragic stiffening, of tragic hardening, of tragic narrowing down. In his earlier poems his interest radiates outwards in a passionate student's response to the loveliness of Nature, to the reformation of abuses, to pride in England as the protagonist of liberty, to the beauty of Diana-like girls and the culture of charming Rousseauish women.

During the Civil War and the Commonwealth he poured forth his savage hatred of secular and religious tyrants, his unbounded hopes for his country's greatness, his indignant revolt against legal customs that cripple the freedom of domestic happiness. His prose is more savage and chaotic than his poetry. He defends divorce. He defends freedom of thought and speech. He passionately defends the regicides.

But the Milton of the Restoration, when all he had struggled for was defeated, and when worldly and cynical wits were clipping the locks of his Samson-England and loosening the limbs of his Heroic Muse, is the Milton we know best, the Milton whose solitary and austere grandeur repels as much as it attracts, the Milton towards whom it is *we* who have to advance like Adam to meet Raphael, if we are to enter the ensorcerized terrain of his guarded mount.

Emotionally his life grew more and more tragic, though steadily calmer, steadily more stoical and resigned, as it advanced to its close.

And poetically it grew grander and sterner and always less compromising, until it culminated in the towering Phoenix-flight of the end of *Samson Agonistes*. It gives one a strange feeling to turn back to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* after following him to the end. These gay, "richly-dight," dainty fancies are like the flutings of some young Enceladus before the gods throw a mountain upon his head. "Doric delicacy," as the wise Provost of Eton said, could scarcely go further; but I feel confident that lovers of the rarer and scarcer elements in poetry will always prefer *Comus* and *Lycidas*. *Comus* is like an impassioned Nocturne upon the two Eleusinian secrets that in his youth interested him most; the "high mystery" of Chastity and the "high mystery" of Music.

There are cadencies in this poem, sounds melting into translunar silence, and silence precipitating itself into quick-silver drops of sound, that might almost be said, if you allowed the wings of Psyche to embrace the wings of Eros, to reach the pure plenilune of the Platonic vision. Anticipations of Shelley blend here with echoes of Spenser; but the fingers on the lute-strings of this Olympian Israfel are firmer, stronger, more deft and definite in their touch than either of those other platonists.

> At which I ceas't, and listened them a while
> Till an unusuall stop of sudden silence
> Gave respit to the drowsie frighted steeds
> That draw the litter of close-curtained sleep.
> At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
> Rose like a steam of rich distilled Perfumes
> And stole upon the Air, that even Silence
> Was took 'ere she was ware, and wist't she might
> Deny her nature, and be never more
> Still to be so displac't. I was all eare,
> And took in strains that might create a soul
> Under the ribs of Death . . .

But if *Comus* reaches forward and backward in its bewitched vistas of moonlit platonism to Shelley and Spenser, there are fairy-like touches that suggest Shakespeare's *Tempest* in lines like these

> . . . else O theevish Night
> Why shouldst thou, but for some fellonious end
> In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars
> That nature hung in Heav'n and filled their lamps
> With everlasting oil, to give due light
> To the misled and lonely traveller?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What might this be? A thousand fantasies
> Begin to throng into my memory
> Of calling shapes, and beckning shadows dire,
> And airy tongues that syllable mens names
> On Sands, and Shoars, and desert Wildernesses.

Every great poet suffers from certain congenital defects which, if not the fatal and inevitable "defects of his quality," are deep parts of his inherent character.

The worst defect, to my mind, in Milton is a certain incurable *materialism*. I use this word deliberately rather than the word "realism"; because both Shakespeare and Keats are extremely "realistic" without ever being in the remotest degree "materialistic."

But Milton is just that; and not seldom! It is a certain *heaviness* in the wings of his imagination, that, while it serves him to good purpose in his huge planetary flights, tends sometimes to brush away some impalpable petal-dust from the "purfléd" parterres of his Muse's Pleasance.

Indeed, so heavily do these great wings flap sometimes among the flower-beds of his Arcadia, that the frail *genii loci* are "with sighing sent" to more secluded retreats. In the beautiful lines I have just quoted, for instance, there lurks, in spite of their Shakespearean audacity, a touch of

this cruder handling. Let us put it plainly. It is in fact a tendency to fall plumb down into the grotesquely *prosaic*; and thus it is something totally different from those startlingly realistic words in Keats and Shakespeare which only enhance the poetical effect.

Consider the word "clammy," used by Keats in the *Ode to Autumn*:

> For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

How perfectly in harmony with the spirit of the hot, misty, wistfully-languorous weather he is describing is that allusion to the wax of the honeycomb!

But though Milton's "dark-lantern" has a Shakespearean ring, I confess to reluctng at the introduction of oil-lamps into the firmament. The word "everlasting" may have a certain biblical congruity with the word "oil," but surely the homely Shakespearean, "There's husbandry in Heaven: their candles are all out!" suggests those flickering points of stellar light more appropriately.

And I cannot resist the same sort of feeling about that expression, "gay wardrobe," applied to the flowers in *Lycidas*; and worse even than that—at least to my Celtic taste—is the passage describing the frugiferous feast offered by Eve to the angel in Eden, when the poet hastens to remind us that there was no danger of such a banquet growing "cold."

It is, I think, always in foreground descriptions that this curious element of prosaic materialism in Milton's fancy emerges. The moment his landscape broadens and expands, the wings of his imagination gather power. His spirit must have been for ever craving wider horizons than ordinary life gave him; and this very clumsiness may have sprung from this. Shakespeare's greater swiftness of imagery and bolder rush of metaphor carry off

a good deal that wouldn't bear the captious scrutiny of lumbering and literal pedantry, and it is true that Milton's incomparable music often serves him the same good turn; but even the music of such a line as "a thousand liveried angels lackey her," in the great passage in praise of chastity, only *just* saves us from this prosaic grotesqueness. The same quaint emphasis upon well-attired attendants—and even there I find it obnoxious—occurs in the *Nativity Hymn* in the passage about the bright-harnessed angels "in order serviceable."

Lovely as his praise of chastity in *Comus* is, it is, I think, not uncharacteristic of the heroic belligerency of his proud spirit that the *negative* side of the great duality should be emphasized, and that it should be rather the defeat of evil than the triumph of good that rings out in grandest blast.

> But evil on itself shall back recoil
> And mix no more with goodness, when at last
> Gather'd like scum, and settled to itself
> It shall be in eternal restless change
> Self-fed and self-consum'd, if this fail,
> The pillar'd firmament is rottenness
> And earths base built on stubble . . .

But it is in *Lycidas* where Milton is at his very best; and I shall have many sympathizers when I call this poem the loveliest in our language. Nor is its perfection—unequalled by any single Ode of Keats or by any single passage in Shakespeare—made less by the formidable outburst of wrath against the unworthy shepherds of the people.

And how curious to note that the finest rendering of one of the most characteristic marvels of our rocky coasts—the whirling revolutions of sea-gull flights around the precipitate cliffs—should appear in this most *unnaturalistic* of scholars, whom even the city-bred lexi-

cographer scolds for his lack of observation. I refer to the lines—

> And questioned every gust of rugged wings
> That blows from off each beaked promontory—

for this is surely as good—and in *their* special province too—as any "realism" of Keats or Shakespeare. *Lycidas* is so drenched in the magic of the ancient poets that for those among us who are ignorant of Greek and Latin it comes miraculously near to being an *adequate substitute* for the Classics, seducing us with the very accents of those siren tongues!

For inspired skill in conveying the evasive nuances of the fond, wistful, and yet even faintly-playful "second-thoughts" with which we soothe our sorrow after a death that touches us but doesn't touch too nearly, this poem is perfect. It conveys every lightest sigh and every long, long thought, and every shift of mood and every wayward fancy, under such a loss.

And it does this in so dulcet-delicate a way that the orchestral flow of the rhythm, as if "the wizard stream" herself were carrying the bard's voice, goes on unbroken to the end.

> Wher were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
> Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
> For neither were ye playing on the steep
> Where your old Bards the famous Druids lye
> Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high
> Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream!
> Ay me, I fondly dream!
> Had ye bin there—for what could that have don?
> What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
> The Muse herself for her enchanting son
> Whom Universal nature did lament,
> When by the rout that made the hideous roar
> His gory visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.

Am I not justified in finding in this passage the very genius of a master-grammarian; the poet's use, in fact—as a painter might use perspective and anatomy—of the most exquisite technical niceties, so that every vibration of his turns of thought should be revealed?

One can see here, too, how down to the very depths of his being Milton's nature, his whole habit of thought, was subjective, egoistic, fastidiously anti-social!

This image of Orpheus being hounded by blustering bacchanalians is one that occurs more than once; and what a depth of dislike for his fellow-creatures in their riotous moods does it display! For all his adamantine armour one detects "the lady of Christ's" in this nervous shrinking.

The truth is, Milton's life was a classical tragedy, and a tragedy attuned to Apollonion music in the true Nietzschean sense. Vain is it—vain as the waftures in his own Limbo—to wonder what poetry he would have written had he not been driven by fate to fight for liberty, religious, political, and personal. I doubt if it was only the war that kept him from his first projected theme, the epic upon King Arthur. War and love and the enchantments of Merlin would never altogether have satisfied him. He was a born rebel, a born reformer, an uncompromising individualist. No ideal-minded Spanish anarchist of the present hour believes more passionately than he in personal liberty, in the inevitable wickedness of kings and priests and governments.

I have confessed to my reaction against that peculiar vein in him which I have called "prosaic grotesqueness," but I am tempted to wonder whether the extraordinary effect—unlike anything else in literature—produced by the sardonic humour, ferocious wit, and colloquial inspiration of his controversial Sonnets, may not be due to

a hammer-blow materialism not unconnected with this offending element. And after all, there must be savage and malignant moods unsuitable to a great poem which can be used to excellent effect in the heat of controversy; moods, too, that beautifully lend themselves to what you might call the brutalities of scholarship.

The more curious of us will not have forgotten how in that fluent Latin of his which he must have written as easily as Conrad wrote English or Oscar Wilde wrote French, he twits his continental opponent in the most bawdy and brutal vein for a harmless sexual lapse, the sort of lapse of which it would be a singular comfort to the impartial historian to be in a position to accuse *him*! And though this personal hitting below the belt is anything but civilized, it is possible that the shameless downrightness of this defect is what gives something of their engaging quality to these colloquial sonnets. But it is more than that! Milton shows in these sonnets an ear for such original musical effects, reached through such crashing discords and sledge-hammer harshnesses, that the like of it will never be heard again. Poets have with more or less success imitated the style of Shakespeare's sonnets; but to imitate Milton's is much harder; and to imitate the ones in this sardonic-belligerent vein totally impossible. They are indeed a poetic *genre* quite by themselves, and a *genre* of extraordinary potency.

The mingling of ribald abuse with satanic pride, and both these things with a liberal Englishman's passion for self-restrained individualistic freedom, makes an amalgam that leaves a unique taste in the mouth.

> I did but prompt the age to quit their cloggs
> By the known rules of antient libertee
> When straight a barbarous noise environs me
> Of owles and Cuckoos, Asses, Apes and Doggs.

As when those Hinds that were transformed to Froggs
Raild at Latona's twin-born progenie
Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
And this is got by casting Pearls to Hoggs;
That bawle for freedom in their senceless mood,
And still revolt when truth would set them free.
Licence they mean when they cry libertie;
For who loves that, must first be wise and good;
But from that mark how far they roave we see
For all this wast of wealth, and loss of blood.

What a mystery *style* is! To *that* we are driven back again and again in reading Milton. You feel as though the very physical constitution of the man and all his little mortal habits embody themselves in the way he picks and chooses his words and balances his syllabic pauses and regressions! You feel that his custom of fencing so furiously for exercise, you feel that his tight, compact, slender, nimble, hard-fleshed figure, you feel that his delicately-tended locks, his brilliant early-doomed eyes, his inability to compose at his best save in the autumnal equinox, his mania for long lonely hours of organ-playing, you feel that his very custom of smoking a pipe of tobacco to make him sleep when his passion for old books, killed by his blindness, no longer could out-watch Hesperus and greet great Lucifer, are all, every one of them, part of the miracle of his style!

How many tags and shreds and echoes from these sonnets keep returning upon us!

Till the sad breaking of that Parlament
Broke him, as that dishonest victory
At Choeronea, fatal to liberty
Kil'd with report that Old man eloquent.

. . . . . .

The great Emathian conqueror bid spare
The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower

Went to the ground: and the repeated air
Of sad Electra's Poet had the power
To save the Athenian walls from ruine bare!

. . . . . .

Men whose Life, Learning, Faith and pure intent
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul
Must now be named and printed Hereticks
By shallow Edwards and Scotch what d'ye call . . .

. . . . . .

Threatning to bind our soules with secular chaines;
Helpe us to save free Conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves whose Gospell is their maw.

. . . . . .

Nor to thir idle orbs doth sight appear
Of Sun or Moon or Starre throughout the year,
Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
Against heavn's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up, and steer
Right onward . . .

. . . . . .

. . . Why is it harder Sirs than Gordon,
Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp?
Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek
That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.
Thy age, like ours, O Soul of Sir John Cheek,
Hated not Learning wors than Toad or Asp;
When thou taught'st Cambridge and King Edward Greek.

But to come to *Paradise Lost*: how many plays of Shakespeare would we give in exchange for Milton's masterpiece? How many plays to make *Paradise Lost* kick the beam?

For myself, I would pile *Othello* on *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* on *Othello*, and the *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, *Coriolanus*, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard II*, *King John*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, on *Julius Caesar*, and add some half a dozen more on the top of those, before the vibrating Parnassian scales would hang level!

And yet the faults—"faults," do I say? the monstrous woolsacks of error, the gigantic ash-heaps of mountainous perversions, to be discovered in this heroic work, are more dumbfounding than those in any other poem of equal magnitude.

But think of the hugeness of excellence that is here to outweigh these equally huge blemishes! I would certainly say that the first Two Books, including the address to Light in the first page of the Third Book, contain what—even if you took it as a disconnected fragment—is a mass of poetry superior to anything *of the same unbroken continuity of length* in Shakespeare, or Dante, or Virgil, or Aeschylus, or in all the poetry in the world except Homer.

But with the close of the Prelude to the Third Book, with the close of the lines:

> . . . all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.

This unequalled continuity of supremely great poetry suffers a collapse into something so inferior that the change can be hardly endured.

From the words I have just quoted down to the words "nor from thy Father's praise disjoine," it is no longer a great poet speaking, though it is the voice of a formidable enough man.

But beginning with his sardonic description of Limbo, Milton recovers his mastery again, and all through the Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Books remains worthy of himself, though not, I think, nearly equal to what he was in those first two books. In fact, do what we can to pretend otherwise—and many of us long to do it as ardently as we long to uphold the character of our own parents—the remaining bulk of the poem is *not* on the

same level as the incomparable opening; and though the battle in heaven and the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, and Raphael's story of the creation are characteristically Miltonic, and contain passages of intermittent splendour, the unique sublimity of those earlier pages has created a taste in us that remains unsatisfied to the end.

When Matthew Arnold declares that from start to finish in *Paradise Lost* Milton never sinks from the "grand style"—whereas Shakespeare frequently sinks from this proud level—he must be referring to the technical flawlessness of his long-flowing rhythms. But no flawlessness in rhythm, no unflagging mastery of syllabic and paragraphic sound, can lift and sustain a subject-matter that contains in its very essence something as unreal, as unnatural, and as unlovely as the dogmatic theology he was exploiting. It was indeed this miserable misfortune of having a theological in place of a *mythological* foundation to his scheme that lowered the key upon which he pitched those first two books. Nothing that even *his* genius could do—and what he did with such material is a wonder—could conjure the living and magical sap of poignant reality into the heavy and monstrous creed beneath whose weight, like Atlas holding the globe, his genius staggered.

And the unfortunate thing was that his worst weakness as a poet—that tendency towards a grotesquely prosaic materialism—was precisely the one of all others that would best lend itself to the theology that limed his wings and hampered his flight.

Take, for instance, this description of the Son of God leaving the bosom of his Father to wage war upon Lucifer. The Son himself is now speaking:

> But whom thou hat'st, I hate, and can put on
> Thy terrors, as I put thy mildness on.

Image of thee in all things; and shall soon
Arm'd with thy might rid heav'n of these rebell'd,
To their prepared ill Mansion driven down
To chains of Darkness and the undying Worm.
. . . . . .

He said, he o're his Sceptre bowing, rose
From the right hand of Glorie where he sate.

It is curious that so stout a Republican as Milton should make so much of God's regality as an oriental Potentate. Even in his touching sonnet upon his blindness we get the same thing: "His state is Kingly; thousands at His bidding . . ." And yet all the while one feels that what he really worshipped in his heart was not this "kingly" tyrant, but the great spirit "that from the first was present . . . brooding on the vast abyss."

The truth is, we need no reminder by William Blake that Milton, without knowing it, was on the side of Satan. The issue goes deeper than that; touches, indeed, the tragic heart of the old immemorial difference between the poetry of conquest and the poetry of the unconquerable endurance of defeat. Milton was on the side of Good, which in the only world we know is ever being defeated by Evil. But the theology he used implied the defeat of Evil by Good: and his incorrigible materialism drove him to give this defeat a palpable semblance. Thus the uttermost law of poetry and of life, namely, that to nobly endure defeat is more dignified, more beautiful, than to conquer with power and acclaim, rises up in the secret heart of every reader to thwart, distort, disparage, and even render a little ridiculous, this materialistic triumph of the Son of God over the despairing heroism of his antagonist.

Milton was not so much blindly fighting for Satan against God as he was deliberately and wilfully struggling against the profoundest law in the nature of poetic beauty,

namely, that the heroic endurance of defeat is more moving than the most resounding victory. Compare, for instance, our poet's description of the two hosts, the hosts of the victorious angels and the hosts of the lost angels.

Of the former we read :

> Messiah his triumphal Chariot turnd.
> To meet him all his Saints, who silent stood
> Eye witnesses of his Almightie Acts
> With Jubilee advanced ; and as they went,
> Shaded with branching Palme, each order bright
> Sung Triumph, and him sung Victorious King
> Son, Heire, and Lord, to him Dominion giv'n
> Worthiest to reign : he celebrated rode
> Triumphant through mid Heav'n, into the Courts
> And Temple of his mightie Father Thron'd
> On high ; who into Glorie him received,
> Where now he sits at the right hand of bliss.

But of the damned, of the devils, of the eternally defeated, of those who "cannot win," listen to the infinite wistfulness and grandeur of what he says :

> Others more milde,
> Retreated in a silent valley, sing
> With notes Angelical to many a harp
> Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
> By doom of Battel ; and complain that Fate
> Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.
> This song was partial, but the harmony
> (What could it less when Spirits immortal sing ?)
> Suspended Hell and took with ravishment
> The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet
> (For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense.)
> Others apart sat in a Hill retir'd
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Fore knowledge, Will, and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, free will, fore knowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
>
> . . . . . .

And while Hell becomes in this manner a much more civilized and sympathetic place than Heaven, others among these devils explore the infernal scenery, and far away through that deep Cimmerian twilight we catch the long roll of the familiar Homeric waves:

> . . . along the Banks
> Of four infernal Rivers that disgorge
> Into the burning Lake thir baleful streams;
> Abhorred Styx the flood of deadly hate,
> Sad Acheron of sorrow, black and deep;
> Cocytus, nam'd of lamentation loud
> Heard on the ruful stream; fierce Phlegeton
> Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.
> Farr off from these a slow and silent stream,
> Lethe the River of Oblivion roules
> Her watrie Labyrinth, whereof who drinks
> Forthwith his former state and being forgets,
> Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain.

I think you have to be a man who, like one of D. H. Lawrence's erotic desperadoes, can be idolatrously enamoured of his feminine companion and yet proudly and austerely independent of her, to do justice to the Miltonic Adam and Eve.

Everything in our particular generation—our undomesticated sophistication, our undersexed fastidiousness, our attraction to all the impotent and perverse sexual cults, our fanatical feminism alternating with our sadistic misogamy—unfits us from appreciating the simple and natural humanity of Milton's description of our first parents.

But as I read again of their dalliance, their pathetic arguments, their quarrels, their reconciliations, I confess I feel as much admiration and surprised wonder at the poet's insight as I feel inability to share his moral-amorous glorying in their portentous nakedness. Into his descrip-

tion of the verdant background to this ill-starred pair he throws all his rich, fanciful, sumptuous, but it must be confessed not very magical descriptive power. Tennyson declares that these "brooks of Eden mazily-murmuring" are his favourite portion of the poem, and though most of us will have been too "spoilt" by the more atmospheric, the more intimate, the more interpretative imagination of Keats and Shakespeare to share this opinion, we must admit that the poet's voluptuous picture of the Garden, with its rich Poussin-like formality and its roses "without thorns," is more poetical than anything he puts into his Archangel's mouth about the Creation of the World. We have, I feel, a real grievance against him that he did not invoke more of his grandest inspiration in regard to these creation passages. Personally, I would have reluctant most of all at the use of the *Golden Compasses* he speaks of, regarding them as a grotesque, hand-to-mouth excuse to escape the effort of spreading his eagle-wings and plunging again, as he did for Satan's sake, into

> . . . the vast immeasurable Abyss
> Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wilde,
> Up from the bottom turn'd by furious windes
> And surging waves, as Mountains to assault
> Heav'ns highth, and with the Center mix the Pole,

did there not come into my mind that terrific drawing of Blake's of the cosmic architect using just such instruments!

But it was the necessity that bound him, or that he resolved *should* bind him, of following, planetary day by planetary day, the precise words of the Bible that gave a predetermined *schedule* to his Vision such as would have totally ruined the inspiration of anyone else.

Most curious and profound has been the impression of the Miltonic Adam and Eve upon the imagination of the

English race. A queer atmosphere, made up in part of childish desire, in part of puritan suppression, in part of the vulgarest aspect of Anglo-Saxon humour, hangs about these fair and tragic figures.

There surged up, indeed, in Milton's own nature a strange blending of emotions, feelings, prejudices, when he came after an impassioned description of the beauty of their bower to describe their first nuptial embrace. He fully realized the dramatic and historic momentousness of this event, the first consummation of mortal love between man and woman on our tragic globe; and his first instinct as an insatiable lover of the old mythology is to tell us that Eve is—

> More lovely than Pandora, whom the Gods
> Endowed with all thir gifts, and O too like
> In sad event . . .

But, as with all human beings, and poets most of all, he cannot approach this inflammable and touchy matter of sex-love without releasing from the recesses of his being a torrent of violent prejudice. Covering his puritan nicety with the unlovely word "connubial," he launches into a defence of our Anglo-Saxon ideal of the married state, at once against "free love," mediaeval courtly romance, and monastic asceticism.

There is much to be said for the position he takes; but something—how shall I put it?—something of the perilous stuff out of which ballad-poetry is made, something of the tragic desperation in the essence of poetry itself, rises up in revolt.

And it is surely significant of the presence of some element in Milton that was being suppressed just then that he seems unable to write of this married love, this

> Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets
> Whose bed is undefil'd and chast pronounc't

in the way in which Homer writes of the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, after the hero's adventures with Circe and Calypso.

And yet there is something honest and simple and Arcadian, such as would please Rousseau, about his attack on—

> . . . Court Amours,
> Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Bal,
> Or Serenate, which the starv'd Lover sings
> To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.

Unlike many Puritans, he certainly doesn't gloss over the sensual delights of the "domestic sweets" thus pronounced "chaste"; but one is permitted to suspect that many modern women overburdened by the fruit of such lawful sensuality would prefer the less biblical attitude of mediaeval chivalry, and even, in spite of the risk of being sold for so many head of cattle, the greater scope offered them in Homer. The handling of the personality of Eve —for in depicting Adam all he had to do was to look into his own mirror and into his own heart—was indeed, since Homer described Helen of Troy, the most difficult task any poet had attempted.

But in one important respect Milton was curiously fitted for it. The Fall took place, we are led to understand, before any child was begotten or conceived; so that although this young mother of us all had already known the pleasure of love—"nor Adam from his fair spouse turned, I ween,"—she was completely untaught in the pains or pleasures of maternity.

Now Milton, lover, as we can see from *Comus*, of the Artemis type of virgin, had no poetic response to make, no response of any kind to make, to the beauty and mystery of motherhood.

And thus, though not to be fascinated by the miracle

of maternity when you are writing of the mother of all men might seem odd, it left him free to treat Eve as if she had been the Flower-Bride of Celtic romance. He was probably like the tempter in *Comus*, extremely conscious of the attraction of maidenhood; so conscious that we can allow ourselves to play with the speculation that he made a deliberate moral effort to paint his Eve as *matronly* as he could, so that, as with Giorgione in his "Fête-Champêtre," the main purpose of his work should not be side-tracked by other emotions.

But he was such a shameless egoist that he must have used without any scruple all his own experiences of women; and I believe a modern reader returning to *Paradise Lost* after a lapse of years, or even entering that happy Garden for the first time, will be startled by the dramatic naturalness and genuine poignancy of both the man's and the woman's words at their supreme and fatal moment.

"Heav'n is high," the hapless girl says to herself when the deed has been done; and it is not hard to catch a multiple echo of that pitiful whisper!

> . . . Heav'n is high,
> High and remote, to see from thence distinct
> Each thing on earth; and other care perhaps
> May have diverted from continual watch
> Our great Forbidder, safe with all his spies
> About him. But to Adam, in what sort
> Shall I appear?

And then having dismissed the temptation of increasing her charms by "the odds of Knowledge,"

> . . . the more to draw his Love
> And render me more equal, and perhaps,
> A thing not undesirable, sometime
> Superior: for inferior, who is free?

> This may be well: but what if God have seen
> And Death ensue? Then I shall be no more,
> And Adam, wedded to another Eve,
> Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct.
> A death to think! . . .

she decides to tell him the whole story and give him a chance to share her fate.

A quaint touch follows, curiously characteristic of that vein of courtly "politesse" in Milton that may have been one of the reasons why among his rude Cambridge companions he received the nickname of "the lady"; for just as he makes Adam, for all his primeval nakedness, receive "the affable archangel" with a decorous bow, and just as he makes the Only Begotten Son bow "over his sceptre" to his Begetter, so now he even goes so far as to make his heroine, for all her nakedness, drop what I suppose was a seventeenth-century curtsey to the terrible Tree

> . . . as to the power
> That dwelt within, whose presence had infus'd
> Into the plant sciential sap, deriv'd
> From Nectar, drink of gods.

Meanwhile Adam, in a most charming and lover-like way, "waiting, desirous her return," had busied himself in weaving a garland "to adorn her tresses . . . as Reapers oft are wont thir Harvest Queen," and it was across the scattered roses of this garland, which soon fell, in his blank horror, to the ground, that the unhappy man uttered his gallant and reckless resolve.

> How can I live without thee, how forgoe
> Thy sweet Convers and Love so dearly joyn'd:
> To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
> Should God create another Eve and I
> Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart; no, no, I feel

> The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
> Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.

Having finally "justified," after his own fashion, a fashion more biblical than orthodox, "the ways of God to men," Milton ends his terrific task in the same grand, calm, restrained manner in which he began it.

> They looking back, all the Eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
> Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the Gate
> With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes:
> Some natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
> The World was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitarie way.

In *Paradise Regained* the cosmic issue is at once deepened and narrowed. It is deepened by the fact that the whole drama becomes a psychological and spiritual one. It is narrowed by the fact that the huge duality of Good and Evil which in the longer poem was diffused and scattered through infinite space is here concentrated in a universal-particular struggle between a superhuman personal Protagonist and a superhuman personal Antagonist.

Though it might be argued that because of its narrower scope there is less here of the abysmal injustice and unfathomable arbitrariness of real life, there is certainly more of that ideal verisimilitude which we have come to feel is all the greater "art" because, in place of trying to reproduce the inchoate pressure, the amorphous incongruity, the blind waywardness of our experience, it gathers up our intimations of some ultimate explanation and rounds them off into an intelligible symbol.

The spiritual grandeur of *Paradise Regained* lies in the

fact that it would not be difficult to take the "Christ" and the "Satan" of this world-deep Dialogue, and turn them into the two opposing personalities of which we are all aware at the bottom of our individual hearts.

The "Temptation" of Christ by Satan is thus abstracted from its place in definite circumstantial history, and projected into the Timeless, the Universal, the Eternal. I find no single place, when the "President of the Immortals" has finished his tedious prelude, where the high tension of the interest flags, as it does over and over again in the theological and scientific talks between Adam and Raphael; and though none of the sublimest inspirations of Milton entered this poem, we never find ourselves, when once the too-familiar voice of Jehovah ceases, shocked by that material grotesqueness into which he falls so often in *Paradise Lost.*

It is the same with *Samson Agonistes.* Indeed, the Milton of these two last poems rises up out of the pages, grand and stoical and defiant, undefeated by treachery within or foes without, a living monument, not of Christian sympathy, but of towering heathen patience and abysmal resignation. *Paradise Regained* is intrinsically a moral-philosophical poem, with a mythical background; and though he uses the biblical story he uses it in an original manner and to his own purpose.

Like Goethe's *Faust* and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and Dostoievsky's *Idiot*, it is an attempt to propound, with a superman as its hero, the writer's conception of the war of the spirit, his revaluation of the values of earthly life. To get this great poem into true proportion and perspective, what we have to do is to tear away the whole theological scaffolding, and recognize the contrasted Christ and Satan as the two ultimate personalities in the bosoms of us all.

In place of the scriptural Duality of which one pole is the Son of God and one His grand Antagonist, we may think of these opposed forces as the two basic Emanations from the actual System of Things to which all human experience points.

Not a living soul among us but has the Christ and the Satan in him, and the contest between them is lifted to the true height of tragedy, because in the real cosmos each is necessary to the other and the only life we know feeds upon the flame of their struggle. The interest of this cosmic debate lies in the fact that as it advances the issue between the two grows deeper and deeper.

Quickly enough are the lower antinomies of sense and spirit transcended. The crude advice of Belial, "Set women in his eye and in his walk," is speedily exposed by the master of more spiritual evil. The subtlety of the real tragic clash only begins when the Will to Power and the Will to Knowledge are confronted by that inward Light not of this world wherein the spirit of man, without calling philosophers or priests or armies or science to its aid, can sink back upon *what is kindred to it in the Power behind the Universe*, and in the quietness of that contact can rest in peace.

We need not be misled as to the ultimate issue between these voices from the deep because one of them, as Matthew Arnold would say, "Hebraizes" and the other "Hellenizes." *That* particular clash of opposed Cultures is a small difference compared with the real gulf between them, the gulf between those who follow "the traditions of men" and those who follow the nameless "spirit-like" power behind the universe.

> Think not but that I know these things, or think
> I know them not; not therefore am I short
> Of knowing what I ought: he who receives

> Light from above, from the fountain of light,
> No other doctrine needs . . .

Who but Milton, however, can read the heart of the Will to Power and the Will to Knowledge when that heart, rejecting the light within, devours itself in its huge Luciferan pride?

> I would be at the worst; worst is my Port,
> My harbour and my ultimate repose:
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If I then to the worst that can be haste,
> Why move thy feet so slow to what is best?

It must be the Protestant-Puritan in our blood—so difficult to eradicate—that prevents our doing justice to *Paradise Regained.* If we could only treat the whole story of the vindictive Jehovah and his humane and sympathetic Son and his conquered but unconquerable Rebel exactly as we treat Greek Mythology, we could enjoy this incomparable style, these rolling lists of magical names, this yawning gulf between proud philosophy based on the egocentric core of "I am I," and the lovely quietism of losing of ourselves in the Power behind the cosmos; just as we can enjoy the beauty, the moral values, the problem of good and evil, in the *Odyssey*, without taking too seriously the fairy-story fury of Poseidon at the slaughtering of his sacred steers, or the fairy-story interferences of Pallas Athene.

Milton himself in his own life is much more like a mythological Titan than he is like a Hebrew prophet. He is like the sort of tragic demi-god, Theseus, Orion, Heracles, Odysseus, who has to bear blow after blow from Chance and Destiny and Fate without wincing or yielding. Step by step, ledge by ledge, he was driven backward by the murderous irony of life. One by one he lost in the

struggle all the mental and emotional and physical possessions he valued most. He lost his women, his friends, his sight, his cause. All the way through *Paradise Regained* and even in certain places in *Paradise Lost* the grand emphasis is laid upon patience, upon resignation, endurance, *quietism*, upon a Quaker-like submission to the invisible spirit who prefers "before all temples" the conscience of the good and just man.

In place of any Buddhist indifference to both pleasure and pain, in place of any stoical lying back upon Nature, Milton's faith in the nameless non-human spirit behind the cosmos gives him the strength to "steer right onwards," even though like Samson he is blind among enemies, even though he has given up all hope, even though he has come to the conclusion that except in the far-off miraculous future evil must of necessity be stronger than good.

I seem to divine, judging purely from his own poems, that he was most delicately sensitive to feminine charm, but, like Strindberg and unlike Blake, completely devoid of that restraint, that indulgence, that massive ironic tact which it is unsafe even for a Caesar or a Napoleon to be without, and fatal for a man of Milton's ferocious imagination.

In these subtle psychological reactions, the law of opposites plays, I suspect, a much greater part than is usually divined. Many people think of Milton as a person infatuated with the idea of *fatherhood*; his own benevolent and stern father, his own thwarted desire to be the father of a son endowing the mere idea of the *heavenly* Father with an appeal that swallowed up all other human relationships.

Now there is, only too obviously, much to be said for this view: but may it not be that the passionate zest with

which he describes Satan—who throws, it must be confessed, all other attempts to depict creation's grand Adversary into the background—betrays the fact that the whole business of the "father-cult" in these poems was one of those curious cases worthy of the analysis of Dostoievsky, where you revenge yourself upon what you suffer from by piling up, Pelion upon Ossa and both upon Olympus, the particular qualities in the object of your reaction that make you suffer the most?

Is it not possible that the real clue to the odiousness of the Miltonic heavenly Father lies, not as Mr. Tillyard quoting from M. Saurat suggests, namely in that Milton believed in a First Cause *who was both bad and good* and who consequently allowed a portion of his Absolute Being to go its way to everlasting damnation, but in a certain feminine sensitivity in the poet's own nature, the quality that got him the nickname of "the Lady," which urged him on in a sort of morbid obsequiousness, that was not free from something hysterical, to utter along with the angelic hosts his hollow hallelujahs.

It is a puzzling question, but one full of a curious interest, and we are confronted by a not very dissimilar difficulty to-day; only with us the question of future damnation doesn't enter; and the difficulty is to reconcile a merciful, unrevengeful Deity with the horrors of the actual world around us. To accept Blake's idea that *without knowing it* Milton was on the side of Satan, would almost imply a half-deliberate malignity in the way he exaggerates the servility of the seraphic court; but the fact that the wearisome adulation of these sycophantic harpings destroys all poetry would rather suggest, considering to what lengths the piety of quite sincere women will go, that it was the numbing and stupefying effect of sanctified masochism rather than unconscious hostility.

But, as I keep repeating, the surest ground we can go upon is to regard Milton's inmost feelings, that inspiration that made him able to "steer right onward" in his darkness and defeat, as an authentic spiritual power, supporting his lonely conscience, and reaching him from outside the whole created world. If not unconsciously malignant, his pæans of praise to Jehovah are completely unpoetical, and *that alone* is a proof that they do not spring from the depths of his being; whereas his sublime invocation of the eternal spirit that "sat'st brooding on the vast abyss and mad'st it pregnant," and his grand appeal to the Inner Light and to Urania, the Muse beyond the Muses, carry with them the whole passion of his soul. No, it was not that he was on the side of Satan against the Father, but rather that, in his greatest moments, he *transcended both*, transcended all the traditions, all the authority, all the creeds of men, and sank down and back and away, into the nameless, formless, timeless spirit behind it all, and in the power of that Spirit obtained the strength to "only stand and wait."

There is nothing forced, nothing obsequious, nothing unworthy in *Samson Agonistes*. The hero's angry rejection of Dalilah is a rejection of the weakness in himself that made him yield to Dalilah. It is a return to the things "that no gross ear can hear." The dominant note in *Samson Agonistes* is not contempt for Dalilah but contempt for himself; and if his patience "at the mill with slaves" is rewarded beyond all hope at the last by so great a triumph, the implication is that with or without that triumph he would have perished in the faith that in the final issue "the Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness" would overcome Dagon.

I cannot but feel that in the closing passages of this unique poem, a tragedy in the true Promethean sense, we

get his final word upon the confused treacheries of earth-life.

One thing remains, not a Protestant faith, not a Catholic faith, not a Hellenic or Hebraic faith, but the faith of a man confronting a world given over to Dagon in the strength of the Eternal Spirit behind all worlds.

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair.
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

THE peculiar advantage, or some would say disadvantage, that comes to a poet when, as in Milton's case, his poetry is only one aspect of a life devoted to political reform, or as in Goethe's to a life of intellectual curiosity, places Matthew Arnold in a totally different category from that of his more narrowly poetic contemporaries.

What a heavy burden of *premeditated originality* a poet has to carry when his own proud life-illusion and the imperative demands of a vast reading public call upon him to become a "professional," that is to say to make poetry-writing his sole and lifelong occupation!

This was the case with both Tennyson and Browning; and the harm done to the level of their work is distressingly obvious as you extricate their more inspired productions from their exhausted and exhausting surplusage.

But with the possible exception of *Merope*, Matthew Arnold's poetry—this one not very thick volume as compared with his rivals' shelves—is arresting from cover to cover.

And what a comfort to the poetry-lover it is when he is spared by the author himself the task of skipping and selecting! He is spared then in the only way that is really satisfactory to the insatiable reader; for no book-worm can quite reconcile himself to *another* book-worm's selections!

And how few *Complete Poetical Works* are contained in one not very big large-printed volume saving us from our usual toil through thickly-crowded pages

with a line down the middle, as we search for some new discovery!

I don't say that all Matthew Arnold's verses can be called poetry; but, and even where they cannot, they do not fill us with that angry disgust at the puerility, egoism, and loquacity of famous men which it is hard not to feel at the mere *look* of so many of these Standard Authors. The whole atmosphere, tone, and temper of Matthew Arnold's volume is the atmosphere, tone, and temper of an easy-going amateur, who only writes when he is inspired to write, and entirely avoids—as Goethe told Eckermann to avoid—"great works."

If what you want in your poet is either a laborious and concentrated artistry, growing more elaborate, more mannered, more idiosyncratic as the poet's years increase, or the sort of popular sentiment and prolific invention that becomes more lax, more voluble, more facile as the poet's pontifical prestige gathers weight, you will never be an adherent of Matthew Arnold.

Not only was his prose, which was all occasional, and composed as the chances of the time urged, more like that of a lecturer than an artist; but his poetry never reached his public—it has not yet reached it!—with the portentous professional prestige of Tennyson, Browning, or Swinburne.

And yet how completely it has outlived the delicate artistry of the first, the convoluted psychologizing of the second, and the rhythmic rhetoric of the third!

It is the old law—true in things aesthetic as in things spiritual—that by taking yourself with a certain careless lightness you are more likely to float down the stream to posterity than by carrying too much proud ballast on board. Students of professional poetry will, I suppose, always be more interested in Tennyson, Browning, and

Swinburne: for these voluminous writers are preoccupied with all the technical problems of their difficult art. But those among us who are struggling to keep our minds calm and sane in this confused modern arena, "where ignorant armies clash by night," will still turn with relief to this less *poetized* intellect who confronts the human situation as the clear-eyed sages of antiquity confronted it.

Yes, Matthew Arnold is the great amateur of English poetry; seeking not so much to add "immortal contributions to our National Literature" as to express his angers and contempts, his loves and his admirations, as the occasion drove. It is this very freedom from what might be called the *professional responsibility* of a recognized poet that gives such a fresh, free, spontaneous charm to his work; to such an excursion into pure Romance, for instance, as his *Tristram and Iseult*, to such an experiment in the high Homeric vein as his *Sohrab and Rustum*, and, above all, to so enchanting an imitation of Milton's imitation of Virgil and Theocritus as *Thyrsis* and the *Scholar Gipsy*.

You cannot help feeling, as you read these easy and fragmentary poems, that he is much less concerned about his public than his rivals are. *They* seem to reluct at being caught for a second by their followers without the great dramatic masks of their trade clapped to their laurelled brows; while Matthew Arnold always has the air of an ironic and urbane scholar chatting freely, perhaps a little indiscreetly, with his not very respectful pupils.

He is so much franker, too, in his personal poetry than his famous contemporaries, giving himself away without a scruple.

Can anyone conceive of Tennyson or Browning publishing such touching and betraying and extremely natural love-poems to a young lady across the water as the

passionate verses *To Marguerite*? And his propaganda for that completely un-Christian stoicism, by which he endured her loss and the other trials of his life, how free and open and unashamed it is!

It must be confessed that, like many an ancient Greek philosopher, this Inspector of British Schools did thoroughly *enjoy* his witty disturbing of credulous minds and his railings at pontiffs. But why not? He certainly had something to say that his fellow-countrymen needed, that indeed they need still; and why should he confine himself to indicating it indirectly, in objective art? He was a pedagogic soothsayer, just as Socrates was; and while he preached for the love of preaching, the wayward Muse he treated so cavalierly rewarded him by touching his airy discourses with a magic far more lovely than he could ever have attained by taking thought.

A great deal too much has been made of Matthew Arnold's "pathetic wistfulness," as he noted the collapse of the Christian faith. He wrote of this event with sympathy and tenderness; but it is surely clear that it gave him profound philosophic satisfaction, and now and then I even detect a touch of heathen glee.

That abysmal respect for Christianity, that infinite terror of giving offence to Believers, which Tennyson and Browning displayed, and which I am sure led in Swinburne's case to that exaggerated orgy of cerebral priapism that to-day affects us no more than the old faded amorous vignettes in the bawdy chap-books of the eighteenth century, did not touch Matthew Arnold at all. We need no psychologist to tell us that Swinburne's "pale Galilean," so pitifully outraged by the biting and foaming raptures of Faustinian lust, is in reality as much a product of the poet's awareness of *horrified Christian feelings* as any discretion practised by Tennyson or Browning.

But Matthew Arnold simply *does not care.* He teases his bishops as lightly as he would have teased his "dear Dr. Arnold" of Rugby. He is mildly astonished when it distresses the friends of the great philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury, to see that noble name applied to the three Persons of the Trinity; but between proselytizing scientists and panic-stricken pietists, Matthew Arnold's attitude is really the attitude of Socrates. He derives—as no doubt Socrates did—a mischievous satisfaction in teasing the orthodox, but this extremely mild roguery never leads him into scribbling phallic insults upon the gates of the temple.

Swinburne's taunt that Matthew Arnold was an "elegant Isaiah" hits the nail admirably; and properly considered, it is praise not blame. "Elegant" can only refer to the discreet cloth, rather than camel's hair, in which this devoted advocate of secondary education travelled about from school to school; and if it be the rôle of a prophet to coin with an inspired genius phrases that illumine the whole mystery of life, I think that such things as his "Eternal not ourselves that makes for Righteousness," and his "Secret" compared with his "method" of Jesus, entirely justify us in regarding him in this light.

The fact that his passionate advocacy of self-culture, his Goethean desire to live "according to the best that has been thought and said," is a different thing from the heroism and devotion of a social reformer, does not detract from the value of his criticism of life: and although Goethe's dictum, "To act is easy: to think is hard," cannot be said to hold good with everyone, it is surely true that the part played by critical onlookers in the evolutionary struggle is no negligible one.

By such detached criticism, as a matter of fact, the practical activities of whole revolutions have been swerved

to the left or the right. Matthew Arnold's peculiar kind of humour is the clue to his prevailing temper. Too proud as well as too kind to be anything but humble in his relations with simple people, he enjoyed to the full the play of his persiflage when dealing with scientists and clergymen and with the limitations of public opinion.

He had the advantage over his intellectual contemporaries in the fact that his indefatigable *literary culture*, his custom of daily pondering over the old poets and philosophers, kept his intelligence malleable and fluid, kept it entirely uncommitted to the transitory fashions of the hour. He is the supreme example of what a persistent reading of the classical writers can do for a modern man's character and brain, making it mellow, sceptical, ironical, while at the same time it gives it a massive stoical power to bear up under the tribulations of life. It is this lucky accident that his culture was literary rather than metaphysical that makes him so completely *in utrumque paratus*, so prepared for either event, and frees him from the dogmatism of both scientists and religionists.

Like Socrates, beyond the conviction that it is important to be good, he has no convictions; and beyond the principle that it is best to be reasonable, he has no principle! And it is this literary fluidity in him, this intellectual *amateurishness*, that proved as annoying to his contemporaries as it is still annoying to the theologians and the scientists of to-day.

Professionals have always a hatred for amateurs; and a humorous amateur who keeps repeating the same hit in the same weak spot rouses them to fury.

Matthew Arnold's mischievous and illuminating phrases are the creation of a man following a trained literary instinct, but a man devoid of dogmatic convictions *on any subject*, except perhaps his conviction that orthodox

Christianity is untrue, and that this country ought to have a sound system of education.

I confess I think his instinct led him wrong in one important point. I refer to his reiterated affirmation in *Literature and Dogma* that the most remarkable thing about Jesus Christ was his sweet reasonableness or *epieikeia*.

In this dangerous and risky matter, full of blind alleys for the most clairvoyant, I confess to a preference for the formidable Jesus of William Blake, and even for the psychological Jesus of St. Paul, over this rational and amiable figure conjured up by Matthew Arnold. Of all noble qualities, that of "reasonableness," sweet or otherwise, seems to me the very last that I would attribute to this mysterious overturner of normal human values, this bewildering Enchanter, whose paradoxical wrath

> His seventy disciples sent
> Against Religion and Government!

He goes wrong again, it seems to me, in his famous definition of Religion itself as "morality touched by emotion"; and I think this error came about by the curious absence from his own nature of what, remembering his own expression "natural magic," might be called "magical awe" or "divine idolatry," the thrilling pleasure, namely, so many people feel in the mere gesture of bowing down before some tremendous mystery, even if such a mystery be no more than the sun or the moon, or the indwelling Genius of some consecrated spot, some spot made holy by the natural piety of traditional reverence.

There is surely no tinge of morality in *this* religious feeling. The most unrepentent of scoundrels could experience it, as he moved from one crime to another; and I am tempted to attribute its absence from the pre-

vailing temper of this enlightened moralist to an over-rational stoicism, wherein Epictetus leads him away from the Socrates of Plato.

As a critic of poetry Matthew Arnold reveals sometimes an inspired penetration, a penetration that is rendered the more convincing by the way he concentrates on particular passages, using as his divining-rod that literary instinct for the essence of style which is only very imperfectly suggested by his rational quest for what he calls "the highest truth and the highest seriousness." Compared with his *artistically masked* poetic contemporaries, the honest light of a free, frank, universal intelligence shone through him, as it shone through Goethe and Emerson. No smouldering manias, no distorted moral prejudices, no fuliginous obsessions, no sulky egotism, clouded the integrity of his vision.

Those who love best the undying books of the past must necessarily be his staunchest supporters, for it was always from books, from the long, deep channel of the accumulated writings of the centuries, that he nourished his imagination and refreshed his spirit. He was a "man of letters" in the profoundest sense of that phrase, for it was by the inspired words of the past, as he perpetually sifted them from the uninspired all down the ages, that he fed the life of his soul. He never aimed at what artist-poets would call "evoking an original method." His method was the old, transparent, proudly-innocent one of steeping himself in the Classics. And it was from the vantage-ground of the Classics that he set himself, in the interests of the human spirit, to play the part of a cultural gadfly to his nation and his time.

Free from any artistic necessity to strive for originality, he could allow the long tradition of classic thought and feeling to flow through him unimpeded, and for the very

reason that he did not, fearfully and touchily, carry about with him a heavy, dim weight of personal artistry, the pure, fine edge of his spontaneous vision of things remained intact, sharp, clear, and decisive.

It was, indeed, with his fresh, natural impulses that he wrote, the motions of which, lucid and flowing, had never to ask themselves the psychological question, "Is this in harmony with the complicated originality I have built up?"

The most beautiful of all his poems, *Thyrsis* and the *Scholar Gipsy*, are, if you seek for models and influences, the least original poems ever written.

Echoing in their long-rippled, cunningly suspended rhythms the peculiar accents of Milton's *Lycidas*, which itself carries as it flows murmurs and reverberations of high Virgilian music and Greek orchestration, these two enchanting poems can yet convey with a fresh and dewy realism unrivalled outside Shakespeare and Keats the magic of our English landscape.

What a retort is this, what a crushing retort, to all originality-mongers!

The loveliness of these spontaneous verses owes the miracle of its startling actuality to the very fact that its author is not labouring under the weight of some carefully worked-up method of "creative insight."

Copying Milton, who copied Virgil, who copied the Greeks, these poems call up the sights and sounds and scents, the stillnesses and the expectancies, of our English countryside more freshly and realistically than any others in the language. Words appear here and there in the lilt of the rhythm that carry across the horizon of our senses the delicate, far-off daffodil-dust of the very flowers that Persephone herself let fall.

Sigh after sigh, tender and infinite, comes to us here

from the margins of our race's memory, from the sad sea-banks of the sunken generations; and yet the familiar river is flowing still, still past us, through the reeds we know, through the hay-scents of this very day,

> Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among,
> And darting swallows and light water-gnats.

And what we see and what we hear, rain-wet or sun-bleached, reaches us through the impact of the Hinksey mud beneath our feet and the look of the well-known track "by Childsworth Farm"!

Writing thus, freely and easily, of the real, actual sights and sounds and smells as he comes bolt upon them from his books and his desk, he has no psychological burden of self-conscious "artistic vision" to separate him from the simplest, most obvious, most universal reactions of our normal senses.

There is, therefore, something in his descriptions of Nature that comes *several degrees nearer* to her real life than anything in Tennyson or Browning or Swinburne. What this something is it is very hard to define. He gets it sometimes by deliberately disregarding the melody of the verse. But whatever it is, it is Nature with her blurred, littered, frayed edges unpolished, and the bloom of her atmospheric magic unimpaired.

The ancient poetic tradition of our Western world—now some two thousand years old—is always reverting to Homer; and it is Homer who not only supplies Matthew Arnold with a background of classical charm, but who, like a perpetually rising and sinking tide, washes even the foreground of his mind clean of the confused rubble of modern aesthetic problems. The concentration of his whole character being fixed, not on the struggle to be, or to be regarded as, a great poet, but on the struggle to

live according to "the best that has been thought and said," he can afford to forget to be an artist. He can afford to become a reed, waving aloof by the grey waters of our northern seas, a reed through which the divine wind can blow as it will, blowing Homeric imagery, blowing Celtic romance, blowing the secrets of the English pastures, till he becomes, except for Keats and Shakespeare, the most magical of all our poets.

Wordsworth can capture, and in yet simpler language, the vaguer impressions, the subtler presences and half-presences of dawn and twilight, of day and night; but there are certain *less usual* natural occurrences, but yet phenomena we have all seen without seeing, heard without hearing, felt without feeling, that Keats and Shakespeare and Matthew Arnold alone have the power to convey.

And Matthew Arnold works this miracle by the use of the same device as Shakespeare and Keats, the simple, obvious device—but none of the rest are bold enough to dare it—of using extremely realistic, and, from any artistic or picturesque standpoint, extremely startling and even *unpoetical* expressions.

Where he falls short of these masters is in his singular lack not only of melody, which is pardonable, but of harmony too, which is a more serious lapse.

Shakespeare and Keats can capture this natural magic and yet keep, in fact *enhance*, the music of their verse.

Matthew Arnold again and again will be found sacrificing melody, found sacrificing even harmony to the evocation, at all costs, of this magical touch. Indeed, I would go so far as to call this union of discordant sound with magical imagery his chief characteristic as a poet.

Of course there is such a thing as a poetic harmony that lies far beyond the superficial music of smooth-

running verse. Great poetry, as we know from Milton, whose ear was certainly no inharmonious one, will deliberately include the jolts and jars of certain orchestral discords, and indeed will take care to avoid, as something superficial and tricky, the overstressing of flowing alliterative devices.

But I am not claiming for Matthew Arnold that *his* harshnesses, like Milton's, were the evocation of a subtler ear. They were, I am afraid, at least pretty often, the direct reverse of this!

All I do claim is that even if he *does* sacrifice the music of sound to the more evasive magic of reality, such a sacrifice has a far more poetical effect than the inverse one—what we so frequently get in Swinburne—of the sacrifice of magic to melody.

It cannot be denied that the *purely aesthetic* motive for writing poetry is present only very faintly in Matthew Arnold's work. The larger portion of what he wrote in poetic form is what we call "occasional," written, that is to say, under the urge of some particular event or situation or passing train of thought.

This alone gives his verse a certain airiness and ease, a certain playfulness even; and it endows it, too, with that fresh spontaneity which often catches, much more realistically and vividly than any artistic premeditation could do, the direct impact, with its taste and tang and escaping overtones, of the thing he is describing.

And his poetry springs naturally from his character. It conveys, even in its most casual and least premeditated outbursts, the high and luminous vision of things which was the essence of his life. To open his volume almost at random is to experience something of that heightening of our feeling for planetary existence that we get from the essays of Emerson.

And the secret of his power as a poet lies in his inartistic sincerity, in his unaffected effort to keep his mind fixed steadily upon the riddle of existence and its ultimate *alternatives* as far as human destiny is concerned. Unlike our other English poets, he follows Goethe in linking up the moral situation with the cosmic one. His personal bias is towards a clarified and monumental stoicism; but a certain lightness of touch, a certain easy playfulness of tone, combined with his genius for the evocation of "natural magic," prevents this stoicism from growing dogmatic or harsh or austere.

Modern sophistication tends to revolt against the simple and transparent efforts Matthew Arnold makes to live, like Emerson, in a large and luminous atmosphere of philosophical detachment; but to my mind there is something disarming and touching about the majestic simplicity with which he struggles to attune his temper to "the best that has been thought and said" in the long history of our race.

To our younger generation, who lack both the vitality and the tenacity of purpose to remain steadily in this serene mountain-air, there must often seem too much of the preacher in his work, and far too little rebellious devilry or satanic malice against the System of Things.

Nor does the loftier and more tragic reaction to the bitter ironies of life that we get so much of in Shakespeare and Hardy enter into his tone—its place is taken by a certain airy philosophical detachment, a detachment archly playful and even supercilious, which just avoids the danger of sinking into the priggish.

Our modern mania, however, for the ugly, the grotesque, the bizarre, the discordant—a perfectly legitimate mania and one that wonderfully lends itself, in the case of a man of genius, to that "chaoticism" that is so marked

an element in life—makes Matthew Arnold's planetary stoicism seem too remote from the "bloody flukes" of experience and from the "brutish sting" of reality.

But it is this very detachment from the blood and the frightfulness, from the maggots and the rats, that makes the reading of his poetry seem like floating in a great calm, full-brimmed river, between waving reeds and pastoral valleys, and always towards "the murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."

Unimpeded by the problems of literary art, as he was undisturbed by the monstrous incongruity and shocking grotesquerie of the world's Burlesque Show, he was further spared that disease of psychological introspection which clouds the brains of so many.

It was always from what might be called the *literature* of philosophy rather than from its logical metaphysic that he drew his inspiration. Hume could no more have bothered him than Hegel could have reassured him. What he lived by were the *logoi* of those great poetic and religious sages who create a spiritual atmosphere rather than round off a metaphysical system. Philosophy in the academic and technical sense is as dangerous to poetry as spiritualism is dangerous to morality, but *philosophy as literature* is the best background a poet can have; and Matthew Arnold used it to wonderful effect.

What concerned him most was the daily struggle to keep his normal mood upon the high level of the sages' thoughts upon which he was always pondering, and it was the tragic gulf between this rarefied air and the hullabaloo about him that provoked his outbursts of supercilious and not always considerate humour.

He was a great generalizer, and his avoidance of metaphysical and scientific logic gives to his generalizations a swift human point and a weighty cogency. He was in

his best vein, for instance, when he generalized about the contribution to the imagination of our race of its Celtic element, and indeed all through his poetry the glamour of *race-contrast* is a recurrent spring of romantic interest.

This passion of his for the poetry of race was made more effective and circumstantial by his inspired use of geographical proper names, the value of which, as in Homer and Milton, lies in the way it universalizes, even to the ends of the earth, that romantic continuity of the human drama, to appreciate which is the chief glory of poetic scholarship.

It is just this element of magical geography that one feels so lacking in the great cosmic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley, and naturally in our modern interpreters of the heroism of the industrial struggle, the long drama of the planet is narrowed down to the tragedy at our doors.

There are many occult hints of Pythagorean ideas in Matthew Arnold. It is hard to read his poetry for long without feeling steal over you that strange presence of many invisible generations, that seems so personal and yet so impersonal, as if we had all passed through cycles upon cycles of incarnations.

> The Guide of our dark steps a triple veil
> Betwixt our senses and our sorrow keeps;
> Hath sown with cloudless passages the tale
> Of grief, and eased us with a thousand sleeps.

And without being dogmatic about it, holding it not as a metaphysical conclusion but as a natural possibility, there runs through his verse an unmistakable hint of the Goethean idea that it is only by our own exertions that we mount—"and that hardly"—to eternal life. It cannot be denied that when his feelings in this ambiguous matter really escape him they betray an intellectual pride a good deal more heathen-stoical than Christian.

Thin, thin the pleasant human noises grow,
And faint the city gleams;
Rare the lone pastoral huts—marvel not thou!
The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,
But to the stars, and the cold lunar beams;
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams.

There is, I think, a very close affinity between Matthew Arnold's attitude to life and that of Emerson. Both of them were essentially preachers, both of them in their high detached translunar manner were sages and poets. Matthew Arnold was more of a scholar, less perhaps of a cosmic seer. In his nature there was—and naturally enough, considering his parentage—a good deal of the liberal schoolmaster; while in Emerson we are conscious of a certain sly practical shrewdness and reserved mother-wit that might have belonged to a philosophic farmer.

Perhaps of the two Emerson remains, in his own impersonal way, nearer to the raw irrational shocks of this confused world; but on the other hand, Matthew Arnold entered much more fully into the religious controversies of his time.

Emerson lacked something of the other's feeling for the romance of history and the glamour of what one might call *poetic geography*, nor is there anything in the American's more reserved life, unless it be his gallant recognition of the anarchistic Whitman, that corresponds to the disturbing spurt of personal emotion in the Englishman's touching verses to Marguerite.

Save for a tiresome, and to say the truth a somewhat conventional prejudice against Shelley, and what I feel to be a decided overrating of Byron, Arnold's clairvoyance in poetic discrimination places him among the best of our critics; and this constant preoccupation with the deeper

rôle of poetry in the world—the self-preservative instinct of the race itself, as he says, keeping it alive—gave him a perennial theme for his own most inspired verse.

For it is not, as I have hinted, with the aesthetic side of poetry he is concerned, but always with its value as an imperishable overtone to the turbulent arena of the passing hour.

> . . . tears
> Are in his eyes, and in his ears
> The murmur of a thousand years.
> Before him he sees life unroll,
> A placid and continuous whole—
> That general life, which does not cease,
> Whose secret is not joy, but peace;
> That life, whose dumb wish is not missed
> If birth proceeds, if things subsist;
> The life of plants, and stones and rain,
> The life he craves—if not in vain
> Fate gave, what Chance shall not control,
> His sad lucidity of soul.

A poet's attitude to poetry in general, whether it be detached and half-humorous as Shakespeare's, or proud and grave as Dante's, is always a matter of curious interest; but a poet's own work reveals much more than this. It reveals not only in definite statements, but in what you might call its diffused atmospheric pressure, the most hidden and secret life-longings, life-frustrations, life-suppressions of the poet's identity.

Some poets, Browning for instance, betray, in this diffused atmospheric revelation of themselves, a warm, glowing, almost sexual attraction to the human spectacle. Others, and Matthew Arnold is an extreme example of this, betray a cold and weary distaste, a fastidious shrinking, a magnetic *repulsion* from the rough-and-tumble of human intercourse.

Almost every one of Matthew Arnold's most characteristic gestures in poetry is a gesture of *differentiating himself* from the passions, ambitions, superstitions, illusions of the mass of his fellow-men. To shake off the too hot, the too dusty, the too familiar pressure of life, to *thin life out*, and to sever himself from this or that in a cold passion for more air, more space, more solitude, seems to be the recurrent effort he is always making.

He seems to derive a certain intimate satisfaction even from the very tragedy of such separation, such severance, such estrangement!

One catches this curiously paradoxical note in the two main undertones of his recurrent poetic themes—his separation from the Marguerite of the Swiss poems and his separation from the faith of his fathers.

To each of these severances he refers in mournful and even tragic tones, but to an ear trained to catch what might be called the *psychic echo* of an emotional emphasis there always returns, like an after-vibration in the air, from these unhappy sighs a certain tremor of exultant relief in having once more *thinned life out*, thinned it out yet a little further, isolated himself just a few leagues further off!

It is as though the whole process of his interior pilgrimage were a series of retreats—tragic retreats, he may assume them to be—from one kindly hearth and from one warm shrine after another, while the spirit within him seeks to flee further and further from the "sweet securities" of dependence, till it escape the last security of all.

The very form of verse in which he excels is a reaction from the near and the homely. This is a rare and special kind of poetry, a poetry which makes use of place-names, *proper* names, as we say, taken from ancient maps and old geographies and from the chronicles of far-off, half-historical, half-mythological times, with the deliber-

ate purpose of evoking a particular type of emotional excitement.

And the excitement it evokes is that curious, magical excitement, hard to analyse, whereby the "topless towers" of old cities, the sacred slopes of enchanted mountains, the sources of mystic rivers, the shores of fabulous seas, are brought before the imagination, and brought before it in such a way as to create the vision of a world that is our world, and yet *not* our world, a world called up out of the universal nostalgia of the generations for the marvellous and the strange, for the terrible and the beautiful. Such place-names are of a kind that *in themselves*, merely by the uttering of the syllables that compose them, have the power of evoking all those dim nostalgic cravings of which I speak, cravings for places "far, far from here," places "where other rivers flow," places where events have occurred, more wonderful, more fatal, more satisfying to the heart, than any we know, and where grasses quiver and plants grow and waves break, that have felt the presences of men and women who have walked upon the earth with the Heroes and have eaten and slept with the Immortal Gods.

There is something about these magical *proper names* from old history, old poetry, and old maps, that reaches the mind quite independently of our having been a traveller.

It is all a matter of books! A matter of old books it is, such books as one of the great Renaissance scholars might have collected, and over his lamp, night by night, in some lonely tower, have drawn the whole history of our race—and yet not of our race, but of a race nobler, stronger, more beautiful, more terrible, a race conjured up by *the demons dwelling in names*—into the narrow compass of his cell!

For such names work a double miracle; they draw the whole world near, so that you can envisage it as Satan made Jesus envisage all the kingdoms of the earth, and they drive it apart, down vast dim receding corridors of prehistoric time! Such names are like aerial flights of migratory birds. They lift us out of the immediate. They carry us to the uttermost ramparts of the world. And yet they bind, in their unthinkable voyagings, all the nations and languages of the earth together. The poetry that *specializes*, so to speak, in the use of magic names like these, names that carry in their syllables so much more than the mere music of sound, is profoundly traditional. It does what not only old poets but old magicians have done from time immemorial. It uses Homeric incantations. It uses Virgilian sorceries. But above all, it embodies the high translunar secrets of the most recondite of all poetry, the poetry of John Milton. There is plenty of intriguing intellectual verse written to-day that is subtle enough; but its subtlety is a purely *mental* subtlety, its illuminations, for all their convoluted and meticulous realism, mental illuminations.

But the poetry of magical place-names that I have in mind, this romantic-geographic, historic poetry, full of cunningly arranged syllables whose liberated Ariels evoke the Lost Atlantis of the imagination, appeals not so much to the intelligence, but, like all the old traditional inspiration that our modern poets have renounced, *to the emotions*, but to very special and particular emotions, whose existence depends on a certain kind of profoundly bookish culture.

Now the greatness of Matthew Arnold as a poet lies in the fact that he combines the rare emotional appeal of these thaumaturgic place-names, dependent upon books, with the freshest and most naturalistic impressions of Nature. He is a true scholar, who, just because he emerges

dazed and entranced from his books, responds with a special childlike naïveté to what he encounters in the open air. Just because he has been so stirred by old geography, old romance, old chronicles, and is so steeped in Homeric tags and Miltonic echoes, the mere sight of "an unskilful gardener" mowing the grass and cutting by mischance some fragrant hyacinth near the lawn's edge will strike him, as he comes back to the real world, with a startling vividness.

And Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* is a poem of precisely this nature. It is a poem Coleridge would have loved; and yet, in its firm, clear, circumstantial architectonics, it is less fragmentary than most of the projections of that great and disordered imagination. Its material comes obviously from a scholar's shelves, but from those of a scholar, as I suggest, whose senses when he goes out at last into the air respond with a buoyant and elemental freshness to what he sees and feels.

What a heavenly thing indeed is this multitude of old books! Not "vain," as the Preacher murmured, but pregnant unto immortal thoughts and imperishable longings. It was from an imagination quickened by much study that Matthew Arnold summed up so well the life of all of us upon earth, putting his conclusion into his young Sohrab's mouth when, not knowing what he did, the boy lifted up his spear against his father.

> For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
> Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,
> Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
> And whether it will heave us up to land,
> Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
> Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
> We know not, and no search will make us know;
> Only the event will teach us in its hour.

But it is the closing pages of this great poem that move me as few other lines in literature have ever done. What an inspiration it was—and yet he learnt it all from books! —to leave the dead boy with the father who had killed him crouching over him there in the sand, while he makes us follow the course of the great Oxus-stream till it reaches *its* resting-place!

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

Thus in true Homeric style does this supercilious Scourge of the Bishops sink his teasing controversies, forget his lost Marguerite, let the *epieikeia* of Jesus go, to lose himself in the calm eternal peace of those god-like elements, that are at once subhuman and superhuman.

But if he shows in *Sohrab and Rustum* to what good purpose—not merely copying the similes of the ancient Muse, but catching her very accent—he has read Homer, in *Tristram and Iseult* he achieves an even greater miracle. How superior to all the laboured and artistic attempts of Tennyson and Swinburne—and of so many others down

to this present hour!—to catch what is really the most evasive secret in the whole over-world of inspiration, is this casual, easy, careless unfinished fragment!

Here we find him, always the arch-amateur, launching forth upon Welsh matters; and I have a dim conviction that, outside the Welsh *Mabinogi* themselves, never has this peculiar enchantment—an enchantment that, for all his rush of eloquence, completely escaped Swinburne, and was only touched at rare intervals by Tennyson—been so miraculously captured.

I have no hesitation in declaring that Matthew Arnold is alone, with Shakespeare, among our great English poets in doing justice to the Welsh genius; and he had, I suspect, less opportunities than Shakespeare in this direction. It was pure clairvoyance, influenced to some extent, I fancy, by his passion for Homer, but also no doubt by some kindred strain in his own childlike, subtle nature.

I am merely following his own lead in this most alluring of poetic quests when I quote one of his favourite selections to show the sort of thing he was trying to evoke. What we tend to forget, however, is that the Celtic genius, or, if you like, the Brythonic-Goidelic-Iberian genius, has *many more elements* than the one or two which Arnold, or myself following Arnold, may have the luck to snatch. From one point of view, such a quest for the essence of the Celtic genius is as absurd as a similar quest would be for the essence of the English genius, a thing that one explorer might find in the humour of Dickens and Lamb, and another in the moral austerity of Milton and Wordsworth.

But here is the particular passage from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *Kilhwch and Olwen* which so appealed to Matthew Arnold. The fragment explains itself as it proceeds.

And the woman asked them, "Upon what errand come you here?"

"We come to seek Olwen for this youth."

"In the name of Heaven, return whence you came!"

"Heaven is our witness that we will not return till we have seen the maiden."

"She comes here every Saturday to wash her head, and in the vessel where she washes she leaves all her rings, and she never comes herself or sends any messengers to fetch them."

"Will she come here if she is sent to?"

"Unless you pledge your faith you will not harm her I will not send to her."

"We pledge it."

So a message was sent and she came.

The maiden was clothed in a robe of flame-coloured silk, and about her neck was a collar of ruddy gold on which were precious emeralds and rubies.

More yellow was her head than the flower of the broom, and her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave, and fairer were her hands and her fingers than the blossoms of the wood anemone amidst the spray of the meadow fountain. The eye of the trained hawk, the glance of the three-mewed falcon was not brighter than hers. Her bosom was more snowy than the breast of the white swan, her cheek was redder than the reddest roses. Whoso beheld her was filled with her love. Four white trefoils sprang up wherever she trod. And therefore was she called Olwen. . . . And Kilhwch said, "Ah maiden, thou art she I have loved; come away with me lest they speak evil of thee and me. Many a day have I loved thee."

Something of the romantic and yet realistic naïveté of such a passage he has caught in *Tristram and Iseult*, and naïveté of this particular sort is precisely what Swinburne and Tennyson could never capture. Pure inspiration it is! Not the cunningest art in the world could have devised the startling and even childish changes in the phantasmagoric metres he uses, flickering, fluctuating, wavering and undulating, mingling with one another, alternating with one another, like the dawn-winds of the sea among the

night-winds of the shore, or like wild salt-marsh estuaries among reed-rustling inland weirs!

I think that nothing in Scott or Coleridge can equal, in pure mediaeval romance, the atmosphere of Tristram's vigil with his page during the long-delayed sailing of the elder Iseult across the water.

> What voices are these on the clear night-air?
> What lights in the Court—what steps on the stair?

And it is one of the curiosities of literature that the ensuing shamelessly sentimental dialogue between these middle-aged lovers does not break the enchantment or spoil the ensorcerized soliloquy of the pictured huntsman on the wind-blown arras! Was it perhaps because the author's thoughts travelled back to Switzerland and Marguerite, that he could be at once so magical and so sentimental?

A far simpler poem in its structure and background is *The Forsaken Merman*; and here one need be no psychologist to detect the secretest life-illusion of the author escaping like a genie from a wave-tossed bottle as he thinks of himself as a lonely elemental being, an unbaptized soulless wanderer, hovering about the warm sheepfolds of the kindly children of men and peeping through the lighted windows of "the little grey church on the windy shore" as he roams in the darkness among the graves.

In reading any great poet's work there is a curious interest, if you possess a certain grim realistic humour, in noting the contrast between what we all see of the author, as he goes about among us in his usual attire, and the wild imaginary situations *into which*, as he projects what might be called the under-consciousness of his soul, *he thinks himself*.

In some cases, in the case of Shelley and Keats, for

instance, there seems no shock of incongruity between the poet as he was in his daily life and this imaginary projection of himself, "ceasing upon the midnight with no pain" as he listens to the nightingale, or dissolving his body into a melting cloud or a leaf-scattering wind. But when one thinks of Matthew Arnold's patient educational labours, when one thinks of his conscientious if not always considerate anti-clerical propaganda, above all when one thinks of his stiffly conventional *appearance*, there comes a singular twinge of human poignance in following his purer soul into these unearthly metamorphoses.

But in *The Forsaken Merman* this supercilious amateur of "the best that has been thought and said" showed how it was possible to use the inspiration he fished up from the books he loved, till, setting free the soul within him from the life he had to lead, and from the bodily vesture he had to carry, it evoked something that approached in beauty the immortal sea-sorcery of Shakespeare himself.

> Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
> Where the winds are all asleep,
> Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
> Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
> Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,
> Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground,
> Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
> Dry their mail and bask in the brine,
> Where great whales come sailing by,
> Sail and sail, with unshut eye
> Round the world for ever and aye.

But among his more casually and airily written poems the one, perhaps, that conveys most persuasively his peculiar genius is *The Strayed Reveller.*

Here again we get that rare device of lifting us up to the top of a planetary watch-tower, from which the

inhabitants of our round globe can be caught in the historic and geographic glamour of their immemorial occupations; and from which, as from the deck of some philosophic air-ship, the past and the present betray their basic and poetic continuity.

In this poem, with its short easily-flowing unrhymed lines—a form of verse by which his not very musical ear was spared the labour of more artful versification—he reiterates his large, free, luminous, unpsychological theory of the nature of the poet's vision. It is a vision by no means free from pain, but pain mellowed to a stoical lucidity and attuned to a calm, disillusioned peace.

> They see the Heroes
> Sitting in the dark ship
> On the foamless, long-heaving,
> Violet sea,
> At sunset nearing
> The Happy Islands.
>
> . . . . .
>
> They see the Heroes
> Near harbour; but they share
> Their lives, and former violent toil in Thebes,
> Seven-gated Thebes, or Troy;
> Or where the echoing oars
> Of Argo first
> Startled the unknown sea.

It must be admitted that an amateur in poetry whose life-purpose is not the "contribution to our Literature of immortal works," but the struggle to live—and help his fellow-countrymen to live—"in the best that has been thought and said" from the beginning of time, will sometimes be found sacrificing beauty, and even dignity, to *preaching*.

When this occurs, however, in Matthew Arnold it is a

very different thing from the unredeemed dullness in Wordsworth at his worst, or the tediousness and infinitely commonplace cheapness of Byron at his second-best.

It *is* preaching, it *is* moralizing; sometimes it is priggish and supercilious moralizing to a point that becomes absurd, but it is never boastful in the intolerable manner of Browning, and it never comes as near to a Sunday-school lesson as Tennyson is capable of doing.

Personally—for I am not ashamed of confessing myself a humble disciple of this struggle to live rather "in the best that has been thought and said" than in any clever aesthetic venture—I can enjoy the most pedagogic poems of this amateur of philosophy just as I can enjoy certain aphorisms of Goethe that to cleverer heads appear tedious platitudes; but I will spare my restless reader quotations from these sermons in verse with the exception of the one entitled *Self-Dependence*, which is so Emersonian, if not Nietzschean in tone, that it would be unfair to leave it out.

Here indeed we get, plainly set down in black and white, the real secret of the irritated hostility that so many warm-blooded lovers of their kind, both godly and ungodly, feel towards him. Here he puts into downright unmistakable language what he is for ever hinting at, namely the desirability of a certain—I can express it in no other terms—a certain *cosmic selfishness.*

A yearning after such planetary isolation seems to have lain at the bottom of the deepest soul of this patient Inspector of Schools, this laborious pioneer of Secondary Education.

If the secret of Jesus was *epieikeia*, the secret of Matthew Arnold was certainly *the individual alone with the cosmos.*

And this cold planetary passion in him is what our warm-blooded herd-animals are quick to smell out, and

it must be to them like a freezing wafture from the ice of glaciers and avalanches! They detect, such lovers of human gregariousness, that down at the bottom of his heart this harrier of the prelates, this uncle Matthew who "could *never* be serious," was an extremely lukewarm lover of the human race, was in fact a misanthrope worse than Timon, would have felt little regret had he seen the whole unlucky breed swallowed up in some vast cataclysm! They detect that down at the bottom of his heart he longed for universal suicide, for universal death, for the great calm, unbroken peace out of which all the folly and all the pain was stirred up by some meddling demiurge.

This explains, they feel, his passion for such advocates of a God-like Nirvana as Spinoza and Senancour. They detect that all the time he was secretly a worshipper of that unruffled Demogorgon of the Abyss who drowned without mercy our first energetic human civilization, the lost continent of Atlantis. And it does seem as if what these bustling Fortinbrases have all the while suspected in him is revealed quite openly in his little Emersonian sermon upon "Self-Reliance."

In a vein quite contrary to the *epieikeia* of Jesus, our planetary Inspector—and I like to fancy he composed it while he was actually crossing the deep grave of that Lost Atlantis—writes this poem to advise us to stick to our predestined job and not worry about the wickedness or madness or ignorance of our less lucky neighbours in the tellurian trenches.

I often repeat the lines to myself when I am tempted to some human weakness; and although they don't jump with my conscience, they are marvellously comforting to my egoism.

In the way we know so well—in what some of us would call his grand "pathetic fallacy"—he thus, in true Empe-

doclean style, calls upon us to imitate the elements. "Wouldst thou *be* as these are? *Live* as they." So far so good; but once having let himself go, as his trans-atlantic liner carries him over the watery grave of *one* human civilization, the secret of his heart escapes, and he reveals what Nietzsche would call the "great loathing."

> Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
> Undistracted by the sights they see,
> These demand not that the things without them
> Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.
>
> And with joy the stars perform their shining,
> And the sea its long moon-silver'd roll;
> For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting
> All the fever of some differing soul.
>
> Bounded by themselves and unregardful
> In what state God's other works may be,
> In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
> These attain the mighty life you see.

The conventional expression "God's other works" does not, I think, conceal from us the inhumanity of this doctrine: but after all—un-Christian as it is—it does have behind it a considerable weight of mystical tradition; and no doubt many of the ancient Hermits were Elementalists in this sense.

But it is the *Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* that will always remain, for the casual and incurious reader, Matthew Arnold's masterpieces; and indeed there are few lovelier poems in our language.

Just as Milton flung into *Lycidas* so much more than an elegiac dirge over the loss of young King, so Matthew Arnold seized the opportunity offered by the death of Clough to compose, in his airiest and most archly-amateur fashion, a couple of poems that reveal the overtones and

undertones, the moral values and intellectual conclusions of his youth, his culture, his experience. What days these young men must have passed together, in a youth as guarded, as privileged, as favoured, as that of any young Mariuses or Florians or Gastons of Walter Pater's invention!

As I have hinted, the mere *realism* of these pastoral vignettes of the scenery round Oxford surpasses all nature-poetry in our language save certain passages in Shakespeare and Keats. The fact that the *kind* of landscape described is not grand or stupendous or awe-inspiring—no mountains like those in Wordsworth, no seas like those in Homer, no wide salt-marshes or vast horizons like those in Walt Whitman—does not lessen its value. It is *foreground* scenery, it is simple, pastoral scenery, just as we have it in Keats and Shakespeare; but unassuming and ordinary as it is, I confess I look in vain for anything to equal it in what has been written before or since of what most Englishmen mean when they talk of the *country*.

And just because of this intimate quality I think it takes a native-born critic to give these poems their true place. Their peculiar tone, conveying something of the familiar classical playfulness that is such a pretty thing when the great Milton unbends, adds to the spontaneity—I refuse to call it affected spontaneity—with which the impressions are recorded. And the point is, these are *honest* impressions! They are not the impressions of a poet pretending to be a farmer, but those of a bookish student following the familiar track of generations of bookish students.

But how English they are! Even the Odes of Keats are more adaptable to other alien landscapes, less soaked in English dew, less drenched by English rain, less "cool-rooted" in English earth!

Even into these poems, however, the grand master-

passion of Matthew Arnold for the romance of historic geography forces its way. Could anything be better as a conjuring up of the grounding of Punic keels upon Cornish coasts than the closing lines of the *Scholar Gipsy*?

> And snatch'd his rudder and shook out more sail;
> And day and night held on indignantly
> O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
> Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
> To where the Atlantic raves
> Outside the western straits; and unbent sails
> There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
> Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
> And on the beach undid his corded bales.

Nor are the allusions to Clough's grave in Italy, with their train of yet remoter mythical suggestion, as we get them in *Thyrsis*, any less magical.

> Hear it from thy broad lucent Arno-vale
> (For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
> The morningless and unawakening sleep
> Under the flowery oleanders pale)
> . . . . .
> Thou hearest the immortal chants of old!—
> Putting his sickle to the perilous grain
> In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,
> For thee the Lityerses-song again
> Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing.

Perhaps the thing of all others that makes Matthew Arnold's poetry of such real philosophical and moral value to us to-day is his reiterated assertion, through every variety of poem he wrote, that our only hope, our only comfort, our only support, in a world so confused and treacherous, is to sink back into our own soul, and draw our strength from that mysterious spring of unconquerable endurance that rises up, as if from some non-human

cosmic reservoir, in the depths where the self touches the not-self.

And in regard to all ultimate problems, and this alone gives his work a special value for us, he remains, steadily, obstinately, and with an instinctive rather than a rational bias, rooted and grounded in his *agnosticism.*

Now it is not at all easy to retain this particular philosophic attitude. The violent dogmatism of the warring political ideals of our time invade our mental attitude to the universe and endow it with a curious craving for authority. We cling, like frantic slaves in a shipwreck, to the authority of spiritualism, the authority of science, the authority of a sacerdotal church, and above all, to the authority of any kind of man-god-dictator who will take our burdens upon him and lift us out of ourselves. In our weakness, our desperation, our nervous recklessness, we grow as terrified of our own solitary wills and our own solitary souls as we might be of ice or water or fire.

Everything that offers itself with the faintest claim to tell us what to feel, what to think, what to love and hate —how in fact to lose what we dread most of all, the god within our own breast—we are prepared to deify, in hope that it will save us from our fear of life.

And thus it comes about that a peaceful, industrious, philosophic personage like Matthew Arnold, struggling in his conscientious, amateurish way to live according to "the best that has been said and thought," an old-fashioned liberal, a patient public servant, whose most exalted "cause" was the unsensational one of Secondary Education, has come to be, of all the poets of his age, the one from whom we can learn the most! And he has come to be this just because he kept harping, in his archly-serious, flippantly-prophetic way, upon the necessity of remaining

an uncommitted agnostic, upon the necessity of depending on *nothing* in heaven or earth, of following *nothing* in heaven or earth, but the god, the daimon, the secret inner voice, of one's own separate soul.

Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Matthew Arnold shamelessly displays in his writings all his lapses from *epieikeia*, all his reactions against his fellow-creatures. How beautifully free he is from the swaggering virility of Browning and the artistic dignity of Tennyson! In his jests on behalf of his Eternal he was never very particular about the figure he cut himself. Like Milton, he could forget propriety. Any stone was good enough to throw at the bishops or at Mr. Spurgeon!

In his advocacy of what the indignant Common Rooms of Oxford would call "University Extension culture" he was as sublimely indifferent to the charge of being popular as he was of being thought priggish. He was always prepared to sink himself and lose himself in the complete guilelessness of his praise for the great writers by whom he lived. He must have gone on gravely filling up notebook after notebook with quotations from the Classics. And it can never have struck him that a time would come when in our inverted intellectual snobbishness we should regard such notebooks as pathetic frivolity, like a great-aunt's album, and that our geniuses would be turning from the Loeb Classics to find—and to find with no negligible success—in gangster-saloons and bull-fights and lynchings and bombings their method of capturing the undying Protean muse.

For all his secret aloofness from human warmth Matthew Arnold must have displayed plenty of *epieikeia* in his domestic life.

Like Cowper, he had a *penchant* for pets, a significant psychological indication, I suspect, if all were known;

and he doesn't boggle at slipping into his *Poetical Works* a courtly apology to his dying canary for

> Troubling with our chatter vain
> Ebb of life and mortal pain,

and one can't help asking oneself whether as he wrote down the words,

> Us, unable to divine
> Our companion's dying sign
> Or o'erpass the severing sea
> Set betwixt ourselves and thee,

any trace of a flicker of Heine-like mischief crossed his face as he remembered that this was not the first time he had used in his poetry the words "sever," "severing," "*severance*"?

> Who renders vain their deep desire?—
> A God, a God their severance ruled!
> And bade betwixt their shores to be
> The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

But he dismisses this other *animula vagula* in the tone of a classic tenderness older than the Christian Hope:

> Fare thee well, companion dear!
> Fare for ever well, nor fear,
> Tiny though thou art, to stray
> Down the uncompanion'd way!

No, there is a residue of a curious kind of poignance in the contrast between his patient, conventional, kindly life and the far-off incarnations of his wandering spirit.

From which of the sages of the *logoi* he was always reading did he learn the secret of adjusting his amiable-sociable *outer* life to the cold, aloof, "soulless" *inner* life, this queer Neckan-life of his, this life of an unconverted Merman who *couldn't* keep grave when he heard how much the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester

"wanted to do something for the honour of Our Lord's godhead"?

The particular influence he exerted all his days must have been of a piece with this queer double life—of kindly rectitude and infinite disillusionment. How he must have been hated in certain quarters! None knew in what curious and new direction he would make his next attack, but it would be sure to be against something profoundly respected by the moral instincts of every class in the country.

And if his poetry was amateurish compared with all the volumes of Browning and Swinburne, how amateurish were his onslaughts on theology! They resembled Goethe's attacks on Sir Isaac Newton. Indeed, like Goethe, he held the view that there was a "penetrable" and an "impenetrable" in Nature and that the Christian Revelation belonged to the sphere of the impenetrable.

Like Goethe's in *his* day, Matthew Arnold's aphorisms and generalizations go far deeper than appears on the surface. They have a certain challenging airiness of tone, but like transparent water they reflect the very abysses of the far-off sky. That "Eternal not ourselves which makes for righteousness" does remain, say what you will, the obstinate and incredible miracle in this careless cosmos.

But how appropriate, how singularly suitable for one who was always something of a male Undine under his Inspector's umbrella, that the most definite statement of his secret thoughts should be put into the mouth of Empedocles, the philosopher *par excellence* of the non-human elements!

Empedocles on Etna is one of the most curious and interesting poems in our language. It is a poem for lonely people; for recluses and hermits, for misfits and misanthropes, for all those who underneath their patient

toil and amiable chatter have a longing, figuratively speaking, to throw themselves into a fiery crater or into the path of an avalanche.

And it is so characteristic of Matthew Arnold, the way in which in this queer poem the careless stage directions are set down. The youthful Callicles—so we are told at one point—"sings unseen from below"; but anything less like "singing" than the slow-measured lines, full of the fragrance of moss and fern-roots that the author proceeds to recite, can hardly be imagined :

> . . . the air
> Is freshen'd by the leaping stream, which throws
> Eternal showers of spray on the moss'd roots
> Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots
> Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells
> Of hyacinths, and on late anemones
> That muffle its wet banks . . .

Presently we are assured that "the music below ceases and Empedocles speaks, accompanying himself in a solemn manner on his harp."

Even our poet's master, Goethe, in his most quaintly stiff and puppet-show style, would hardly have mentioned this accompaniment. But we forget it all when we read what follows :

> All things the world which fill
> Of but one stuff are spun,
> That we who rail are still
> With what we rail at, one;
> One with the o'er-labour'd Power that through the breadth and length
> Of earth, and air, and sea,
> In men and plants and stones,
> Hath toil perpetually,
> And travails, pants and moans;
> Fain would do all things well, but sometimes fails in strength.

And patiently exact
  This universal God
Alike to any act
  Proceeds at any nod
And quietly declaims the cursings of himself.

The philosopher closes with that "sad lucidity" of our author's stoical mood that we have come to know so well.

I say; Fear not! Life still
  Leaves human effort scope.
But since life teems with ill,
  Nurse no extravagant hope;
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair!

And the stage-direction at this point reads, "Long pause." Alas! such is the contrariety of the human mind that it is hard not to fill this "long pause" with a rebellious after-thought from some less pessimistic echo of "the best that has been thought and said" in the long travail of the human spirit, an echo from some voice that refuses to let the elements have the last word.

But Callicles sings again; and there follow lines so lovely in their Dorian calm that I know few that thrill me more.

Far, far from here,
The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
Among the green Illyrian hills; and there
The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
And by the sea, and in the brakes.
The grass is cool, the sea-side air
  Buoyant and fresh, the mountain-flowers
  More virginal and sweet than ours.
And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore
In breathless quiet, after all their ills.

I would be very unwilling to admit that Matthew

Arnold's disillusioned endurance and stoic resignation was the final word of human wisdom under the sun; but after *some* of our blustering hope-bringers, his mood at least seems worthy of the dignity of the human spirit. Reading him always seems to me like walking on the bank of a full-brimmed river, a river whose clear surface reflects the delicatest of wind-shaken reeds as well as the ruggedest of rocky promontories.

And indeed as we walk along that river-bank, listening to a faint sad wind stirring amid the alders, we seem always to hear beyond that wind, always beyond the murmur of that river, always beyond the cool deep reflections in that brimming water, a far-off sound of a different tone!

And I seem to catch, making the hopefullest choruses from the confident camp-fires we have left behind fall vulgar-sweet and grossly satisfied upon the ear, the unearthly breaking, hoarse, harsh and strange, but with all its strangeness answering some heroic homesickness in the soul, that like a great fish leaps to meet it—the breaking of the waves of the non-human ultimate sea!

Yes, not for nothing did Matthew Arnold select the old Empedocles as his mouthpiece. There is, I fancy, among poets and mystics a long, long occult tradition, reverting to the megalithic age, of this worship of the most inhuman of all the elements, the worship of stones and water.

Even in our own time that proud anti-social poet of the Pacific Coast, the American Jeffers, promulges some such reversion to the most primeval of all animisms—if it be animism! For the chemistry of our bodies will always draw some among us, and the nostalgia of our souls will always draw some among us, away from the warm securities of flesh-and-blood to that pre-historic

remoteness and unapproachableness, that final escape of hunter and hunted, the elements from which we came.

In speaking of the old Welsh tales that we now call the *Mabinogi*, Matthew Arnold, with one of those subtle inklings of pure genius that he sometimes displayed, makes use of the following significant words.

> The mediaeval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret; he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds of is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely: stones "not of this building," but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestical.

Ha, master! was it, then, to this "older architecture," to these stones "not of this building," that you secretly responded all your life? Responded even while you were tormenting the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester? Responded even while you were explaining that the word God only meant "shining," and that the word religion only meant "morality touched with emotion"? Responded while you were listening to the "grating roar of pebbles" on Dover Beach, like Sophocles on *his* beach, and were "finding in that sound" what in your quaint pedagogic way you called "a thought," but which really was a cry to your lost love—

> for the world which seems
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain,
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Responded even while you were listening to that *other* cry, the cry of the "armies of the homeless and unfed"?

And was this response to an architecture "cunninger and more majestical" nothing less than a response to that "house not made with hands" whose builder and ruler is Death?

We have overheard in recent years various hints and rumours telling of an unconscious yearning within us—there is no need to give it a more technical name, but it is some kind of navel-string nostalgia—a yearning to revert to our pre-natal condition within the body of our mother. And if the maternal womb of us all, as the drift of speculation seems to point, was nothing less than the shell-strewn *windrow* between sea and shore, may we not regard this worship of water and stone, this atavistic "religion" *un*-touched by morality, as a longing for that untroubled *bios-akinesis*, that blessed existence without motion or thought, which was interrupted when we were born?

But agnostic still as to the fate of the soul at this critical juncture, our author's Empedocles fears that even after death the terrible *thinking-power* may be our bane:

> . . . thought and mind
> Will hurry us with them on their homeless march,
> Over the unallied unopening earth,
> Over the unrecognising sea; while air
> Will blow us fiercely back to sea and earth,
> And fire repel us from its living waves.
> And then we shall unwillingly return
> Back to this meadow of calamity,
> This uncongenial place, this human life;
> And in our individual human state
> Go through the sad probation all again,
> To see if we will now at last be true
> To our own only true, deep-buried selves,
> Being one with which we are one with the whole world.

Sometimes when one thinks of that mid-Victorian era

and compares it with our own it seems like an epoch of giants! Think of the men who were contemporaries of Matthew Arnold! The roll of their tremendous names is overpowering; nor do I think, if it were a simple question of outstanding originality, we should dare to rank him among the first of these Titans. Curiously enough, however, as Oscar Wilde so admirably hints, great critics of life and literature are in reality a good deal rarer than these vital geniuses.

And consider how blind, how absurdly prejudiced, how ignorant and childish, these original ones are in regard to each other's work!

The number of really great *critics* in the historic roll of English letters is indeed strikingly small compared with the crowd of eccentric creators; while I suppose—Matthew Arnold would certainly say so—it is the other way round across the Channel!

Holding a natural brief for his own detached onlooker's point of view, which he quite properly praises as an Hellenic one, Matthew Arnold was tempted to deplore the absence from England of any concentrated body of intelligent criticism parallel with what exists in Paris.

Personally I hesitate to follow him here. Well-balanced criticism can of course be a help in keeping erratic geniuses to their proper predestined path, but when you consider the predestined path of our whole Anglo-Celtic imagination, its chaotic, meteoric, dark-star orbits, its terrific individualism, its heroic provincialism, it seems a question whether in the long run it doesn't fare better and achieve more natural and autochthonous results by being spared the assistance of such highly-trained critical aid!

The present work is a book upon books, and in such

a survey, to omit Matthew Arnold would be like dropping our best pilot when our small craft is in the middle of the reefs and shoals. Our present-day critics have either so violent a social *parti pris*, or they are themselves, in their charming gossiping manner, so extravagantly personal, that a true literary criticism, going, as his did, to the root of the matter, and using for his criterion not so much personal whims and caprices as a detailed comparison with "the best that has been thought and said," is no less rare and precious in our era of mass-movements than it was among the self-absorbed giants of his time. He is a light-weight, we must admit, compared with his master Goethe, but like Goethe—and of how many others can *that* be said?—the method he reiterates is the old Socratic one of patient self-culture based upon the great works of the past but accompanied by a purgative and wholesome scepticism of *all* the dogmas of the past!

This method of self-culture has the supreme advantage of detaching us from the catchwords of the hour and of fixing our minds upon what is abiding; and the grand example of his own application of it is his treatment of the Bible.

He may have made mistakes in this biblical exegesis. He was always a careless amateur. But when one encounters in so many quarters the same neglect—I speak of pure cultural neglect, for indifference to dogma is another matter—of the Bible as of Homer or Rabelais, it does seem, considering what he called the instinct of self-preservation in the soul, it does seem as if we would be wise to accept his "method," though his Empedoclean "secret" may not be for us.

But perhaps we say even this too quickly! At any rate let the power we still call Nature, that great non-human

power he worshipped in preference to the Second Person of the Trinity, have the last word *here* . . .

> Race after race, man after man,
> Have thought that my secret was theirs,
> Have dreamed that I lived but for them,
> That they were my glory and joy . . .
> They are dust, they are changed, they are gone!
> I remain.

WALT WHITMAN

THE most striking characteristic of Walt Whitman's poetry is surely its astounding optimism. And the curious thing is that it is an entirely heathen and profane optimism. Now we all know that pagan poets have very frequently, either from stoicism or from cynicism, been what you might call *cheerful*; but one would hardly call any of them exuberantly optimistic.

In England William Blake, I suppose, though he included Jesus in his mythological Pantheon, is our nearest approach to a triumphantly optimistic pagan poet. And it must be remarked that both Whitman and Blake are extravagant mystics. In fact, one wonders sometimes if it is possible for any pagan poet to be rapturously happy in this world who is *not* a violent mystic.

Browning, of course, was optimistic enough; but Browning's optimism was based on his individual interpretation of orthodox Christianity, and though extremely personal it certainly cannot in any sense be styled pagan.

But Whitman's optimism is pagan through and through. No poet since the Christian era has been less influenced by Christianity. The anti-Christian quality in his work goes down to its deepest roots. This can be seen in its undeviating pluralism and polytheism. Where Christian poets rejoice in the spirit of God, or, if they have a pantheistic bias, in the inspiration of some great Over-Soul or Anima Mundi, Whitman rejoices in the individual souls of the multifarious populations, human, subhuman,

and superhuman, that crowd with their diverse identities the whole fathomless ocean of Life and Being.

Instead of calling on us to worship God, or to imitate Christ, he calls on us to "follow the Great Companions"; an allusion, I take it, simply to the souls of all the dead, who are all exempt, as Pantagruel says, from the scissors of Atropos, but have by no means all been famous heroes! Where his originality shows itself as most staggering to the rational mind is in the vast scope of this mystical pluralism.

The implication is that the secret of the System of Things is to be found altogether in the *Many* rather than the *One*. It is a Sovietization of the Absolute. His universe is, in fact, not a universe at all, but a *multiverse*; the sort of world for which William James had so decided a predilection. A multiverse, if one can speak in such terms, lends itself much better to the magical and the miraculous, and to all the vagaries of chance and accident and free will than a world made of one piece or a "block-universe," as William James rather disparagingly called our ordinary scientific cosmos.

It is, of course, this world-of-one-piece that lends itself so smoothly and satisfactorily to the rational determinations of both orthodox science and orthodox religion.

Walt Whitman's world, in fact, for all its gigantic realism and cosmogonic proportions, is like a fairy place in comparison with the world of logical physics and metaphysics. Another striking thing about it is its triumphant response to the natural heart's desire of the ordinary man.

One of the reasons why the idea of death is so unpleasant to most of us is that we are faced with a choice between the complete extinction of our personality according to scientific law, and a moralistic Judgment

Day according to religious law, both of which alternatives are extremely disconcerting to the human ego.

We have no wish to lose our personality, and we have still less wish to pay a heavy price for our dalliance with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But Walt Whitman's mystical fairy-world gives us all exactly what we want. It encourages us to assert our natural egoism while we live, and it assures us that no amount of mortal sin will debar us from continuing to assert our natural egoism after we are dead. In a word, Walt Whitman's poetry is an exultant and prophetic affirmation of all that the normal heart of man would like to believe *if it dared.*

And it is not only we mortal men who are to have the immortal satisfaction of our profligate hearts. Like St. Paul, Walt Whitman never allows himself to forget the "whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together"; and without having recourse to any religious or any moral redemption that would confine its benefactions to the chosen few, this unexampled Hercules of Felicity opens the gates of what might be called a Fourth Dimensional Paradise to every living creature in the teeming cosmos. Would it be a malicious question to ask how far this surprising soothsayer honestly and confidently felt in his secretest heart that the System of Things really *was*, as he declared, prepared to satisfy to the full the egoistic yearning of all the children of life?

It is a fascinating psychological problem anyway, whether malicious or not, to ponder on the relation between an optimistic poet's oracular utterances and those lapses into ordinary human doubt and despondency which must often have put down the "pegs" that made such tremendous music. Only once or twice in *Leaves of Grass* does our author confess to such despondent moods.

But I fancy, when they *did* come, the collapse of these Gargantuan certainties must have been a lamentable landslide. And indeed, when he does confess his doubts he certainly does so without beating about the bush. "Bloody flukes" are what rise to the surface then, as if from the spoutings of some cosmic Moby Dick, whose writhings, as the harpoon gores its side, "the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red." In its terraqueous vastness and huge camaraderie, in all its grossness and piled-up compost, in all its measureless and mountainous rubble and slag, Whitman's world resembles the world of Rabelais.

But while Rabelais drew the rich unction of his life-acceptance from a large, lazy, easy belief in an indulgent and bountiful God, who is in all and through all and behind all, Whitman celebrates the innumerable host of all souls, human, subhuman, superhuman, who, like the *Ideas* of Plato, fill the multitudinous reservoirs of imperishable Being.

It seems to me, then, that Walt Whitman's optimism is the life-blood of his poetry, and that the boldest and most heart-satisfying mysticism ever projected by a poet's will to believe is the life-blood of his optimism.

There *are* things in Walt Whitman—I hasten to admit it—such as his *style*, for instance, and his peculiar and quite special renderings of certain aspects of nature, that make it possible for any materialist who loves poetry to enjoy him up to a certain point; but all the same I cannot help feeling that if we rule all this mysticism of his and all this talk about "immortality" out of court, what is left for us in these redeeming features of rhythm and description will be a meagre feast.

Let us therefore consider in patient Socratic manner what the implications really are that are blurred and

concealed under the sweeping assertions of our unseduced materialists. Whitman's mysticism is such an excessively pleasant one, and so free from any need of exceptional virtue or exceptional intellect in its candidates for immortality, that after saturating oneself in his poetry—as the present writer certainly may claim to have done, since he read nothing else for two obsessed years—it is a gloomy and a melancholy business to fall back upon the ordinary scientific world of matter and motion, a world of electric forces and mathematical symbols, where the personality of a living soul is no more than the spurt of a match struck in the dark.

As I have hinted, it is easier to give up the immortality offered by the Church, an immortality dependent upon our avoiding fornication and humbling our pride, than it is to give up the immortality offered by Walt Whitman, which is to be shared by every living soul, good, bad, and indifferent, in the whole animate and inanimate cosmos; and I, for one, am not prepared to give up this "sure and certain hope" without putting a few pertinent questions to these confident doomsters.

The first question I would like to ask is this. Is it not rather hastily concluded that it is easier to believe in a universe friendly to our heart's desire than in a universe dedicated to satisfy no one, save him who prays for "eternal rest"? Does not the truth rather lie in the fact that the sense-world is the world we *naturally* believe in, whereas it requires, I will not say greater purity or greater intellect, but a greater scepticism about appearances, to shake off this "once-born" reaction to life? It is at any rate surely true that any kind of sturdy materialism has the immense advantage of a direct and constant appeal to our five senses. But is this verdict of the senses a really sound and satisfactory one? Does not a certain deep, calm,

rational instinct in us, what you might call a super-commonsense, feel always a little sceptical about it?

Nor do I think it requires any very subtle metaphysical introspection to isolate and clarify this basic scepticism. For it is not hard to see that our senses are anything but infallible, anything but what you might call *self-supporting*.

"All that exists in the mind," affirmed the judicious Locke, "comes from the senses." "*Except the mind*," retorted the incorrigible Pangloss.

But it is, I admit, extremely hard to convey to a mind convinced that the visible world *is all there is*, the grotesque and ridiculous narrowing-down of the possibilities of Life and Being that this drastic way of going to work, this dogmatic limiting of things to the astronomical universe around us, really implies. For not only have we to instil into the mind of our champion of the sense-world a corrosive doubt as to the absoluteness of this obvious reaction; we have also to implant in him the seed of an unkind doubt as to his assurance with regard to the "big" and the "little." We have, in fact, to make him comprehend the complete relativity and even negligibility of all "bigness" and "littleness," and consequently of all material distance and nearness.

An advocate of the view that the astronomical world is all there is is for ever reminding us how impressed, over-

and ridiculous narrowing-down of the possibilities of Life

remains an awe-inspiring vision even if we have the mental detachment necessary to *round it off* as a relatively-enclosed mathematical circle, rather than to regard it as something which extends indefinitely straight ahead.

But it is less overpowering, for the simple reason that there is a portion of our mind, not a mystical portion but a common-sense one, that feels quietly aware that this reduction of the boundless possibilities of Life and Being and Existence to our particular three-dimensional astronomical universe is an incredible and inconceivable limitation, a limitation not only unthinkable but grotesquely absurd.

And yet it seems an easy and a natural thing for human minds that are temperamentally hypnotized by the senses to accept this astronomical universe we know so well, with its physical forces and electronic energies, and its flash-in-the-pan spurt of transitory life on a planet or two, as all there is; and to regard all the layers, all the levels, all the regions, all the planes, all the dimensions, that can be found in the fathomless abysses of Existence and in the infinite bosom of Being as mere mystical jugglery.

The problem that confronts us if we are to clear our minds of the sort of prejudice that makes Walt Whitman's mysticism ridiculous at the very start, is how to disturb, shake, trouble, expose, and bring down this dogmatic belief that a telescopic and super-telescopic Immensity, surrounding a planet full of doomed simpletons and crafty cut-throats, is actually *all there is* in the boundless reservoirs of Being.

How can we track down this lamentable simulacrum of a world to its source in these stalwart minds? How can we throw a little sceptical light on all this? How can we unsettle the assurance of these people? Consider from a certain angle what it would really mean if our material

world were all there is. Of course when I say "our material world," I'm not unaware that modern physics has so thinned out the old-fashioned atomic mask of our evasive cosmos, that after disguising herself for a dance or two in electrical forces and invisible motions she has retired for ever from normal apprehension behind the black domino of mathematical symbols.

But whether the mask of the world is electric or dynamic or no more than an algebraic equation, she still remains the same old visible or telescopic-visible world, wearing the disguise that the Earth-Spirit in Faust calls "the Garment of the Deity."

And what I am anxious to do, in clearing away the heaviest prejudices from the path of Walt Whitman's triumphant belief in "Immortality for All," is to convey to a few minds as illogical as my own what we are really in for, if this same astronomical world, made of a stuff formerly called matter but now reduced to a mathematical symbol, turns out to be, with a planetful of agitated and short-lived organisms, *all* that the whole infinite ocean of Life and Being and Existence contains.

What I am trying to suggest can, in fact, only be properly grasped if we get rid of our uncritical respect for mere physical height, mere physical depth, mere physical distance. As a help towards this salutary reduction of our childish awe in the presence of mere enormity, it is well to contemplate the recession *inwards* as well as the recession *outwards* of the mystery of matter. I mean it is a good thing to set the microscopic relativities against the telescopic ones.

Nor must we forget that modern mathematics, though not going as far as the philosopher Kant, has taken something of the serpent's sting out of the terrifying iniquity of space.

But let us assume for a moment that the astronomical world, as presented to us by modern science, is really *all there is*, and that all the layers, levels, planes, dimensions, that our common sense tells us the unfathomable sea of Being contains have no existence, the conclusion is inevitable, considering the statements of astronomers and biologists, that for unthinkable epochs of time, for what are practically infinite epochs, this astronomical universe was entirely composed of that dark, shifty, ambiguous, mindless "stuff" that used to be called matter. This uninspiring world-stuff took for unthinkable aeons of time the shape of gaseous nebulae whirling about in an etheric void.

Now consider what this actually means when once we have got rid of our reverential obsequiousness in the presence of mere size and distance. It means that for epochs of time so incredibly vast that the minds among us who are awed by mathematical symbols are crushed beneath them, there have been no thoughts, no intelligence, no souls, no life; in other words, no real existence at all!

There has been, in fact, for these unthinkable immensities—if immensities are to be taken literally as well as mathematically—simply *nothing*; nothing but blind, dark, amorphous matter, nothing but the meaningless and purposeless gyrations of inorganic motion.

But you must remember that this whole vision of what our astronomical universe was before mind appeared is an entirely *mental vision*. In fact it is an entirely mental imagination. For it is only through our senses, as coordinated and concentrated by our minds, that we possess any idea at all of these eternities of dark, blind, unconscious, chemical-electrical forces, whirling about in their etheric void. "*Where wast thou*," the Lord might most pertin-

ently ask, in the sardonic vein of the Book of Job, "when the foundations of the world were set, and the pillars of the universe were established?"

We were nowhere; and our human minds, upon which all our science depends, were nowhere, and even such sub-human, sub-animal, sub-vegetable sensibilities as many suppose exist in the rocks and stones and minerals of our life-bearing earth, were nowhere. *Nothing was anywhere*; nothing but the blind, dark, meaningless whirlings and eddyings to and fro in a boundless void of vortices and maelstroms of unconscious electronic force.

This whole materialistic—I won't say pessimistic, for the life that many creatures have to live makes annihilation an agreeable contrast—but this whole materialistic notion of there being nothing in existence except an astronomical universe that for billions and billions and billions of years has "swung its obscure body to and fro" in a state of blind, dark, unconscious electronic chemistry, is a projection of pure human imagination. Not the maddest superstition of the most primitive African tribe could surpass it as a cosmogonic fantasy. Its grand advantage is that it is so *easy* a speculation. Our senses, with the aid of our co-ordinating minds, provide us only too naturally with the idea of darkness, blindness, meaninglessness, and nothingness.

We take the phenomenon of physical darkness, we take the phenomenon of our own unconsciousness in sleep; we remember what we felt when we saw certain scoriac wildernesses, certain devastating scenes of absolute loneliness; we remember certain moments in our lives when we felt inert and helpless in the power of the cosmic chemistry, and with all this to help us we project into the abysm of time an imaginative vision, a dead universe of matter, a vast dark blot of whirling chemistry, a black

infinitude of nonentity, and yet something, many of us feel in our secret hearts, that is a comforting object of thought after the troubles and tumults of our mortal life.

But what I want to say to these tough-minded adherents of the atoms and the void is this. When you take a philosophical view of distance and magnitude—those mathematical illusions so entirely dependent on the mind —this astronomical universe, to whose poor pretensions all the teeming reservoirs and fathomless dimensions of Being have been reduced, looks, as the Psalmist tells us the vast isles of the ocean looked to the Lord, *like a very little thing*. In fact, it looks too small to be true ; too small, too negligible to be the sum-total of the fathomless potentialities of Being.

What I would like to convey to our unseducible champions of the visible world is that from the calmest and quietest standpoint of common sense it is impossible that the reality of things should be as absurdly curtailed as this.

I am not claiming that common sense demands that, as individuals, *we* should survive the death of our bodies, but I am claiming that to regard this visible and telescopic universe of thinned-out matter and motion, this universe that has only, so to speak, *come to life* on one or two small planets after aeons upon aeons of dark, blind, unconscious, chemical-electrical amorphousness, is a far more fantastic and monstrous absurdity than the most primitive fairy-tale of creation.

Champions of the astonishing theory that the astronomical world that surrounds us is literally *all there is* must be so hypnotized by the sense-illusion—soon reduced to its proper place by mathematics—of the big and the little, that because with the most powerful telescopes they can't reach the end of the star-galaxies or the end of space they

feel that their visible world is sufficiently staggering *as it is*, without adding to it any other dimensions or any other possibilities from the mystery of Being.

By a crude reduction of the inescapable *mental aspect* of all things to the brain-functioning of a billion or so of apelike organisms, they simplify the situation to a point that makes the whole business unthinkable. For ever talking of the "immensity" of space and the "immensity" of the star-galaxies, they trick themselves into the notion that there is something "immense" about the huge deadness of a great mass of electronic force, existing with no mind to see it, no consciousness to know that it is there, through unthinkable aeons of time; till at last after a few lucky shuffles—miracle of miracles!—in this dark *all-there-was*, there arises on some swampy sea-coast of Earth, and possibly on some crater's edge in Mars, a semi-conscious amoebic life-cell, out of whose heroic progeny all flesh can evolve.

With this amoeba, or whatever the first life-cell may have been, appears for the first time the only reality that to us is *thinkable*, that to us is more than pure imagination; for before this dim and groping semi-consciousness came on the scene there was no mind to use the senses and no senses to be used by the mind. There was, in fact, *nothing at all*; for if mind and consciousness only began with certain particular material organisms, all these trillions upon trillions of years are a black void. Without a mind to note them, those whirling electrons, those motions, those energies, those forces, those nebular gasses, those dark stars, were simply nothing; nothing until certain scientific anthropoids of these latter years set themselves to imagine their blind existence.

Let us project whatever soul we *have* got, reader, to the utmost star of the Milky Way, and then *as far on again*,

and then as far on again, and than as far on again, and what shall we find? We shall either find ourselves returning full circle to the exact spot on this little orb from which we started, or we shall find ourselves lost altogether in a voyage through infinity. Perhaps at some point during this appalling journey our soul will wisely say to itself, "But this whole thing is a mental trick, a mathematical illusion, and this empty space through which I am journeying must be something *I am carrying with me*, just as the last star-galaxy I passed would be nothing if I had not been there to see it," and back our mind will come of its own volition, not so much dizzy with the distance it has gone, as convinced that there must be some mathematical treachery in regard to this infinite space.

Our modern physicists who deal with the astronomical universe and with its mysterious *substance-no-substance*, can easily, for all their obscure mathematical symbols, be seduced by religious special-pleaders into a vague Deism; but they can be also, though perhaps a little less easily, because of the devilish *coup de grace* their mathematics have bestowed on the solidity of matter, be given a jerk in the direction of deterministic atheism.

But it seems to me that from a really philosophical point of view, when both the religious specialists and the scientific specialists are put aside, we are confronted, *as of old*, and without any change having been worked in the familiar spectacle, on one hand by the same mysterious sense-world of the telescope and the microscope with its well-known hopeless limitations, and on the other hand by the inescapable *knowledge* of our deepest, calmest, and most rational intellect, that this sense-world with its bewildering antinomies of space and time, is *not* all there is.

The present situation in regard to human thought about

the questions that matter most to us all—that is to say, whether there is any kind of life after death, whether there are any other dimensions of Being beside the astronomical world, whether to be good is important or unimportant, whether righteousness is inherent in the System of Things or is a mere invention of man—is a very curious one.

So *specialized* has all knowledge become that there are no longer any great thinkers in the sense in which Heraclitus and Socrates and Spinoza and Goethe were great thinkers.

And yet these narrow specialists, or the better known among them, utter resounding and portentous words upon philosophical matters with the portion of their brains that is no more enlightened—and we are lucky if it is not less enlightened—than the most ordinary man's brains. And the champions of the orthodox religions, as these die slowly, like bright pitiful gasping fish at the bottom of a fishing-smack, naturally take a despairing advantage of this dearth of real philosophers, and quote with joy the casual announcements of specialists who are no more philosophic than they are themselves.

And in this way it has come about that all manner of slap-dash pseudo-philosophic ideas have become popular whose only value is to be straws on the current of time, indicating the direction of its drift.

One of these mental straws is the idea that the old palpable matter of atoms or electrons has become a series of impalpable mathematical symbols reaching our mind from a completely unknowable reality.

Much has been made by orthodox apologists of this refining away of matter; but the positive human gain to us, as living souls, of this conversion of palpable forces into mathematical symbols is nil.

No conceivable thinning-out, even into the subtlest mathematical symbols, can ever transform matter into mind, or turn the object of thought into the power of thought. The objective universe, after all these chemical, electrical, and finally mathematical reductions, remains to our human senses the same visible universe and to our human soul the same invisible mystery; and it seems to me that Walt Whitman's anthropomorphic mysticism is just as likely to represent—if representation is all we can expect—the unknowable reality behind the System of Things, as the most attenuated set of electric objective forces or mathematical symbols. Attenuate the objective universe as subtly as you please, *the receiving instrument is still the mind*, and through it all the mind is covertly presupposed.

But because modern science can do nothing but strip the objective world of its apparent tangibility and static pressure, there seems no reason why we should all become orthodox believers. Why shouldn't we select a quite different alternative and boldly become mystics in the manner of Walt Whitman? We shall at least, on such lines, come much nearer to realizing in our faith—since *some* kind of faith seems inevitable—the natural longing of our heart's desire.

It would be an interesting *referendum ad orbem* if it were possible to take a census of all the "yeas" and "nays" of the whole human race on the subject of our personal survival of death. With most unorthodox persons it is usually, I fancy, as with myself, a case of "fifty-fifty"; varied, I suspect, in gloomy moods, to a much lower percentage in favour of survival.

But to whichever side this *in utrumque paratus* tilts, it seems to me that the most promising assumption we can make if we want to do justice to the mystical optimism of

Walt Whitman is the assumption that our minds are by no means so circumscribed by the position in space and time of our physical bodies, as to lose their underlying contact with dimensions of existence outside the mathematical circle of the sense-world.

And I think this assumption finds a real justification, quite apart from moments of special emotional illumination, in a feeling that I am sure a great many people *habitually* experience, namely that the margins of our minds are wider and more comprehensive than the margins of matter. All that I have been fumbling to express in this clumsy and unmetaphysical way could be summed up thus. Without *mind* of some sort—though not necessarily without the particular multifarious human minds that people our earth—this visible world of the senses would simply cease to exist; for to *be* there, and to have no consciousness, not even the rudimentary one of an amoeba, would be identical with not being there at all. It would leave the universe a complete blank.

Now since the adherents of the astronomical world *as all there is* are constantly referring to immensities of time —these sacred "immensities" with which they would overawe a mind that can travel through eternity a billion times faster than the fastest light-wave—when nothing but blind forces and the possibility of blind mathematical symbols existed, we are forced to assume that for unthinkable periods of time there was simply *nothing anywhere.*

Now it presents itself to my mind as a preposterous idea to think that for an eternity of time there was simply nothing, *then* a brief flash-in-the-pan of life and the mind, *then* the familiar nothingness again, with the poor universe, "which is our all," settling humbly down to its normal patient extinction. In other words, both life and mind

are, according to the view I am criticizing, accidental and not very welcome intruders in an empty void.

Nor does it help matters to call this void by the soothing word "sleep," for a sleep implies a sleeper, and here there is nothing but the possibility of mathematical symbols without a mathematician, nothing but prodigious immensities that it would be equally correct to call "littlenesses"; for, little or big, they are as though they were not.

I have tried to put this matter into plain and simple words, because I think that many people are liable, when they conjure up these images of matter triumphant, *to imagine themselves there*, hidden, like Satan in Milton's Chaos, behind some gaseous cloud, and observing their un-ideal truth with a grim sardonic eye of disillusioned satisfaction. But they are *not* there. Nobody was, is, or ever will be there.

And it seems common sense to consider that a state of things that no one has seen or ever can see, a state of things that cannot see itself, and yet a state of things—save for the spurt of a match in the dark when a planet or two becomes pregnant—that is the natural condition of the only universe that exists, has only to be *realized* to be found totally absurd.

Surely such a limited universe is a grotesque and preposterous substitute for the teeming Reservoirs, Levels, Regions, and Dimensions of Life, which not only the mysticism of Walt Whitman but the natural, normal, inevitable mysticism of ordinary humanity, the mysticism that springs from the calmest and clearest portion of the human mind, feels assured must be discoverable, somehow or other, in the bosom of the All.

Our human mind is naturally so inert, so lazy, so swamped in its immediate sense-impressions that the

movements it makes to envisage its cosmic situation tend to be hypnotized by whatever scraps and straws of scientific hypothesis are floating about at the moment. These obscure and technical theories our mind adopts loosely and vaguely, almost always emphasizing their *negative* implication.

Thus when science breathed the magic words, "atoms," "molecules," "evolution," "natural selection," we said to ourselves: "That's the end of the Book of Genesis!" Then when we picked up the thaumaturgical expression "electrons," we said: "That's the end of solid matter!"

And now that electrons have melted into God knows what, into something that only the most recondite mathematical symbols can name or weigh; we say in our hearts: "Reality is unknowable; everything is relative; let us become Roman Catholics or at least Anglican Catholics, for science has discovered that there's no reason, after all, why there *should not* be a Divine Power."

But without hurrying off in a panic to consider our end and learn theology, let us rouse up our lazy minds till they do at least envisage clearly the sort of cosmos from which Walt Whitman's mysticism rescues us, and rescues us without having to give up our lascivious ways or humble our proud intelligence before the Great White Throne.

And we must not forget that even Walt Whitman *had* his doubts to the very last. And in describing these doubts, he summed up as well as anybody the triumphant march of matter, and the maggots and rats that end us, and the bloody flukes, and the "alarums" of our betrayal.

Do not be angry with me, reader, if I put this case for the devil once more in a cantankerous nutshell. For an unthinkable eternity there was *nothing*. Then, for a few millions of years, there was rudimentary consciousness,

on at least one "thick rotundity" of cooled-off lava; reaching its height of mental awareness in a few more millions of years, and, after that, nothing again, and this time nothing, as far as we know, for ever and ever.

Chance, and pure Chance and nothing but Chance, according to this theory, brought consciousness into existence, and with consciousness everything, but in characteristic preference for the worst, what must our realists do, now that consciousness *has* appeared, but proceed to strip chance of its dominant rôle, lest, I suppose, in a Walt Whitman mood it might suddenly give us Free Will and Immortality, and usher to the front a new master of our fate, namely rigid Determinism. Thus does the Will to Die, or the Will to the Worst, or the Will to have No Illusion, use the two opposite hunting-dogs, Chance and Destiny, to catch the soul which ever way it runs!

Among Walt Whitman's illusions one of the most inspiring to himself was the idea that he could not only face everything, but write of everything; and, indeed, I think with the exception of Rabelais no human author has come as near to realizing both these impossible ideals.

But of course, with all his magnificent battle-cries, he *does not* face everything; and with all his piled-up catalogues he *does not* write of everything. For even our present world—this poor astronomical dimension of space and time whose limitations we have been emphasizing—contains abysses of mental and physical horror that are as beyond Walt Whitman's fathoming as the depths of the Atlantic Ocean are beyond the fathoming of a newt in Withybed Pond.

But Walt Whitman's optimism has a physical as well as a mystical basis, and it is curious to notice how his bodily self-consciousness causes a particular kind of nervous irritation in certain types of people, an irritation that must

be extremely comprehensive, for such persons feel disgusted with him when he talks of the smell of his armpits, and equally disgusted with him when with a carefully-washed shirt open at his tanned neck, and his loose, free, easy, athletic limbs clothed in spotless workman's trousers, he appears before us with an almost sailor-like nonchalance, but obviously with an intense narcissistic enjoyment of his healthy body in its clean linen.

But this is all part of his deepest life-illusion; and whether he annoys us by his dandified elementalism or shocks us by talking of the hairs on his chest, I cannot see how we can avoid the recognition that he is one of the greatest poets in our language. Like Homer, like Dante, like Keats, like Wordsworth, he has a *secret* to communicate which is as much more than a "message" as the blood in a man's veins is more than a mole in his cheek.

And as in the case of Rabelais, this secret is diffused through every word and every cadence of his style, so that even if he had never actually stated it we should know perfectly well what it was

And what is it? What is the grand secret of Walt Whitman? I think it is to be found in the emotional extension of our personal ego till it enters the inner identity—all those other personal egos—of each object that surrounds it. And what separates him in this respect from all other poets is, that these external objects, through whose inner identity his ravishing spirit flows, are just simply all the objects, accidentally selected and without any aesthetic discrimination, that happen to be around him when the spirit takes him by the beard and says, "Prophesy unto us, Walt Whitman!"

Thus the beauty and magic of this secret is that we learn by degrees from it how to enjoy the most secure and

impregnable happiness there is, independent of our human affections; the only happiness which neither the jade Fortune, nor any other Queen Whims or Fata Morgana can take away or destroy.

It is a happiness of a peculiar kind, a kind which all men know at moments but few cultivate, and wherein our prosperity depends in almost equal measure upon a certain premeditated sensitiveness and a certain premeditated insensitiveness.

To take the latter point first, there is required in this business a particular toughening and hardening of certain nerves, so that the endless occasions for sick disgust and weary distaste that we encounter can be warded off by our natural animal resilience. And then with regard to the sort of sensitiveness needed, what we have to do, if we are to catch the secret of this "mystic trumpeter," is to cultivate a response to things that are not in the ordinary sense either beautiful or even particularly appealing.

Every great poet reveals some aspect of the inanimate world which save for his insight we might have missed, or caught only in unconscious snatches. And the aspect of the inanimate revealed to us by Walt Whitman is of all others the least attractive to senses that only respond to the sunny, the cheerful, the ingratiating. It is, in fact, an aspect of things that strikes many of us as we go through the world as bleak and forlorn, devoid of bloom and fragrance, all, in fact, that is left over when what most beguiles, endears, and seduces has been washed away, as if by a salt tide.

It is the litter and the debris omitted by Homer. It is the slag and the offscouring, the rubbish and the desolations, that Wordsworth put aside to enjoy the clear-cut shadow of a flower upon a stone, or the reflection of a naked moon in a mountain-tarn. It resembles the sort of

thing that would be found in the path of one of Dostoievsky's lacerated spirits, as on the outskirts of a town he leaves his mud-planks for a muddier tow-path.

But the lover of Walt Whitman sees these things with an exultant eye, and with a heart that responds to this ooze and mud and murk, as if there were an immortal soul in such desolations.

And we learn from him how to let our human ego flow forth like a disembodied vapour through the heaps of grey stones and the dusty weeds, through the disordered scatterings of wayside rubble, through the rain-soaked palings and the broken shards, through the tidal drift and the flotsam; in fact, through all those backwaters of matter that he loves to call the "measureless float." He can isolate when he wants to—who better?—the lilac in the door-yard, the lonely bird in the sea-swamp, the solitary star above the horizon; but what he prefers to concentrate upon are the things neglected by other poets, the things that have hitherto seemed in their essential nature to be the extreme *opposite* of the poetic. And he loves to see these casuals and castaways and transients of the workshop of life thrown accidentally together in large, loose, vague heaps and neutral accumulations; for not a bank of them, not a murky pool of them, but sinks down and away, into other dimensions of mystic being.

> Melange, my own, the seen and the unseen,
> Mysterious ocean, where the streams empty!

He doesn't botanize or geologize; he doesn't paint delicate symbols in artful gradation, or etch vignettes and silhouettes against appropriate backgrounds.

Over the "growths by the margins of pond-waters," in all their chance-flung anonymity, he lets his spirit hover. Over the brown manure-heaps of ramshackle farmyards

he lets it loaf. Over the windrow of sea-debris between shore and ocean, that trail of "little corpses," that no-man's land of broken shells and sea-gluten and drift-wood, he sends his soul, till the miracle of his own identity, "floating the measureless float," sinks into the mystery of the sea-scum and the sea-wrack, the submergings and the dissolvings, the derelicts and the tangle, all with something immortal in them ready to debouch into another dimension.

And as he lets his soul brood over the melancholy salt ooze and bitter salt mud, as he lets it embrace the trailing smoke from the factory chimneys and the mounds of ghastly slag and the broken and blackened sheds, and the interminable monotonies of begrimed shanties and the iron spikes of the factory palisades, and the spoutings of the blast-furnaces, and the filthy pools and the fire-bitten cinder-paths to the pit-heads, he hears the "ho-honk" of the wild geese of eternity.

And all this comes to us as we read these tumultuous pages not merely in oracles and soothsayings, though there are plenty of such, but in the strange originality of the words he uses, often of the words he coins, and always of the rising and falling of the musical lilt that carries them.

When his inspiration is full upon him no poet surpasses him in the staggering appropriateness, the intimate, fluid, miraculously-identifying appropriateness of the words that come into his head.

Wordsworth selects noble and simple words that isolate the elements he writes of with heroic austerity, and make his clouds and waters and suns and moons and all the motions and aspects of his dawns and twilights take on an inevitable and awe-inspiring grandeur; but Whitman, with a reckless American audacity and shameless realism, is not content with this. He seizes upon these dignified,

simple traditional words and melts them into flowing vapour and splashing spray; he pounds them into scoriac dust, he freezes them into arctic ice, he gouges them into burning craters, he makes them sob and surge and gibber and groan and whistle and whimper. His pluralistic mysticism, with its vistas and avenues of progression, its rebirths and transfers and promotions, gives a soul to every living identity; a soul to abortions, a soul to raving maniacs, a soul to embryos, a soul to all the quintillions of vanished corpses since the world began.

Everything that hath breath, everything that hath being, purging the unspeakable "compost"—it is his own word—of the cast-off scurf of mortality, he sees it rushing forward, along with hosts upon hosts of indestructible spirits, into an exultant redemption.

And the peculiar and unique words he uses, while they convey the tang and taste and smell and heave and sob of the thing's bodily reality, are melting words, decomposing words, dissolving and metamorphosing words, undulating and fluctuating words, such as suggest in their very tone and cadence the birth-pangs of corruption putting on incorruption, of mortality putting on immortality.

Absolutely pagan as he is in his exultant and shameless acceptance of the lusts of the flesh, absolutely anarchistic as he is in his attitude to the authority of the State or the dignity of Omnipotence, no one has ever worshipped more passionately what Emily Brontë so boldly describes as the God within our own breast. This is where his mysticism has both its triumphant root and its beatific consummation; and it is on the strength of this that he makes his indiscriminate bow to all the gods and saviours of the world, not forgetting, as in that queer poem *The Square Deific*, to celebrate the Holy Ghost in Taoistic

fashion as "Santa Spirita," and Satan, in the style of William Blake, as the heroic, cosmic Prometheus.

And it is in the strength of this god within his own breast that his defiant and heathen Quakerism mounts up by degrees to that sublime mood—let the frivolous blaspheme as they please!—wherein he becomes more than the bearded darling of Manhattan, more than the elemental child of fish-shaped Paumanok, more than the representative of America and the Average Man; in which, in fact, he becomes—and only a great spirit would *have the gall* to assume such a rôle—something uncommonly like a mythological Being himself!

And why not? He has already announced to each of us, even though we are the viciousest and miserablest wretches on earth, that there is no position, not even the position of being a god, that is closed to our transmigratory progress!

The tone he adopts in these proclamations is a superhuman one. It sounds as if—— "But having thus 'sovietized' the Absolute, and substituted the Many for the One as the ultimate reality, why shouldn't he, in his rôle of Atlantean medicine-man to the wide West, *feel himself into* this superhuman mask of planetary 'guru'?"

There are two kinds of symbolic figures, as we say, among human writers. The inferior kind are symbolic in a gaudy, spectacular, worldly sense, like Beckford or Byron or Oscar Wilde, while the superior kind, like Blake and Nietzsche and Whitman himself, have the power of actually feeling themselves to be great occult Apparitions in the history of our race.

And perhaps they are what they claim! Walt Whitman goes beyond even Nietzsche in the extravagance of his self-assertion; but since he remains a good anarchist and

claims almost as much for everybody alive, it is impossible to take it as mere megalomaniacal boasting.

This the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointment with all . . .

. . . . . .

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

. . . . . .

Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset, earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!

. . . . . .

Far-sweeping elbow'd earth, rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes—

. . . . . .

You sea! I resign myself to you also—

. . . . . .

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always ready graves,
Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.

. . . . . .

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Whoever degrades another degrades me
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index.

I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy.
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves.

. . . . . .

Of the deformed, trivial, flat, foolish,
Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veiled and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.

. . . . . .

And as to you Life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,
O suns—O grass of graves—O perpetual transfers and promotions,
If you do not say anything how can I say anything?
Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,
Toss, sparkles of day and dusk—on the black stems that decay in the muck,
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

. . . . . .

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on shadowed wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

It is curious that there should be anything in common between two such very different contemporaries as Matthew Arnold and Walt Whitman; but I cannot help feeling that both these poets are philosophers in the *ancient* Greek sense, in the sense in which Empedocles or Heraclitus were philosophers rather than Plato or Aristotle.

And it is interesting to note too, for all their extreme differences, that Matthew Arnold, like Walt Whitman, can convey a magical impression of reality by the use of a certain easy, careless, unmelodious juxtaposition of prosaic details. A casual aside like this, for instance, reminds one of certain digressions in the *Scholar Gipsy* :

> Now by the post-and-rail fences, where the old stones thrown there, pick'd up from the fields, have accumulated,
> Wild-flowers and vines and weeds come up through the stones and partly cover them.

But it should be noted, too, that Walt Whitman's oracular proclamations of hope for every possible identity, his proud anarchistic attitude to all authority, his feeling of himself as a triumphant medium for the unseen forces through which all the broken, baffled, frustrated abortive souls in the world pass on to higher dimensions, is intimately linked with what might be called his supersexual amorousness. Shrewdly reticent as he always was as to his *particular* love-affairs, whether of a normal or abnormal character, he lets himself go to the limit in the expression of a free and flowing sexuality *in general*, a sexuality both passionately physical and spiritually vulnerable, and which is confined to neither man nor woman, though its poignancy culminates perhaps in regard to his male companions.

The curious thing is that though he always celebrates his sexual excitements *in the abstract*, and, as one might say, *anonymously*, he uses the most physiological, and from the view-point of even our modern censors of such things, the most shamelessly realistic imagery. No poet has ever been at once so reserved and so portentously unabashed in these erotic ejaculations.

What elements of ordinary romance appear are certainly of a homosexual character, but with a shrewd

prophetic instinct he has made it impossible to particularize even this; and his magical way of gathering together in one wild sobbing refrain all the tragi-exultant passion, all the desperate, surging, pent-up longing that the whole planetary ocean of sex, as it heaves and pulses and churns and foams and breaks, lets loose in its ecstasy, sweeps all the traditional psychological differences between normal and abnormal into a cosmic level where they seem negligible, unimportant, transfigured.

And after love, after this super-sexual ecstasy, in which the surge and the sob and the world-obliterating embrace open, shall we say, the final seventy-seventh heaven to the lowest of the low and the weakest of the weak, it is death that stirs him the most.

No one has felt for death what Walt Whitman felt. The power to feel so must have come to him because of all the deaths he had watched and soothed when he was in those field-hospitals in the war. Death has upon him an effect that resembles the effect of love. It seems the fulfiller of all that is unfulfilled in love, it seems the answer to all that is dumb in love, it seems the grand dénouement of love and the rounding-off of love's broken circle.

And now we can see why, if we are to do justice to Walt Whitman, it is necessary to shake off the sterile mystery-drained doctrine that our telescopic, microscopic, astronomic universe is all there is. And with this limited conception of the cosmos, Whitman's "serenely arriving" death sloughs off from us the fret and gnaw of the world and the contemptible ambitions of the world. This divine life-enfolder, this transforming and transfiguring mother of life, is the very touch of the dimension we see not, the very embrace of the secret we cry for. The world hates death. But love does not hate death. Love has something

of death in it. Love and death together are stronger than all the meanness and silliness of the world. The world can vulgarize life and is always doing so, but death and love, when they are in league with each other, fling off its grasp as the impalpable night-air flings off an evil smoke, escape its venom as the voyaging wind purges itself of a graveyard smell.

Walt Whitman's grand "triad"—perhaps it was his Welsh blood that taught him the art of such uttermost fusions—is always the same; "love, death, the soul"; "death, the soul, love"; "the soul, love, death."

These three Incomprehensibles lie, according to him, at the bottom of life, and each of the three has something of Beyond-Life in it; each of the three can hold life in its hand as a very little thing.

Death is without emergencies here, but life is perpetual emergencies here,
Are your body, days, manners, superb? after death you shall be superb,
Justice, health, self-esteem, clear the way with irresistible power;
How dare you place anything before a man?
Fall behind me States!
A man before all—myself, typical, before all.
Give me the pay I have served for;

. . . . . .

I have loved the earth, sun, animals, I have despised riches,
I have given alms to every one that asked, stood up for the stupid and crazy . . .
Claimed nothing for myself which I have not carefully claimed for others on the same terms.

Has it occurred to any reader of this essay to note what a triumphant contempt for psychology and pathology Walt Whitman's poetry indicates?

How wise he was to cover his own psychological and pathological tracks so well, that to this day no one really

knows what the actual sex-peculiarities were of thi sublime super-sexualist!

He is a reversion to Homer and the Old Testament i this; and I think his primordial, physiognomic, un analytical carnality—the healthy body quite as mysteriou as the twisted mind or the damned nerves—would hav pleased Goethe. It would certainly have pleased Rabelais

If he is anything in politics he is an anarchist; and it i hard not to wonder whether any young Syndicalist o Barcelona to-day, fighting for a free Spain, recalls thes words, entitled, "Spain, 1873-74":

Out of the murk of heaviest clouds,
Out of the feudal wrecks and heaped-up skeletons of kings.

. . . . . .

Ruined cathedrals, crumble of palaces, tombs of priests,
Lo, Freedom's features fresh undimmed look forth—the sam immortal face looks forth,

. . . . . .

Thou waitest there as everywhere thy time.

Some have objected to his extraordinary use of foreign words, mostly French, and indeed one does begin tc wonder sometimes among what circles in the Philadelphi of the 'seventies and 'eighties these singular expression circulated. Or did he pick them up from the woman he loved in New Orleans?

But personally, I feel as if this curious frenchified lingc has a lively charm and a secret power all its own, initiating us into some occult confraternity of libertarian free spirits, "citoyens of the world" who use French very much a ecclesiastics use their Latin or thieves their argot, to indicate a certain sly solidarity, a certain emancipated roguery that treats with a mocking and sentimental cynicism both the pious gravities of virtue and the tender prejudices of Belles Lettres.

It is natural enough that his pathetic boast that his poetry "went well with simple uneducated persons" should be the exact opposite of the truth. What it were best to assume he meant was that he himself went well with such people; which undoubtedly *was* the case.

Of course there have been plenty of tiresome individuals of both sexes who have used his unexcluding embrace, I speak metaphorically, as an encouragement to an irritating expansiveness far more unpleasant than the most archaic conventionality; but the honest truth is that his most passionate and devoted lovers are self-centred intellectuals, while the sort of young men who were his principal inspiration, if they read poetry at all, read a very different kind from his.

But all that is as it should be. It is more than doubtful if Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer could have enjoyed the poem written in his praise. That heroic old wayfarer got his leeches and his chimney-corner, while we, through the mediumship of Wordsworth, have our nerves fortified and our imagination quickened by the poem to which *they both* contributed. And if it seems ironical that he who felt himself to be, and who actually was, the medium through whom the self-reliant, kindly, profane, cynical-sentimental, average "Americano" took his place among our national types, should become the favourite of a nervous and sophisticated *intelligentsia*, rather than of those whose "free and flowing" aplomb was his inspiration, we must remember that just as it is always the dumbness, the inarticulateness, the withdrawnness of Nature's secrets that rouses to reciprocity the mediumship of genius, so the deeper significance of the average man is revealed rather to the prophet than to himself.

What undoubtedly is hardest for the normal human conscience to swallow in Walt Whitman's soothsaying,

and I confess hardest for my own, is his telluric celebration of the evil along with the good.

> I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.
> What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
> Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent,
> I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

Now of course it is possible to take this sentence in a large, easy, careless way, and not try to press the logic of it too far; and one must remember that in any country where the puritan conscience—a thoroughly diseased conscience—has been long rampant, a good deal of "wickedness" is virtue, and plenty of "virtue" is evil in the deepest sense.

With any great writer, too, it is often advisable to go behind the superficial meaning of any particular words while we follow the general tidal-stream of his habitual feeling. But one cannot help, I think, even so, recognizing in Walt Whitman a mood that crops up now and again, which, if you were Attila or Ghengis Khan or even the Emperor Nero, would be the reverse of any austere check upon your orgies. It is true he is not always consistent in this beyond-good-and-evil vein. So human is it to have *some* values and discriminations that he often permits himself this privilege, however contrary to his antinomian theory. And we are only taking him at his own word when we refrain from demanding consistency at every point of the emotional compass. Identifying ourselves, all the same, with the main drift of the mystical gulf-stream of his passion, we come, I think, to feel in his refusal to play the reformer, in his refusal to reject anything that life has tossed up, in his refusal to be negative *even for the noblest reasons*, something that seems almost to belong to the great pulse-beat of Being itself.

For, as Hegel explains, the antagonist and opposite of Being—what Hegel would call its "other"—is not wickedness but nothingness, not strife but inertness, not violence but futility.

I speak with some hesitation here, for I suppose it is possible that while the path for most of us is to try to follow what Matthew Arnold calls the "stream of tendency that makes for righteousness," there *may* be such a thing as a cosmic Quietism so abysmal that it can even include the opposite of Being in its embrace!

But one must realize all that this would mean; and it would mean the inclusion not only of the deepest depths of futility but of a Deep below even that.

In his imaginative heroism over the sharing of extreme pain he was on a path sufficiently hard for most of us, as when he declared, in his mood of reincarnating exultation, that "agonies were his changes of garments"; but I confess, if he did really feel at moments that he could accept all the cruelties that are done under the sun from the point of view of the cruel as well as the victims, and "moisten *their* roots" equally with their victims', I can only say, humbly and blindly, that as far as my own conscience goes I must part company at that point.

It may be the highest path never to resist evil, but to stand indifferent where cruelty is concerned is surely another matter. I prefer the cry of the old Gothic king when he heard of the Crucifixion: "Would I had been there with my Franks!"

But to return to the sex-question. In spite of the fact that Walt Whitman's passionate and romantic vein is excited more strongly by men than women, it would be a great mistake to regard him as anything but an absolute egalitarian in regard to the two sexes. In his cosmogonic celebration of women he starts at the opposite pole from

Goethe's. To Goethe, her chief value was her power of luring the soul of man forward and upward; whereas Walt Whitman, beginning at the other end, treats the Feminine Principle, just as the ancient Taoist sages did, as *prior* to the masculine, and as *including* the masculine.

> Unfolded out of the sympathy of the woman is all sympathy.
> A man is a great thing upon the earth and through eternity, but every jot of the greatness of man is unfolded out of woman;
> First the man is shaped in the woman, he can then be shaped in himself.

Perhaps it is not remarkable that this despiser of "embroideries and embroiderers" should be, of all poets except Shakespeare, the most original in moulding words and fusing words and transmuting words and snatching words from anywhere to serve his turn. It is this that gives his mysticism such sap and salt, makes it so sticky and adhesive, so full of stinging, caressing, biting, bubbling, spitting, splashing, sucking, lapping, bleaching, wetting, soaking, slithering, drenching *reality*.

How one comes to welcome all those curiously characteristic expressions of his that are so often recurring, such as "tally" and "promulge" and "filaments" and "prismatic" and "float" and "drift" and "electric" and "libertad" and "fluid" and "résumé" and "finale" and "absorb" and "exhibit" and "husky" and "cohering" and "effuse" and "efflux" and "ecstatic" and "sagging" and "adhesiveness" and "en masse"!

And does it not almost seem as if there were some curious *chemical* quality in the larger number of these words, "indicating," as he would himself put it, the flux and the surge and the merge and the recession of the huge masses of our astronomical elements till they touch something else, till the substance of Matter itself *is transmuted*

into another dimension, or at least trembles and shivers on its edge?

Certainly we come to feel as we read him as if the old Empedoclean notion of the love and war of the elements is not far wrong, and that earth and water and fire and air are attracted and repelled by the same love-hate as attracts and repels ourselves!

It is in things of this kind that the wise Goethean heathenness of Walt Whitman so beautifully shows itself. And how refreshing after the narrow tyranny of orthodox theology and orthodox science to return to the natural magic of the real elements of our life!

It is one of those silly unimaginative mistakes, like the one that turns Nietzsche into an advocate of bullying and brutality, to regard Walt Whitman as if he were "the great boaster" in Hiawatha. Walt Whitman's arrogance is indeed as much of a spiritual cult as the humility of the author of the *Imitation*. It is a deliberate personal cult, and it is also a representative cult, made on behalf of the souls of all. He is arrogant for living beings, simply *as* living beings, including the lowest and most contemptible. And he is arrogant for them *as against God*, arrogant for the filthiest and vilest and meanest of them, as against God's favoured great ones, and as against the world's favoured great ones!

In all this he is the true pluralistic anarchist. All souls are equal and every soul is a disguised god.

> The pert apparel, the deform'd attitude, drunkenness, greed, premature death, all these I part aside.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> These shows of the East and West are tame compared to you,
> These immense meadows, these interminable rivers, you are immense and interminable as they.
>
> . . . . . .

Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain, passion, dissolution—

. . . . . .

Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided, nothing is scanted,
Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance, ennui, what you are picks its way.

How easy it would be to pile up on the soul of Walt Whitman, as it "picks its way" still among us, every single one of the complexes that the new pathology reveals! The Messiah-complex, for instance, wouldn't those syllables be illuminating and confounding? Illuminating with regard to the person who used them, but certainly not confounding to Walt Whitman.

As long as the hearts of men and women wrestle with matter and the void, as long as they struggle to get a little happiness before they die, this great life-heightener will be reborn, and his anarchism and his mysticism will be reborn! You can mould into conformity nations and states and empires; you can call prophecy a complex, and immortality an illusion; but one thing you cannot do. You cannot make a man say "yes" when the soul within him, from a dimension beyond both life and death, says "no."

We have reached the moment in human history when mass-movements made possible by mechanical science are moulding the nations into integrated hostile groups. There is certainly more justice between rich and poor than there formerly was, and less chance for the minority to enjoy their parasitic leisure and quiet and culture in unperturbed complacency.

And just because of these things there never was a moment in the evolution of humanity when the mental attitude of the average person was so important. Is his

type of intelligence going to become more and more slavish, submissive, drilled, mechanical; or is he going to insist on enjoying to the full the spiritual intellectual inheritance that has come into his hands from the lucky ones whose leisure to attain it was made possible by his labour? Doctrinaire Communists murmur, and perhaps with some measure of truth, of the *bourgeois mentality* that must be destroyed before justice between man and man can cover the earth.

All right then! Let *us* destroy our own bourgeois mentality, and substitute for it mentality of a nobler, larger, more magnanimous, more sensitive, more subtle kind. One cannot but agree that a great deal of the printed matter in our bourgeois shelves is poor enough stuff, paltry and uninspired, more selfish cringing before God and Great Men, reeking of moralistic hypocrisy.

But it certainly will be an evil day for the human race when some modern morale of tyrannical mass-movement grows able, by the diabolical aid of a conscienceless science, to do what the Inquisition could not do, and the Puritans could not do, and the old oppressors could not do; that is to say, really and truly crush down and obliterate the free thoughts of individual men and women. We shall be arrested and imprisoned, perhaps, in this mass-psychologized and science-enslaved age for possessing a copy of *Leaves of Grass*. It will have become like a translation of the Gospels in Catholic days, or like a translation of Rabelais in Protestant days.

The new blood-and-iron State, with its armies of bureaucrats riding about in armoured cars, will be as nervous of this great anarchist's talk of the souls of independent people as the old aristocracy used to be of the promulgations of Tom Paine.

And then—who knows?—some miraculous renaissance of the average human soul may suddenly—

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,
(Is it night? are we here together alone?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.

. . . . . .

Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,
I receive now again of my many translations, from my avataras ascending, while others doubtless await me,
An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts awakening rays about me, *So long!*
Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.

CERVANTES

AT this moment of writing all the eyes of our Western World are directed, though by no means with the same emotion, towards Spain. In Cervantes's time Philip III was turning the Moors, where they had lived so long, out of the Peninsula; but it was through the medium of an imaginary Moor, Cid Hamet, that the story of Don Quixote is told. The great original of the temper we call quixotic, on which side of the present struggle would he range himself? Personally, I like to think of him among the defenders of Madrid; but others, no doubt, just as we swing the Figure of Christ first one way and then the other, would place him with the enemy.

But we have, anyway, as book-lovers, to face the fact that it is a Spaniard created by a Spaniard who is the most living, the most endearing, and the best-known character in all human Literature!

How profound was the inspiration of the Italian philosopher, Croce, when he said that a great work of art is not *completed* until humanity itself for many generations has set its seal upon it!

Upon the figure of Don Quixote, of this ill-favoured, ill-starred, impoverished gentleman, who, as Tom o' Bedlam says, "knows more than Apollo," has been concentrated, beyond all parallel, this instinctive genius in our race which rounds off the invention of the individual.

Long ago—almost as soon as Cervantes invented him—Don Quixote was snatched at by humanity and rendered in a sense independent of his begetter. There are indeed

to-day three Don Quixotes. There is the author's, the authentic original, from whose living reality the other two draw their life-blood. There is the popular Don Quixote, or, if you like, the mythological Don Quixote, who has become a proverb, a legend, a universal symbol for all men. And finally there is the Don Quixote of the *literary disciples*; the Don Quixote who has been treated almost as Jesus was treated, and has been turned into various mystical, aesthetic, and moral Messiahs. Of all masks of this third Don Quixote the most original as well as the most passionate and fantastic is the one flung so desperately and defiantly at the head of the rationalists by the late Unamuno.

The curious thing is that in both the popular proverbial version and the literary-mystical version it is the *humour* that chiefly suffers. The word "Quixotic" suggests, it seems to me, something tragic, noble, and heroically foolish. Its endearing comicality has been diluted to the vanishing-point. Yet it is surely this humorous endearingness of both Knight and Squire that is the chief cause of our pleasure in reading the book.

And the more we read it, the less, it seems to me, do we feel that the chief element in it is the attack upon the favourite books of the Knight of the Woeful Countenance. It is the humorous contrast between Don Quixote's essential nature and the essential nature of Sancho that enchants us the most; and as the unequalled livingness of these central figures grows on us, we don't care an owl's pellet whether there were or were not knights-errant in the world.

The humour of Cervantes reminds us sometimes of Shakespeare and sometimes of Rabelais, and most of all, especially in the details of its presentment, of the Russian humour of Gogol; but the longer we share the experi-

ences of Don Quixote the more definitely does the peculiar flavour of Cervantes's own turn of mind disentangle itself from these resemblances and leave upon our palates its own unique tang.

Up to a certain point, what Goethe said of the *Vicar of Wakefield* applies to Cervantes. "That lofty and benevolent irony, that serene indulgence to all human faults and frailties, supplies us with the best way of taking life." But the humour of the Spaniard goes far beyond this. For one thing it is much more than the humour of a scholar. It is the humour of an heroic and romantic soldier; and it is also the humour of a man well-stricken in years.

Before writing *Don Quixote* Cervantes had seen, as we say, history in the making. He had seen campaigns by land and sea, battles, imprisonments, treacheries, rescues, hairbreadth escapes, perils by land and water, desperate cruelties, life-and-death struggles, impoverishment, plottings, conspiracies, law-suits, disparagements, and running through it all the "insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit from the unworthy takes." It is a book written not only by a poet, a gentleman and a wit, but by a battered soldier-of-fortune, a captive-slave of pirates, a "haggard and woe-begone" knight-at-arms; one of those "prisoners of the world" who, like the faithful Kent in *King Lear*, might say of what he wrote:

> All my reports go with the modest truth,
> Nor more nor clipp'd, but so——

But if the Don Quixote, to the chiaroscuro of whose lean visage the infatuated disciples hold up their blazing torches, be somewhat too nicely and narrowly conceived, somewhat too fantastically paragon'd, what can we get from the stable-lanterns of the popular glimpse at him,

that glimpse which has gone to the heart of the man in the street, such as may throw a broader light on those haggard lineaments?

A great genius often invents more than he wots of, and his creation, drawing new and unexpected life from the bowels of the human race, gets out of control, "gangs," as we say, "its ain gait," and leaving its author's original intention far behind, *becomes itself* a *creative power* and works strange wonders!

Now the most striking thing about this popular Don Quixote who has thus run amok by drawing on the heart's desire of humanity, is the somewhat startling fact that, quite contrary to the author's avowed and reiterated intention of showing how fairy-tales could upset a good man's wits, *he is not a madman at all!*

It is true that he spears sheep, tilts at windmills, rescues galley-slaves, takes a barber's basin for a helmet and honest whores for princesses; but such has been the mysterious emotional accretion with which, as Croce so beautifully says, humanity rounds off and completes a work of art, that even these peculiarities do not turn him, no! not while his name endures, into a madman.

What, after all, *was* the "madness" which obsessed this great adventurer? We are agreed upon *that* point, author, disciples, and popular rumour. Nothing less than the restoration of the lost Golden Age, that ideal age in the past—perhaps less imaginary than many think—when the *spirit* of Knight-Errantry, never mind about particular Amadises of Gaul or Palmerins of England, prevailed in the world.

"Why," argued Don Quixote, "if the world is out of joint, don't we try to save it by reviving this chivalrous, this heroic, this magnanimous ideal of individual behaviour?"

Whether it has come or not from reading this book at about the age when the author wrote it, but certainly under the spell of Don Quixote, it does not strike me as entirely impossible that some new spirit of Knight-Errantry, or the same spirit under another name, using aeroplanes if you like in place of horses and asses, might devote itself to the succouring of the oppressed and the overthrow of human giants and human enchanters.

The real defence of Don Quixote's wits is, of course, to be found in the text of the book itself; but that the common instinct of humanity holds the good gentleman to be of sound understanding though of eccentric behaviour is a convincing proof of Croce's theory about the multitude playing this decisive role in the creation of all supreme works of art.

The study of the text, however, at critical moments in the tale, is the best way of proving that a really mad Don Quixote is, if not a contradiction in terms, at least a blowing sky-high of the whole pith of the invention.

Take the scene of the penance in the mountain-glen, after the thief has stolen Dapple. This is the scene in which the Knight displays, according to the over-astute Coleridge, indications that his sanity has not disappeared so entirely but that there can still be found in him a sort of "twilight of the mind."

But an ordinary reader—and perhaps all the more shrewdly for being unburdened by psychological and metaphysical endowments—has only to read the conversation between the Knight and the Squire on the subject of Dulcinea to get the drift of the situation without resorting to any "twilights of the mind."

Here, indeed, it becomes apparent once and for all that Don Quixote's so-called "madness" is nothing but his deliberate and perfectly conceivable, though somewhat

unusual, passion, hobby, desire, or mania for playing the part of a knight-errant, and, indeed, for restoring in our Age of Iron—for that age still continues—the nobler customs of the Age of Gold.

It is only when considered in this way that the whole trend of the author's method, his handling of each new situation as it follows the last, finds its deeper justification.

And after all, why does this book have a more universal appeal than any other in the world? Surely because we all have a touch—though it is true that our successful men of action and powerful rulers tend to let that touch atrophy more quickly than others do—*of Don Quixote's own mania*; which is not merely, be it remarked, for helping the oppressed, but for helping them in a particular manner, that is to say, by indulging our passion for whatever fantastical cult—in *his* case knight-errantry—satisfies our particular life-illusion.

It is a perfectly natural chance, when one considers the erratic motions of the best-balanced minds, and the secret fancies, weird imaginations, exquisite whimsies, surreptitious illusions, in which we indulge, that the most popular of all invented characters in the world's fiction should be this homespun gentleman of La Mancha. How deeply in harmony, indeed, with all Nature's ways that this high destiny should have fallen to the lot of no great magnate, but of one "spare of flesh, dry of visage, a great early riser, and a lover of the chase," a third of whose substance was consumed in beef and salad, "a hotch-potch on Saturdays, lentils on Fridays, with the addition of a pigeon on Sundays," but whose mania for reading romances of chivalry was so great that he sold many acres of land to satisfy it, till at last "with little sleep and much study his brain dried up and he lost his wits."

Now it is, as I say, essential to the appreciation of Don

Quixote's character and his relations with Sancho that we should take this "drying up" of the good Knight's brain and this "loss of his wits" with what Sir Thomas Browne would call "a wide solution."

When the wind was not in the wrong quarter Don Quixote knew a hawk from a heron as well as another, and it is never *just* his illusion, but always his illusion *plus* the wind being north-north-west, that's the clue to the real quality of the situation! There is, in fact, so much method in his madness that it is constantly resolving itself into a quite conscious determination—like what children show when they are playing at being pirates—to find matter for his crazy purpose from situations upon whose normal and natural semblance he yet manages to keep at the back of his mind a shrewd weather eye.

This is shown over and over again in his talks with Sancho, especially on the occasions when the latter's private mania about the Governorship of the Island is to the fore. Sancho's perpetual harping on this precious Island becomes, indeed, a muted variation upon the main theme of the book, and it happens more than once that the Knight shows himself the more realistic of the two. For example, on their second visit to the inn together, Don Quixote requires all his "dried-up wits" to make Sancho accept the crushing return to reality which occurs when the sprightly Dorothea sinks from the rôle of princess into that of a private and somewhat sportive lady.

Don Quixote achieves this in his usual crafty manner by a resort to enchanters, both friendly and hostile, and on this occasion the natural innocence of Sancho puts him into the curious position—as when he hunts about for the head of the giant after the pricking of the wine-skin—of being madder than his master.

Upon this quaint reversal of the situation the author

himself makes the appropriate comment; and he does it through the groans of their frantic host, to the effect that the Squire's hunt for giants' heads in inn bedrooms is worse than the Knight's despatching of them in his sleep!

But the most delicate and subtle proof of my contention that Don Quixote's normal mentality—a mentality superior to that of everyone he meets—is never destroyed by his mania, lies in the way, after showing a little natural irritation at Sancho's obstinate literalness, that he *is* prepared to accept the normal appearance of things—of the barber's basin, for instance, and even of the manners of Dulcinea—and confines himself with most profound sagacity to this felicitous theory of enchantment, whereby Sancho's "reality" remains true to ordinary vulgar eyes and yet does not interfere with that higher truth which is the truth for a knight-errant.

It is not, in fact, *only Sancho* who is hypnotized by the Don's powerful imagination; for, if I am not greatly mistaken, we all, as we read, begin to feel the solid ground of our normal apprehensions a little insecure. And, indeed, the beauty of it is that by that splendid stroke when he makes the innkeeper and his whole family passionately and indignantly defend these debatable and dangerous books, Cervantes shows clearly how the popular mind itself, in its own simple mania for "better bread than is made from wheat," is always rushing to the defence of the Knight's spiritual infatuation.

Though irritated and indeed "stung," as he himself confesses, by Sancho's teasing knowledge of Dulcinea in her homely reality, Don Quixote replies, in a vein of the profoundest philosophy, that the girl, *even as she is in Sancho eyes*, serves well enough for the purpose to which it is essential she should be put!

How daintily, too, is it indicated by Cervantes that this

worthy gentleman of fifty was *already*, before he decided to be a knight-errant, not a little in love with the original of Dulcinea! That the wench herself, so merry and tall, was ignorant of the "ingenious" Alonso's enamoured observation is natural enough.

We may be sure that the eccentric hidalgo was as tactful and discreet and courtly in his normal attraction as was the Knight of the Rueful Countenance in his abnormal infatuation.

The love of Sancho for Don Quixote was as deep as his admiration, and the homely display of this love, throughout all their escapades and imbroglios, is one of the most moving things in the book. If I may be allowed to say so, there is not a little in it of the peculiar bond that exists sometimes between a Negro servant and his master; and, indeed, we are struck throughout by the familiar intercourse between all classes in this Spanish book, compared with the separation between them which is so apparent in Shakespeare, in spite of his rustic humours.

Spain was clearly in Cervantes's time exactly as it is now, not only a land of unconquerable individualism, but a land also of such courteous man-to-man familiarity that it submerged and overrode all the fantastic differences of rank set up by Church and State.

It is hard to imagine the emotional affection, the humorous understanding, the physical intimacy that bound Don Quixote and Sancho so closely to each other, existing between Englishmen of such different classes.

There ought to be some especial psychological and spiritual name for this breaking-down of social barriers where social barriers of the extremest kind exist. But in truth, it is much more than the breaking down of merely *social* barriers. It is the lifting up of all those dams and

dikes of human *psychological reserve* that restrain us still in England.

In Gogol and in Dostoievsky this reserve breaks down too; and we find something of the same kind in Rabelais, where it takes on an evangelical flavour; but for all our poet's love of simple folk, it never really appears in the plays of Shakespeare. Prince Hal comes nearest to it, but that is simply a matter of condescending to the roguery of tavern and brothel.

What a mystery it is, this breaking-down of psychological barriers between human beings. It resembles, only in a spiritual sense, that "uncovering of nakedness" spoken of in the Bible. In England it is made difficult because of the filtration of the dregs of class-consciousness into the very soul. In America it is made difficult because the soul itself is there so shy that it hides away even from its possessor's own consciousness.

It remains, anyway, that all through *Don Quixote*, just as all through Dostoievsky, there is a frank outflowing of the wildest and oddest peculiarities of the human soul, an outflowing that would have been impossible if its reception had not been guaranteed by some implicit feeling as to the underlying equality of all souls.

Sometimes it seems as if Sancho, in spite of his vigorous objection on one occasion to being compared to a woman, played in a real spiritual sense the feminine part between them

On several occasions it is he, rather than the Knight, who shows the more considerate, the more tactful, the more admirable, as well as the more sagacious instinct.

The truth is, that almost all the familiar generalizations about this pair of friends which we writers have so glibly repeated, would be crucially altered did we, as I am doing at this moment, read again, in middle age, or in

old age, the work we rushed through when we were young!

One of these easy statements, which takes Cervantes's official words at the foot of the letter, is to the effect that the book was written to destroy the ill-effects of the false, silly, futile and sentimental Books of Chivalry.

Now one of the first things that surprises and startles a reader of *Don Quixote*, next to his discovery that the Don is not always a noble idealist any more than Sancho is always a gross realist, is the infinite trouble that Cervantes takes from beginning to end to distinguish and discriminate *between* these Books of Chivalry. Some he roundly condemns. Others he warmly and eloquently praises. But in either case, he makes it sufficiently plain that he is himself an imaginative, romantic and passionate *reader* as well as an imaginative, romantic and passionate writer.

As I have already pointed out, this unique book is the inspiration of long and harsh experiences. It is not only a work of maturity; it might even, considering how much earlier maturity came in those days, be called a work of old age.

And yet it shows no trace of exhaustion. An unconquerable spirit emanates from every page. The reader seems, as he goes on from one Part to another, from one Chapter to another, to be tapping a fount of resistant endurance that sinks down beyond the bottom of life!

It is the book of an *old soldier*, literally and spiritually. "We enter war," said Voltaire, "when we enter the world." "On entre en guerre en entrant dans le monde." And this battered, maimed, but undefeated warrior of old Spain communicates to the weakest among us a living drop of some celestial ichor that in place of making our gorge rise, like the Knight's unlucky balsam, "works

inward" through our most secret vitals, till it fortifies what one might call the very stomach of the soul.

And it does more than this; for the remarkable thing about the spiritual aura of Cervantes is that it makes us humbler and tenderer as well of a stouter heart.

Nor does the magic stop there; for there still remains what we so lightly and hurriedly call *the humour of Cervantes*. Few literary undertakings are more enthralling, few more difficult, than a comparison between the nice and exquisite shades of difference that separate one great humorist from another.

Let us begin, in this case, by eliminating the particular kinds of so-called humour which are entirely absent from Don Quixote. Well, for one thing, in spite of a few fantastical parodies upon the rhodomontade of the worst chivalric excesses, Don Quixote is free from satire. Adjectives like satiric, sarcastic, sardonic, though so applicable to Swift and Voltaire and to James Joyce, are as out of place if applied to Cervantes as they are if applied to Shakespeare.

But come, now, to that peculiar form of humour that is called *cynicism*. Think of all the subtle philosophical connotations that lie hidden in this significant word!

Now the one thing most alien from the soul and style of Cervantes, as it was alien from the soul and style of Rabelais, is this same cynicism. Shakespeare, though he doesn't deal in satire, does, I think, in *Measure for Measure*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and even here and there in *Hamlet*, approach cynicism. But whatever Cervantes's humour may be, it is certainly not cynical.

But what of the word comic? Would it be correct, above every other quality, to praise *Don Quixote* as the most comic of books? Well, I suppose the oldest as well as the most popular form of Comedy—only second per-

haps to grotesque dancing—is pure knock-about farce; and of this there is so much in Don Quixote that a nervous book-worm like myself tends to squirm and fidget a little beneath this everlasting drubbing.

But in my childhood I was never tired of the bangings and pummellings in Punch and Judy; and no doubt there are plenty of grown-up people, a good deal more sophisticated than I, who to this day find no impediment to their enjoyment of the universal humour and tragic pathos in the inventions of Charlie Chaplin from the fact that they are so full of this oldest of all forms of comedy.

But the clue to the secret of Cervantes's real humour lies, I believe myself, in a certain universal *humility* which was intensified by his misfortunes.

It was in the year 1571 that he was so grievously wounded in the naval battle of Lepanto, where, under Don John of Austria, the high seas were made safe from the Turks; and since this maimed old soldier was nearly sixty when he published the First Part of *Don Quixote*, and nearly seventy when, ten years later, he published the Second Part, we are, as I keep repeating, confronted in this book, especially when we consider how much sooner people grew old in those days, with a work that, regarded relatively to our easier times, is the inspiration of an old man.

And not only of an old man. Of an old man who had known in his time most of the worst ills that flesh is heir to.

Now there is a certain endearing humility that is implicit in the character of a particular type of soldier, or sailor, and that a long life of hardship only intensifies. It is a quality exactly the opposite of that self-conscious mock modesty, and pretence of despising glory, which we meet in a different type of heroic adventurer.

Like Don Quixote, one can very well imagine Cervantes talking proudly and eloquently in many an inn parlour, of the day he got his wounds under Don John. And why not? The unchristian, snobbish, and misanthropic conceit of being superior to tavern-boasting is the real sin, not this other.

And this instinctive humility which is perhaps the best gift Christianity gave us—for think what a different tone the boasting of Odysseus takes from that of Don Quixote! —is a thing that lends itself better than anything in the world to the deepest of all forms of humour. Satire, cynicism, sarcasm—nay! *irony itself*—are all signs of that innate sense of dignified superiority, of that refusal to recognize the equality of all souls, which is the last infirmity of noble minds.

It is a thing intimately connected with our *physical dignity* and our inability to allow this same physical dignity to be punched out of all recognition by slap-stick knock-about!

But that is precisely what has happened to the physical dignity of Don Quixote. What with sharing all the grosser details of life with Sancho—even to those which the latter so delicately calls "the lesser and the greater affair"—and what with being scratched and ducked and drenched and banged by every clown he meets, and what with being hung up even by little Maritornes, that no-better-than-she-should-be "slip-shoe Lovey," as Mr. Masters would say, there is no physical dignity, no artistic dignity, no intellectual dignity, no moral dignity, left in that Rueful Figure.

There is only left in it, what the world can neither give nor take away, the *dignity of the Holy Ghost!*

And it is—at least this is how this profoundest of literary problems presents itself to me—out of this lack of

all dignity but the unconscious one of the equality with all souls that the real humour of *Don Quixote* springs.

Consider the causes, occasions, manifestations, and accompaniments of Don Quixote's outbursts of temper. In that pharisaic superiority of self-control, which is often more malicious than a clap over the head, he is as lacking as he is in every other peculiarity of those of us who so gravely remember "what is owing to ourselves."

> "I am positive," said Sancho, "that this lady who calls herself Queen of the great kingdom of Micomicon, is no more so than my mother; for if she were what she says she would not go nuzzling at every turn of the head and every corner with somebody of the present company."
>
> Dorothea reddened . . . she was neither able nor willing to answer him a word. . . .
>
> "I tell thee this, master," continued Sancho . . . "there is no need to hurry oneself saddling Rozinante or packing the ass or getting ready the palfrey, but we had better remain quiet, and let every trull to her wheel and us to dinner!"
>
> Good Lord, how mighty a rage was kindled in Don Quixote on hearing these unmannerly words of his squire! It was so great that with shaking voice and a stammering tongue, the live fire darting from his eyes, he exclaimed:
>
> "O villainous knave! uncircumspect, ill-mannered, ignorant, blasphemous, foul-mouthed, audacious back-biter! . . . Out of my presence, monster of nature, magazine of lies, sink of roguery! . . . Away with thee!"
>
> Saying this, he arched his brows, blew out his cheeks, glared about him on every side and gave with his right foot a great stamp on the ground."

But leaving the spiritual foundations of Cervantes's humour and coming to his lapses in the art of narrative, what a pity it is that after those ten years he forgot the upshot of one of his best scenes.

In the First Part we are led to understand that though the real Dulcinea was ignorant of the impression she had

made on Alonso the Good before he became Don Quixote, he *had* seen her, though only from a distance and with chaste admiration.

We are also told that Sancho knew her well. Nevertheless, on returning to his tale after this long interval the author clearly states that neither the Knight nor the Squire had ever seen her, and allows the former to be diverted by Sancho to the ill-favoured wench on the she-ass, outside the city of Toboso!

This reduction of the real Dulcinea to thin air, or at least to a person of hearsay, strikes us—at least it strikes me—with somewhat of a shock. And it does almost seem as if the author desired a complete change of atmosphere and tone at this point, for this lapse is followed by that portion of the work so frankly reprobated by Charles Lamb; the portion that deals with the master and man's adventures at the court of that unworthy Duke and Duchess. I say "adventures"; but as a matter of fact what occurs is simply a fantastically elaborate fooling of both Don Quixote and Sancho by these aristocratic triflers.

Of course it might be argued that the majority of the people whom our wanderers encounter—including the Priest, the Barber, and that malapert young popinjay, Samson Carrasco—are perpetually playing on his mania, and that what these idle magnates do is only what everybody else does. But when one bears in mind the extraordinary naturalness and inevitableness of Cervantes's highway inventions, and the convincing humour of Don Quixote's encounters with simpler people—with people like the Puppet-Master and the Showman with the lions—there does slip into one's mind the feeling that our author has begun to sail very near the wind when he throws the Knight and the Squire on the mercy of those capricious and brutal magnates.

Mr. H. E. Watts, whose admirable translation and exhaustive commentaries it would seem impossible to improve upon, defends this long episode of the playful Duke and Duchess on the ground that all possible highway adventures had already been exploited and that we all needed a change. For myself, I would simply say that it is hard to conceive how even the inventive genius of Cervantes could get Sancho his Governorship without the aid of some such objectionable and tricky potentate, and that for the sake of seeing Sancho keep his integrity, *as he certainly does*, even to the tune of turning the tables on his mockers, and for the sake of the perfect passage at the end when he throws up the job and goes off to put the saddle on Dapple again, saying, "I am of the family of the Panzas, who are all stubborn, and if once they cry odds, odds they shall be, though they may be even, in spite of all the world," it *is* worth paying the price that Charles Lamb found too heavy.

Don Quixote is really a triumphant yet tragic apology for heroic illusion. Cervantes seems to hint that until some extreme pain makes us "lie howling," it is possible to bear up somehow under the whips and scorns of time as long as, in the teeth of every humiliation, we still can dance to the tune of our particular mania, Sancho to his, Don Quixote to his, and all to their own—"for let him twang who knows the strings and Saint Peter in Rome is well at home."

That nothing but the quality of our soul's inmost character, whereof our worst vices are but the lamentable defects, must be the secret of our universe, is proved by the art of Cervantes in this book to the most delicate point.

Has it been noticed how he anticipates all the cleverest, neatest, most convoluted conjurings with the Mystery of

Identity in Change in which our modern geniuses love to dabble?

The continuity of any living character and the necessity of its re-creating the universe to fit its private Illusion of Life, lies at the heart of Cervantes's daring scheme of introducing the *fictional* Knight and Squire to the notice of the *real* Knight and Squire, so that the projected image of themselves, as existing mentally in the minds of the readers of the *First Part*, falls across their figures in the *Second Part* as if the shadows of Plato's Cave, by mingling with *that which throws them*, had attained a double reality.

What, in other words, Cervantes has done in the actual process of the story is to anticipate what we ourselves are now doing in thickening out its extraordinary reality. He begins by thrusting Cid Hamet, his imaginary Moorish narrator, between his readers and himself, so that whenever he pleases he can introduce the phrase "the story tells"; but not content with this, he takes advantage of the ten years during which all Spain and indeed all christendom had become acquainted with the Knight and the Squire, to make them *see themselves* as the whole world had begun to see them.

Though the malignant and spurious version of the Second Part may have helped to keep him poor, it probably increased his public; and one even begins to get a curious feeling, when the Knight is under the care of Don Antonio in Barcelona, that he has become so real to his begetter as to have almost reached the point of being too real to fool with, too real to be the subject of further fictional inventions! It is as if Don Quixote had come to life to such a point that his creator began to feel such a tender and scrupulous awe for him that he longed to take his hands off him altogether and leave him to his own devices!

That is really the impression you get that day in Barcelona, when the Knight visits the printer's establishment. You feel that he has escaped, not only from the clutches of his friendly host, but from the presumptuous meddlings of the author himself!

And this triumph of characterization, which is likely to last as long as the world lasts, depends, it would seem, as much on the personal character as on the genius of Cervantes. How instinctively he took himself out of the way, and reduced his ideas, opinions, feelings, prejudices, fancies to the minimum in comparison with those of his creation!

And he didn't go to work according to any Flaubertian theory of objective art, but, if I may say so, according to his natural courtesy and instinctive disinterestedness: a disinterestedness which, all the same, it is hard not to regard as one of the subtlest of all imaginative weapons.

Shakespeare's disinterestedness went even further: went, as we know, to such complete self-effacement that, because of something queer about his signature and because he didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge, we are ready to give the credit of his work to almost any aristocratic Incognito.

But this very quality in the book, which is the secret of its author's greatness, makes it hard for us earnest-minded Lollards of Literature to disentangle in clear unequivocal terms the Spaniard's Message to us all, and the moral interpretation of his living Parable.

Great writers, like great moralists, are generally extremely willing to assist us in discovering their views upon God, Immortality, Free Will, the nature of Evil, and the origin, end, and purpose of the World. How easy it is for us to explain where the Optimism of Meredith differs from the Pessimism of Hardy, or where

the Pluralism of Whitman differs from the Pantheism of Emerson. And though it is less easy to epitomize from the multitudinous secular stage of Shakespeare any definite prophetic gospel, there *is* a tone in the air, a many-voiced murmur on the wind, caught up from a thousand broken asides, that does protest, though without bitterness or laceration, against the cruel ironies of life and the unyielding Mystery that surrounds them.

But the most patient and devoted Wilhelm Meister among us, unless endowed with "a heart of furious fancies" like the late Unamuno, will have difficulty in squeezing any very definite drops of metaphysical comfort from the brave humours and chivalrous inventions of this battered fellow-soldier of Don John.

Perhaps it is for this very reason that no nation has been more infatuated with *Don Quixote*, or has printed more volumes and brought out more editions of *Don Quixote*, than the British nation. From that first Elizabethan translation which may have supported the last years of Shakespeare, when "deeper than did ever plummet sound he drowned" *his* magic wand, to this gallant version by Mr. Watts which swings like a "good lantern" over the threshold of the present century, we have loved this work better than any.

Perhaps, as it says in the Play, we're all so mad in these isles that we notice nothing unusual in this work. But at any rate, though we lack the French genius for criticism and the German genius for philosophy, we do seem able to steer our "dark steps a little further on" by the help of Rozinante and Dapple.

My only personal quarrel with the excellent commentaries of Mr. Watts is that he seems to me to permit himself a little too much stress upon the *irony* of Cervantes.

Now irony, as we all know, is a very ticklish thing,

and a thing of a thousand shades and inflections. In its airier and more diffused forms it melts so delicately into a certain sturdy and amused acceptance of life's absurdities that its self-consciousness, as an animadversion on these absurdities, is lost in imaginative relish of their very monstrousness and grotesqueness.

Now to a realistic English intelligence few things are more repellent than the grosser aspects of the popular faith in the efficacy of relics. Long before the Conqueror tricked Harold into perjuring himself upon such gloomy fragments of mortality, the Anglo-Saxon mind had felt for these things a certain distaste, a distaste that culminated in the movement called Lollardry.

And so, to my English commentator upon *Don Quixote* the following argument as to the rival claims of Sanctity and Knight-Errantry seems purely ironical:

> "Which is the greater," said Sancho, "to raise a dead man or to kill a giant?"
>
> "The answer is plain," replied Don Quixote; "it is a greater thing to raise a dead man."
>
> "I have caught you now," said Sancho. "Then the fame of those who bring the dead to life, who give sight to the blind, straighten the crooked, and heal the sick, and before whose tombs there are lamps burning, and whose chapels are full of devout folk who kneel before their relics, is a better fame for this and the other life than such as all your heathen Emperors and Knights Errants have left or will leave in the world."
>
> "That also I confess to be true," answered Don Quixote.
>
> "Then this fame," continued Sancho, "these favours, these privileges, or what you call them, the bodies and relics of the saints have who, with the approval and licence of our Holy Mother Church, have lamps, candles, winding-sheets, crutches, pictures, eyes, legs, periwigs, whereby they enlarge their christian reputation."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "All this is so," Don Quixote made answer. "But we cannot

all be friars, and many are the roads by which God carries His own to heaven. Chivalry is a religion. There are sainted Knights in glory."

"Yes," responded Sancho; "but I have heard tell there are more friars than Knights Errant in heaven."

"That is because the number of those of the religious profession is greater than of the knightly," said Don Quixote.

Now this is a very good example of what my admirable translator calls the "irony" of Cervantes; and he is hard put to it to account for the fact that Inquisition authorities, though more lenient in the days of Philip III than of Philip II, allowed this sort of thing to pass.

But, heavens! think of the colossal sport made of monks and friars in Rabelais, compared with this harmless passage! Surely to get the clue to the exact tone upon religious matters taken in *Don Quixote* it were wiser, instead of using the ticklish term "irony" which makes one think of Voltaire and Anatole France, first to remember Shakespeare's tone in these things, a tone too profoundly agnostic ever to approach irony; and then to think of the attitude to religion in our own personal experience of the most long-enduring, long-suffering, humble-minded man of action we may happen to know. I suspect that such an one will probably be a patient humorist, one who has made up his mind once and for all and long ago as to the limitations of the human intellect and especially of the intellect of those we call powerful original thinkers.

There is such a thing as taking for granted both the superstitions of the vulgar *and* the errors of the judicious, while we retain a modest attitude to our own mental endowments.

A veteran observer of the mad panorama of the world may surely be one who could enjoy the fantastical spec-

tacle of the clash of human character without bothering very greatly about the clash of human ideas. It may even be that the necessity of heresy, like the necessity of logic, is an attribute of a mind that cannot get on without an intellectual system, whereas a tougher intelligence, especially a humorous intelligence and one that has long suffered "the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune," may acquire a kind of unprincipled relish for the very chaos of human opinion.

As I have hinted, what we call irony is usually the sign of a deep sense of personal superiority to the ordinary run of people, and I confess it is hard for me—though, I daresay, like Don Quixote he fought his battles over again in many a village inn—to think of this ex-captive of the Moors assuming that supercilious sense of superiority to the superstitions of the vulgar that heightens the wit of Voltaire's *Candide* and rounds the periods of Anatole France's *Jerome Coignard.*

Among the curious experiences of Don Quixote in Barcelona, as he nears the close of his adventures, is the one of the Oracular Head, an episode of no very pungent entertainment.

Now I fully and completely share my English translator's horror of the abominable crimes of the Spanish Inquisition; and I share his view that nothing can excuse such atrocities. I also share his feeling, borne out by what I saw in Spain before the war, as to the harm done to the country by the Church.

But it seems to me as improper for us sturdy islanders to make Cervantes a rationalist as it is improper for Unamuno to make him the blood-thirsty Christ of the mystical Spanish spirit.

But it being spread about the city that Don Antonio kept a magic Head in his house which answered all questions, fearing

lest it might reach the ears of those watchful sentinels of our faith, he gave an account of it to the Inquisitors, who ordered him to take it to pieces and use it no further, so that the ignorant vulgar might not be scandalized.

Now since it is the lawful uncontrovertible right of commentators to come to blows over their author, our English commentator challenges the Spanish commentator at this point to explain how this allusion to "those watchful sentinels of our faith" could possibly be taken as other than ironical. Well, I cannot tell!

But I seem to visualize Cervantes as more like Shakespeare than like Voltaire; and I can easily imagine Shakespeare, just as I can imagine the late Thomas Hardy, casually referring to some magisterial bench as "those watchful sentinels of our morals," without any unctuous respect, but also without any particular ironic emphasis.

No, this whole business of analysing the ingredients of the humour of a great writer is a very ticklish one. The humour that is the deepest, the most mysterious, as well as the most difficult and the most imperishable is not satire or sarcasm or ludicrous farce or even intellectual irony; it is and was, and always will be, one thing only, the creation of humorous character.

Like Falstaff and Pecksniff and Panurge and Uncle Toby, only a hundred times more so, Don Quixote and Sancho justify the ways of man to God, if not of God to man, in the simplest of all possible modes, *by being themselves to the limit*; and what an inspiration it was that made the Knight catch the habit of rattling off proverbs from the Squire, and the Squire catch the trick of poetical eulogy—as for instance the famous one upon Sleep—from the Knight!

What I feel when I close *Don Quixote* is, that we are all the imaginary characters of some great Cervantes of

the Cosmos, and that nothing in the external world—whatever power of giving buffets it may have—is as real as the passion, or the mania, or the illusion, that we each of us carry in our own head!

As we read this unique book we certainly get the feeling that the dominant life-illusion in a person's head, whether we're mad or sane, is more real than the heat of fire, the cold of water, the damp of rain, the slipperiness of ice, the obstruction of marble, the beat of waves, the wash of air, or the boundless recession of the infinite sky!

Even under the pressure of his hungry Governorship and of all his pinches, blanketings, drubbings and lashings, Sancho will utter his incorrigible proverbs; and even under the spear of the malapert Samson, Don Quixote will utter those words that Heine thought the most beautiful in all literature.

My English commentator quarrels with Heine because this latter says that Don Quixote was overthrown by Master Nicholas the Barber, instead of by Master Samson the Bachelor. For myself, I can see no more "buffoonery" in his being overthrown by a conceited young scalliwag, with a smattering of learning from college, than by an honest barber, his old neighbour and familiar gossip.

But what matter such bagatelles? I owe far too much to Mr. Watts to take any real exception to his protest. That the Knight was done for is the crying point. We know too well that both the Barber *and* the Bachelor survived him. Indeed, they survive him still.

The egregious Avellaneda, whose spurious Second Part has, I presume, never appeared in English, ended his version, Mr. Watts tells us, by confining Don Quixote in the Toledo Lunatic Asylum.

Reserved by his true creator for a kindlier fate, Don Quixote actually encounters towards the end a character

taken bodily out of Avellaneda's pirated version. By playing these tricks with Time and Space, and with what might be called the different dimensions of fictional reality, we are compelled to feel that Don Quixote and Sancho have an existence and a being not only independent of the injurious Avellaneda but independent of Cervantes himself. It is a master conjuring-trick; and though several clever moderns have tried their hands at a similar device, *their* Homunculi remain as unreal in their new objective masks as they were in the laboratories of their makers.

But never was there a situation, before or since, like the one Cervantes now imagines; for this poor *revenant* from the lewd brain of Avellaneda—who must have felt like one of those dissolving *shells* of the dead that theosophists speak of, who hover over cemeteries—is anxious, the moment he sets eyes on the real Knight and Squire, to suck fresh vitality from their imperishableness, and to affirm—poor ghost!—even before the Mayor of the Town, "that I have not seen what I have seen, nor has there happened to me what has happened."

But it is not only the Knight and Squire to whom Cervantes gives a triumph over the treachery of time, equal to, if not more perdurable than his own. Horse and ass, Rozinante and Dapple, share this deathless survival; for what animals, historic or otherwise, have got themselves lodged in the human brain as these two?

And when you come to examine the art by which this miracle has been achieved, it is just as hard to arrest this sorcery, and to catch its magic between crucible and retort as it is to catch Providence itself in *its* workshop.

One thing, however, seems clear. It is partly done by emphasizing the *inconsistencies* of both men and beasts. Had the Knight been always the unruffled but deluded

hero, Sancho always the affectionate but greedy clown, they would never have been "clothed upon with immortality," and the same thing applies to their four-footed companions.

The essence of *Quixotism* is its war with what we call "the World," and Don Quixote himself, when he listened to Sancho's praise of the relics of the saints, spoke as if there were something corresponding to Knight-Errantry that already, apart from its failures in Time and Space, "had overcome the world."

But one of the most beautiful and subtle touches in the whole book is when Don Quixote feels that it is incumbent upon him *to pretend to be mad* for the love of Dulcinea. With this in view he is anxious to perform certain crazy pranks, the tale of which Sancho is to convey to the sprightly wench Aldonza.

> "I trust to your worship," said Sancho, . . . "for I intend to start at once without witnessing the mad pranks which your worship is going to play, for I will say I saw you perform so many that she will want no more."
>
> "At least I should like thee, Sancho, and because it is essential . . . to see me stripped, and go through a dozen or two of mad things, which I will despatch in less than half an hour——"
>
> "For the love of God, dear master, let us not see your worship naked, for it will raise in me so much pity, and I shall not be able to keep from crying; . . . but if it is your worship's pleasure that I should see some mad tricks, do them with your clothes on —short ones, and such as are of most account. . . . For how should it be suffered that a Knight Errant so famous as your worship should go mad without why or wherefore for a—let not my lady make me say the word, for by God I will out with it and scatter it by the dozen. . . ."
>
> "In faith, Sancho," said Don Quixote, "it would seem that thou art no saner than I am."
>
> "Not so mad, but more peppery," answered Sancho.

Whether Charles Lamb or whether my scholarly Com-

mentator is in the right of it over the elaborate fooling that our adventurers suffer at the hands of the frivolous Duke and Duchess, it certainly remains that both Don Quixote and Sancho come out of the ordeal with their integrity unabated and their dignity enhanced.

Not only does Sancho astonish these silly play-actors by his shrewdness and mother wit, but his master reduces them to silence by some of the noblest justifications of the profession of knight-errantry that appear in the whole book.

The part of the episode that I myself like least has to do with the author's deep-rooted prejudice against those unlucky elderly ladies, spinsters or widows, called Duennas. Mr. Watts seems to hint that, as an impoverished soldier and a poor proud gentleman, Cervantes may have easily suffered in the houses of certain Patrons of Letters from the backbiting spitefulness of this duenna class.

It certainly shows the extraordinary livingness of the story that a detached book-worm like myself should suffer a positive pang of vexation when Don Quixote's gallant championship of this luckless Duenna and her seduced daughter comes to nothing, owing to the Duke's capricious meanness, so that the girl, instead of being married to her enamoured lacquey, is clapped into a convent; but, after all, these shocks to the less-tough reader occur all the way through the tale, and it is hard to point to a single instance, right up to the very end, where the Knight's interference does any good.

Possibly the release of the luckless chain-gang—but even there the ungrateful Gines rewards his rescuer by making off with Dapple.

Gentle and courteous as his hero was, with his mania or without it, Cervantes himself can hardly be called a writer of squeamish sensibility.

The return home at the last is as curious as it is sad, and I confess it does appear here as if Mr. Watts had justification for his contention that the great writer had, as we say, his knife into the Inquisition. Certainly, to dress up Dapple at that moment in the institution's famous flames and mitre does seem going a bit further than a thoughtless jest.

But if to see the ass in the terrible sanbenito is a pleasure to a humane conscience, it is painful, at least to one reader, when Don Quixote gives back the hunted hare to her pursuers.

> "Your worship is a strange one," said Sancho; "let us suppose that this hare is Dulcinea del Toboso and these hounds are the vagabond enchanters. . . . She flies; I catch her and place her in your worship's power, who hold her in your arms and caress her . . ."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then the huntsman came up, and asking for their hare Don Quixote gave her to them.

It is curious to notice how Cervantes resembles Rabelais in his miraculous memory for popular proverbs. Sancho is the grand adept in this kind, but though applied in a more judicious manner, as he himself hesitates not to point out, Don Quixote uses them too, and to fine effect.

But it is Theresa Panza who rounds off her argument with these rich oracles most neatly of all, using them more sparingly than her husband and less sententiously than his master.

> "I tell you, wife," said Sancho, "that if I did not think to become governor of an isle before very long I would drop dead upon the spot."
>
> "Not so, husband," cried Theresa. "Let the hen live though it be with the pip. Live you; and let the Devil take all the

governorships that are in the world; without a government you came from your mother's womb; without government you have lived till now, and without government you will go or be carried to the grave when it shall please God. How many in the world are there who live without a governorship, yet for all that they do not give up living and being counted in the number of the people!"

Now, if anyone were to ask me what in my opinion was the most humorous remark in all literature, I would be tempted to try and remember this speech, ending with "for all that they do not give up living and being counted in the number of the people!" And yet the whole thing is only an extension of her own homely proverb: "Let the hen live, though she *has* the pip."—"*Viva la gallina con su pepita!*"

But doesn't it seem as if this inexhaustible memory for old wives' sayings which Cervantes shares with Rabelais is a shrewd indication as to the nature of their common inspiration, tapping, as they both do, the bottomless reservoir of folk-wisdom?

Here are a baker's dozen of these "unvalued gems," filched at random from this book, and the reader must not suppose they are all Sancho's.

Whether the pitcher strikes on the stone or the stone on the pitcher, it is bad for the pitcher.
It's no good to look for flitches where there aren't even hooks.
The pure woman and the broken leg are best at home.
The honey is not for the mouth of the ass.
Another's ill hangs by a hair.
Don't name rope in the house of the hanged.
He is safe who sounds the bell.
Behind the Cross stands the Devil.
God grant it and Sin be deaf.
To an ill wind goes *this* grain.
Not with whom thou art bred, but with whom thou art fed.
St. Peter is very well at Rome.

The dog saw himself in linen breeches and did not know his companions.
Let folks laugh, so I go warm.
When they offer thee a calf, run with the rope.

How impossible it is not to wonder, when we read of Don Quixote's adventures in Barcelona, what the Knight of the Rueful Feature would feel to-day about events in Spain. He was certainly glad enough to escape from his luxurious imprisonment with those idle patrons.

"Liberty, Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts which Heaven has bestowed upon man. With it no treasure can be compared which the earth contains or the sea conceals. For liberty, as for honour, one can and should adventure life. . . . In the midst of those high-seasoned banquets methought I was suffering the straits of hunger, for I enjoyed them not with the same freedom as if they had been mine own; for those obligations, which benefits and favours received impose, are bonds which will not let the mind range freely. Happy the man to whom Heaven has given a crust of bread, without the obligation of thanking any for it but Heaven itself!"

Tiresome and silly though the pranks were that those rich idlers played on our wanderers, we at least owe to them the piquant situation of the thousands of lashes which Sancho had to inflict on himself for the disenchanting of Dulcinea.

It is, I think, partly owing to what might be called the "skin for skin" intimacy between master and man—as when Sancho suddenly looks at Don Quixote and bluntly expresses his wonder that any wench could be excited to amorousness by such a figure, or, on the other hand, when with the utmost delicacy of consideration he gets him out his cage in order that he may do "what we can only do for ourselves"—that the livingness of the pair attained to such an *absolute of reality*.

It is in connection with the putting off of this "dis-

enchanting" process that Sancho bursts into his famous eulogy upon sleep.

> "O squire without pity! . . . Through me thou hast seen thyself a Governor and through me thou seest thyself in near expectation of being a Count . . . for *post tenebras spero lucem*."
>
> "I know not what that is," replied Sancho. "I only know that while I sleep I have no fear, nor hope, nor trouble, nor glory; and good luck to him who invented sleep, a cloak which covers all a man's thoughts, the meat which takes away hunger, the water which quenches thirst, the fire which warms cold, the cold which tempers the heat; to end up, the general coin with which all things are bought, the balance and weight which levels the shepherd with the king, and the fool with the wise man."

Certainly if it were the sweet perilous drug of Romance that sent Don Quixote crazy, Cervantes took a strange way of combating it. Why, he has set an eternal advertisement of it among the stars.

It is as if, when he took up that pen of which he speaks so touchingly, to attack this thing, the real Don Quixote, armed at all points, appeared at his elbow. Did he appear *in vain* at his elbow when it came to that final recantation?

Oh, how many simple readers there must be, who, like those the indignant Innkeeper told his clever guests used to listen spell-bound, must have reluctantly from their deepest hearts at Don Quixote's death-bed "sanity"!

Well, it matters not. Alonso the Good may make his will as he pleases, and may thank God as he pleases that he dies in his right mind. *To us he is not the man.* From that unreal death-bed, from all the unreal death-beds of imperishable Romance, comes the voice of the real Don Quixote, still reversing all the values of this plausible world, still putting invisible things in the place of visible things, still declaring in defiance of all the vivisecting science of all the schools: "Dulcinea del Toboso is the

most beautiful woman in the world and I the most unfortunate Knight upon earth; and it is not well that my weakness should discredit this truth."

For my own part I cannot help thinking that however triumphant Sir Homo Sapiens, our constantly re-born "Bachelor from Salamanca," may prove to be, there will always be some pair of arms, some pair of legs, even if no braver than Sancho's, to follow that faint voice, though it *is* as feeble and weak "as if out of the tomb."

With a Knight of ghosts and shadows,
I summoned am to Tourney:
    Ten leagues beyond
    The wide world's end;
Methinks it is no journey.

MELVILLE AND POE

POETRY can round off a subject better than prose, so I will break the natural chronological order and begin with Herman Melville. It is hard for me to understand any reader selecting as his favourite work of this great genius any book but *Moby Dick or the White Whale*.

Compared with *Moby Dick*, both *Typee—Narrative of a Four Months' Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands*, and *Omoo—Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*, are characteristic and original productions; but hardly "immortal works of art."

But an "immortal work of art" in the purest sense is *Moby Dick*. In fact, I regard it as the greatest book about the sea ever written; and it interests me to note how our best present-day sea-writer, James Hanley, in every new sea-tale he writes, approximates more and more closely to the particular category of human imagination represented by Melville, and less and less to that represented by Joseph Conrad. Though few writers could be more of a landlubber than I, I am inclined to claim certain advantages in analysing Melville's genius not permitted to all. Criticism, as Goethe says, ought to be positive. Carping, captious, academic stricture is totally devoid of value; though it is true that sometimes an inspired distaste, a devastating personal revulsion, like Nietzsche's against Wagner, is more illuminating than any but the profoundest and subtlest love.

But frequently one experiences an indignant longing to compel a critic to give, so to speak, his *credentials*, his

licence from the Muses to take upon himself so daring and drastic a task. The most effective form of criticism, second to killing your author, is what we call "the Conspiracy of Neglect."

The first of these methods was the one applied by the Bacchanalian Pietists—who still feel the same urge to censorship—to the poet Orpheus and in a certain round-about way to Edgar Allan Poe, whom no Nymphs of the purer element were able to save.

> Ay me, I fondly dream
> Had ye been there—for what could that have done?
> What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
> The Muse herself for her enchanting son
> Whom Universal Nature did lament,
> When by the rout that made the hideous roar
> His gory visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.

But it was not by rolling his head down the Hudson, or even by burning all the volumes that could be procured of *Pierre or the Ambiguities* in a bonfire in the town of Pittsfield, that the America of the Fifties and Sixties punished Herman Melville. It was by giving him what I understand is technically known as "the fade-out"; and I have lived long enough in his native Manhattan, and long enough in those Up-State regions he writes of in *Pierre*, to see exactly how this less violent method of dealing with a genius of his type can be successively applied.

Yes, few great men have been as neglected as Herman Melville. The later years of his life were allowed to fall into a sort of ghostly posthumousness; but the wheel has turned at last, and by steady degrees he is coming into his own.

Were the Muse to demand my own credentials for

writing on this man, who takes, along with Emerson and Whitman and Henry James, the platform in American Letters, I could only say that though my knowledge of Cetology is limited to a sight of the living spoutings of these creatures in the Atlantic and a sight of the memorials of their destruction in the town of New Bedford, I *can* claim to be a congenital disciple of the particular kind of Imagination, both mystic and realistic, both monstrous and grotesque, that was so natural to Melville.

I follow him in my attraction to those "Ambiguities" in our mad life at which both the Public and the Coteries instinctively boggle. And before the tremendous artistry of *Moby Dick* I cannot but feel a thrill of pride to think I have entered myself as a pupil in this sea-bottom school of sub-human intimations!

The imagination displayed in *Moby Dick* is indeed a model for all time of the most penetrating form that this great faculty can take. It does not show itself, as in Homer, in happily-chosen similes that become, as you might say, poems within the poem, nor does it display itself in far-fetched flights of fancy as in so many poetical novelists. It makes use of that deepest of all kinds of metaphor, the kind that sinks down into the very substance, essence, and occult life of the thing described, indicating its inmost esoteric affinity, nay! its spiritual identity, with some kindred emanation from the world-reservoir, whose external appearance is different, but whose root in the great underlying Noumenon is the same.

If, as Goethe says at the end of *Faust*, everything in our transitory experience is a symbol of the underlying unknown, Imagination of this sort looks down into the depths of the thing upon which it is concentrating until the thing's outer semblance yields, melts, dissolves, only

to gather again its dispersed lineaments, like the fragments of a broken reflection in water, into a larger, grander, more diffused image, and one that carries with it hints, glimpses, memories, revelations that have hitherto floated in and out of our human consciousness without leaving any definite or lasting impression upon the retina of the mind.

Perhaps it was this same deep Imagination that in itself led to the gross neglect from which Melville suffered; this, combined with his proud, lonely, Diogenes-like philosophy, which treated all competition, all rivalry, all ambition, all that is implied in the lively expression "making good," with transcendental contempt.

But I think it was also his peculiar brand of humour. Melville's humour is of the kind more adapted to alienate than attract. To the average mind it is not humour at all, but on the contrary comes near to showing itself in the light of a malicious wilful rejection of what ordinary humanity means by humour. Indeed, in this whole matter of Melville's *humour-that-is-no-humour* may be found the secret of his character, of his philosophy, and of his genius!

What *is* ordinary humour? Well, that is a question curiously difficult to answer, for different human races have a different ordinary humour. If you take Mark Twain, who is a master of ordinary American humour, and compare him with Dickens, who is a master of ordinary English humour, or if you take, in more recent times, our English humorist Neill Lyons and compare him with the American Ring Lardner you will find yourself confronted by two distinct forms of ordinary humour. Both kinds are appreciated, and deeply so, in *both countries*, but their origin, their method, the particular nerve to which they appeal, is totally different.

The examples I have given represent, of course, the humour of the ludicrous and the absurd; a thing that of necessity exaggerates our national differences; but apart from this, the average American and the average Englishman have a sense of what I might call the universal *Tragic-Comic*, a sense that they share equally between them, and share too, as is proved by the popularity of *Don Quixote* and Charlie Chaplin, with the whole Western World.

But the peculiar "humour-which-is-no-humour" of the author of *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* is neither the brilliant sense of the ludicrous of the writers I have named, nor is it the eternally human farce, so close to tragedy, of *Don Quixote* and Chaplin. It is, indeed, a thing *sui generis*, this peculiar Melville tone, and one of its hall-marks is a fierce malicious urge to lead this whole business of "being funny" such a dance that it will hardly be able to recognize its own features in the circus-mirror.

That I really do know what I am talking about here is proved, as I say, by my having taken out my own apprentice papers in this sub-oceanic, Hermanic, cetological school of humour that is not comical.

One grand aspect of this peculiar Melvillean humour is its huge and unashamed naïveté, a tremendous simplicity of buffoonery that is as imperturbable to the harpoons of facetious cleverness as the featureless forehead of Moby Dick himself.

Another aspect of it, if so it may be called, which is rather its sea-weed root in the dim *morbidezza* of the man's marine soul, is Melville's abysmal pessimism. Here I am of opinion he is as profoundly American as Walt Whitman is American in his optimism. These two are, indeed, the grandest products of American genius, with Emerson standing like a canny Arctic explorer between

a leviathan spouting sub-human joy and a Kraken wallowing in the sea-ooze of sub-human spleen.

The truth is, the pessimism of Melville actually does resemble what we may well suppose to be the attitude to life of the Father of all Devil-Fish as it lies at the bottom of the bottomless sea. It is an inarticulate pessimism, enormous, sluggish, titanic, such as the first children of Uranus and Gaia may well have had as they pondered on the gulfs of existence.

It is closely linked with the peculiar sadness of the more *continuous* elements; of the desert where there is only sand, of the sea where there is only water, of the poles where there is only snow; and it is linked too with certain uncanny phenomena in Nature which are weird rather than beautiful, such as this extraordinary yellow substance known as *brit* upon which the Greenland or "Right Whale" feeds, and such as this monstrous sea-bottom *squid*:

> Slowly wading through the meadows of brit, the *Pequod* still held on her way north-eastward towards the island of Java, a gentle air impelling her keel . . . but in this profound hush of the visible sphere a strange spectre was seen by Daggoo from the mainmast head. In the distance a great white mass lazily rose, and rising higher and higher and disentangling itself from the azure, at last gleamed before our prow like a snow-slide, new slid from the hills. Thus glistening for a moment as slowly it subsided and sank. Then once more arose and silently gleamed. . . . Almost forgetting for the moment all thoughts of Moby Dick we now gazed at the most wondrous phenomenon that the secret seas have hitherto revealed to mankind. . . . furlongs in length and breadth . . . long arms curling and twisting . . . no perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of either sensation or instinct; but undulated there on the billows, an unearthly, formless, chance-like apparition of life. As with a low sucking sound it slowly disappeared again, Starbuck, still gazing at the agitated waters where it had sunk, with a wild

voice exclaimed, "Almost rather had I seen Moby Dick and fought him than to have seen thee, thou white ghost!"

"What was it, sir?" said Flash.

"The great live squid which they say few whale ships ever beheld and returned to their ports to tell of it. . . . They fancy that the monster to which these arms belonged ordinarily clings by them to the bed of the ocean; and that the Sperm whale, unlike other species, is supplied with teeth in order to attack and tear it."

It is in fact—as one follows Melville's imagination plunging into the heart of this Scylla, of this Briareus of fabulous legend; and what would one not give for a scientific and historical work by him on the Sea-Serpent? —it is, I say, exactly the sort of pessimism that the Titans must have had, and that an incredibly vast sea-monster in its dumb, blind way might be conceived as possessing, that is darkly intimated in *Moby Dick*

Melville was too Kraken-like a man even to *want* to be redeemed by Jesus Christ, too deeply acquainted with the appalling cannibalism of life to be able to feel anything towards the Absolute but the deep, dark discomfort and sullen suspicion of primeval matter made conscious of itself through pain. Sorrow and pain to this man's mind were certainly more characteristic of the nature of the universe than joy and well-being. In this, as in almost everything else, he is the extreme opposite of Emerson, who, like Goethe, made a cult of turning away from the mad and the sick and the monstrous.

But the curious thing about the pessimism of Melville is that it is a *mystical pessimism*. Almost all mystics are by nature happy. Like Blake—perhaps the only perfectly happy prophet—they find in the mystical world their grand escape from the miseries of the actual.

But the mysticism of Melville is a dark satanic mysticism. He seems to detect in the First Cause Himself an element of

mysterious evil. It is clear he is a reader of Rabelais; bu Rabelais gives him no comfort. The man who knows th Truth, he says, the man who *is* the Truth, is the Man c Sorrows.

With a wise knowledge of his own limitations Melvil differentiates very little between the tone and accent an peculiar lingo of his Cape Cod mate, his Martha's Vine yard mate, and his Nantucket mate. None of them utte their sentiments in a style that differs very much, save i degrees of passionate intensity, from the style of Ahab, th *Pequod*'s captain. They all use the "thou" and "thee of the Quakers; but beyond this they all speak in Me ville's own huge, imagistic, occult manner.

It is true they are all constantly indulging in saturnin jesting, that curious jesting of Melville that resembles th jests that might be made by some monstrous noddin Mask among the freaks in a Circus-Parade; but just a the *Pequod* itself seems like a Phantom Ship upon fabulous Cruise, so the talk of these men is so heightene by the mystic quest they are following as to resembl anything rather than the real talk of real whale-fishe upon a real sea.

The three harpooners, however—Queequeg, the kindl Caliban from the South-seas; Tashtego, the pure-bre Indian from "Gay's Head," Cape Cod; and Daggoo, th majestic Negro—are sometimes permitted, but even i their case rarely, to use a speech other than the grandios language of their author. The old Manx sailor, with h Druidic predictions, and Fedallah, the mysterious Parse whose fate is so closely linked with that of Ahab, neve utter a word that isn't in the dark, brooding titan-speec of Melville. The real exception is Pip, the negro boy who in a fit of panic jumps out of the boat and goe insane from being left in the sea so long. *His* mad word

are wonderfully dramatic and natural; and, indeed, in everything relating to Pip, Melville introduces a more humanly-poignant note.

But the symbolic grandeur of this brooding and sombre masterpiece, in which the fathomless American reserve, and the fathomless American pessimism, and the fathomless American occultism are all embodied, finds its consummation in the figure of the *White Whale* himself. Nor did this Elemental Mystery vanish with Melville. I find it heaving up again in the work of Masters and Dreiser.

> The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity that has been from the beginning; which the ancient Ophites of the East reverence in their statute devil . . . all that most maddens and torments, all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought. . . .
>
> Here then was this grey-headed, ungodly old man . . . at the head of a crew made up of mongrel renegades and castaways and cannibals . . . and how it was that they aboundingly responded . . . what the White Whale was to them . . . or how in some dim unsuspected way he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life—all this to explain would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean miner that works in us all, how can one tell whither he leads his shaft by the ever shifting, muffled sound of his pick?

I am continually being made aware, as I too—a timid and awestruck book-worm—follow in the wake of the *Pequod*, in the wake of Queequeg and Tashtego and Daggoo and Pip, of rhythms and lilts and cadences and diapasons, which in the heave of their vessel, a vessel rigged with the hemp of our deepest nerves and figure-

headed with the phallic coulter of our most dangerous defiance, made me think of the resonant prose-music of Sir Thomas Browne.

And in spite of Melville's cetological substitute for what our facetious sun-fishes call "a sense of humour," there come passages sometimes—as, for instance, where white Ahab and black Pip play priest and acolyte as he nails the Doubloon to the mast—that mount up to the *tossing bells* and *streaming beard* of a frenzy not unknown to us:—

Edgar. Look where he stands and glares! Wantest thou eyes at trial, madam?
Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me—
Fool. Her boat hath a leak
And she must not speak
Why she dares not come over to thee.

The old prophetic Manxman is now staring at the Doubloon—and I do not know a grander example of the mystic identity between the souls of things and the souls of events than the part played by this Doubloon:

I've studied signs and know their marks . . . the old witch in Copenhagen taught me . . . and now in what sign will the sun then be? The horseshoe sign; for there it is, right opposite the gold. . . . Here comes that ghost-devil Fedallah . . . ah! only makes a sign to the sign and bows himself . . . there's a sun on the coin . . . a fire-worshipper . . . this way comes Pip . . . would he had died or I. . . . Stand away and hear him.

I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look. . . . Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw! . . .

I can stand the rest; for they have plain wits; but he's too crazy-wittin for my sanity. . . . Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it . . . when aught's nailed to the mast it's a sign that things grow desperate. . . . Ha! ha! old Ahab! the White Whale; he'll nail ye! This is a pine tree. My father, in old Tolland county cut down a pine tree once, and found a silver ring grown over in it . . .

and so they'll say one day . . . oh, the gold! the precious, precious gold! the green miser'll hoard ye soon!

But of the concluding passages of this book, unequalled ır imaginative grandeur save in the great poets, I will ıly as a *finale* quote one minor passage:

The ship? . . . Soon they, through dim bewildering mediums, saw her sidelong fading phantom as in the gaseous Fata Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of water, while fixed by infatuation or fidelity or fate to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking lookouts on the sea.

But as good an example as could possibly be found of e mystical fusing power possessed by Melville is the anner in which he speaks of the *Pequod* as she sank, agging down with her the sky-hawk caught against the ast-top by the harpooner's hammer, and thus, like ıtan, refusing to sink to hell "till she had dragged a ring part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herlf with it."

And if Melville's imagination is an immortal triumph the peculiar American genius, like no other in the orld, so also, though in a very different sense, is the ıagination of Edgar Allan Poe.

The best spiritual bridge that I can find, to lead us backard in an inevitable reversion to this great poet, is a line two from Melville's extraordinary chapter in praise of e supernatural element of terror that is the inverse side the traditional holiness which our race attributes to the ırgantuan mystery of *whiteness*.

All lovers of Poe will recognize, I think, in this analysis the shudder that comes over us in the presence of rtain aspects of *whiteness*, a mood akin to Poe's genius; d it must be remembered that *Moby Dick* was not ritten till just about one year after the death of Poe.

Melville has been speaking of a New England colt, terrified by the shaking in the air behind him of a buffalo-skin.

> Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt somewhere those things must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright . . . and pondering all this the palsied universe lies before us like a leper. . . .

Now if Melville was under-rated by the Nineteenth Century, Poe, just as unfairly, is under-rated in the Twentieth; and yet it is this very same supernatural shiver—as if in the presence of "invisible spheres formed in fright"—that he, of all men, is the hierophant.

How are we to account for the downward trend at this particular hour, especially in England, of this great poet's reputation?

I think there are many causes. For one thing, all human ideas move in spiral circles as evolution proceeds. Behind the philosophy, the science, the amusements, the conscience, the psychology, the religion, of each age moves some fatal destiny.

Now this destiny is like a tide sweeping round the feet of the Individuals who have the power to make what we call world-Literature, and all these, as Goethe so profoundly says, are linked to their age *by their weakness.* Their strength and their greatness, however, consist in their ability to resist this tide, for the highest and deepest things are the things least affected by this spiral flow. Homer would understand Shakespeare, and Aeschylus Hardy; whereas the minor men of talent of such different epochs would patronize each other with supercilious contempt.

Nothing reveals the real stature of a modern mind more

effectively than its attitude to the great figures of the past. When you hear a clever modern roundly disparaging some tremendous figure of the past, it is a proof that he himself is of so moderate a stature that the tide of evolution has carried him off his feet. His voice is the voice of a straw on the swift current, whose chief service is to indicate what is not very obscure, the direction in which the stream is flowing.

What those of us mean by *Poetry*, who are transported with pleasure by the poetry of Homer, and Shakespeare, and Milton, and Keats, and Blake, and all the anonymous Ballads, is a certain very definite blend of emotion and magic and music. As Milton says, it is something that is "simple, sensuous, and passionate," but as Milton also says, it is something that doesn't depend on rhyme; something, therefore, that *can* certainly include the "free verse" of volumes like *Leaves of Grass* and *Spoon River Anthology*.

But it is something, as those of us who love it most and are most steeped in its subtle laws know to our cost, that does *not* include the witty, clever, startling, epigrammatic social-philosophic verse that is the top-crest to-day of the literary fashion.

I should be a fool to disparage the value of this phenomenon as a new and remarkable *aesthetic medium*; but it is only a clouding of issues to confuse the purely mental and virtuoso-artistic pleasure which we derive from the work of those who use this new medium, a medium which is neither "simple nor sensuous nor passionate," but on the contrary is obscure, intellectual, and dispassionate, with the emotional, magical, and musical pleasure we derive from what for more than two thousand years we have learnt to call *poetry*.

But there is, I think, another reason why, at least among English critics, there is so marked a tendency to disparage

Edgar Allan Poe. He is, in a very peculiar sense, an *un-English* poet. Of Northern Irish parentage, riddled through and through with the *genius loci* of the most English of the American Colonies, educated at a boarding-school in England during his most impressionable years, his dominant mental tendency is as remote from the English one as was that of Oscar Wilde or Benjamin Disraeli, or in spite of the cult they made of these islands, of Conrad or Henry James; while the literature upon which his genius exercised its chief influence when he was dead was not ours but that of France.

And not only is our English spirit peculiarly liable to be unfair to Poe, who had, from our point of view, no sense of humour, and whose "art for art's sake" strikes us as a teasing affectation, and his mania for analysis as a knife in the morgue, both the two chief modern schools of poetry in England, the one I might call the "Curfew and Cowslip" school and the one I might call the "Barbed Wireless" school, are at the opposite pole from his erotic fantasias and sepulchral bizarreries. The one lives sensibly and genially on ale in the tavern, the other sensibly and angrily on whisky in the gas-house: while the least drop of that nepenthe which Helen of Troy brought from Egypt was enough to turn Edgar Allan Poe's wits.

Many of the circumstances of Poe's life had no small resemblance to those of the life of Coleridge; and I confess I find it hard to see how lovers of the subtly-imaginative, subtly-musical, and subtly-terrifying Coleridgean effects, can refuse their impassioned adherence to the almost precisely similar note in Poe.

It is of Poe as one of our major poets that I want to speak, not of Poe as a prose-writer, else it would be possible to extract from his *Tales of Mystery* specimens of a power of conjuring up what Melville might call the

Fear-Spasms of God which would make many moderns, who have forgotten to what Terrors he can steel himself, wish they had let him alone! The dark engine he employs to evoke these horrors might be called *the imagination of the nerves*. Pain plays little part in it. It is rather the quivering of the antennae of the pain-nerves before the actual shock comes which concerns him.

And I suspect no one but a professional psychologist knows the amount of steely will, of adamantine will, of aboriginal Red-Indian will, that was required when he allowed his trembling soul to be hunted, as slave-dealers hunt slaves, or harriers hares, till, turning at bay at the black-ice-wall of the last barrier, he defied "those spiritual spheres which were created in fright."

It would almost seem as if Poe were the most entirely *non-moral* poet who ever lived! Unlike Shelley and Byron, he is completely devoid of any social or revolutionary enthusiasm. He is equally devoid of any philosophic, or, in the ordinary sense of the word, any spiritual doctrine.

Like Keats, he reverences nothing in Heaven or Earth save "the Principle of Beauty and the memory of Great Men"; but unlike Keats, there is nothing in him of that Shakespearean humanity, that Homeric sense of the pathos and tragedy of normal human life, which is perhaps a richer poetic inspiration than any spiritual or metaphysical message. His life-illusion is subjective and egocentric to a degree such as only a nature of hard and crystalline detachment could sustain without going mad. But so intense and so concentrated was his genius that he has done what few merely artistic poets can do, he has created, or perhaps it would be better to say he has discovered, a world of romantic and morbid loveliness, into which, now that he has pointed the way, lovers of

his poetry can pass at will. It hangs suspended in the middle-air, this region, like an enchanted sky-pillared mirage, like the mysterious and magic *Caer Sidi* of the old Welsh bards. It is the impalpable City, built upon the waters, "out of Space, out of Time," wherein all the wild, self-centred, erotic cravings, such as philosophy destroys and morality condemns, may take refuge. It was of this unearthly but yet distinctly un-celestial region that he wrote in his second published volume, his *Endymion* as it were, and called it by the Arabian name, *Al Aaraaf*. But the appearance of this book, early in 1830, excited, so one of his biographers assures us, "more merriment than interest" among its readers.

It was this same *Al Aaraaf* that he "palmed off," as my biographer of the early 'nineties says, fifteen years later, "before a disappointed audience at the Boston Lyceum." Well! this queer poem excites in the present writer other emotions than those of merriment.

To my mind, youthful though it is, it is a much more significant and interesting production than the more popular *Bells* which he finished only a few months before his death. To me it contains, indeed, many premonitory hints and embryo suggestions of some of his grandest and most inspired effects.

The Paolos and Francescas who select *Al Aaraaf* as their refuge after death are doomed, the youthful Poe informs us in his notes, to eventual annihilation; but they regard their experiences in this region as worth even that price.

Their fate is suggested in the final lines of this curious poem:

> Thus, in discourse, the lovers whil'd away
> The night that waned and waned and brought no day.
> They fell: for Heaven to them no hope imparts
> Who hear not for the beating of their hearts.

Well! it appears that the partisans of the schools of English poetry to which I have referred are as unsympathetic to-day as Heaven was then to the denizens of Al Aaraaf.

Let them be so! We must console ourselves by the thought that the two greatest living poets in these islands, the poets who follow the poetic tradition of twenty centuries—W. B. Yeats and Walter de la Mare—display in their different ways a closer resemblance to Poe than to any other poet in our tongue except William Blake.

What floating fragments of his enchanted city far down within the dim West did this American poet gather as a child from the high-walled ancient parks of the landscape adjoining his English School?

For myself, I have caught again and again, among the ghostly backwaters and "melancholy seignorial woods" of Maryland and Virginia, glimpses of "alleys Titanic of cypress" and of lonely swamps "where the toad and newt encamp," and of "time-eaten towers that tremble not," where

> . . . travellers, now within that valley
> Through the red-litten windows see
> Vast forms, that move fantastically
> To a discordant melody.

But it was in my own youth, long before I had seen Virginia, that none other than Thomas Hardy pointed out to me, with more passionate appreciation than I ever heard him display *for any other author*, the power and beauty of Poe's *Ulalume*, that weird poem that represents the inmost essence of his genius; and indeed anyone who has ever visited the enclosed recesses and leafy watercourses of Bindon Abbey, not many miles from the mounded sepulchres Hardy used to watch in his lifetime, might well cry aloud:

Ah, what demon has tempted me here?
Well I know now this dim lake of Auber,—
This misty mid-region of Weir,—
Well I know now this dank tarn of Auber,—
This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Yes, literary fashions may change as they will, and light tide-borne intelligences may follow them as they will; but the figures whose stature permits them to keep their feet on the river-bed will always be able to recognize one another.

Edgar Allan Poe is certainly a unique figure among poets! Compared with his unearthly non-moral *egocentrism*, creating its vistas and avenues of eternally-receding romantic escape from everything normal and mellow and human, Oscar Wilde seems a genial wit, Baudelaire a bourgeois *bonhomme*, and Verlaine an honest Pantagruelian toss-pot.

One suspects that the *amount* of his drinking has been viciously exaggerated. Probably the least drop of alcohol flung that arctic-cold, insanely analytical brain into a hectic fever. The man was the purest Cerebralist who has ever written poetry; and what is more, he carried with him his cold sardonic American grimness into that "luminous void"; till like a steel-white engine among "azure towers" and "winged odours," his infernal logic ticked out its frozen commentary beneath the moon-lit battlements of the Empyrean.

The natural result of clamping down such steely scale-armour upon normal human sympathies was that his intense ego shot like a luminous projectile towards whatever dark moon of Venus it may be that contains the deepest and the *deadest* seas of erotic desire!

And thus it comes about that the erotic element in Poe is less spiritual than with Emily Brontë, less poignant than

with Hardy, less passionate than with Keats, but has a neurotic intensity of its own beyond all these.

Eroticism of this intense kind is naturally obsessed by the whiteness of death; for the dead alone cannot escape from it. And thus with the *tick, tick, tick* of the terrible logic-machine *which is its heart*, it circles for ever over that sepulchre by the sea, that "tomb by the sounding sea."

It was a romantic and ideal lust, this maniacal Eros whose inhuman desire inevitably "killed," in Wilde's phrase, "the thing it loved"; for an embalmed immortality in a "legended tomb," reached by a route "obscure and lonely," could alone satisfy a possessiveness that was jealous of every breath of air its poor Ulalume drew.

The scurviest trick by which our cowslip-ball school of poetry seeks to disparage this unique genius is the old pedantic device of dragging in poor patient Mrs. Radcliffe and her obedient partner Monk Lewis whenever our immortal *Eros Necrophilios* drives a poet among the tombs! But to explain the mania for sepulchral loveliness which is so dominant a note in Poe by any lugubrious literary fashion among New York and Baltimore ladies, is as unfair as to explain the fairy-like wit of Shakespeare by the fact that the jargon of the Court in his time was riddled with fantastical Euphuism.

One marked characteristic of Poe's most formidable poetry which our recent arbiters, drunk on their "cowslip-tea" or deafened by their "barbed wireless," find, I suppose, simply cheap and vulgar, is the sardonic playfulness with which he deliberately introduces what in his own analysis of *The Raven* he calls, "an air of the fantastic, approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as is admissible."

As a matter of fact, if the ghost of this great poet will permit us to carry his researches a little further still, this "air of the fantastic approaching the ludicrous" sublimates

itself when he is at his very greatest, which of course is not in *The Raven*, into something that might be called a Virginian counterpart of the sardonic tone we know so well in both Hamlet and Hardy.

Modern critics of Poe seem sometimes to play Rosencrantz and Guilderstein to these airs of the fantastic!

> See! it flickers up the sky through the night!
> Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming.
> And be sure it will lead us aright.
> We safely may trust to a gleaming
> That cannot but guide us aright,
> Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night.

Ros. I understand you not, my lord.

Ham. I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear

Ros. My lord, you must tell me where the body is and go with us to the king.

Ham. The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing——

Guil. A thing, my lord!

Ham. Of nothing: bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after.

Is it not proper and right in this chaotic world that there should be one unique poet—call him a demented escapist, if you will—who turns away in Luciferan indifference from both the Good and the True and builds up for himself his solitary Cave of Ice out of those quarries on the other side of the moon that Beauty still keeps for herself alone?

Few things are more painful, more jarring and disconcerting, than the perusal of almost any ordinary Life of Edgar Allan Poe; and I suspect the cause of this is that the average biographer is more concerned with his own delight or his own indignation over the startling queerness of the outward events that occur, than with

the more subtle problem of the relation between these weird happenings and the provocations and frustrations they work, in the occult Al Aaraaff of Poe's unique imagination. Lively psycho-analytical speculations are naturally roused in us by the erotic element in Poe's life; but nothing is more treacherous than to apply such a detailed psychological science to the creative imagination. Much safer is it, it seems to me, to treat these intimations as if they were an inspiration from some platonic over-world, peopled by the imaginative "escapes" of all the successive generations, and already *there*, pre-existent and imperishable, in a planetary super-consciousness.

Perhaps, as Goethe seems to hint, there are revelations from what we call "Beauty" that are in direct and independent contact with the creative energy that builds the world, and are totally beyond the reach of analysis, even of such analysis as this extraordinary poet loved to practise.

Such is, at any rate, what Melville would teach us; and if we were content to regard Poe's City in the Sea:

> Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
> Have gone to their eternal rest,

as a symbol resembling the White Whale, we should be in a position to reply to Poe's disparagers that this crazed lust for the "whiteness of death" is only another aspect of Faust's craving to reach the Secret of the Cosmos.

It avails nothing to bring against this great poet the charge of futility. Poe's hit-back at the Divine Comedy, indicated with such ghastly power in "the Conqueror Worm," is no reasoned philosophy of universal disillusionment nor is it an artistic affectation. It is a voice proceeding from Satan, as he stands in the presence of the Ancient of Days. In other words, it is a voice from one of the Janus-faces of the Ancient of Days Himself.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And over each quivering form
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the Tragedy "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

Great creative Nature, in league with that Daughter of hers, who is also, some think, her Sister—Tyche Sōtēr, Chance the Saviour—was kinder to Poe than his fellow-men.

Nature and Chance together aided him in his life-and-death struggle with the horrible Society and the monstrous Morality into which he had been born. Culture may have been more ideal in "our Boston," as Poe calls it, than in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond; but one does have a feeling that morals were a trifle more lax in those sunnier places.

At any rate, no poet has ever been luckier than Poe was in that extraordinary pair of intimates, his aunt and his aunt's child. Respectable and normal human relationships were, I suspect, completely disregarded in that fortunate ménage, a ménage, after all, that could hardly have existed anywhere but in those Southern States. Poe's feeling for that mother and child must have been of a most curious kind. Both of them seem to have been devoted to him, and the girl was like a Paracelsian Elemental, created by himself out of air and water.

However unlucky he may have been in his other, later loves, it is impossible not to feel that, in spite of all the miserable poverty he endured with those two, he was incredibly lucky in that "more than mother" and in that little-girl wife who seems to us still as if she were only *half incarnated*, and for that very reason could no more die

than a spirit could die! His romantic cerebral Nympholeptism was spared the danger by this good luck of dissipating itself in casual encounters and in hopeless obsessions, and he could make of its fortunate fulfilment and too brief duration an ideal that transcended all mortal bounds.

Alive or dead, this child-wife's frail and evasive identity could now fuse itself with all those weird unearthly regions of the imagination through which he moved with a clarity of vision beyond the reach of any other poet.

But what things, what things went on in the reality behind these "ultimate dim Thules" of his creation. For instance, how like a passage out of Dostoievsky is this pitiful scene as described by my present authority, when the girl lay dying in that cottage on Fordham Hill, near New York!

> Once when Mrs. Mary Gove, whom Poe called a mesmerist, a Swedenborgian, a phrenologist, a homoeopathist, and a disciple of Priessuitz, went to call upon them, she found Mrs. Poe suffering from "the dreadful chills that accompany the hectic fever of consumption." Wrapped in her husband's military overcoat, she lay on a straw bed with a snow-white counterpane and sheets for its only clothing. A large tortoise-shell cat snuggled to her bosom to keep her warm, while Poe held her hands and Mrs. Clemm her feet.

How many different accents of subtle disparagement have to be swept away before justice can be done to this rare poet! I think the tone of half-moralistic, half-facetious commiseration is the most blighting of these; although the most unintelligent is the one that refuses to take his romantic subjectivity seriously, but insists on treating it as an artistic affectation and cold-blooded charlatan-trick.

But the most *malicious* of these lines of attack is undoubtedly the one that finds in him not only charlatanism

but a theatrical insincerity, corroding his nature to the very depths of his soul. Well, the only answer that is finally confounding to all these temperamental hostilities is the one he would give himself—the incomparable *beauty* of his best work!

But unfortunately the best poetry is precisely the thing which you can least defend; *for it is an Absolute*, and like all absolutes, it is accepted in an act of faith, an act that fuses reason and logic and analysis and appreciation in one single intuitive assent. Where Poe is at a disadvantage compared with Shelley in the hearts of the "loving" and the "noble" is the fact that his mania for Beauty, as a facet of the Absolute, allows no room for either social or pantheistic idealism.

Where he is at a disadvantage compared with Keats is that his *particular kind of beauty* excludes those magical interpretations of real and breathing Nature which have so much more of a general and popular appeal. Keats, like Shakespeare, merges the narrower subjectivity of his personal emotion in the universal feelings of our race; and *his* landscapes are the familiar foregrounds of our earthly experience, felt through a sensibility a thousand times richer than our own and expressed in a language that "resolves itself into the thing it contemplates."

Poe also is a great poet, but his poetic realm, like that of Coleridge, narrows itself down to a certain romantic and unearthly mood, to a certain romantic and unearthly milieu, which, though they are shared, Heaven knows, and shared only too fully, by natures akin to his own, can never be as *influential* in our mystical culture as, for instance, the more universal spiritual world of William Blake.

But, on the other hand, no malicious moralistic attempts to bring down the reputation of Edgar Allan Poe can be

for long successful; for his poetry, narrow though its scope undoubtedly is, remains the only flawless representation in rhythm and rhyme of a particular individual mood that can only perish with our race; a mood that gathers into itself, from a dim margin of tribal memories, the lonely feelings of millions of isolated souls, whom public virtue could not heal nor public piety cure of the "deep scars of thunder" of our original Fall from Heaven.

When we are tempted, as camp-followers of the Cowslip Club or paying guests of the Barbed Wireless Club, to regard Poe as the Circus-Petrushka of a theatric Dance of Death, we must remember that both the great universalists, Shakespeare and Homer, "find room for this also."

Here is what that Poe-like visionary, Theoclymenus in the *Odyssey*, saw, as he contemplated one laughing assembly:

> "Ah, wretched men, what evil is this that you suffer? Shrouded in night are your heads and your faces and your knees beneath you; kindled is the sound of wailing, bathed in tears are your cheeks, and sprinkled with blood are the walls and the fair rafters. And full of ghosts is the porch and full the court, of ghosts that hasten down to Erebus beneath the darkness, and the sun has perished out of heaven and an evil mist hovers over all." So he spoke, but they all laughed merrily at him.

And there are cheerful souls who "laugh merrily" still, though, let us hope, to a happier issue, when Poe writes:

> By a route obscure and lonely,
> Haunted by ill angels only,
> Where an Eidolon, named Night,
> On a black throne reigns upright,
> I have wandered home but newly
> From this ultimate dim Thule.

It is because our critical approach to Poe's poetry has been from the wrong direction that we have laid him open to these disparagements. In place of trying to explain what psychological perversions in his character and what unhappy accidents in his life moulded his genius, we ought to accept his genius—for all his own mania for analysing it—as the pure inspiration it was, and then, occupying ourselves with the *nature of this inspiration* rather than with the pathological weaknesses of its mortal medium, to seek to follow him into those particular purlieus of our race-consciousness whither his intense and abnormal subjectivity carried him.

And the interesting thing to notice here is, as I have already hinted, that there should be so little that we can *localize*, or trace the *origin* of, in the actual New York or Maryland or Virginia of this poet's sojournings.

For myself, as a traveller for a score of years between all of Edgar Allan Poe's particular cities, and knowing the country round them a good deal better than I know my native Derbyshire, I confess—though it may be because of a kindred sensibility towards the ghostly, the weird, and the horror-hinting—I *have* found even in those districts, though, of course, far more in the "deeper" South, elements here and there that corresponded with disturbing closeness to the frightening things in his imaginary landscapes.

But it is not from those haunted pine-woods and those livid morasses and those treacherous estuaries and those weedy lethean wharfs that the darker vistas and more troubling visions of Poe's inspirations come.

They are conjured up from the occult symbols of pre-incarnate tremblings that we all find written on the nerves of our race, though only a few abnormal

individuals can render articulate these hieroglyphs of "holy terror."

And it is as if by turning this burden of ancestral "night-thoughts" into the loveliness of perfect rhyme he was able to bestow an enchanted peace—the peace and fulfilment of beauty—upon the "perturbed spirits" of this "ghoul-haunted" region of the human brain.

A traveller along strange roads is the soul of man; and there come to us all, along with the undying life-seed of the generations, hints and glimpses of dark moods and occult experiences that only a few individuals, down the long line of our dead, have been destined really to know.

Poetry as beautiful and strange as this could only have been written by a proud and lonely spirit whose intense subjectivity tapped some abiding reservoir of these debouchings from the normal path of the pilgrim soul.

Yes, it is not he alone—"ah, bear in mind this garden is enchanted"—who has crossed those "ramparts plumed and pallid" of Porphyrogene! It is not only he who has learnt that "no more—

> (Such language holds the solemn sea
> To the sands upon the shore)
> Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree
> Or the stricken eagle soar!"

It is still *there*, in the long deep memory of the Mnemosyne of our race, that "City of the Sea," where gleams the light that is older than the light of the sun; and when we hear people making so much of the "crass casualty" of this proud poet's end, and of the brutal and ghastly chance that bore him down, let us think of that other great poet, sepulchre-obsessed, who lost *his* Ulalume in Hell. In no very different barbarous dissonance he too perished, and he had gods, not human rivals, for *his*

detractors; but their common cry into the great darkness —Eurydice! Eurydice!—is not to be stifled by any "hideous roar," whether of the one or the other.

> And all my days are trances
> And all my nightly dreams
> Are where thy dark eye glances
> And where thy footstep gleams,
> In what ethereal dances,
> By what eternal streams.

NIETZSCHE

WHEN you examine closely—I do not mean with any particular pathological clairvoyance, such as he himself possessed, but with ordinary critical common sense—what might be called the Nietzschean antithesis or spiritual seesaw, it seems to me that it is not so much a case of Dionysus *versus* Christ, as he says at the end of *Ecce Homo*, as a case of Nietzsche *contra* Humanity; for both the spiritual dynamite with which he destroyed what he hated and the spiritual energy with which he created what he loved were used with the deliberate intention of substituting something else—a new Being—for the creature hitherto known upon this earth as Homo Sapiens.

The human race, its ways, its values, its virtues, its religions, its rationalisms, were all repugnant to Nietzsche. They excited disgust in him. They nauseated him.

At the supreme crisis of his spiritual life, in his desire to go to the uttermost tragic limit of that "love of fate" which was his ideal, he conceived as the worst possible of all issues, and therefore as the thing he *wanted* to be true, the doctrine of "Eternal Recurrence."

And he tells us how Zarathustra, pondering on this truth, was so overpowered by disgust when he thought of an eternal repetition of us "petty souls," that from the pit of his stomach there was torn forth the frantic cry: "Loathing! Loathing! Loathing! Loathing!" and he fell into a swoon that lasted for seven days.

Now Nietzsche was not the first to feel this loathing

for our "baffled, thwarted, and much-enduring humanity," as Hardy calls it. All the way down the long history of our bewildered race certain lonely "great" ones have felt it, and God alone knows how many lonely "little" ones!

Many before and since Heraclitus, many before and since Swift, have groaned under the weight of this "great despising," but none save Nietzsche has dared to make it the foundation of his message to the world. His whole philosophy is to be found in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; and as he tells us in *Ecce Homo*, he expressed himself here in oracular and dithyrambic poetry so as to *catch the ear of humanity* and compel it to hear him.

Well! he certainly has compelled humanity to hear him, at least the Western portion of it, as no other destroyer of human values has ever done, and what we have to do with his writings is first to extricate from them as clearly as we can what his actual doctrines are, then to criticize and appreciate these doctrines, and finally to indicate as well as we can—and this is by far the most difficult, as it is by far the most important aspect of our labour—what particular spiritual temper and mood and tone and atmosphere are communicated to us by his books, quite apart from their provable or unprovable "truth."

The personal and psychological basis of Nietzsche's work, what "set him off," so to speak, steering his vessel *north-north-east*, was undoubtedly this neurotic disgust in the presence of average flesh and blood. This loathing for average humanity and for average humanity's moral values will be found to have a very close connection if not an actual identity with the sadistic nerve.

Now I cannot regard this sadistic urge, which I am sure is an element in his whole attitude to the human race, as ever having the remotest connection with his attitude

to individuals. The mere fact of his putting into the mouth of the old woman, who gave her advice to Zarathustra, those famous words about women and the whip, is for any pathologist who has learnt his art from Dostoievsky sufficient proof that Nietzsche's sadism was no ordinary itch of the blood *but entirely of the spirit.* Sadism as a nervous vice was not a temptation to Nietzsche, *as it undoubtedly was*—although he succeeded in doing what people nowadays call "sublimate" it—to Dostoievsky.

But "once a sadist always a sadist," and Dostoievsky's sublimation never conceals from a reader, who has learnt psychology at the fountain-source, the fact that this particular nerve-quiver was always, in a personal sense, his grand temptation.

This, however, is not the case with Nietzsche. Never for one single flickering second do the writings of Nietzsche reveal *anything else* than the translunar vein of purely spiritual sadism, a vein that seems much more like the mood of one of Dante's angels of the Revolving Spheres than like the mood of Dante himself.

Criticizing Darwin for his idea that the struggle for existence implied the will to live, Nietzsche declares that all living entities, whose perpetual battle with one another is the basic fact of life, want something much more exciting than just merely to remain alive, something much more active than the seeking of nourishment and the propagation of their species. They want, all these living things, to assert themselves, to exhibit themselves, to attack, to dominate! Not the "will to live," but *the will to power* is the moving force of the world.

Being in his inmost nature and through his whole soul a passionate idealist—"thou too art pious," says the "old Pope" to Zarathustra—it was absolutely essential to his

spirit to give life a meaning and a goal. Struggling against illness, struggling against what he calls his own "decadence," he sought through health, through the over-brimming pride and strength and harmony that come with health, and above all through *courage*, to move towards this purpose.

Thus he is the enemy of pessimists, of defeatists, of all who poison the wells of life by their murmurs about the "ultimate futility."

His final argument against the existence of God is really Walt Whitman's. "How can I, in my over-brimming ecstasy of life, feel and act like a god if *God* exists?"

But if the only true road to the purpose of life is the road suggested by the Earth herself, and by the healthy ways of living things, and by the natural *will to power* of living things, how can he find, this naturally religious, naturally pious, naturally idealistic soul, a purpose for our earth-life in harmony with strength and health and beauty and courage? How can he find a purpose for life that shall at once satisfy his passion for a spiritual ideal, leave unrebuked his mania for beauty and strength and pride, and give scope to his translunar sadism?

And there is yet another "desideratum" to be won before Nietzsche can feel that he *has the right*, as he would put it in his haughty chivalrous manner, to satisfy his strange "piety." The natural healthiness of a strong, brave, fighting spirit demands an element of the pure joy of destroying, of *the will to destruction.*

But the ideal of our Western humanity under the influence of Christianity has corrupted this healthy belligerency. A set of unnatural values has appeared, begotten upon the sick, perverse, morbid instinct of the enslaved masses by crafty priests and nature-hating prophets, values that place the human ideal in "another,"

a "better" world, values that treat as "evil" the three most beautiful things in life—voluptuousness, passion-for-power, and courageous selfishness.

"Good," according to this "slave-morality," is to be loving to one's neighbour *so that he shall love us in return*; to repress sexual voluptuousness so as to poison the natural happiness of the beautiful and the brave; and to despise the body for the sake of the "spirit," so that our weakness and "unselfishness" shall perpetuate humanity *as it is*.

In Homer, Nietzsche would remind us, the word *kakos*, "bad," means the base and cowardly, and the word *agathos*, "good," means the beautiful and the valiant; whereas Christianity, by its implication that sex-pleasure and honest selfishness are wrong, has poisoned the wells of life.

But while engaged upon his task of dynamiting these false values, Nietzsche was slowly building up in his mind an ideal worthy of that saturation with "piety" which the "old Pope" detected in Zarathustra.

We have seen how that new "religion" of his implies a wholesome satisfaction for his translunar sadism, by the blowing sky-high with voluptuous sexual excitement of all these morbid asylums for the weak and the cowardly that we call "God," a "better world," "immortality," "purity," "love," and above all "pity." What we have not yet arrived at in our summary of his doctrines is the ideal *for the sake of which* this "old artillery-man," as he loves to call himself, has *transvalued* all our "human too-human" values.

Voluptuous quiverings of sadistic pleasure accompanied the explosion of each charge of his dynamite, and this he freely confesses, for he is far too honest and too subtle to pretend, as our scientists do with their poison-gases and

their vivisection, that his cruelty is "for humanity" or "for the Truth."

To strip "God," "Immortality" and "Free-Will" from the trembling shoulders of cowering Idealists, gave him what he would describe as an "innocent-wicked" delight. For him, as for Heraclitus, life and war were synonymous terms. "A good war," he says, "justifies *any* cause."

But the spirit of the great Nietzschean "war" looked forward over uncounted generations to a future harder, stranger than itself. Here indeed he found a "cause" more exciting to the nerves of a cosmic sadist than the dynamite-shock of any "transvaluation of values."

For the purpose of life, what we must, according to this man's doctrine, call the ideal of all true "Higher Men" is nothing less than the substitution of a Being *different from man* for the familiar humanity to which we now belong.

Now there is a distinct suggestion of something of this sort in the words of Kiralov to Peter Stepanovitch in Dostoievsky's *Possessed*. But there is no hint that the god-like Beings predicted by Kiralov would, like Nietzsche's "Over-men," force the masses of humanity to play the part of "helots," that is to say of protected and well-nourished slaves to their radiant selves.

Under our Nietzschean rulers we should have, it is true, certain important privileges. We should be permitted to retain our "slave-morality," and possibly even to wrap ourselves up in whatever shreds may have been left clinging to the parched bushes when the "Great Noon" was over of such ragged old clouts as "God," "Immortality" and "Free-will."

And let us now examine a little more closely the nature of the Beings who will in future rule our earth, exulting in their proud and beautiful life, and for whose sake our

"Higher Men" have to cultivate "hardness" and "innocent wickedness" and loneliness and courage and the dancing feet of those who have conquered remorse.

Well, I do not think we can blame Nietzsche for not defining in very exact terms what these "Over-men" are to be; for since they are to be as different from human beings *as human beings are different from animals*, it is clear that even a "Higher Man" like Zarathustra himself can only visualize them, and their manners and their ways, very dimly.

Their nature is expressed symbolically, however, so that we can in a measure guess roughly at it, in the great yellow Lion who appears at the mouth of the cave at the close of *Zarathustra*. The word "Superman" seems to be a somewhat inadequate rendering of this leonine symbol of the Nietzschean "Over-man," since what it suggests, owing to the infirmity of our language, is nothing better than the excess of such qualities as Herculean muscles, satanic wisdom and god-like beauty, all of which, if not normal human characteristics, are certainly normal story-book characteristics; and represent what the more child-like and unphilosophic among us have from paleolithic days regarded with excitement and awe.

There must be indeed, I think, to the mind of any of the *old* races of the world, like the Chinese, or the Egyptian, or the Welsh, or the Basque, or the Jewish, or the Arabian, something singularly child-like and fairy-story-like about Nietzsche's "Beyond-Man"; and I have a suspicion that *all women of every race* would prefer to continue being the companions of the gullible and easy-going humanity dispossessed by these austere warriors.

But the great yellow Lion at the end of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is perhaps rather a sign that the "Over-men" are at hand than a complete symbol of their nature.

Seduced by the old "Soothsayer," who may be regarded as an incarnation of Schopenhauer, Zarathustra, contrary to the "hardness" he has assumed for the sake of the future, that is to say for the sake of his "children," the "Over-men," has followed a pitiful "Cry of Distress" and has collected in his cave all the "Higher Men" of existing humanity. Here is the "Magician," representing Art in the person of Wagner. Here is the "last Pope," representing the best in the old Religion. Here is "the Conscientious One of the Spirit," representing Science; and here, along with the "Ugliest Man," the atheistic God-Murderer, is the "Voluntary Beggar" who may be regarded as a symbol of the Buddha.

All these various "higher men," in Zarathustra's absence, have been seduced into worshipping an Ass; but the Master has been playfully indulgent to this lapse from the austerity of his teaching, treating it as a humorous sign of convalescence.

> Forget not this night and this ass-festival, ye higher men! . . . And should ye celebrate it again, this ass-festival, do it from love to yourselves, do it also from love to me! And in remembrance of *me*! Thus spake Zarathustra.

But before the "Great Noon" in the revolving of the eternal circle of all things, when the Clock of the Cosmos strikes Twelve, Zarathustra teaches these poor ass-worshippers his mystic song, "the name of which is 'Once more,' and the significance of which is 'Unto all eternity'!"

> O man! Take heed!
> What saith deep midnight's voice indeed?
> "I slept my sleep—
> "From deepest dream I've woke, and plead;
> "The world is deep,
> "And deeper than the day could read.

"Deep is its woe—
"Joy—deeper still than grief can be:
"Woe saith; Hence! Go!
"But joys all want eternity—
"—Want deep, profound eternity!"

And the reader of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, waiting with his spirit strung like a bow for the loosening of the arrow, will perhaps recall at this crucial moment that other strange Litany of the Absolute at the end of the Third Part, whereof the rhythmic refrain repeats itself thus:

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity, and for the marriage-ring of rings—the ring of the return?

Never yet have I found the woman by whom I should like to have children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love thee, O Eternity!

For I love thee, O Eternity!

But at this moment, as he sat on a big stone at the exit from his cave, along with his "pet animals," the eagle and the serpent, drawing the fresh, deep, lonely air into his soul, he was aware of "the sign."

"What happeneth unto me," thought Zarathustra in his astonished heart . . . and while he grasped about with his hands . . . behold there then happened to him something still stranger; for he grasped thereby unawares into a mass of thick, warm, shaggy hair; at the same time, however, there sounded before him a roar,—a long soft lion-roar.

"The sign cometh," said Zarathustra and a change came over his heart.

By degrees, as he caressed the Lion and allowed a crowd of doves that had come with this beast to perch on his shoulders and on his white hair, he realized that the hour of his "Over-men" had come, *that future* for the sake of which he had rejected pity and had trans-valued all values.

When all this went on Zarathustra spake only a word: "My children are nigh, my children"—

But at this moment the assembly of "Higher Men" came out of the cave; and the Lion, leaving Zarathustra, sprang towards them roaring so that they cried all aloud as with one voice and fled back and vanished in an instant.

This was the second time that he had heard the "cry of distress" from the "Higher Men"; but this time, for the sake of the "Great Noon" that was approaching, for the sake of "his children," for the sake of *Those* who were to be as different from Man as Man was from the Beasts, he hardened his heart.

Suddenly he sprang up,—"*Fellow-suffering!* Fellow-suffering with the higher men!" he cried out, and his countenance changed into brass. "Well! *that*—hath had its time!

My suffering and my fellow-suffering—what matter about them! Do I then strive after *happiness*? I strive after my *work*!

Well! The Lion hath come, my children are nigh, Zarathustra hath grown ripe, mine hour hath come:—

This is *my* morning, *my* day beginneth: *arise now, arise, thou great noontide!*—

Thus spake Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun coming out of gloomy mountains.

An alert reader will have noted in the Clock-striking Song, Zarathustra's "roundelay," the reference to joy and grief, and how grief cried out for the end of all, but how joy "wanted eternity"; and how joy was "deeper than grief."

And it is impossible not to ask oneself the question: what was the main urge—for we have learnt from St. Paul and from Dostoievsky that in psychology and not in metaphysic lies the secret of life—that drove Nietzsche to round off his revelation with the doctrine of "Eternal Recurrence"?

Consider for a while, reader, this sublime and appalling

fancy; for one can hardly regard it as either a metaphysical or a scientific "truth." Well, according to this wild doctrine, every single event, person, character, scene, every single moment of what, as it streams past us we call the Present, is eternally recurring in a vast, never-ceasing infinite circle! Does it seem to you that this idea came to Nietzsche as a scientific conclusion drawn from the scientific assurance that while *energy* was limited and for ever taking new forms, time was unlimited; and that therefore in the circle of infinite time and after infinite other forms have appeared, *the same forms* are bound to come round again, and to come round not only once again or even a million times again, *but eternally again*?

Or does it seem to you that it was from pondering on the mystery of pleasure and pain in their psychological essence, that he was driven to this thought?

Or finally—and this is my own explanation—does it seem to you that the same vein of what might be called "cosmic sadism" in him that drove him to the idea of sacrificing Man to "Over-man," drove him also upon this horrible closed circle?

Surely it is not impossible to imagine the very stages—*psychological* in the most appalling sense!—by which he arrived at this frightful conclusion.

Let us attempt to reconstruct them.

In the first place, we must remember that for seven years he taught Greek and studied classical culture in that School at Basle. It was during this epoch that he used his *psychological imagination*, that mental weapon in the use of which no great genius except Dostoievsky has ever equalled him, upon two things, the philosophy of music and the secret of Greek tragedy. His professional subject as a German scholar was *philology*, but there seems little doubt that he might in addition to this have become a

formidable composer. Thus at the back of all his work—and one sees how, in this way, he became the greatest prose-stylist in the German language—lay the science of words and mystery of rhythm.

In those seven years of scholastic work at Basle he fathomed Greek tragedy to its depths; and it was here he not only conceived his illuminating aesthetic antithesis, Apollonian art *versus* Dionysian art, but found in the birth of tragedy out of music the clue to the yet greater antithesis, Dionysus *versus* Christ, that resounding chord upon which he was playing in his favourite Italian city when his brain but not his spirit broke.

The philosophy of Schopenhauer and the music of Wagner were together—the "Soothsayer" and the "Magician"—the *point d'appui* from which he leapt into the arena; but it was from the Greek conception of tragedy, which implied to his mind an exuberance and overbrimmingness of life, and *not* any essential despair, that he derived what might be called the *aesthetic formula* for his optimism in the midst of torture.

Thus we reach what might be called the "jumping-off-point" for the Nietzschean doctrines, a reaction against three things, against Wagner, against Schopenhauer, and against what he calls the corrupting "Nihilism" of socialists, anarchists, philanthropists, and Christians.

But the tidal wave of his "yea-saying" to both the pain and the pleasure of life mounts steadily higher and higher, till its terrible exultation after one final fanfare of sea-trumpets in *Ecce Homo* breaks its sea-wall and floods everything!

But meanwhile his conception of the "Eternal Recurrence" shows itself in its true light as the only logical terminus to which this optimism-under-torture could drive him. He had taken the phrase "amor fati" as his

motto, and he now forced himself to exult in fate, to *love it backwards and forwards*, so that to everything that has ever happened and to everything that ever *will* happen, including the most horrible frightfulnesses, he sets his ecstatic seal.

And thus finally he was driven by the urge of his translunar sadism to take the one last step; namely, to make this rapturous love of everything that has ever happened or *will* ever happen, good and evil alike, pain and pleasure alike, into an eternal and forever-recurrent circle!

What he calls the "Great Noontide," therefore, is the dramatic point on the curve of this circle when *man*, that living Bridge between beast and "Over-man," that weak, cowardly, neighbour-fearing, neighbour-envying, neighbour-loving creature who *must be surpassed*, evolves into "Over-man"! He does not tell us what ultimate fatality it is that befalls *Over-man*; but this very likely may be the destruction of his planet or of his whole solar system.

At any rate, it is something that means that the portentous process of evolution has to begin all over again. It is when Zarathustra realizes what to him would be *the worst thing that could happen*, namely, that man *as he is now*, with all his cowardice and "lovingness" and faith in a "better world," should *return again exactly as he is*, and that the actual moment through which we are now passing, down to its most infinitesimal detail and gesture, should return exactly as it is, and has indeed so returned an infinite number of times, that he decides that this *must* be how things are.

The doctrine of the "Eternal Recurrence" was in fact to Nietzsche the most frightful test to which it was possible to put his *amor fati*. If his *amor fati* could swallow *this*—loathing! loathing! loathing!—and still

cry its "Yes" to life, why then it was indeed the great "noontide philosophy" of the eternal circle!

And thus we arrive at the real reason for Nietzsche's announcement of the "Eternal Recurrence." Being by nature full of pity, being by nature akin to a mediaeval saint, the worst possible world would be a world in which all the unspeakable frightfulnesses of life repeated themselves *sans cesse*. *Therefore this was the truth.*

Covering, as it were, these bare nerves of the Nietzschean system with a little real flesh, we must note that the man's cosmic sadism began with himself. It was auto-sadism here, and yet always connected with the entire System of Things. Beginning with the long illness from the conquest of which all his "hardness," all his "flair" for decadent spiritual smells, all his "healthiness," all his "dancing" thoughts, arose, what we contemplate in Nietzsche's life is the metamorphosis, through auto-vivisection, of a natural saint into a *tour-de-force* Dionysus.

How different this cruel process was, in its furious Euclidian artificiality, from the really healthy, really normal, really human *theatricality* of his friend-enemy Wagner! There is no one in the remotest degree like Nietzsche, as far as I know, in the whole history of literature.

It is ironic that he, the great champion of the body against the soul, and of life against "beyond-life," should have been the most purely *spiritual* of all great writers. Shelley perhaps was more ethereal, and Shelley's *nerves* were less involved in his work, but how vague and wordy is Shelley's eloquence compared with the forked-lightning and crashing thunderbolts of Nietzsche!

When one thinks of the part played by the bodily constitution and the bodily senses in the work of most talented men, it seems as if the genius of Nietzsche was

made of pure intellect, pure nerves, and pure spirit. As he says himself in *Ecce Homo*, he is completely impersonal in his attacks; and yet we follow his sword-thrusts with a delicious, dizzy sense of becoming the very blade and point as they strike home! He denounces alcohol and was a hermit in his tastes, but his work goes to the head like vodka or potheen. Is it the absence from his style of everything belonging to the body *except the nerves* that makes his thoughts affect us as if they were the burning tunes for which armies have perished and cities been sacked?

Benjamin de Casseres, who, like the impassioned "Strayed Reveller" in Matthew Arnold's poem, has picked up the thyrsus dropped by some "bright procession of eddying forms" in this "Dance of Shiva," is profoundly right in calling to our notice the *musical* element in Nietzsche's hypnotic thought.

No wonder the serpent and the eagle and the lion and the doves all clung to Zarathustra! 'Tis as though Lucifer himself has turned snake-charmer; and we can imagine the glittering scales of the great Norse World-Snake rising gleaming and coiling to the surface under his spell—"superficial out of profundity!"

Come let us imitate "Heedless Blurter" in the wayward philosophy of Kwang-Tse, and whisper the truth.

It is *not* essential that we should accept his frightful dogma of the "Eternal Recurrence." It is not essential that we should harden our hearts against pity for the poor "Higher Men," or against pity for ourselves in the process of being "surpassed."

It is not essential that we should accept the "pathos of distance," that pretty euphemism for the selfishness of man to man, or that we should treat ourselves to the "golden-brown drops of perfect happiness" squeezed

from the ripe round fruit of the eternal circle, while the "petty souls" of the commonalty drug themselves with neighbour-love.

It is not essential that we should accept a single one of all the Nietzschean *doctrines*. What *is* essential, if we are not, in the fatal consistency of our prejudice, to stop our ears to the most prophetic voice since Blake, is that we should apply to the spiritual drama of our own life the searching psychology Nietzsche applied to his, and let the arctic wind of his relentless purification blow free upon us.

For, like the old Greek philosophers, Nietzsche has a way of making us feel our own personal mental drama as no modern thinker can make us feel it. If we were a Pariah, or a Chandala, or the most shamefaced "Untouchable," who can only read his own "surpassing" as the "Great Noon" draws nearer, we still could derive from this arrowy eloquence that heightening of the pulse which even the cruellest logic gives when its deadly edge flashes with gleaming rainbows.

Even if we were stirred to that malicious "resentment," which Nietzsche detects in the treacherous virtue of the weak, it would be a different emotion from the feeling that all was vanity and futility. At least the sun-sparkles would gleam for us on the sea-horses of Chance, and upon the blind forehead of the "Moby Dick" of our fate the moonbeams would glitter, and galley-slaves to the Future though we were, we should gain a fierce purchase for the pull of our oars and catch a suicidal beauty in the lift of our keel.

The glory of reading Nietzsche is that it *forces the issue*, that terrible issue between the "haves" and the "have-nots" which *ought* to be forced.

For myself, I have learnt from St. Paul and Dostoievsky a certain curious delight in yielding to the strong and the

well-constituted, which I sometimes fancy goes deeper than the "resentment" unearthed by Nietzsche. Indeed it goes so deep—or I think it goes so deep—that sometimes it seems to me "stronger," if I may say so, than the triumph to which it yields! These are deep secrets; but I would like to suggest just here that there *may* be in that "low" life-love, whose method the proud and aristocratic would describe as "Kick me, but let me live!" a mood that descends as far down into the life-force as any heroic and honourable belligerency.

But one thing is certain. What we get from Nietzsche's book is the greatest of all gifts that any writer can give us—namely, a heightening of our dramatic *interest* in life.

As I have hinted before, when people say "I couldn't stand it if it weren't for my sense of humour," they don't mean that their troubles seem comic to them, or that dull and annoying and stupid people make them hilarious. They mean that life *as* life, on the most troublesome and distressing terms, is *an exciting drama.* They mean: "I couldn't stand it if it weren't such an interesting show, and if the *dénouement* weren't so uncertain!"

But wherein lies this redeeming interest? Surely it lies in two things: in the excitement of our contact with alien selves; sub-human selves if we are hermits, the cosmic self if we are religious, and all other human beings if we are normal. And it lies in our complete ignorance of the future.

Now Nietzsche shows us how we can so pierce down into the depths of human psychology and so grasp the dramatic issues of human life that everything dull and monotonous and commonplace, everything "taken for granted," simply ceases to exist. Whether death ends us or not, whether we are moralists or immoralists, whether space is infinite or not, whether God is dead or not, in

the mere fact that we are now alive and must shortly die, in the mere fact that we are wickedly dominating others or voluptuously yielding to others, in the mere fact that we are eternally ignorant about *to-morrow*, whether it will bring unthinkable frightfulness or unthinkable delight, in the mere fact that good and evil can be reversed if we set ourselves *to will their reversion*, in other words in the mere fact that we can be hard or soft to life itself just as if life were a woman, *there* lies sufficient cause to cry "Yes!" instead of "No!" to existence!

And bodiless though Nietzsche's thoughts are, and fantastical though his conclusions may be, there is that in his tone, in his mood, in his spirit, which, just because it is so bodiless, just because it quivers with such a white-heat of psychological inspiration, seems much nearer to the heart of our ego, even if we are *not* "Higher Men," than all the cumbrous paraphernalia of the best metaphysical system.

A first encounter with Nietzsche must be always an event in a person's life, the sort of event wherein you recall the place and the occasion. But the curious thing is that the same stir of excitement is repeated after a lapse of years.

For myself, though I *can* recall where I first struggled with Hegel and the occasion when I first held in my hands Haldane's translation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*, I have never opened those volumes again, and never shall!

But I cannot see a volume of Nietzsche on any shelf without opening it, and it is like the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—you cannot open it without feeling, just as you did at first, the old fatal intoxication.

This is because Nietzsche, though a philosopher, resembles those prophetic soothsayers of the ancient world

who use a language that is sometimes dramatic and poetic and sometimes gnomic and oracular. He draws his bow with his brain, but the arrows of his thought are feathered with his imagination, spliced with his nerves, dipped in his blood.

And how meet, right, and salutary it is that the foundation-values of our "good" and our "evil" *should* be challenged! Things as important as our basic notion of right and wrong *ought* to be challenged. That is what philosophers, what prophets, what poets *are for*.

Let the constituted authorities, the vested interests, the indignant tyrants of Church and State, bar and ban and confiscate and burn; let the self-preservative instincts of the masses disparage and deride; the lonely soul of man will always turn to spiritual explosives and mental gunpowder, to the dynamite of Lucifer and to the deadly flame, driving the holy hyaenas away, that Prometheus carried in his fennel-stalk!

This artillery-fire from the batteries of "Anti-God" and "Anti-Man" is precisely what our deepest human values *need* to drive them to salutary desperation!

This is the sort of onslaught that keeps our "kindness," and our "pity," and our "patience," sound and formidable and sweet. Rotten and smelling of corruption grows our Christian virtue when it grows *safe*; when, like a golden cross on a "capon-lined" belly, it no longer tosses in the wind, tattered and bloody, against the fury of the heathen.

Our Christian virtue, as Blake taught, must bear up under devilish persecution, or it ceases to be itself. "In the world ye shall have tribulation. But be of good comfort. *I* have overcome the world!"

And what a mischievous satanic humour there is in the fact that still to-day, just as it was in Dostoievsky's tale

of the Grand Inquisitor, this crafty World continues outwitting its divine Enemy by melodiously intoning every morning and every evening in its sly episcopal throat, "Lo! I *am* overcome!"

No, no! The persecution of Christians is the best thing that can happen to Christianity. If it survives, it means that that shrewd "Higher Man," the Grand Inquisitor, has not yet been able to "square" his troublesome Prisoner.

Nietzsche informs us most significantly in *Ecce Homo* that he always got on very happily with real Christians; and one can understand this well, for his secret soul was riddled with religion. He speaks quite frankly of his admiration for Pascal, calling him a kindred-spirit; and *so he was*, a Nietzschean self-sadist the other way round, with his sprinklings of holy water and his deliberate *bétise*! *Ecce Homo*, even more than *Zarathustra*, is the book to read, to understand Nietzsche; for his brain when he wrote it was exactly like what Dostoievsky describes in the case of Prince Mishkuin before one of his fits.

It was abnormally clairvoyant, abnormally lucid, and with all its mental powers at their best. It is in *Ecce Homo* that he declares that he only attacks strong opponents and opponents worthy of his most tempered steel. Such a strong opponent is, he feels—but in reality it is perhaps rather *big* than strong—this Minotaur-monster, born of the incestuous marriage of Christ and the Pharisees, that we call *official* Christianity; and certainly, as far as most book-lovers are concerned, the fiercer he can make the fight with this worldly Beast the better for all our souls!

But it is quite right also that those *really* powerful things, those "invisible" things as St. Paul would say, those things that are the opposite of "big and strong," those things which the churches theoretically exploit and

practically oppose, should be subjected to the Nietzschean cannon-shot.

It is perfectly right that our most sanctified and most malicious humility, our profoundest Pauline *agapē*, yes! and such kindred human aberrations as Shakespearean indulgence, Socratic irony, Rabelaisean evangelicalism, and Dostoievsky white-magic, should be dragged into concentration camps and driven into the firing-line. If the blows and the bullets kill them; if Christ finds he *can't* forgive, Shakespeare he *can't* be indulgent, Socrates that his irony loses its bite, Rabelais that the heart is taken out of his cosmic aplomb, well then, so much the worse for them! But if they survive and "overcome the world" so much the better for us all, and the worse for Nietzsche's diagnosis!

Nietzsche would say, if he were alive to-day, that the persecution of Jews is not only a sign of our own weakness but a sign of our helpless anger in the presence of something too subtle for us.

But I think that Nietzsche, with the help of Dostoievsky, made one of the profoundest psychological discoveries ever made when he declared that there is a cunning layer of malicious poison in almost all forgiveness. And how grandly he defends "hitting back," on the ground of our delicacy of feeling towards our opponent, and our desire to spare him from being "abashed"!

> When, however, ye have an enemy, then return him not good for evil: for that would abash him. But prove that he has done something good to you. And rather be angry than abash anyone! And, when ye are cursed, it pleaseth me not that ye should then desire to bless. Rather curse a little also! And should a great injustice befall you, then do quickly five small ones besides. Hideous to behold is he on whom injustice presseth alone.
>
> Did ye ever know this? Shared injustice is half justice. And he who can bear it, shall take the injustice upon himself!

> A small revenge is humaner than no revenge at all. And if the punishment be not also a right and an honour to the transgressor I do not like your punishing. Nobler is it to own oneself in the wrong than to establish one's right, especially if one be in the right. Only one must be rich enough to do so.
>
> I do not like your cold justice; out of the eye of your judges there always glanceth the executioner and his cold steel.

It seems that Nietzsche did not always conceal his indignation when mean and unpleasant people excused their brutalities on the ground that when pursuing without shame or remorse their own satisfaction they were good Nietzscheans.

And yet this attitude in such people was natural enough, considering the mischievous delight Nietzsche took in making god-fearing men open their eyes by his praise of a dare-devil like Caesar Borgia as a commendable link in the bridge from animal to "Over-man"!

The mistake our modern Borgias make lies in thinking they are *wicked*, when all they are is childishly greedy. Any well-trained priest would know more about the silly conceit of these baby Satans, whose "sin," as Father Zosima would tell them, is not really, as they would have us think, "voluptuousness" or "passion for power," but simply an incurable self-deception, an everlasting tendency *to act lies*!

After all, when one thinks of the protected life Nietzsche lived, though he *was* so ill and so neglected, compared with the wild chaotic extremities of terror and pity that made up the existence of Dostoievsky, it is clear he never had the opportunity to drop his plummet into the deeper seas of evil. And yet who can say? Had he *had* the experiences of Dostoievsky it would probably have been just the same.

For let me whisper the truth. The mere fact that he

selected a murdering, intriguing, light-weight rogue like the young Borgia as his symbol of "evil," whether we admire his choice or the reverse, is proof that compared with the evil hinted at by Dostoievsky, and incarnated in a character like Stavrogin, Nietzsche had a most simple conception as to what wickedness was. His innocent-wicked "evil" is simply insensitive and bloody rascality.

Even Goethe's Mephistopheles could have given Zarathustra enlightenment in the metaphysics of such matters; and so too could Shakespeare's Iago.

However! Nietzsche would no doubt maintain that when to our Christian mood, or to our Diogenes-in-his-Tub mood, the power-lust of even such great men as Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon appears childish, it is because an element of human envy and secret malice enters into our spiritual superiority.

I find myself wishing that that classic heathen, Walter Savage Landor, were alive to-day, so that we could persuade him to compose an "Imaginary Conversation" between Marcel Proust and James Joyce on the subject of Nietzsche. I confess it seems to me that the history of Joyce's greatness among the intellectuals of to-day and the history of his influence upon the literature of to-day, beautifully illustrate the Nietzschean conception of the "Higher Men" among us, who are to evoke with so much labour and pain the electric clouds out of which the "Over-man" will finally burst, and burst with anything but a "still small voice."

Does it not seem as though the power of Joyce's brain, his astounding erudition, his contempt for all the old-fashioned literary values upon which we have been brought up, the sense we have, when attempting to read him, of something absolutely new in the sphere of lexicons, grammars, syntaxes, dictionaries, prosodies, rhythms

—though one catches faintly now and again stray lilts from Rabelais and Shakespeare—together with something absolutely new in the sphere of realistic "streams of consciousness," have exactly that effect upon us of troubled and puzzled awe that one would expect when in some weird leap forward of evolution our old human ideas of what is excellent in literature are in the process of being "surpassed."

For what would we expect from a new Nietzschean "Higher Man," following Zarathustra's "Ugliest Man" of "the Great Despising," and his "Soothsayer" and his "Magician" and his "Conscientious One of the Spirit"?

Would we not expect him to be like a Gulliver among Lilliputians? Would we not expect him to parody our pathetic human ideals, sentiments, illusions, idioms, accents, gestures, moralities, immoralities, our monkey-ways and our monkish ways? Would we not expect him to be only interested in us as subjects for artistic experiments, experiments that will be as much beyond our comprehension as this new type of brain exceeds our brain?

The difficulty that we, "the Many, too Many," experience in reading Joyce, does indeed become, when linked up with Nietzsche's Prophesyings, a most fascinating problem.

One begins to ask: How far were Homer and Rabelais and Don Quixote and Shakespeare and even the anonymous Ballads and the Gothic Cathedrals and the Old Masters in Painting, appreciated by the commonalty in *their* time? Is this great gulf that has begun to yawn between the "Intelligentsia" and the People a completely new phenomenon, or has it, in reality, always existed?

In the mediaeval Scholastic days, by reason of the scarcity of books and the absence of the art of printing,

learning anyway was confined to the few. Was this case also with regard to the appreciation of poetry and music?

This is a question to be asked. And another follows from it. Are we to rejoice in a proud, lonely, Nietzschean spirit at the very difficulty that most of us feel as we confront this Irish Titan, whose astounding philological experiments, whose amazing mythological learning, whose seductive syllabic rhythms, whose sardonic realism, are used to parody with remorseless ease all our old human ideals and sentiments? Or are we to wait in sulky expectation some inspired popular voice, some *new* Shakespeare, some *new* Dickens?

All that an open-minded Lollard of literature can do, it seems to me—in the absence of a Landorian "Conversation" between Marcel Proust and James Joyce—is to apply to *literary* values what we have learnt from Nietzsche to apply to moral values, and then decide, according as *our attitude may be* to this great "despising" and "surpassing," whether the old "simplicity," and the old "being-understand by the masses" which we have been brought up to assume were the characteristics of Homer and Shakespeare and the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress and Don Quixote and Rabelais and Dickens and St. Paul and Dostoievsky, were or were not destined to yield to a completely different standard of excellence, an excellence whose virtue is not, as hitherto, an inspired and imaginative criticism of life for the Many, but an inspired and imaginative criticism of life for the Few, leading up perhaps to a yet further narrowing down, when the great men of letters write only for the *Very* Few; until at last——

But I am beginning to assume the rôle of "the Ugliest Man" in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, who permitted himself to speak as follows of the simple admirers of the spirit of

Jesus and Don Quixote and Dickens as he strained forward in his self-despising towards Man's surpassing:

> Beyond all these do I look, as a dog looketh over the backs of thronging flocks of sheep. They are petty, good-wooled, good-willed, grey people.
>
> As the heron looketh contemptuously at shallow pools, with backward-bent head, so do I look at the throng of grey little waves and wills and souls.
>
> Too long have we acknowledged them to be right, those petty people: *so* we have at last given them power as well;—and now do they teach that good is only what petty people call good.
>
> And "truth" is at present what the preacher spake, who himself sprang from them, that singular saint and advocate of the petty people, who testified of himself: "I—am the truth."
>
> That immodest one hath long made the petty people greatly puffed up,—he who taught no small error when he taught: "I—am the truth."

But we have followed this line of thought far enough if we have succeeded in suggesting that the creation, by the efforts of lonely "Higher Men," of the same sort of transvaluation of values *in literature and art* as Nietzsche struggled to suggest in *morals* is a natural implication of this evolutionary leap forward towards the "Great Noontide." Some readers of Nietzsche will naturally be tempted to go further afield still and to drag his formidable name into our present-day racial and ideological contentions; but it is very hard to hazard a guess upon what side he would range himself were he alive to-day.

He certainly would be opposed to the mass-spirit and the nationalistic spirit of the totalitarian states. But on the other hand, I cannot see him as very sympathetic to our capitalistic, parliamentary democracies. I have a faint inkling that something about our English aristocracy would appeal to him; but at the same time I cannot see him "taking refuge" in England! Were one to select

for him a spot upon the surface of the earth from which he could survey the "good wars that justify any cause," one would, I think, hesitate between Switzerland and Thibet; for the truth is—and we may as well out with it—that this great champion of "frightfulness" and "hardness" and swords and guns not only "fought shy," as we say, of those "dangerous playthings" with small waists and soft bosoms that are the perplexity of "Higher Men," but had in his own life little experience, till his brain broke down, of what human beings *can* suffer—things a good deal worse than the physical weakness and the mental neglect which he shared with so many.

But the Nietzschean battle-field is, after all, the *mind of man*; and Heaven knows there is enough "war" and "frightfulness" *there* to try the spirit of the most heroic. And one feels that there must have been many mothers of our much-enduring race tempted to retort in the words of Euripides's Medea, that the travail of child-birth is as much a test of courage as swords and bullets.

All the same, I am ready to confess it does rouse my anger to hear some clever smug rogue who knows nothing of what our old Puritans used to call "wrestling with the Lord" make vulgar sport of Nietzsche's desperate spiritual paradoxes. At the worst, they are *splendid lies*; and a person who isn't stirred to the depths by their heroic challenge is a "petty soul" in a more serious than a Nietzschean sense! How fundamental are the problems into which he flashes his dagger! Is that queer urge, for instance, to repress sex-pleasure, which goes back to immemorial antiquity, to be regarded as an evolutionary instinct in Nature herself, or to be held as a perversion of Nature, arbitrarily thrust upon us by the will to power of sick souls?

And suppose, reader, that you were a Catalan Anarchist

fighting inch by inch for the ideal of personal liberty against politicians, generals, bishops, landowners, capitalists, and dictators, couldn't you snatch a fine weapon from Zarathustra's sayings and turn it against himself, declaring that you also had an iron determination to *create the future*, and to create it on behalf of *humanity*?

Yes, I am sure the thing to do is to accept Nietzsche as we accept the Aurora Borealis; not to try to light the coals on our hearth by it, but coals in our heart! I cannot for a moment believe that there is any justification, either from the science of his day or of ours, for the notion that the spatial-temporal, psycho-physical content of our astronomical world recurs eternally in vast periodic cycles; nor can I believe that Nietzsche or any other scientific prophet has the right to assume that the mystery of life, which Zarathustra himself declares to be so *deep*, excludes the possibility of Dimensions of Existence totally outside the astronomical universe.

Nothing is more interesting to me than to study the death-masks of Dostoievsky and Nietzsche. And what a much more formidable, what a much more *deep* countenance the former has than the latter!

Dostoievsky's face has the raw, rugged, scoriac look of a volcanic crevasse, out of which at any moment a fire might break forth—black or white—from the *other side* of "the thick rotundity of the world"; and compared with *this* look the sword-dance duellist-stare of the proud Transvaluer shows brittle in its tense beauty.

In his extraordinary book *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche sets himself actually to describe the *phenomena of inspiration*; and none has done it so well.

> If one [he says] had the smallest vestige of superstition left in one, it would be hardly possible to set aside the idea that one is the mere incarnation, mouthpiece, or medium of an almighty

> power. . . . One hears—one does not seek; one takes—one does not ask who gives; a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes with necessity, without faltering—I have never had any choice in the matter. . . . Everything happens quite involuntarily, as if in a temptuous outburst of freedom, of absoluteness, of power and divinity. The involuntary nature of the figures and similes is the most remarkable thing; one loses all perception of what is imaginary and metaphor——

These proud words are, I confess, a great comfort to me when I find it hard to bear the thought of the death-in-life that, even while he wrote them, hung over his head. If any great writer got ecstatic happiness from the process of writing, that writer was Nietzsche.

The translation of *Zarathustra* that I am now using is Thomas Common's, with notes by Anthony M. Ludovici, and it must be remarked how easily and naturally Nietzsche's German passes into our own Biblical tongue. Lines like these, for instance, hardly seem a translation at all.

> False shores and false securities did the good teach you. In the lies of the good were ye born and bred. Everything hath been radically contorted and distorted by the good. . . .
>
> Keep yourselves up betimes, my brethren, learn to keep yourselves up! The sea stormeth: all is in the sea. Well! Cheer up! Ye old seamen-hearts!
>
> What of fatherland! *Thither* striveth our helm where our *children's land is!* Thitherwards, stormier than the sea, stormeth our great longing!——

But it is as the poet of a rapturous happiness in the midst of suffering that Nietzsche is at his greatest, and let us boldly say of this "Happiness of Zarathustra" that it does not matter what strange theories of the logical brain lie behind it, because *in itself*, apart from our treacherous reason, it holds the mystery of life!

We all of us have these moments of strange causeless

happiness, when the atrocities of existence are forgotten. I do not say they are solved or absorbed; for even while we are happy something in us, aware of the individual nature of our luck, is ashamed of being "squared" while others perish in torment. But at least we have touched the fringe of a feeling of universal redemption; and here again, as Goethe says, "feeling is all in all," and the reasons we give for the feeling, all these logical "surpassings" and "recurrences," are of little moment.

Hush! Hush! Hath not the world now become perfect? What hath happened unto me?

As a delicate wind danceth invisibly upon parqueted seas, light, feather-light, so—danceth sleep upon me.

No eye doth it close to me, it leaveth my soul awake. Light is it, verily, feather-light. . . .

How long and weary it becometh my strange soul! Hath a seventh-day evening come to it precisely at noon-tide? Hath it already wandered too long, blissfully, among good and ripe things? . . .

O happiness! O happiness! Wilt thou perhaps sing, O my soul? Thou liest in the grass. But this is the secret, solemn hour when no shepherd playeth his pipe.

Take care! Hot noon-tide sleepeth on the fields.

Do not sing! Hush! The world is perfect.

Do not sing, thou prairie-bird, my soul! Do not even whisper! No—hush! The old noon-tide sleepeth, it moveth its mouth: doth it not just now drink a drop of happiness—

—An old brown drop of golden happiness,

golden wine? Something whisketh over it, its happiness laugheth. Thus—laugheth a God. Hush!—

. . . The least thing precisely, the gentlest thing, the lightest thing, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a whisk, an eye-glance—*little* maketh up the *best* happiness. Hush! . . .

What? Hath not the world just now become perfect? Round and ripe?

Thus spake Zarathustra—to himself.

GOETHE

IT was at Cambridge that I was first brought under the influence of Goethe; and though still ignorant of the German tongue, so that I cannot enjoy in connection with him, as I can with Homer and Dante, those intimations of new worlds of feeling that we get from a foreign language, I certainly can say that no writer, no thinker, no teacher, has influenced me more all my life long.

I do not at all agree, though no one could be less of a linguist, with Emerson's theory that you can get the essence of any foreign genius through a translation. Translations of poetry are, to my mind, usually worse than useless; for not only do you get no adequate idea of the poet in that way, you often get a *wrong* idea, which may cling to you all your life.

In prose it is quite different. Few of us can do more than glance cursorily at the French of Rabelais, but I have a shrewd inkling that Sir Thomas Urquhart's translation runs it close; and I cannot believe that our Authorized Version of the Old Testament falls far short of the original Hebrew.

If, however, there *is* an exception to the rule that poetry is untranslatable, I would say such an exception exists in the case of Goethe's *Faust*. Both the First and the Second Parts of this great drama are crowded with ideas that belong to the whole human race; and in addition to this the sex-interest in the Gretchen tale is of peculiarly universal character. Then there is the world-embracing folk-lore, deeper than any merely local legends, out of which Goethe builds up his symbolism.

And may it not be, too, that Goethe's thought does not wed itself so intricately and absolutely to the syllabic sounds he is using *as to be undetachable from them*, or, when detached from them, to be unrecognizable?

I am not one of those who in praising the First Part of *Faust* disparage the Second Part. Except for Proust's masterpiece, and by reason of his dying so young, *his* Second Part was necessarily a little hurried, it is hard to think of another literary work—I mean a work that is more than mere "essays" or "confessions," a work that forms an imaginative projected whole—into which a crowded personal life of thoughts and feelings, experiences, disasters, redemptions, has been caught up.

The *Divine Comedy* itself might be called a "static vision" as far as Dante's own spiritual and intellectual development is concerned, and even the history of humanity implicit in it is visioned as subject to an inflexible *schedule*, a schedule, it is true, with a complicated metaphysical frame-work, but a schedule that allows but little for the dim, obscure, living mystery of organic growth.

Although the *Divine Comedy* visions the Invisible World as threefold, its Purgatory is only a temporary preparation for its Paradise, and between its Hell and its Paradise there is no interchange of experiment, experience, or condition.

All is over, all is done for and finished at the fatal moment when the soul leaves the body, "The rest is silence"; but it is the silence of a Purgatorial ascent to Paradise, or of an irremediable Perdition.

But the essence of Goethe's *Faust* is that it is a living growth, a progressive development, full of something vast and blurred and dim and dark and mysterious, something completely *beyond any schedule*, something where good is mingled with evil and evil is mingled with good, and where both of them are surrounded by huge natural and

supernatural mysteries, at present unsolved and perhaps insoluble.

Goethe began *Faust* when he was twenty and finished it when he was eighty-three; and every time he came back to it after a lapse of years he threw into it some new experience, some new intellectual or aesthetic discovery, some new hint of intercourse between Heaven and Hell, some new vibration of the mountain of Purgatory, unforeseen by the angels at either its summit or its base!

What makes *Faust* so great a work, taking its place along with *Lear* and *Hamlet*, along with *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*, among the universal poems of the world, is its constant preoccupation with "first and last things," and its treatment of these things with the highest imagination and the deepest realism.

In solid philosophical weight it has the advantage of Shakespeare's tragedies, because it offers a more definite intellectual system. Shakespeare's art, though closer to common human experience, is like a many-sounding ocean of mortal outcries, lashed and tossed into foam by the criss-cross winds of "crass casualty."

And Goethe is a greater help to us in our modern life than Milton or Dante, because the burden of orthodox religion is loosened, lifted, broken up, diffused, dispersed, lightened of its dogmatic necessity.

Shakespeare's attitude, when you come to examine it, implies no more than a poetical acceptance of religious tradition as an undertone in life, with its inevitable reaction upon moral issues and dramatic emotions. What absorbs him is the visible spectacle of the secular world, its exultations, its humours, its despairs, its struggles, all of them "rounded" by the silence of death and riddled with insoluble mystery.

When you come honestly to think of it, how hard it

is to draw from any of these other famous works, from *Paradise Lost* with its Protestant theology, from the *Divine Comedy* with its scholastic metaphysic, from *Hamlet* and *Lear* with their pessimistic reserve, any real help in our secret inner wrestlings with life!

A word of sad resignation here and there:

> Man must abide
> His going hence, even as his coming hither:
> Ripeness is all.

or of patient fatalism:

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will . . .

or of a desperate hope-against-hope in the far-off heavenly Father:

> All is best, though we oft doubt
> What th' unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close;

or of unquestioning obedience to Holy Church:

> Avete il vecchio e il nuovo Testamento,
> e il pastor della Chiesa che vi guida:
> questo vi basti a vostro salvamento;
>
> (Ye have the Old and the New Testament, and
> the Shepherd of the Church to guide ye: let
> this suffice ye unto your salvation;)

such is, as honest John Ruskin long ago complained, about the best we can get, in our complicated mental and emotional difficulties, from these great poets.

And many hold that it is absurd of us to crave for more. Over the turbulent arena of our earth-life, rounded by unbroken silence, Shakespeare scatters the ineffable balm of an imagination that gives to the worst—or to *almost* the worst—a magical "fata-morgana" beauty.

In a world dominated by Moloch and Baal and Dagon, Milton stands and waits in blind trust that the "Eternal not ourselves who makes for Righteousness" will one day bring down their circus-roof upon the heads of the ungodly ; while to satisfy his insatiable lust for a divine malediction upon human malefactors Dante sees the atrocity-workers of the earth condemned to a despair worse than any they have inflicted.

> Bestiemmiavano Iddio e lor parenti,
> l' umana specie, il luogo, il tempo, et il seme
> di lor semenzo e di lor nascimenti.
>
> (They blasphemed God and their parents, the
> human race, the place, the time,
> and the seed of their engendering
> and of their birth.)

But, as the indignant Ruskin says, it *is* hard, when we ask the greatest geniuses of our race for bread, that they should give us these stones, give us in fact the same wistful resignation, the same blind trust, the same implacable resentment, that we know only too well in the weakness of our own hearts!

But in *Faust* Goethe does, I think, come a little nearer than Dante or Shakespeare or Milton to offering us some more solid assistance in our mental and emotional quandaries.

It is, of course, a well-known trick of the cynical conservative mind, aimed against youth's impatient wrestlings with life's riddle, to praise with an air of fatuous maturity the philosophical reserves of Shakespeare and his careless acceptance of life's tragedy at its face-value. As a matter of fact, one could easily gather evidence from his plays to prove Shakespeare a pessimist of a brand so extreme that the people who praise his well-balanced normality would be aghast at the morbid desperations of his spirit.

But the fact remains that Shakespeare's genius does lie rather in throwing a magical glamour over the figures of our life and its appalling predicaments, than in trying to get behind the drama to any secrets of the management.

Perhaps it is impossible to get behind the drama, but the door is not shut yet; and from the first to the last line of *Faust*, into which, as he told Eckermann, Goethe "put his whole life," we get a deliberate and concentrated attempt to throw into symbolic form all that he—our wisest sage since Rabelais—thought and felt of the general human situation.

The four-square *satisfactoriness* of *Faust*, its suggestiveness for any sceptical and yet religious mind, lies in the depth of its mysticism, in the vitality of its symbolism, in the huge reservoirs of religious mythology it conjures up, and finally in its magical closeness to Nature.

The religious problem is at the bottom of it all; and in his occult wisdom Goethe has frankly followed the natural instincts of his soul even where they break down, in their overbrimming vitality, the brittle ramparts of logical reason.

And it is here, above all, that he is so significant for us to-day. Not to feel a certain unfulfilled craving for religious satisfaction in the face of all our specialized science is to confess yourself a thin, atrophied, desiccated, abortive nature, a nature only half-developed, a nature blighted and withered in its flowering.

There is hardly any natural religious impulse, whether pantheistic, pluralistic, monotheistic, pagan or Christian, that does not find its appropriate symbol in *Faust*. The "Chorus Mysticus" at the close, which sounds like the voice of the Nameless itself, heard faintly from beneath the waves of the tossing ocean of Being, declares that the whole stream of life is but a symbol of what lies beyond.

And this idea, that all our religious instincts, infinitely various as they are and mutually conflicting, are representative each in their own way, of the Indescribable, is exactly what we most need just now, to put both theological and scientific dogmatism in their place. A gentle mind turns in weary distaste from the arbitrary jealousies of the cruel Father of men as Milton's obsequious hallelujahs belaud him. It turns with an even deeper reaction from the "somma Sapienza e il primo Amore" of Dante's ferocious "emperor of the Universe."

But the tyranny of science, with its withering of individuality, its contempt for the difference between right and wrong, its vivisectors and gas-poisoners, is worse than the tyranny of Jehovah, save that its régime is ended by death.

And Goethe treats science with the same freedom as he does Religion. *Faust* is the most agnostic poem in the world, and yet it is the most religious! Its whole tone and temper does exactly what at this day and hour we most need should be done. It *de-dogmatizes* Christianity, turning its nobler elements into the beautiful mythology they are; not treating them for that reason as untrue, but as humanity's culminating symbol in a world where *everything* is a symbol!

In these days when the traditional churches and their worship are becoming a No Man's Land of conflict between reactionaries and revolutionaries, it is most salutary to return to the atmosphere of *Faust*, wherein if all "houses made with hands" for the cult of the Invisible were destroyed, the religious impulse would still remain and the cosmos would be as full of magic and mystery as it ever was.

The essence of religion—that is to say, the feeling of wonder and awe in the presence of life and of the unknown

Powers behind life—is, according to *Faust*, the supreme and highest virtue of man. This is what Goethe was never, never weary of repeating. The more reverence the more culture: the less reverence the less culture! And thus, in an age when a smattering of extremely questionable scientific "truth" is assumed to justify a human soul—a soul that has entered into its inheritance of the inspirations of the noblest minds of ten thousand years—in taking up a negative attitude to everything beyond the scope of the senses, there is every reason why we should return to Goethe.

A mind inspired by *Faust* would not be overwhelmed with dismay even if revolutionaries did destroy every religious edifice in the world. Such a person would neither fight to defend churches nor to destroy churches; for he would know that *all* churches in the world, together with all the gods and all the demons invoked or exorcised therein, are to be found in *the mind of man* out of which they arose, and in which, though all their priests and black-and-white magicians were slain, they would still survive and beget innumerable progeny.

Any modern intelligent person, if he never entered a church, and confined his reading to Homer and Rabelais, would find plenty of scope wherein to cultivate that religious awe which is the highest attribute of man.

And the devotees of the inexhaustible gold-mine of human wisdom to be found in Goethe will, of all things, most avoid the negative attitude in religious controversy. Life is *more* religious, not *less* religious, than the orthodox hold it to be. It is the vicious, malignant, negative aspect of God that Goethe rejects; but even *that* he doesn't so much fight against, as subsume, sublimate, and hypostatize in the figure of Mephistopheles, the enemy of creation and life, but in spite of himself the minister of creation and life.

In one's reaction from the too-human behaviour of Jehovah one tends, especially after reading Milton, to feel that it is a mark of intellectual superiority to worship God as a Great Spirit rather than as a Person who loves and hates. But one sometimes grows aware of certain serious doubts about this intellectual superiority of believers in "Spirit" over believers in "Personality." "Spirit," after all, is only a metaphor drawn from the wind; and one feels sometimes a little doubtful whether as a worshipper of the Ultimate in the form of wind one is superior to those who worship it in the only form of which we have any experience *from inside*, the form of personal consciousness.

But the satisfactoriness of the Goethean attitude to religion, as we allow it to sink into us in *Faust*, is that it finds room for everything. Goethe himself declared that he had it in him to be a pantheist when need were, a polytheist when need were, and if his nature at any time required a personal god, "there was room for *that* also."

No remark could be more infuriating to dogmatic believers than that! To come to the feet of the living God as lightly and casually as this, is, they feel, a greater insult than to deny His existence. But, after all, it is only because Goethe was so absolutely certain in his own mind that the Ultimate Power of the Universe was not on the look-out for petty insults, nor had any resemblance to a touchy parent, that he wrote of it as he did, and felt towards it as he did.

What Goethe felt was that though it transcended human personality by as large a gulf as eternity transcends time, there was no reason why it should be something *less*. There were, however, a great many reasons against accepting the orthodox view of the three Persons of the Trinity; and in this sense Goethe remains a heathen.

There seems to be some law of life by which it is impossible for a great work of art to come into being by the arbitrary fiat of a single brain, working independently of any deep human tradition. Shakespeare, indeed, broke this law and achieved this impossiblity, for though both *Hamlet* and *Lear* were drawn from old chronicles, their stories were just insignificant folk-lore episodes, without any mass of popular legends behind them.

But *Faust*, like the *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost*, had behind it a huge agglomeration of mythological tradition and mediaeval legend, each of them of the sort that are of all most appealing to the superstitious instincts and rooted sex-manias of average humanity.

Save for our own Marlowe, however, no great genius had made use of this rich mine of popular appeal; and even in his hands the legend still kept its grosser, cruder, more sensational aspects. But Goethe changed the whole thing. He purged it of all its meaningless sensationalism, and where he retained its grosser and more grotesque elements he forced them into subjection to the main stream of his symbolic thought.

The Gretchen episode was a pure inspiration of his own, and in all the Gretchen scenes he surpassed himself and attained a dramatic poignancy that Shakespeare himself has never excelled; but, for the rest, all the way through this huge creation he gathers his materials from the deep mass of our demonology and mythology.

But into the heart of all this, giving it a vivid modern interest, he flings, in the figure of Faust, all his own erotic intensity, all his own titanic super-moral struggle after the secret of life.

The whole work—the two parts taken together—forms a vast Mythological Cathedral; for in spite of the Greek folk-lore and the Helen episode of the Second Part his

mystic-realistic treatment of these classical legends, with its incurable bias to the grotesque, is in reality profoundly *Gothic*, and for all his yearning after classical balance and proportion is much more Dureresque than Raphaelesque.

The First Part of *Faust* with the piteous tale of Gretchen's earthly fate—for the undying spirit of the girl plays its part in the final redemption—is like a sort of Lady-Chapel to this great Gothic Pantheon; and its heavier, darker, more mediaeval vaulting accords most suitably with the romantic magician's cell in which Faust is first discovered.

The device of bringing the Lord and the Devil together in a confederate colloquy is, though borrowed from Job, profoundly significant of Goethe's intimation that good and evil are both necessary in the evolution of life; and while the Daedalian chantings of the archangels, suggestive of the music of the spheres, gives the drama its planetary background, it is the Lord himself who in philosophical detachment strikes the non-moral keynote to the whole symphony. In the sentence "While man strives he is bound to stray," we receive the first hint of Goethe's meaning. It is made still clearer when this is added: "In his own dim impulse a good man has an instinct of the true way"; and it receives its final emphasis when this extremely unbiblical pilot of the System of Things indicates his ambiguous method of keeping up what you might call the tone of evolution by temporary "liaisons" between Heaven and Hell.

> Man's efforts lightly flag, and seek too low a level;
> Soon doth he pine for all-untrammelled sloth.
> Therefore a mate I give him, nothing loth,
> Who spurs and shapes, and *must* create, though Devil!

How portentously upon the ears of every lover of the world's great plays fall the famous opening words of

Faust, as they indicate in unmistakable terms the sort of intellectual mystic yearning to drink deep at the breasts of life which in his own experience had led Goethe such a dance!

> Philosophy and Medicine have I studied
> And Jurisprudence and Theology . . .
> . . . . . .
> And I have found that all we know is nothing!
> . . . . . .
> Therefore to magic will I turn my mind.

The youthful Goethe himself "turned his mind to magic" at one epoch of his life, and all the way through both parts of *Faust* there runs an umbilical cord, linking this huge work with his own personal adventures and his own cultural development. It was no doubt from his own remorse concerning more than one "Gretchen" that he drew the *emotions*, though not the facts, of this particular girl's fate. It was himself who turned, just as Faust did, from an impassioned study of books to a more vital but not less mystical contact with Nature. And again, it was himself who, like the early scholars of the Renaissance but still more like the yet earlier mediaeval magicians, forced his way into the undying underworld of classic symbols and ravished with his volcanic-gothic passion the calm loveliness of the Hellenic ideal.

The thrilling power exerted upon us by Faust's invocations as he bends over his magic book is due to the fact that we all conceal within us, inherited from an immemorial past, a secret yearning to enjoy by some magical short-cut the hidden potencies of Nature. A responsive pulse begins to beat irrepressibly within us when Faust makes the sign of the Macrocosm; for there is not one among us for whom the idea of forbidden sensual joys

and an unnatural power over the forces of Nature has not got a seductive appeal.

It is, in fact, just in that very quality in *Faust* which has troubled certain rare and pure minds that we must look for its real greatness; for Goethe brings to the whole problem of good and evil a planetary detachment that is not a little disturbing. It is true he never, as Walt Whitman claims to do, "moistens the roots of all that has grown" in the sense of celebrating the evil *equally* with the good; but he rejects the evil in so cold-blooded a way and acknowledges the Lord's use of the evil, to bring forth more good, in so shameless and unshrinking a manner, that though no doubt both St. Paul and Dostoievsky would have understood him, Nietzsche seems to have been deceived by his demonic detachment into taking for granted that he was a good deal more "beyond good and evil" than in reality he was.

But if *Faust* is not altogether pleasant reading to the simpler kind of moralist, it cannot be much more pleasant for the rationalistic type of scientific thinker. The calm planetary eye he turns upon Nature, that *physiognomic eye* of which Spengler speaks so eloquently, is a very different approach—at once more mystical and more realistic—from that of average mathematical or chemical science.

Faust remains an imperishable refutation of our modern preference for a mathematical universe over a magical one. I am not referring merely to all the thaumaturgic paraphernalia which of course was implicit in the Faustian legend, but to what might be called the living magical element in the mysterious processes of Nature herself.

When Faust falls back in weakness and terror from the apparition of the earth-spirit, at whose occult breast his book-magic had been sucking for so long, we touch what was one of Goethe's most subtle intimations, namely that

Nature, in a manner totally beyond our comprehension, possesses a consciousness of her own, a consciousness not less but *more* than human, which she expresses all the while through the multiform tongues of all her children, but in a language that not one of these children understands.

Like many another despairing human intellect wrestling with the insoluble riddle, the Goethe-Faust of this moonlit Gothic cell feels a sudden inspiration that it is Death rather than Life which holds the ultimate clue; and few situations in the roll of the world's great plays are more dramatic than where the Easter bells recall him to life, and with the stars of the morning announcing the happy tidings he dashes the death-cup from his lips.

Not a little suggestive of these temporary "marriages of heaven and hell" by which, according to Goethe, the tricky First Cause works His evolutionary scheme, is the fact that our commentators leave it, as Mr. Latham says, "to the reader" to decide whether the spirits who cry out, "Thou has shattered it all, the beautiful world! Build it again fairer than before!" are good or evil spirits.

Faust now walks abroad with his *famulus* Wagner among the spring-time crowds pondering upon the strange nature of his own soul—the soul of Goethe—which, unlike his worthy companion's, is torn by two insatiable contradictory passions, one for the visible world of the senses, and one for the invisible world beyond the senses; and it is at this crucial moment, as he realizes the full implication of this duality within him, that Mephistopheles appears.

"*Dost see yon black dog?*" But the good Wagner—for the abysmal spirit of Futility is unknown to the average man—sees nothing more than an ordinary dog, a teachable dog, a patient obedient dog, a well-behaved dog, just suited to be a scholar's pet.

Nor is it insignificant that as soon as Faust is back again alone in his cell with this docile pet, his total disillusionment with everything else in life drives him, as a last resort, to the Gospel of St. John.

Helped in his interpretation of the most crucial metaphysical passage in the world, "In the Beginning was," by more than one spiritual power, for his black pet is now becoming extremely lively, he rejects the "Word" and the "Thought" and the "Might" for the heretical but perhaps more modern version, "In the beginning was *the Act.*"

So many commentators have had their fling at interpreting *Faust* that the book has become, like the philosopher's stone, a Mecca of mystery for all occult pilgrims.

Certainly as we come back to this tremendous work, to its ironies within ironies, its secrets within secrets, its revelations within revelations, we are left staggered at Goethe's weight of genius.

It is the only play—Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a hurried sketch beside it and the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus a broken torso—that rivals the Book of Job as a philosophical commentary upon the ways of the First Cause; and for myself, as the latest *famulus* to *Faust*, I find its contents far more useful as a guide to the cosmos than Job's Apologia pro Deo.

Of one very interesting aspect of man's life, not referred to at all amid the terrific imagery of the Book of Job, Goethe makes a great deal. I refer to the magic power over both the spirit of evil and the spirit of despair exercised by what one might almost regard as an erotic passion for the elements. One feels sometimes, especially in the first scene of Part Two, as if one were on the tantalizing edge of an actual formula for the seduction of the Powers behind the forces of Nature, for these Sylphs and Ariels

and Undines and Salamanders, whose non-human embraces can erase the troubles of the mind.

There is something in *Faust* as there was something in Goethe, that remains strange and weird and inexplicable; but his mysticism differs from other mysticism by being rooted in a curious realism, by being a matter of personal experience rather than of theory. It is this emphasis upon real experience that gives such integrity to his irrational instincts, even to that most irrational one of all, his obstinate belief in personal immortality.

The precise terms of the bond that is finally arranged between Faust and Mephistopheles are of Faust's own making. The magician, not the Devil, suggests them, and their nature reveals the whole Goethean supermoral, or, if you like, submoral attitude to life. They follow the line suggested in the Prologue by the Lord himself, namely, that the essence of Good is *to strive* and never be content, while the essence of Evil is to give up striving and to rest in the enjoyment of the moment.

As soon as Faust can be persuaded to call upon the moment, as it flits past him, to stay and immortalize itself, then the Devil is to have him. "Let Pain and Pleasure come and go as they will," Goethe declares, "it is only by eternal striving that man fulfils life's law."

Here we get a definition of the difference between good and evil which may well indeed set us thinking! I cannot tell what other disciples of Goethe may feel about it, but for myself I can state my attitude with extreme clarity. Theoretically I entirely disagree with Goethe. Theoretically I find the essence of good in harmless happiness, in the harmless happiness of rapt contemplation, while I find the essence of evil in frivolous curiosity, in malice and in cruelty.

I must confess, however, that in practical experience I

have found it very difficult to call upon the moment to stay. Devilish thoughts, devilish fears, a deep devilish restlessness, have urged me on, have urged me to let the moment go; and, do what I can, this same troublesome servant of the Lord goads me still into this same action and striving.

Cleverer Wagners than I will have to reconcile, as time goes on, Goethe's words in Wilhelm Meister, "To act is easy, to think is hard," with all this praise of action; but it may be the "thinking" he had in his mind was very different from the psycho-sensual quiescence that Faust rejects as he plunges into the ocean of experience to test and taste all; and it may also be that the opposite of this sacred striving is not calm contemplation but vicious negation, and what might be called *malicious inertness.*

As I have already hinted, not only is *Faust* uncomfortable reading for theologians and puritans, it is also extremely disturbing reading for average scientists. Goethe is the grand enemy of the mechanical-logical-mathematical school of scientific thought.

While Faust is getting ready to set out to see the world, Mephistopheles, disguised in his doctor's gown, interviews an eager student and mockingly bids him study logic, but closes his mockery with true Goethean seriousness and hatred of soulless dissection :

> He who some living thing would study
> Drives first the spirit out of the body,
> And then the parts he holds in his hand
> And there fails him but the spiritual band,
> *Encheiresis Natura !* . . .

Never failing to keep a close contact with the historic symbols of humanity, Goethe liberates from each one of these as he touches it that living essence whose reality lies

in the actual experience of the individual. Just as the cry, "Christ is risen!" at which the death-cup falls from the lips of Faust, celebrates the birth of life out of death which is within the consciousness of all the children of men, so the drunken revel in Auerbach's cellar, with its notorious flea-ditty, stirs up that sediment in the breasts of us all which is the water-become-wine of the Rabelaisian Holy Bottle.

But further down still, among the unsanctified dregs of creation, must this Goethe-Faust soul be conducted by his graceless guide, before he is in the right mood to enter Gretchen's chamber. "Fie upon such fantasies!" cried Charles Lamb, when he was made acquainted with the "he-ape" and "she-ape" of the Witch's Kitchen; but as with all the other grotesque details of this gargoylish Gothic Pandemonium, there is natural truth enough in the Devil's having to "aphrodize" his adventurer's book-benumbed senses with the prophetic crystal and philtre before the casual sight of a simple girl upon the pavement can create in such a master of magic the imperishable Illusion.

When once, however, with the Devil's help and that of the lively Martha, the lust-drugged wanderer has destroyed Gretchen's peace of mind, who but Goethe can describe to a nicety the miraculous change from lust to love, and the seducer's romantic-ideal attempts to leave the girl before he ruins her?

Deep indeed is his reading of his own heart and, through his own, of the universal masculine heart, as in that scene entitled "Woodland and Cave" which follows the girl's cry, "I know not what he can find in me!" he struggles with his infernal comrade and recalls his discomfiture before the earth-spirit's apparition, and "sees, not feels" the pure beauty of Nature.

But we are soon given proof, as the Lord hinted in the Prologue,

> That a good man, by his dim instinct driven
> Of the right way hath ever consciousness;

for it is after he has gone back—in spite of his ideal resolutions—to complete her seduction, that we find him pouring into her startled ear what is no less than Goethe's ultimate religious faith.

Hitherto I have been using Albert Latham's translation in the *Everyman* edition; but I now quote from Bayard Taylor's version.

> Who shall dare, "I believe in God" to say?
> Ask Priest or Sage the answer to declare,
> And it shall seem a mocking play,
> A sarcasm on the asker.
>
> Then believest thou not?
>
> . . . . .
>
> The All-upholder, the All-enfolder,
> Folds and upholds he not, thee, me, himself?
> Arches not there the sky above us?
> Lies not beneath us firm the earth?
> And rise not on us, shining,
> Friendly, the everlasting stars?
> Look I not eye to eye on thee, and feel'st not
> Throbbing through head and heart the force
> Still weaving its eternal secret
> Visible, invisible about thy life?
> Vast as it is, fill with that force thy heart,
> And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
> Call it then what thou wilt—Call it Love, God, Life!
> I have no name to give it—Feeling is all in all—
> The name is sound and smoke,
> Obscuring heaven's clear glow.

The story of Gretchen's seduction seems to call forth every sympathy, every idealized memory, every imagin-

ative instinct that Goethe possessed; and so natural and convincing is the figure of the unhappy girl that even the most cynical reader must feel a shock of moral—or immoral—reaction, from the deep-rooted social conventions that bring about, even without the help of the Devil, these world-old sex-tragedies!

Nowhere is a writer's most secret nature revealed more searchingly than in his handling of this ancient and pitiful theme. The helpless docility of Ophelia in regard to her father and her lover evokes what is perhaps a more *individualized* though not less poignant figure, and every touch, in every successive scene, that *her* poet adds to her picture intensifies this brooding passivity till it finally emerges as something definitely recognizable in the lineaments of a particular maid.

And not only does Ophelia become, just because of this touching dependence, a clearly defined personality, but her madness and half-accidental death take on a certain poetic inevitability. Her very pliableness in the hands of each one of the people of her life prevents the wavering, hesitant, inner romance of her nature from betraying itself, until, as Goethe himself has hinted, it is pitifully released by the unsettling of her brain.

But her personality from the beginning is so particularized in its shrinking receptivity that it is impossible to think of any future for her when her world trembles under the shocks of mischance; whereas, if things had gone otherwise, it is easy to imagine a most natural future for Goethe's Gretchen. Touch by delicate touch Ophelia's poet evokes her fragile lineaments, till they limn themselves as clearly in our mind's eye as the reflections of the "pendent weeds" in the water where she sank.

But what Goethe does with *his* young heroine is very

different. With hardly less inspired art, but to a quite other purpose, he concentrates in her figure all the most characteristic qualities of her sex, adding stroke after stroke to make her as much of a universal symbol of susceptible and innocent girlhood as a young German woman—and no women lend themselves better to this—could possibly be made.

It is the fleeting charm of youthful feminity *in general* that he struggles to capture rather than the individual characteristics of a *particular* young girl; and he achieves this with such success that for stage-purposes Gretchen must always be the easier of the two to play.

In a sense, *all* young girls are Gretchens; at least they all have something of Gretchen in them, whereas Ophelia is a rare, baffling enigmatic entity, a unique human soul, such as it may, or may not, be our luck to encounter in real life.

But how cunningly Goethe goes to work in his task of creating a living symbol of tender, trusting, unsuspicious girlhood! Not a word she speaks, not a song she sings, not a prayer she utters, but enhances with a new magic this universal embodiment.

To every crisis in the Gretchen tragedy—and how easily one false note, too much sensuality here, too much sentimentality there, would have spoilt it all!—Goethe rises with easy, inspired mastery. Faust's emotions in her chamber when with Mephistopheles he is secreting the tempting casket and they catch the sound of her step below, his outburst of remorseful shame, "Away! Away! I never will return!", the girl's entrance:

> How sultry 'tis! . . .
> I know not what comes o'er me . . .
> What a silly, timorous girl I am!
> [*She begins to sing as she undresses.*

There was a king in Thule
Was faithful to the grave
Him she that loved him truly
A gold cup dying gave . . .

and the scene a little later where she plucks off the daisy's petals . . . "loves me . . . loves me not . . . *he loves me!*" and all this followed so quickly by the heart-sick love-plaint at her spinning-wheel, and then, when a maid no more, by that cruelly natural dialogue with her companion at the well where they chatter, just as Hardy would have made them do, about another girl who "has got herself into trouble," all these things as they mount up, adding here a little and there a little to this world-old pitiful tale, certainly leave us with the feeling that never again will the classic theme, "the woman pays," be treated according to its demands.

No one can accuse Goethe of dragging in unessentials where Gretchen's fate is concerned. Scene by scene—from her desperate prayer to the Virgin's picture on the town wall to her brother's denunciation of her as a whore, and from her despair in the cathedral when the organ plays the *Dies irae, dies illa,* to the final moment in her prison—this supreme outrage upon great creative Nature, wrought by Society and Religion, and by women themselves in their selfish trades' unionism, is exposed and immortalized.

And this is done by the one of all others best fitted to do it, both from his own relations with women and from his superhuman understanding of that mysterious creativeness in the heart of Nature which he himself calls *the Mothers.*

But everything else apart, what an inspiration it was to introduce the witch's orgy in the Harz Mountains between Gretchen's despair in the church and the last scene in her prison!

Here again Goethe defeats all rivals in yet another terrific piece of symbolic universalism; but it is by the black-magic cult of obscenity this time—of obscenity in relation to the essence of life and of its *necessity* in regard to the highest purposes of life—that he shows the connection between monstrous grossness and the most quivering tendrils of spiritual clairvoyance. The vision of Lilith, and that other vision whom his guide names as Medusa but who reminds the distracted Faust of Gretchen *paying the price of infanticide*, are so weird and terrible in their appeal that it seems strange that he could have brought along with them such a puerile topical jest as Herr "Prok-tophantasmist," the local bookseller, exorcising his demons by putting leeches to his rump!

But after all, there are occasions when our own imaginative writers sail as near the wind as that, and there are certainly moments in the lives of us all when we would be willing to recognize this or that familiar face on the top of the Brocken!

As for that absurd "Intermezzo," or what he calls "Walpurgis-Night's Dream," it is incredible that he should have inserted these preposterous jibes, these frivolous and vulgar broad-sheet skits, between pages of sublime inspiration that he must have known would be read for a thousand years! If he wanted a greater weight of contrast with what was to follow, why couldn't he have carried further his Witches' Sabbath?

More saturnalian obscenity would have been perfectly in order; more about the "apple-tree" and the "cloven-tree." He might even have brought his he-ape and she-ape on the scene again. But these foolish "Zenia" epigrams —what strange element of solemn clownishness was it that allowed him to drag them in?

In one sense it is an illuminating phenomenon that

he did so, for it proves that in a man of supreme creative genius the critical faculty *can* sink into complete abeyance!

The truth is that with all his perpetual preoccupation with art there has seldom been a genius with a less sure artistic instinct. He says himself that no laborious effort can produce the Best, but that our inspired thoughts must come like happy children, and cry, "Here we are!" And certainly few great men have been more dependent upon Nature and Chance and the urge of the immediate Occasion than Goethe was.

Successful artists are as a rule far more remarkable in their art than in themselves. Goethe was the reverse of this. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he was far greater in himself than in anything he achieved. One wishes there had been a score of devoted Eckermanns to record his most casual sayings, for no human being has uttered so many profound oracles. And there was always something so indifferent to our ordinary human ideas of success of life and success in art about Goethe's methods, that you feel sometimes as if he were a changeling from another planet. He cared nothing what the mass of people thought; and when you consider the shock he deliberately gave the ceremonious Weimar Court by his proletarian marriage, you can see that his interest in high society that caused such pain to Beethoven was only part of what nowadays we would call a polite Proustian curiosity!

It was the same in everything. Not one single moral passion of the crowd, not one single electric mass-prejudice but he deliberately flouted it. Patriotism meant very little to him. "How can I hate the French," he said, when they were actually occupying his province, "while I owe so much of my intellectual culture to Voltaire?" He classed the symbol of the Crucifixion with tobacco and bugs as his

three greatest aversions; and his attitude to the science of his day was as detached and critical as his attitude to its morality and religion. He passed through human life as if it were all of equal interest; of an interest that was on a level with the engaging peculiarities of Nature, but not of *more* interest than that.

But if he was free from the normal prejudices of humanity he was also free from its abnormal obsessions. Think of the part played—since those names were coined, and probably before—by what we now call sadism and masochism in the history of human genius!

Goethe is absolutely free from the faintest trace of either of these perversions. One sees this clearly enough in comparing the way in which Victor Hugo, Balzac, Thomas Hardy, and so many others, delight in *hunting down their feminine victims* with Goethe's treatment not only of Gretchen in Faust but of Mignon in *Wilhelm Meister.*

Scientific psychologists will smile at such a remark, but it seems to me as if the inmost organism of woman's being was expressed in some of Gretchen's most simple outbursts, while it is society, not any sadism in the author, that drives her into madness.

The closing scene of the First Part of *Faust* seems to me as fine as anything in Shakespeare; and not only so, but it rivals Shakespeare upon his own peculiar ground—I mean in being permeated by the *ballad element.*

No quoted fragment could do justice to it: the reader must turn to the book; but might we not be allowed to suggest that it was just because of that Saturnian detachment from ordinary human passions, making him both so startlingly unselfish and so startlingly selfish, that he was enabled to keep this flawless scene—perhaps the most moving scene in all human drama—free from any lapse into either sentiment or cruelty? And here, at his best,

how little of the classical there is! How little of the influence of Voltaire, or of Sophocles either! The end of the First Part of *Faust* is pure romantic hyperborean ballad-tragedy, and could have been written nowhere else but in the "Gothick North."

The Second Part of *Faust* begins with an Interlude in which, throwing his soul into those vast cosmic reservoirs which are beyond both good and evil, Faust bathes his despair and remorse in the elemental sea of dawn, where the spirits of air and fire and dew are giving new life to the earth. The voices from his victim's death-cell, "She is condemned!" "She is redeemed!" together with that terrible commentary of Mephistopheles, "*She is not the first,*" are absorbed and sublimated now, not in any human pardon but in the vast primordial forces that urge life on, be it the life of the good or the life of the evil, into eternal mystery and eternal change.

In their new rôle as court magician and court fool to the Holy Roman Emperor, it soon becomes necessary—their poet flinging into their quest his own life-nostalgia for what the Gothic North could *not* give—to call up from the classic past the Homeric Helen herself, the embodiment of what life appears, when it is seen as neither moral nor immoral, neither good nor evil, neither vicious nor spiritual, but simply and solely as an "aesthetic spectacle."

And to bring back this shameless, mysterious, terrible loveliness to the divine-satanic Nordic world, Faust's companion explains to him that he must descend to *the Mothers.*

Here we touch one of Goethe's tremendous inspirations, an inspiration of which, when Eckermann pressed him, he had no rational explanation to offer.

Interesting indeed would it be—for do we not touch

just here one of the profoundest mysteries of imaginative creation?—to follow the precise emotional process that made him feel such reluctance to confess to his faithful *famulus* anything more about *the Mothers* save that he found a passing reference in Plutarch to their worship in the town of Engyion in Sicily. In his notes to the *Everyman* translation Mr. Latham connects these powers of the abyss with Plato's archetypal Ideas in the *Timaeus*; but for myself, I prefer to think of them as belonging to that remote human tradition of which we find traces in Crete, and even, according to Sir John Rhys, in certain queer survivals in the Welsh language, concerning some prehistoric cult of the Feminine Principle, regarded as the origin of all things.

If this is so, it would connect *the Mothers* with that gnomic word with which the Chorus Mysticus rounds off the whole thing; and we would be justified in regarding that oracular expression, "the woman-soul leads us upward and on," which follows the words, for I desert my fellow-countryman's version at this point for the American poet's, "the Indescribable, here it is done," not as commending any definite attribute of mortal women for our human example, but as suggesting that above and beneath all the vast evolutionary cycles of Being, where all is transitory and symbolic, the Feminine Principle dominates the cosmos.

Faust's guide to the "Classical Walpurgis Night"—which is as much a prelude to his encounter with Helen as the Nordic Witch's Kitchen was a prelude to his encounter with Gretchen—is not Mephistopheles nor the Mothers, it is *Homunculus*, the little artificial Being created by the patient toil of the pedantic Wagner.

Thus when it comes to the actual reviving of classical antiquity, Goethe is too true a Teuton to refuse the most

important rôle to the hard-working, one-track-minded scholar; nor is there wanting a real touch of pathos when the little newly-formed Being, unable to leave his crystal container without perishing, compels this gleaming receptacle to carry him through space and time like a flying electric-globe and ungratefully forsakes his humble creator.

For my own part, I find this Pharsalian field of mythic shapes—as if Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* had been struck with a magic wand!—more pleasing, though less awe-inspiring, than the Brocken revel; nor do I feel that Goethe's passion for the particular part played by water in place of earthquakes in our planet's geography detracts in the least from the magical feeling one gets of being present at some universal daedalian dance of the evolutionary forces of the world. Homunculus's suicide—if such it be, rather than a fusion with some imperishable life-force—by breaking his glass globe against Galatea's beautiful shell, evokes once more that curious, excited, uneasy feeling that Goethe's conceptions so often produce, as if we were contemplating the secrets of earthly life through the eyes of some superhuman or, if you like, some subhuman creature, who is not afflicted with the same afflictions or stirred by the same sentiments as we are ourselves.

Just as the soul of this Goethe-Faust, journeying through the cosmos after leaving Gretchen's call, purges its remorse by bathing in the dew of the morning, so Mephistopheles puts off the Gothic Terror from his satanic soul, and by sharing her body with the third Phorkyad assumes that more disgusting and realistic hideousness which is the price we have to pay for accepting life simply as an aesthetic spectacle.

And so we come to what has been to some minds a great

stumbling-block in this portion of the poem, the introduction of the *Kabiri*.

For my part, I accept whole-heartedly Kuntzel's interpretation of these symbolic totems and entirely refuse to regard them as a mere satire upon a fantastic controversy. The historic Kabiri seem to have been mysterious divinities of Samothrace, probably of a chthonian character; but Goethe, always pursuing his evolutionary idea of making everything come from the sea, uses these occult fetishes—who, although only idols of clay,

> To the Inexplicable
> Forward still are yearning,
> Hunger-bitten, ever-burning,
> For the Unattainable,

—as symbols; for, according to his magic-illusionist feeling about life, the whole stream of things is only a series of symbols of the divine Reality.

And the mysterious Kabiri, each one a stage in the evolution of religion, rise like all other living things out of the sea, out of the shell-cradle of the mother of Eros, and as symbols of all the mystical creeds of the world—the last of which, though it has not yet incarnated itself in any material form, is the religion to which the whole world is groping—are found here, in characteristic Goethean significance, in the hands of Nereids and Tritons!

This is no satire. This is the truth; and to anyone who has come under the secret spell of Goethe's occult yet realistic method of handling Nature, there is a profound satisfaction in seeing these great, proud, troublesome, historic World-Religions presented to us as the fetishes and totems and transitory playthings of the universal unknown Divinity, whose garments—although as Goethe

calmly remarks, "if you require personality *there is room for that also*"—are the water and the air and the earth and the fire!

Goethe lived, like Spinoza who so deeply influenced him, in a sphere of thought and feeling as much above that of ordinary scientific men as of ordinary religious men. And so, although in both science and religion he was a master-adept, his methods in them both appear to the average scientist and the average pietist as grotesque and fantastic. He hated mathematics. He despised all the lower levels of logical and rational understanding. Not through dissection or vivisection, or metaphysical abstraction, or any other narrow specialization, was Nature's secret revealed. Nature is magical, not logical in her ways; and she refuses to betray her secrets to those who fail to recognize her divine spirit.

In 1829 he spoke as follows to Eckermann; and his words might have been chanted by those very Nereids and Tritons who bear the Kabiri to Homunculus:

> Without my attempts in natural science I should never have learned to know mankind as it is. In nothing can we so closely approach pure contemplation and thought, so closely observe the errors of the senses and the understanding, the weak and strong points of character. All is more or less pliant . . . but nature understands no jesting; she is always true, always serious, always severe; she is always right, and the errors and faults are always those of man. Him who is incapable of appreciating her she despises and only to the apt, the pure, and the true does she resign herself and reveal her secrets. The understanding will not reach her; man must be capable of elevating himself to the highest Reason, to come into contact with the Divinity, which manifests itself in the primitive phenomena (Urphenomenon), which dwells behind them and from which they proceed. The divinity works in the living not in the dead; in the becoming and changing, not in the become and the fixed. Therefore reason, with its tendency towards the divine has only to do with the

becoming, the living; but understanding with the become, the already fixed, that it may make use of it.

The Third Act of the Second Part describing the union of Faust and Helen, has a more purely *poetic* beauty than any other portion of the whole drama. This Act offers us more of the peculiar tone, temper, atmosphere, more of the curious fatalistic resignation, of the old Greek stage than you would suppose could possibly be reproduced in a modern tongue, still less in one modern tongue translated into another.

What deathless vitality these old Greek gestures and attitudes and turns of feeling must have, to be capable of such diffusions and dilutions and yet remain so dynamic! Those old poets must have carved their rendering of human passions upon an uncrumbling granite monolith of aesthetic response that has the power, like some immortal stone quarried from a nobler planet than ours, of yielding an echo that resounds through eternity.

The Fourth Act of the Second Part, on the contrary, is unendurably tedious. Nothing but the pedantic architectural necessity of accounting for Faust's favoured position under the Emperor, as a reclaimer of fertile land from the salt-marshes, seems to justify its existence, and its stiff and wooden and unrewarding expanse, like pasteboard upon which some solemn child is arranging his tin soldiers, has as its only interest the psychological problem as to *what it was* in Goethe that lent itself to such tedium. But this is not the only occasion when he works like a man made of sapless wood. The close of *Wilhelm Meister* has the same lack of inspiration One can only suppose it came from some weight of cosmogonic rubble in this Colossus that a little Celtic quicksilver or a grain of Gallic roguery would soon have transmuted!

But the moment we come to the Fifth and last Act of the whole play we find him gathering himself together in the strength of all his most disturbing wisdom. In his extreme old age we discover the world-weary Faust rejoicing in the material benefits to posterity of his marsh-reclaiming exploits. It would have seemed natural for Goethe to have let him die just so, acclaiming in a final Nunc Dimittis the satisfying perfection of the passing moment; while by the nature of this perfection he slips out of his hell-fire pact.

But Goethe's everlasting refusal to forsake the shocking mixture of good and evil in life forbade so easy a close, and by the aid of his black magic Faust proceeds to evict the amiable old couple whose defiant homestead, like Naboth's vineyard, has long been taunting his satisfied mind. In this eviction both the old people perish; and once more it becomes his destiny to endure the misery of remorse; remorse not quite as extreme as he had felt over Gretchen, but enough to surround him with spectres of horror.

In his dialogue, however, with one of these ghastly visitors, who to keep all distraction away now adds blindness to these devastating thoughts, he has an opportunity to indicate what Goethe's own methods were when fear and horror and loathing attacked his mind.

Most sensitive natures, at one time or another, have to pass through a period when the three kinds of fear, physical fear, mental fear, and what in homely fashion we can only describe as "the Horrors," come gibbering at their threshold and plague them with mystic panic and physical loathing. With a natural psychology wiser than most of our risky modern conjuring tricks, Faust defies these spectres of remorse and terror by a yet more savage plunge into work, into yet heavier work, into

desperate Lethe-bringing struggles with the resistance of matter.

And in these final struggles, which are simple and practical enough, and indeed are no less than what all pioneers have to do in unreclaimed wildernesses, the old eroticist and illusionist finds he can forget his guilty conscience.

> For he alone deserves liberty, as he alone deserves
> life, who every day conquers it afresh.

It is with a very Gothic ecstasy that Faust winds up his contract with the Devil, and in so doing makes a fool once more of that queer son of negation, who "*willing the evil* is for ever furthering the good."

What the Lord said in the Prologue turns out now to be literally true:

> A good man, by his dim impulse driven
> of the right way hath ever consciousness;

and Mephistopheles is cheated of his rational and logical victory.

Faust has brought about the ruin of Gretchen and her people and the wretched deaths of Baucis and Philemon, and yet when he contemplates his final practical achievement he bids the "fair moment stay," and falls triumphant into the grave dug by the Lemures. It thus becomes significant that while Shakespeare, the pessimist, makes his powers of evil conquer Macbeth by a superficial equivocation, Goethe makes his evil one defeated by a more spiritual quibble. But this extraordinary poem, which is nothing less than the greatest autobiography ever written, does not end with Faust's death.

While the soul is not yet free, Mephistopheles utters his word of everlasting futility which, for it springs from the same abyss as the word of life, cannot in the nature of

things find any logical refutation. Here is Mr. Latham's admirable rendering of this Satanic self-justification.

Chorus. 'Tis past and over.
Mephistopheles. Past! a stupid word.
Why past and over?
Past and pure Nothingness! The same and wholly one!
What boots us then Creation's endless travail?
Created but to nothing to unravel!
'Tis past! From *that* what meaning can be twisted?
It is as good as had it ne'er existed
And yet in cycle moves as if it were.
Eternal Emptiness would I prefer.

Thus does Goethe drop his plummet into the void, into the *other side* of the mind of "the Mothers," into the inert malice of the Absolute; and in comparison with this indrawn breath of Brahma, in comparison with this abysmal sigh of "the Thing in Itself," how frivolous does most human pessimism appear!

In fact Mephistopheles, though defeated by Faust's irresistible share in the creative energy that evolves the world, is never *in his own nature* put to silence. He remains to the end the eternal protest of *Not-Being*, which, as Hegel says, is the necessary compliment to *Being*.

And how characteristic of that non-moral element in Goethe's own nature that has always been such a stumbling block to certain minds, and that made even his admirer Carlyle more than once throw down *Wilhelm Meister* in despair as he struggled with it, is the way the pretty boy-girl angels steal off with Faust's soul while their adversary is absorbed in his satyrish lust for their lovely limbs!

The poem ends as it began, in super-terrestrial regions; and among the ecstatic worshippers of the celestial Life-Force—represented, be it noticed, by *the Mother*, not the

Son, of God—we are permitted a vision of the redeemed Gretchen.

The Indescribable,
  Here it is done:
  The Eternal Feminine
Leads us Upwards and on!

HARDY

HOW long ago it seems since in my early twenties, some forty years ago, I first saw Thomas Hardy!

I had addressed some boyish verses to him in my first printed book, the opening lines of which ran as follows:

> Master of human smiles and human moan,
> Of strange soul-searchings, raptures, agonies,
> Passions that ask for bread and find a stone,
> Hopes hungered into madness, like the seas,
> And Pity dumb and pleading, like the wind;

and he had asked me to visit him at Max Gate, and in return had come by train to Montacute, just over the Somerset border, to spend the day at my father's vicarage, bringing with him the first Mrs. Hardy.

And now with more recent memories of one of the best friends my brother Theodore and I have ever had or are likely to have—I speak of the late Mrs. Hardy, his second wife—I still find that my deepest impression of this great man's genius has to do with his pity—"Promethean" I called it in my youth, and it seems to me not less than that still—for the frustrated loves of simple hearts, thwarted by the "crass casualties" of a blighted planet. Matthew Arnold speaks of "the something that infects the world," and it was with this primeval "something" that Hardy was concerned, however its origin may be explained.

The number of thorough-going pessimists in English literature is singularly small, considering the "vapours" and the "spleen" of which our neighbours across the

channel used to accuse us; and even in Burton's *Anatomy* Hardy's cause for melancholy finds no mention.

His cause for rising up "in the fertile pastures of Wessex" and cursing the "President of the Immortals" was not a political or an economic one, was not even the moral one of the cruelty of man to man. It went deeper than that. It went to the bitter root of the whole matter. There are no Iagos in the Wessex novels, and hardly any thoroughly wicked people. The evildoers are only a little less pitiable than the righteous. All are victims together of *the nature of the Universe.*

Yes, I would be tempted to call Hardy the only great pessimist in our literature—for certain terrifying moods in Swift and an isolated challenge here and there, like that of the *City of Dreadful Night,* can hardly be said to represent an undeviating philosophical vision of life—were it not for Shakespeare. Save for an occasional indulgent and careless obeisance to the faith of his fathers, it is hard to see, in spite of the familiar academic view of him in which most of us have been brought up, how the general drift of his plays can be called anything but deeply pessimistic. I would go so far as to say that in pure pessimistic feeling Shakespeare is the only Hardyesque writer we have. The outcries to this effect—to this indictment of the nature-of-things as being responsible for our pain rather than any particular wrong-doing—follow one another throughout his tragic plays like straws and feathers on a wind that for ever reverts to the same quarter. "Still through the hawthorn" blows this cold wind of Shakespeare's anticipation of Hardy; and what it amounts to psychologically is surely nothing less than that these two poets were at once more sensitized to the sufferings of our race—especially to those that spring from wounded hearts—and less padded with comfortable palliatives, less

sprinkled with the holy water of forgetting, than the other men of genius in our list.

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us *for their sport.*" This is the unadulterated Hardy-note in Shakespeare; and we get it repeated with the very accent of one after another of the Hardy women, in Lady Macduff's words before they kill her :

> Whither should I fly ?
> I have done no harm. But I remember now
> I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm
> Is often laudable, to do good sometime
> Accounted dangerous folly ; why then alas !
> Do I put up that womanly defence
> To say I have done no harm ?

But I must lay no undue stress on these Hardyesque passages, for from every birthday-book in the kingdom tags could be shuffled together that would be glib to the opposite tune. The point I want to make is, that in the spiritual essence of the plays, never mind where he picked up the plots, and in the handling of the characters and in the particular kind of poetical atmosphere he throws round them his mood comes nearer to the Hardy mood than to any other temper, moral or immoral, to which you could point. Shakespeare's poetic magic, that unequalled magic that throws its own wistful and tender charm over the crazy cruelties of life, is steeped in simple, unsophisticated *ballad-pessimism*, which is the most unadultered pessimism in the world, and our immorally cheerful propagandists can pile up their consolatory tags from his plays, beginning with "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" and ending with "flights of angels" as high as they please, without being able to change the fact that the ballad-beauty that dominates his work is the beauty of tragedy, not of redemption.

But though the old ballad-touch, with its wild sad tenderness and homely realism, often enters into Hardy's work the main driving-force of his genius is a philosophical arraignment of the ways of God to Man.

When Wordsworth looked at any landscape with its woods and fields he drew something from its "colours and forms," and divined something in its "language of the sense" that charged with a mystical hope the "still sad music of humanity" even if it didn't change its key.

But Hardy when he looked at a similar landscape was aware of the cruel drama that is being played below this apparent calm. He saw the ivy killing the tree, he saw the weasel killing the rabbit, he saw the trees strangling each other as they contended for light and air, he saw the sportsman wounding the pheasant, and the collector bringing down the rare migratory bird. And he saw the cruelties that are an essential part of Nature's life and have nothing to do with man. He saw all the children of the earth feeding upon each other. He saw the dark unseen tragedies that go on all the while in these peaceful places. Instead of a "Presence that disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts," he felt a blind irrational "Immanent Will" driving vegetation to strangle vegetation, beast to destroy beast, bird to prey upon bird, insect to torture insect. And as he brooded upon all this, the mindless and meaningless Chance that governs the destiny of living things took to itself demonic lineaments and became something much more sinister than mere "crass casualty," became in fact the dominant pressure of a super-mundane Mischief, that with an ironic and goblinish malice persecutes the luckless children of its wanton creation.

Hardy is perfectly honest in the way he makes no tricky attempt to bridge the logical gulf between this dumb, blind, irrational "Immanent Will," working through all

the meaningless accidents and chances of life, and this deliberately personified "President of the Immortals" who is so mischief-loving. Nor is there any need that he should make such an attempt. He accepts in himself on behalf of us all the inevitable human tendency to *anthropomorphize* the inscrutable Power behind the universe; and in place of estimating its characteristics in terms of the presence of a Wordsworthian Over-Soul, felt in our rare moments of ecstasy, he estimates them in terms of those wanton and wayward "ironies" that require no rare moments of sensuous well-being for their disclosing.

What makes Hardy, with Shakespeare, the greatest of our pessimists is that his pessimism is not a matter of personal nerves or personal misfortune but a matter of indignant sympathy with a suffering world; but it is significant, as with Shakespeare too, that the kind of suffering on which he concentrates is not, though the physical enters also, the misery of hardship and destitution so much as the emotional tragedies of the heart.

A great writer reveals himself in his ideas of good and evil as much as in anything; and it is most interesting to note the difference between a Hardy "good man" and a Dostoievsky "good man." Hardy's good men are, above all else, what we call strong characters. They invariably display a mixture of simplicity and sagacity, and they seldom, if ever, surprise us by explosions of morbid nerves or of imaginative weakness. Even Henchard, the ill-starr'd Mayor of Casterbridge, is passionate rather than imaginative or subtle; and it was much more by the force of his character and by the strength of his passionate will that tragedy came upon him than by any neurotic infirmity. Loyalty, fidelity, simplicity, sagacity, disinterestedness, are the marks of a "good" Hardy character; and these would scarcely be the characteristics that would

first leap into our minds in thinking of the "good" Dostoievsky characters! It is true that both the Idiot and Alyosha Karamazov are "simple" in a certain sense; but it is an enigmatic simplicity, a mysterious spiritual simplicity; anything but the downright stoical goodness, earthy and unself-conscious, of Giles Winterbourne and Gabriel Oak and the Reddleman.

And it is the same with Hardy's good women. Tess is certainly "a good woman," if ever there was one; and what a comfort to feel how the moral sense of the age has advanced since such a "wounded name" as Tess's needed the bosom of a great and daring genius to house it!

But fidelity, simplicity, loyalty, are Tess's virtues, just as they are Giles's and Gabriel's. Indeed I suspect there are few of our younger generation who as they read her story don't find themselves actually indignant with her for her extravagant docility. "*Too* good!" is what some of these youngsters must feel about her; but no one would call Raskolnikov's sweetheart with her heroic "yellow ticket" *too* good; and it would be hard to apply this word at all to such proud and wayward creatures as Lisa and Nastasia and Aglaia and Grushenka!

Tess is like the patient Griselda of the old story; and she is still more like those unprotesting Margarets and Maisies and Annies of the ballads. In spite of all ill-usage from men, and from a Providence who behaves to her like a man, she still would reply, as Burd Ellen did to the cruel Childe Waters:

> O I will drink of the wan water,
> And eat of the bread of bran
> And aye will I bless the happy hour
> That ever I loved a man.

I have an inkling that the author himself set a higher

value upon his poetry than upon his prose. I can only say that for myself I would put certain great descriptive passages—like the one about Egdon Heath at the beginning of *The Return of the Native*, and the one about Stonehenge in *Tess* and about Tess's crossing the farm-garden in early dawn, and the one about the approach of the storm in *Far from the Madding Crowd*—above any verses he wrote; but on the other hand, I feel as if the *Collected Poems* make up a volume of such absorbing interest and of such uninterrupted value that in comparison with it *half the contents* of the *Complete Works* of Byron or even Shelley are unarresting and unrewarding.

And why should this be? Surely because what thrills us beyond everything else is a story when it is told by a master story-teller. And who can touch Hardy in dramatic intensity? With the exception of the Elizabethans and the old anonymous ballads, Hardy's poetry is the most intensely dramatic that we possess. Short poems of dramatic narrative—which are really nothing less than little Odysseys in realistic miniature—are the hardest of all poetry to write; and apart from the ballads there are few of such poems that hold us spell-bound till we've finished them. But this is what Hardy's poems do; and they do it by means of intensity, of concentration, of a laconic and sardonic power of biting into the subject till the teeth touch the bone.

Like certain other very great writers, though not like all, Hardy created a style for himself which is recognizable at a glance. In this he resembles Dante. And not only in this! there is indeed a particular kind of intensity that Dante and Hardy possess in common and that no other writers possess; and the expression of this, in a certain stripped abandonment of the syllabic sound to the very body of the thing described, carries what we call "realism"

to a point beyond which it could not go ; to the point, in fact, where between the words and the matter of the words there is as little space as between the flow of drapery in a Pheidian figure and the form it follows.

Hardy's Promethean championship of thwarted and frustrated mortality against the malefic element in life, whether he chooses to hypostasize this element as Demiurgic Malice, or to let it go as blind and purposeless chance, was met, when it culminated in the premeditated protest of *Jude the Obscure*, by that evil insensitivity, masquerading as cheerful piety and humorous common sense, which plays the Herod to all such inopportune voices, whether they rise from beyond the Jordan or from beyond the Frome. But the critical reception of one of the bitterest *hit-backs* at providential malignity that this country has produced, only set him the more resolutely upon preparing his brief for the Pot *versus* the Potter in the higher court of poetry.

A poet he always was, first and last; and in poetry he could not only mould his style to his design in a bolder, more drastic, more personal way than in his prose, but he could express the burden of his appeal for a more magnanimous attitude towards the victims of the "Immanent Will" more directly, free from the restraints of the less subjective form of art.

Seeing him at intervals during a period of more than thirty years, the mortal lineaments of the man have come to brand themselves on my consciousness as few other human countenances. There was much of the falcon about his aquiline nose and his hovering and "pouncing" eye-glances, an intensity of regard that was accentuated by the slightness of his figure, by the curiously elfin tilt of his eyebrows, and by his trick of holding his head a little on one side, as though the frailty of his form were

constantly deprecating the terrible and august passion of his thought.

His apprenticeship to the art of the architect fell upon something eminently congenial in his temper; and it is hard not to link the monumental building up of his sentences, their words of Saxon origin so deftly balanced against the sonorities and plangencies of a Latinity that showed the influence of Sir Thomas Browne, with the handicrafts that are akin to architecture, the tools of the sculptor in stone and the carver in wood.

His landscapes are the landscapes rather of a draughtsman than of a colourist; and it might be said that his supreme power as an artist lay in his genius for reproducing in words what you might call the *tactile values* of the things he looked at.

Dorset scenery, and especially the scenery round Dorchester, lends itself to this manner of treatment; for the bare open spaces of that part of Wessex, culminating in the uplands of the Chalk Downs, have a way of throwing into clear relief every tree and gate, every tumulus and ridge, every quarry and telegraph-post, every thorn-bush and hay-stack, every sea-gull that follows the plough, every raven that flies croaking across the welkin.

Like Wordsworth—and I well recall my pride when this particular point, made in my first encounter with him, was accepted with approval, though it led to a characteristic animadversion upon Wordsworth's obstinate piety—he has an extraordinary power of making you feel the palpable presence of those half-abstract, half-concrete entities; the processes of dawn and twilight, for instance, as they move in their mystic visitations over foreground and background, making the familiar unfamiliar, the accustomed phantasmal, and the reassuring ghostly and strange.

Few lovers of Wessex can keep the thought of Hardy and his far-swooping hawk's eye out of their minds when they see the shafts of a deserted plough protruding from a bare hill-top, or the outline of a solitary human form silhouetted against a pale sky, or a horse and wagon following the dwindling perspective of some distant white road.

Yes, he saw most things—from a tuft of wind-swept grass to the swinging tail of a stalled ox, from the crumpled wrinkles of a bedridden woman's cheek to the crater-ridges in the voyaging moon, from the grinning skull of a dead rabbit to the quivering snout of a living hedgehog —under what might be called their *lineal absoluteness*, the imprint that they make, ere the universal flux carries them away, upon the camera obscura of the Timeless.

He was one to notice everything that moved over the face of that curved segment of the planetary rondure that we call Dorset. With the eye of a kestrel he noted all that scurried, crawled, waded, swam, or flew! He knew how to track the burrowings of the mole, the skulkings of the fox, the noon-sleep of the adder.

I recollect well how on that day, so memorable for me and my brothers, when I decoyed him to Montacute, I saw him stand staring like one in a trance at a certain spot in the road, a spot where his eyes had marked down, as if he had been some wayfaring elf and no preoccupied biped, the microscopic rufflings upon an infinitesimal puddle that betokened the approach of frost.

He knew every tellurian hieroglyph in the wanton script of the heedless Master of Life, that kept its aeonian secret on our Dorset cliffs; and the majestic cadences of his intense sentences, "tuned to other notes than to the Orphean lyre," seem to throb to far-off cataclysmic upheavals in the scoriac evolution of the globe. He dropped the architecture of bricks and mortar only to

build into the "ferro-concrete" of his pages both the hugest megaliths and the tiniest snail-shells of the dark track of the Immanent Will.

It gives me a peculiar satisfaction to think how much he appreciated my architect-brother, the late A. R. Powys, and it pleases me to think that it was from the sale of one of his manuscripts that the ancient shrine was restored which the restorer selected for his own burial.

There is no doubt that there is an element in Hardy's genius, just as there was in the genius of the Elizabethan Webster, that, like the hands of King Lear, must needs be "wiped" by the over-particular lest they "smell mortality."

He it was, the very first time I saw him—more than forty years ago now—who introduced me to that most startling and characteristic of all Poe's poems, the one called *Ulalume*.

Of late I regret to say there have been attempts in one or other of our modern schools of verse to disparage the genius of Edgar Allan Poe. These posthumous disparagements are inevitable. They have occurred in all ages. And they are, of course, balanced by exaggerated fashions of revival, which are often just as unbalanced.

Take the recent "boom"—if I may use so gross a word—of my own "forefather," as Cowper called him, the fantastical John Donne. Donne was a rare and exceptional genius; but when groups of modern writers are prepared to *put him up* against Milton I feel as if the critics of poetry were madder than the poets themselves.

Or consider the modern "furore" for Dryden. I protest I appreciate as much as any the brave swing of such a sentence as

> Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
> The power of beauty I remember yet,
> Which once inflamed my heart, and still inspires my wit,

but when I think of what a simple-minded lover of *poetry* must feel when he hears of such hectic maladjustments and wilful confusions of values, I should be bitter at heart if it were not that I remember how Shakespeare had *his* hour of such clever see-saw aspersions, and that from this new point of view not only *Lycidas* but *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gipsy* must seem the most frivolous and affected of airy trifles.

Can they not see that a certain rich vein of the romantic-sardonic that Poe—alone among poets, for Baudelaire is "literary" in comparison—quarried with success, has been unearthed again by an equally goblinish and much more realistic mattock in Hardy's poetry?

Might it not be called a subtle and laudable retort to the irony of the Immanent Will to make use of the same kind of sardonic humour, *only on the other side*?

I sometimes find myself wondering whether the architectural element in Hardy's genius did not lead him in some of his stories to design the plot in too premeditated and too rigid outlines. But he was a great reader of Greek Tragedy; and it may well be that it was his long brooding on the sculptured processions of doom followed by the unhappy ones of the houses of Atreus and Oedipus that led him to force the gargoylish inspirations of his Gothic muse into these austere classic moulds.

As with Shakespeare's clowns, Hardy's comic supernumeraries, his Christopher Cantles and William Worms, utter their irrelevant commentaries upon the course of events in whimsical contrast to those events' importance.

The part of the Greek chorus—the voices of the "ironies" and the "pities"—is taken by the author himself, and is often implicit rather than explicit; and this method gains in grandeur and emphasis by the classical simplicity of the psychological element in the novels.

Much here is deliberately sacrificed to the exigencies of the rigidly-planned plot, much to the absorbing interest of the narrative, and the dialogues are frequently marked —I would hesitate to say marred, for it is all part of his rather formal method—by a certain old-fashioned stiffness, too simple to be called stilted, wherein the tragic intensity of the march of fate forbids the fluttering and wayward debouchings of more natural conversation between men and women.

This intentional formality of dialogue wherein the caprices and spontaneous surprises of human intercourse are sacrificed to the pity and terror of the situation is broken as soon as dialect is used. But Hardy employs dialect very sparingly, making much less use of it, for instance, than my brother Theodore does in *his* pictures of the same region.

But it is always in what might be called the *humours of Providence*, especially when these assume a poignant and picturesque outrageousness, as when one pair of rivals for a woman's love gamble by the light of glow-worms, or another pair travel to find their girl while her coffin journeys by the same train, or a maiden saves a man's life by making a rope of her underclothes, or Tess is caught by her pursuers asleep upon the altar-stone of Stonehenge, or her seducer paints blood-red "Damnations" upon the bars of gates, or Arabella flings at Jude a gobbet of the raw flesh of the pig she is slaughtering, that the "miching-mallecho" of Hardy's retort reaches its culmination.

Like Shakespeare, and unlike the Greeks, he takes a grim satisfaction in making the supreme crises in his tales turn upon some trifling occurrence that is entirely due to chance.

Tess's letter to Angel Clare, for instance, confessing to him about her seduction, goes by pure accident, when she

pushes it under his door, *under the carpet*, so that the man never receives it; while the trifling fact that Yeobright's furze-cutting hook has been propped against the entrance to Eustacia's house is enough to make his mother certain that he is within; enough to drive her forth in desperation to the sun-scorched Heath and the adder's bite.

King Lear was evidently—as well indeed it might be!—Hardy's favourite among Shakespeare's plays. It pleased him to think that his native Egdon was the actual site of those "sulphurous and thought-executing fires, vaunt-couriers to the oak-cleaving thunder-bolt" that "singed" that white head; and with one of the grandest and most beautiful plagiarisms in literature—for to plagiarize from the great is always a sign of greatness—he makes Mrs. Yeobright use words from her wounded heart almost identical with Lear's "mine enemy's dog. . . ."

Æschylus and Shakespeare were Hardy's models, and his deliberate echoes of them are to me only another convincing proof that there is in literature an undying underground stream of tradition as to the kind of subject and even as to the kind of treatment of that subject which strikes deepest into the universal and unchanging such as binds all the really great writers together and leaves outside in each successive generation the clever "originals" of the passing cults.

In the case of *Jude the Obscure*, one of the most poignant tales in English fiction and a tale he wrote in the full plenitude of his mental power, the bulk of the criticism brought against him was of the pious "cheerful" type; but it was also delicately deplored that he must needs put into the mouths of Jude and Sue such a lot of "University Extension chatter."

This is the old story. It is Ben Jonson's aspersion upon Shakespeare! No doubt the whole of Shakespeare's

classical equipment was "University Extension chatter," what he picked up, in other words, from the "University wits" of his time, with perhaps a little help from Montaigne, when he in *his* turn was engaged in cribbing, with disconcerting gravity, from Plutarch's Lives.

The truth of the matter is that Hardy had presumed to handle in *Jude the Obscure* subjects for which our conventional and academic exponents have invented a particular tone, a *social* tone, a tone of discreet House-of-Commons badinage, and a tone that is careful to avoid taking too seriously the explosive and troublesome Thomas Hardys of the classical past!

The more I think of it, the more significant does it seem that his philosophy of defiance and pity—defiance of the cruelty of the First Cause and pity for the wounded hearts of its creatures—should have won the hearing in his poetry that was refused to *Jude the Obscure*.

What has given the monumental syllables "Thomas Hardy" such a carved and graven niche in the minds of so many is the "mortised and tenon'd" simplicity of what it represents. To have made his own a whole segment of the globe from zenith to nadir has a peculiar congruity with the single chord—deep as life and inevitable as breath—upon which, all through both his prose and his verse, he was for ever harping—I mean the passion of love.

Think of the complications that go to make up the rich interwoven tapestry of any novel of Henry James! Think of the innumerable facets of social and mental life that are crowded into any page of George Meredith! But from first to last with Hardy, save for that terrific tour de force, *The Dynasts*, it is the heart, with its wounds and its bruises, that fills the entire scene. Swooping down like a hawk upon our human panorama, he sweeps aside all the modern tangle of social and pathological riddles, and

concentrates upon the ancient undying tragedy of the love-hate between men and women, as its obsessing drama, criss-crossed by all the malignities of Chance, plays itself out between earth and sky.

"How little," said Henry James once to Robert Louis Stevenson, "how little does Hardy know about sex!" And when one considers the bewitched forest into which our younger generation, led by what Rabelais might call the "Dark Lanterns" of psychoanalysis, have carried their smoky catchwords, and when one considers how the loves of men and women are daily offered up as so many specimens for dissection upon the operating tables of an inhuman and bestializing science, it comes to us as the renaissance of a lost miracle to look into the hearts of Hardy's simple lovers.

In our owlish search through the fascinating morgue of lust-doomed complexes, in our Iagoish treatment of romantic love as "an itch of the blood and a permission of the will," the more formidable of our writers seem to have left the emotions that absorbed Shakespeare, intrigued Jane Austen, and dominated the Brontës, to the faithful adherents of honeysuckle novelettes.

They say that over the grave of the old ironist Anatole France, the new school of authors, like the ghost-demons in a Mexican-Indian orgy, danced for joy. We are more restrained, or less concerned over aesthetic matters; but I daresay many of us in our scientific hearts turn from these love-tragedies of Wessex and their Promethean apologist as only one more old-fashioned *escape* from the pressing problems of the day.

Escape? Escapist? Ah! in the long history of our hunted and enduring human species how much more do we owe to those who have made us forget, than to those —with the noble exception of a few Lord Shaftesburys—

who in the process of relieving our troubles have plunged us into worse!

From Homer to Hardy all the great story-tellers of our race are "Escapists." Escape we must, or we perish. The opposite road to the road of escape is the road to madness. To follow reason to the limit in *any* direction, whatever your "problems," is insanity. Madmen are people who never can escape. They are compelled *sans cesse* to use their undistracted reason. That is why an absent-minded novel-reading public prefer to have them shut up.

What illogical nonsense this is to blame a great story-teller like Hardy for making his imaginary love-affairs so vivid, so moving, so enthralling, so heart-breaking, that many of us even go so far as to skip some of the finest descriptions of Nature ever set down in prose, just to see *what happens next* to these Marties and Graces, these Thomasines and Elizabeth-Janes, these Bathshebas and Susans!

For that is the whole point. Hardy's enormous superiority over Meredith, which all people who read for the pleasure of vicarious pity and terror must surely feel, is due to the fact that from Homer down to our own day what thrills the average reader beyond all else, what helps him to escape from himself most completely, is a love-story. To our puritanical "intelligentsia" who call Hardy an "escapist" because his novels are domestic rather than social, the best retort is to appeal to Homer. The scene, for instance, between Odysseus and Penelope over their nuptial bed—the bed for whose posts he had used a living tree—is full of the poignant *heightened domesticity* that is at once pure "escapism" and pure "Thomas Hardy."

All life is an escape. All time is an escape. All space is an escape. The great Macrocosm itself, so the astronomers say, is in a process of escaping; and escaping too,

as we poor microcosms would be wise to do, eternally from itself.

No, the classic greatness of Hardy's writings is that they are concerned first and last with the human heart. Is it not a singular thing that it should be precisely "the human heart" that we clever writers of to-day with our fantastical inventions, dodge, sheer off from, and avoid like the plague? The heart *hath* its authors, of course, and their readers far outnumber ours; but they are not authors who, like Hardy, write with the eye of a hawk. They are writers who write with the eyes of sparrows.

Hardy is much more of a *stylist* than many great novelists, more than Balzac, for instance, or Scott or Dostoievsky, and one can recognize any sentence of his, at least any descriptive sentence; but his purpose is so obviously to mould and hammer and carve and plane his syllables so as to compel them to follow every convexity and concavity of the object, that one never feels conscious of that kind of atmospheric mannerism cultivated by Henry James, or of any witchery of premeditated seduction such as one enjoys in Walter Pater.

But a true craftsman he was; and I can remember well when he showed me the manuscript of *Tess*, how surprised and even perhaps a little shocked I was while he spoke of an earlier epoch when he was "feeling about for a method." With Keats's words in my head about inspiration coming like growing leaves, or Goethe's about it coming like happy children and crying "here we are!" there was something disturbing in the idea of a great genius searching for a "method."

But, after all, what matters it whether the effect produced by a supreme artist come consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or at random, as long as they come; and it remains that in the midst of those who aim

at creating a glow of sensuous well-being in their readers, and of those who aim at disturbing their readers with frightfulness and disgust, the figure of Thomas Hardy stands out clear and distinct—*monumentum aere perennius*—as one whose purpose was to capture the simple truth; and to present it, whatever the effect on his readers might be, with the patient taciturnity of the monotones of Nature as they refuse to change one note of their grey neutrality under the prayers and imprecations of our troubled race.

PROUST

LIKE the masterpieces of all great novelists, Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is a whole world in itself, a world into which you can pass, in which you can dwell, in which you can continually be discovering new avenues, new vistas, new horizons.

This is true in a measure of every great novel, but I think it is for many reasons especially true of *A la Recherche.* The book, with its shelf of volumes, covers not only the physical impressions and the mental development of its hero, but re-duplicates its theme in the secondary *motif* of Swann, whose jealousy over Odette anticipates the hero's imprisonment of Albertine, and who enters the circle of the odious Madame Verdurin—by far the most unpleasant and by far the most savagely handled person in the book —while the hero was still a child.

When one thinks of the work of James Joyce, our *other* famous modern, and considers what enormous erudition, philological experimentation, and symbolic architecture he labours under, one feels as if Proust's great shelf of volumes was created by the easiest method of all possible literary methods—the *rambling autobiographical essay !*

Having once established his characters he seems only, without bothering about plot, to let them live and love and hate and die at the un-interfered-with pleasure of chance and fate; and this appears to make his job so easy that one almost grudges him his success.

It must have been so easy to do, one tells oneself. And yet one would have to take a considerable slice—though

not quite the whole!—of the *Comédie Humaine*, wherein the same characters appear, to match the richness, thickness, solidity, and orbital independence of this Proustian world!

As we contemplate it lying here before us in all its plenitude, with the titles, so familiar to us now, of its various parts—but I can well recall how strange they looked to my eyes in one of those crowded Chicago streets, "off Michigan," when I was first introduced to them by my fellow-Celt, Llewelyn Jones—the merest glance at those gnomic inscriptions, *Swann's Way*, *The Guermantes Way* and *A L'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, carries for us, at least for book-worms of my years, the same sort of enchanted escape from the flowing of time that the hero of the tale himself enjoyed when he lingered for hours in his great-aunt's enclosed garden on the Rue de Saint-Esprit in Combray, unearthing the buried treasures of his favourite Bergotte.

And our escape from the importunity of time and the desecration of time is thickened out for us as we catch those magic syllables, *Swann* or *Guermantes* or *A l'Ombre* by a rich, dim cloud of half-realized impressions, "borne aloft or sinking as the light wind lives or dies," that reach us not only from the scenes of Proust's great invention but also from the vague memories that the mere thought of Proust's evocations calls up out of the long-forgotten tracts of our own experience.

For the beauty of Proust's masterpiece is that while it hits off with such exquisite malice all the fine shades of middle-class snobbishness and upper-class arrogance, and discloses with such subtle sympathy all the humorous refinements of old family-retainers, its *real theme*, its inmost essence, has to do with the most evasive element in our secret personal life, namely, with those obscure

feelings of delicious ecstasy which are as hard to arrest or analyse in their swift passage as it is hard to explain why such small, slight, trivial and casual chances are the cause of their rising up out of the depths.

These rare individual ecstasies are to Proust—or at least to that prophetic soul in Proust embodied in his hero—precisely what the same experiences were to Wordsworth, that is to say authentic "intimations of immortality"; and it is impossible to think of any great novel that proves this daring proposition, and this very definite proposition, so effectively as Proust does. Neither Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*, nor Romain Rolland in *Jean Christophe* conveys to us such a clear-cut unmistakable "message" as to the nature of the human soul and its relation to the Eternal as Proust does in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

In other words, while catching so vividly one after another the insect-flights, the plant-loves, the aquarium-gestures of human society's snobbishness and perversity, the book begins and ends with those "obstinate questionings," so congenital with the Hebrew spirit, as to the relation between the individual soul, incarnated in Time, and *that* which lies beyond Time.

Whatever we forget in the criss-cross interplay of these swirling crowds of delicately delineated figures, one recurrent *motif* it is impossible to get out of our heads, the effect upon the hero's mind, as it reaches him through his senses and as he struggles so intensely to catch its philosophic significance, of that memorable incident—so trivial and yet so world-deep—of the "petite madeleine" dipped in lime-flower tea. The phenomenon recurs once or twice again, but its culminating occurrence is at the end of the book, when the hero is middle-aged and the generation before him have become old men and old women, and he is on the point of entering the great reception-rooms

of the final gathering of all the dramatis personae of the tale, where to our fairy-story satisfaction as well as to our metaphysical content the picture sinks away into its predestined perspective.

> And soon mechanically [thus is the first occurrence of this revelation described], weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake.
>
> No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent on the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin.
>
> At once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect, which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal.

The curious thing about these sensuous "intimations of immortality" in Proust is that *they come by chance* and that they are connected with irrelevant and perfectly trivial occasions. Here, as in other things, we note in our author a complete lack—as if he were colour-blind or had no ear for music—of that particular nerve in the human soul which is the cause of so much nobility of character as well as of so much sickening hypocrisy, and which we name by the ambiguous word "spirituality."

There is nothing "spiritual" in Proust; and this it is that gives such formidable authority to his aesthetic and philosophic generalizations. What indeed we have come to feel, and not without justice, is that an Intimation of Immortality based upon the effect on our soul of a "petite madeleine" dipped in lime-petal tea is of more actual and living weight than all the mental arguments of the Platonic Socrates!

The second dominant *motif* of a book that is surely the most important work of fiction of our time, is the gradual clarification and definition of the hero's first principles of art. These are also summed up in the final volume of *Le Temps Retrouvé*, and they condense themselves into a convincing proof of the *subjectivity* of all great art as against the noisy and aggressive heresy, so tempting, so plausible, so obvious, that Beauty, like Truth, has an objective reality in the cosmos, before which the business of each artist is to reduce his personal imagination to a blank.

Thus we find this great work of Proust, as it takes its place beside all these other masterpieces of human genius, reaffirming the doctrine implicit in Homer and the Hebrew Prophets, as well as in Rabelais and Shakespeare and Goethe, that man's redemption lies in the character of the individual and not in mechanized efficiency.

What might be called the third theme of the work is the problem of erotic jealousy. To emphasize this particular *motif*, Proust has recourse to the inspired device of projecting into the first place in the book two protagonists, who hold much the same symbolic relation to each other as do Daedalus and Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

But Proust's young man has a more personal resemblance to his friend Swann than Daedalus ever had to Bloom; and it is wonderful to note—considering the complicated "streams" of so many different "consciousnesses," for which, as his tale moves forward, he has to dig channels and lead them like currents of various temperature and density round and about each other in the sub-aqueous world of his own mind—how free from any *real* obscurity Proust's art is.

It has many resemblances to the art of Henry James; but I think it can be said—certainly as far as individual paragraphs are concerned, and even in some cases, remem-

bering *The Sacred Fount*, in the final disentangling—to be clearer than that great master's method!

Some of our modern geniuses make deliberate use of obscurity, at least of something that is obscure to ardent but not abnormally clever readers like myself, an obscurity that seems to utter a pontifical challenge—"Who are you to understand *me*?"—as if from the hanging folds of some dark magisterial tapestry to all who presume to enter so recondite a temple. And I do think there *is* a certain aesthetic value in obscurity, *just for its own sake alone*, as there is a peculiar beauty in twilight: a beauty that satisfies a profound and mystical love of abracadabra in all our hearts, a beauty that at once rouses the imagination and troubles the reason. But at the same time, in spite of Spinoza's saying that the best things are difficult, I think that all the supreme literary works in the world—for we are talking of literature, not metaphysics—are free from obscurity; for though obscurity is the cause of one of the most delicious of human feelings, intellectual superiority to others, it does undoubtedly interfere with the work's universal appeal.

I admit, however, that ever since the days of the old Mysteries there has been an exciting *religious* titillation in thaumaturgical nebulosity, and this undoubtedly does have, as the god of the *orgia* hints in the *Bacchanals*, a definite aesthetic repercussion.

But there is absolutely nothing of this kind of thing in Proust. If he is difficult to read, it is for just the opposite reason. It is because he throws a too exhausting searchlight upon too many riddles in too quick succession!

Proust's enormous work is, in fact, as artful and simple in its story-book complications and unravellings as *Tom Jones*. We soon discover, if we presume to skip a page, that we have lost some important clue; and, as so rarely

happens with even the finest novels, there goes on here, side by side with the analysis of the characters *in statu quo*, a constant and often surprising development, sometimes a startling transformation, in the said characters.

Charles Swann is, as I have hinted, a sort of alter-ego to the young hero, reproducing some of the latter's strongest emotions on a different and wider plane. Thus the "little phrase" from Vinteuil's Sonata which becomes such a symbolic accompaniment to the elder man's passion for Odette, and which was composed by the unhappy musician as an outlet to his feelings about his daughter's Lesbianism, strikes a chord of tragic beauty which is destined to repeat itself in the hero's own alternations of frantic faith and desperate doubt over the same vice in Albertine.

A reader would have to have suffered from feverish possessiveness, and also to have been tormented by an insatiable suspicion as to the ubiquity of this second City of the Plain, to enter with full sympathy into the torturing jealousies of Swann and the young Marcel. Love, to Proust, means frantic jealousy; and jealousy, to Proust, means an inquisitorial desire to know *everything* about the least butterfly-stirring of the "prisoner," her faintest gesture in the direction of any lure, whether innocent or guilty, that is not connected directly with ourselves!

So vibrant are these chords of jealousy throughout this book, and so furiously, one might almost say from an Anglo-Celtic point of view so comically devoid of all impulses of magnanimity towards the objects of their desire, that one begins to sigh for that more indulgent, more generous, less analytical touch of—well! say of the Sonnets of Shakespeare, a touch which can still be found in the poetry of as young a poet as our Dorsetshire Kenneth Hopkins.

Describe each patterned circumstance of love!—
As well coerce and govern the grey rain,
With easy arrogance, whose vapours move
And quench the light from the uneasy grain,
Whose golden gratitude to the kind sun
Fades in the dusk to unripe green again:
As well persuade the noon that night is come
Or bid the tide run out before his time.

And our mind turns, too, towards the devoted lovers in Hardy, and towards the self-restrained generosity, so heroic and long-enduring, of the unexacting amorists from the New World in Henry James.

Is it untrue to experience, is it false to nature, this estimate of what the old ballads call "true love" in Hardy and James?

But Proust's microscopic analysis of "each patterned circumstance of love" is only equalled by the devastating realism with which he traces, step by step, its pitiful disillusionment and final perishing; for Proustian love certainly *does* "alter when it alteration finds."

Here again, in this universal dissolution under the sliding away of the golden sands, one pauses to ask oneself whether Time, even Time itself, cannot sometimes be tricked?

But one thing is certain, the whole subject of Proust's great book is the battle of man's soul with what Hardy calls the "delving imps" of Time.

Time is the Antagonist of this book; and the Timeless —revealed in Art and revealed in these rare outbursts of the Self that is eternal—is the Protagonist. But this deeper theme in the book is half-concealed by the wavering consistence of the element that embodies it, just as the vital centre of a jellyfish is surrounded by the floating substance of its transparent body.

And this gelatinous element that rises and falls with the fitful undulations of the tide of our life is the element of

our secret sense of superiority to one another, in other words the element of snobbishness.

Now in Proust's book this snobbishness is primarily *social*, and only secondarily intellectual and aesthetic; whereas in the psychic chemistry of many impassioned readers of Proust the social variety of this universal ingredient plays a subordinate part, while its kindred emotions, such as cultural, moral, and even professional snobbishness, are revealed to the most cursory introspection. For it must be remembered that the most devoted lovers of *A la Recherche* are not the sort of persons, whether they be men or women, to become *social climbers* in the sense in which the good Doctor Cottard and his simple lady can be counted in this category, or even to possess any very sensitive divining-rod in its baleful presence.

Doubtless most Proust-lovers *have* met in the course of their experience intriguing wretches like the appalling Madame Verdurin, the most repulsive figure in the book, and hypocritical fools like M. Legrandin; but these are extreme examples of snobbishness, and I believe our Proustian initiates would have to admit that in their own experience they have encountered many more types like the hero's Grandmother, or the pure-minded Vinteuil, or that patient, unworldly gentleman, Saniette, than they have seen specimens of these glittering society-fish, whose shining tails and gleaming fins are always beating against the glass of the great Proustian aquarium!

But just as Walt Whitman is for ever "celebrating" the one type of person of all others least likely to read his poems, so we may be sure that few Madame Verdurins or Legrandins among us will have the discomfort of recognizing themselves in Proust's pages, or, I suspect, few Orianes de Guermantes either!

But the truth is, there are uncommonly few great writers, though there must have been many portrait-painters, who have had the privilege of living cheek-by-jowl with the beau-monde as Proust did; and we may note that among the novelists who *have* described such circles, such as Thackeray, Disraeli, and Henry James, and some would add Balzac and Tolstoy, there is nothing to approach the microscopic analysis—at once aesthetic and scientific—of Proust's investigations in these glass-houses of his Botanical Garden.

And if, as seems likely enough, these particular breeds of human orchids are, as our revolutionaries would say, liquidated out of existence, together with the particular kind of snobbishness that their presence implies, we may be perfectly sure, human nature being what it is, that some other form of coveted distinction, very likely a good deal less harmless than that which made an ideal of Oriane's receptions, will take its place, implying in *its* turn a new form of our ancient vice and, let us hope, a new Proust, not to moralize or sentimentalize over it à la Thackeray, not to bewitch us and drug us with its charm in the manner of Henry James, but to do what the author of *A la Recherche* alone has done, date, collate, and isolate its flowerings, from the pollen of its least pistil to the curve of its least calyx!

Proust is surely right in his emphasis on the enormous part played in our daily life—in England and America as well as on the continent of Europe—by the estimation in which we think we are held, or fear to be held, *by our neighbours.*

It is, I think, this less active aspect of snobbishness which *is* really universal; for this is shared by the least ambitious among us, while the exhausting process of social climbing, entailing so many rebuffs and such heart-rending frustra-

tions, even though it *may* lead to a Guermantes salon in the end, must be the lot of few. It is, however, as absurd to quarrel with Proust—as he makes point after point as to wherein consist the real degrees of social distinction—on the ground of his being snobbish as it would be to quarrel with a collector of butterflies on the ground of his carrying a butterfly-net.

And, after all, what we call Fashion, with all its subtle psychological and aesthetic implications, is something that must exist as long as our race exists, though the particular set of people at any given epoch favoured by being the ideal repository of this cult must always be changing.

It is perfectly right that this *fashion-phenomenon* should be of great interest to novelists, since so many human values, not always as superficial as cynics suppose, can be tracked down in these *mores* of sophisticated tribal custom.

Proust is always reverting in his own mind to certain famous social Memoirs of the past, and he is careful to inform us that his own Madame Villeparisis, Oriane de Guermantes's old-fashioned aunt, was engaged upon the compilation of her Memoirs.

Over the most frivolous Memoirs floated, according to him, the purest perfumes of history, and what those unearthed ashes of Urn-Burial, "cooled a long age in the deep-delvéd earth," were to Sir Thomas Browne, these tricky mementos of the paper-chase of Time were to Proust.

Lovers of Walter Pater will remember those unequalled passages in which that great virtuoso analyses the work of Watteau. Well! the work of Proust was, if I may say so, the work of a *Watteau reversed*; for with a tragic intensity in frivolity he seeks to retrace what Lord Chesterfield would call "*des graces*" of the fleeting Present, till

they sink back and away into the immortal shadow-shapes of a mythological *Temps Retrouvé.*

His hero, for instance, is always catching, in the most fleeting expression of his Gilberte or his Albertine, those looks on a girl's face that revert to the legendary women of the past; and his alter-ego Swann does the same with Odette. It is, in fact, the "eternal recurrence" of the imperishable secret of feminine beauty as it can be caught on the profile of the most casually-met grisette that these Proustian lovers are always seeking:

> —Like those Nicean barks of yore
> That gently o'er the perfumed sea
> The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
> To his own native shore;
> On desperate seas long wont to roam—

Few Proust-lovers will disagree with me when I maintain that as a painter of the Great World's dependents, or perhaps I should rather use the heraldic word and say supporters, he is unsurpassed, except—and with what a difference of emphasis!—by our own Sir Walter Scott.

Proust's Françoise is indeed one of those characters whose existence is a better excuse for the presence of gentle-folk in the world than gentle-folk always offer for themselves; and in regard to Françoise any upper-middle-class person in England, that is to say of the class in which Proust places his hero's parents, will of necessity conjure up from his own childhood some old servant—whether she be a Nanny or otherwise—whose peculiarities are vividly recalled by this unequalled old woman.

If there are certain scenes in Proust where we are reminded of Disraeli's novels, the moment Françoise comes on the scene we reach an atmosphere of such touching subtleties of loyalty that Disraeli is forgotten, and we think of the feudal retainers in Scott's books.

Proust's way of analysing all that St. Paul declares to be "a shame so much as to speak of" strikes my mind as the best possible way in which a writer *can* deal with these things, unless of course, either for his own pleasure, or the pleasure of temperaments akin to his own, he wants to be provocative.

I would say, myself, that Proust is never provocative; but since there seems to be no limit to what certain natures can find disturbing to their peace of mind, it is better not to be dogmatic about this.

The truth is, that directly you touch any human sex-nerve, whether it be normal or abnormal, and both are in nature, you touch a nerve *that can only be understood from inside.*

Take the case of what we have come to call Sadism. Now there are obviously infinite varieties of this vicious emotion, all of which may be roughly defined as sexual excitement produced by cruelty. The most harmless of these varieties of sadism is the pretence of cruelty in a sadist towards a masochist, when each of them is equally guilty of perverse excitement. Less harmless than this is the half-conscious sadism of audiences at cruel performances.

Much more serious is the sadistic pleasure of writers—a pleasure instantaneously recognized by persons of the same kidney—in inventing cruel scenes.

Now I think it may be laid down as an absolute psychological law that unless a particular sadistic impulse is a temptation to oneself and the cause of sexual agitation to oneself, it is impossible to be convincing in describing it.

Now my own humble contribution just here to a critical analysis of the sadistic element in Proust is that he is totally unconvincing in his description of the wicked emotion felt by Monsieur Vinteuil's daughter, who, in the

process of being made love to, encourages her friend to spit, or at least to talk of spitting, on the portrait of her father which she has deliberately placed near them.

Now that this perverse, but inherently good girl, should derive sadistic pleasure from being caressed under the picture of the dead parent is quite credible to me; but this spitting in the face of the picture strikes me as totally incredible.

I do not mean that it is incredible for a heartless child to spit into the face of a dead parent's picture. I mean that the introduction of this spitting in Monsieur Vinteuil's face into a scene where the inhumanity is purely sadistic and consists in being caressed in his presence, is an irrelevance.

It is a brutality that has nothing to do with the sadistic nerve. You must remember that we have been especially told that the musician's daughter was not in any sense a bad, or a brutal, or a malicious, or even a spiteful girl.

In a word, while it is natural enough that she should get pleasure by being caressed before the photograph, the idea of spitting on it is unnatural. It was in fact a spiteful, not a sadistic action. It is as though Dostoievsky in his *Confession of Stavrogin* had made the unhappy man admit that in the midst of his sadistic sensuality he had perpetrated some act of vulgar brutality, the crudity of which sprang from a callousness in his nature that had no connection at all with his perverted feelings.

But if I find lapses in Proust's handling of "the most dangerous of human nerves," I am reduced to astonished awe at his perfect insight into the heart of a selfish aristocrat. We need never, I think, have known such persons ourselves to feel the delicious shock of absolute truth in what he reveals about them.

Psychological reality of this sort carries its own con-

viction; just as we need never have known a murderer or a murderer's accomplice to accept every Shakespearean revelation as to the feelings of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

And thus, while to our astonishment it seems quite natural for the inherited good-breeding of M. de Guermantes to leave his young visitor—who cannot at that epoch have been more than seventeen—for three-quarters of an hour to enjoy his picture-gallery in peace, while he keeps a large company of guests awaiting the signal to move into the dining-room, it seems also the pure essence of truth about this man that when he condescends to present himself in the Proust flat to enquire about the dying grandmother he should be so absorbed in the immense honour he is doing them as to be totally oblivious of the human tragedy going on under his nose.

At moments like this—and let readers who upbraid Proust for his snobbishness ponder on this—the indelible Indian ink at the point of his sharp pen takes on a satiric bite worthy of Jane Austen.

> At this point my mother, who was waiting impatiently for some cylinders of oxygen which would help my grandmother to breathe more easily, came out herself to the hall where she little expected to find M. de Guermantes. I should have liked to conceal him, had that been possible. But convinced in his own mind that nothing was more essential, could be more gratifying to her or more indispensable to the maintenance of his reputation as a perfect gentleman, he seized me violently by the arm, and although I defended myself as against an assault with repeated protestations of "Sir, Sir, Sir," dragged me across to Mamma, saying: "Will you do me the great honour of presenting me to your mother?"—
>
> And it was so plain to him that the honour was hers that he could not help smiling at her even while he was composing a grave face. He apparently proposed to enter into conversation, but my mother, overwhelmed by her grief, told me to come at once, and did not reply to the speeches of M. de Guermantes.

A similar obtuseness in this perfect gentleman manifests itself when Charles Swann, a much closer intimate than our hero could ever hope to be, had the temerity to hint to Oriane de Guermantes, as she and the Duke were hurrying off to a party, that his, Swann's days upon earth, were numbered; but he might just as well have informed the lady's red shoes or the man's opera-hat of this irrelevant fact.

"I don't know why I am telling you this; I have never said a word to you before about my illness. But as you asked me, and as now I may die at any moment. . . . But whatever I do, I mustn't make you late; you're dining out, remember," he added, because he knew that for other people their own social obligations took precedence of the death of a friend, and could put himself in her place by dint of his instinctive politeness. But that of the Duchess enabled her also to perceive in a vague way that the dinner to which she was going must count for less to Swann than his own death. . . .

Mme. de Guermantes advanced resolutely towards the carriage and uttered a last farewell to Swann. . . . "I expect they gave you a dreadful fright, come to luncheon whatever day you like" (with Mme. de Guermantes things always resolved themselves into luncheons), "you will let me know your day and time," and, lifting her red skirt, she set her foot on the step. She was just getting into the carriage when, seeing this foot exposed, the Duke cried in a terrifying voice: "Oriane, what have you been thinking of, you wretch? You've kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and . . ." "But, my dear," replied the Duchess gently, annoyed to see that Swann, who was leaving the house with me but had stood back to allow the carriage to pass out in front of us, could hear, "since we are late."

"No, no, we have plenty of time. It's only ten to; it won't take us ten minutes . . . and after all if we turn up at half-past eight they'ld have to wait for us, but you can't possibly go there in a red dress and black shoes. . . ."

The Duchess went up to her room.

"It's not unbecoming," said Swann. "I noticed the black shoes and they didn't offend me in the least. . . ."

"Good-bye, my children," said M. de Guermantes thrusting us gently from the door. "Get away before Oriane comes down again. . . ."

And so it was simply from good breeding and good fellowship that, after politely showing us out, he cried from off stage in a stentorian voice from the porch to Swann, who was already in the courtyard: "You, now, don't let yourself be taken in by doctors' nonsense, damn them. They're donkeys. You're as strong as the Pont Neuf. You'll live to bury us all!'

In regard to Proust's *method* of writing, his most remarkable device, or perhaps we should say discovery, is the imaginative bringing together of ideas, or essences, or images that in objective reality are scattered through many various levels and dimensions, but can be fused together by our power of feeling things, not in their isolation, like instruments of torture in a museum, or like nectarines in cotton-wool, but in their living, breathing, fluctuating environment, permeated by the airs and sounds and smells about them, and by our own complicated feelings with regard to them.

But the art of fusing together these scattered essences, moral, emotional, psychological, sensual, and all treated, for the whole process implies both sensibility and analysis, with what might be called *aesthetic science*, is no easy achievement. It entails, if the style is to represent the dissolving horizons into which the ripples of these psychic-sensuous "events" vanish, a certain stretching out of sentences and paragraphs, yes! and even of pages, to a length before which all but inveterate Proustians are forced to cry, "Hold, enough!"

The truth is, there are two urges in this great writer; and not all of us can sympathize equally with both. Thorough-going Proustians, like thorough-going Wordsworthians, are rare birds.

In one of these urges the scientific element predominates

—though the science is Proustian science—while in the other the aesthetic element, which lies closer to the author's private philosophy, leaps up to monopolize the field.

In certain illuminating passages we encounter a definite and conscious clash between these two, though no doubt it is a more *serious* clash to the young hero of the book than to his scientific creator.

For instance, after devoting the best part of an entire volume to the by-no-means inspiring chatter at a de Guermantes dinner-party, the author permits his young man to utter a heart-felt sigh of disappointment and to prop up his tottering illusion by a shaky hope that when these people are *by themselves* they are less fatuous.

> I barely listened to these stories, stories of the kind that M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they supplied no food for my favourite train of thought; and besides, even had they possessed the elements which they lacked, they would have had to be of a very exciting quality for my inner life to awaken during those hours in which I dwelt in my skin, my well-brushed hair, my starched shirt-front, in which, that is to say, I could feel nothing of what constituted for me the pleasure of life. . . . Was it really for the sake of dinners such as this that all these people dressed themselves up and refused to allow the penetration of middle-class women into their so exclusive drawing-rooms—for dinners such as this?

And if Proust permits his youthful hero to sigh like this over the inability of the fashionable world to supply grist for his mill, may we not ourselves be allowed to express a wish that in this huge mass of herbarium or aquarium investigations—they are his own comparisons —there had been a little more of the madeleine *motif*, a little more of those Ways that would have interested Walter Pater more than Saint-Simon?

It is interesting, in any case, to note how in the vast

canvas of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* the Proustian "science" often gives the Proustian "aesthetic" a little more than it can carry off. This is curious, considering his steady faith in subjective as against objective methods of art.

In the hands of Dorothy M. Richardson, and in the hands of James Joyce, the art of the novel makes use of what, I believe, May Sinclair was the first to call the "stream of consciousness." Now strictly speaking, this is *not* the method of Proust; for while we are told what the hero thinks or what Swann thinks, we are told this rather by the author than either by the "I" of the story or by Charles Swann.

In fact, Proust permits himself to do to the limit the very thing that is anathema to the artist-type of author; that is, to intersperse his fiction with what is not so much a "stream of consciousness" as a stream of Proustian commentaries upon consciousness!

Let us, for a moment, compare these streams of consciousness as we receive them from Dublin, London, and Paris. Let us listen to Joyce, to Dorothy Richardson, and to Marcel Proust; as each of them soliloquizes in these cities through the lips of their protagonists.

Let us begin with Joyce.

> Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsomever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the *nacheinander*. Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible.' Open your eyes. No. Jesus! If I fell over a cliff that beetles o'er his base, fell through the *nebeneinander* ineluctably. I am getting on nicely in the dark. My ash sword hangs at my side. Tap with it: they do. My two feet in his boots are at the end of his legs, *nebeneinander*. Sounds solid: made by the mallet of *Los Demiurgos*.

Am I walking into eternity along Sandymount strand? Crush, crack, crick, crick. Wild sea money. Dominic Deasy kens them a'.

Won't you come to Sandymount,
Madeline the mare?

Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. A catalectic tetrameter of iambs marching. No, agallop: *deline the mare.*

Now, whether we can follow or not the meaning of *nebeneinander*, or can say what a "tetrameter of iambs" is, or what is conveyed by the words *deline the mare*, most of us, less erudite readers, can I think catch in all this the sad, bitter, satirical-scholastical, metaphysical-circus tone of a modern Hamlet fooled to the top of his bent. But whatever we catch, or whatever, by reason of our imperfect education, we fail to catch, here undoubtedly our Dubliner passes completely into the person of Stephen; and it is Stephen's stream of consciousness, however obscure to the unsophisticated, that we are being obsessed by and absorbed in.

Now let us leave Dublin and Stephen's bitter Hamlet-metaphysics, and plunge into a London stream of consciousness, the impressions, namely, of Miriam Henderson, Miss Richardson's heroine.

Sitting exempted, sipping her milk while the others talked, lounging, in smooth gentle tones, three forces . . . curbed to gentleness . . . she felt the room about her change from gloom to a strange blurred brightness, as if she were seeing it through frosted glass. . . . A party of young men were getting up to go, stamping their feet and jostling each other as they shook themselves to rights, letting their jeering, jesting voices reach street level before they got to the door. They filed past, their faces, browless under evilly flattened cloth caps, or too large under horrible shallow bowlers set too far back, were all the same, set towards the street with the look, even while they jested, of empty finality; choiceless dead faces. They were not

> really gay. They had not been gay as they sat. Only defiantly noisy, collected together to banish, with their awful ritual of jeers and jests, the closed-in view that was always before their eyes; giving them, even while they were at their rowdiest, that look of lonely awareness of something that would never change. That was *why* they jeered? Why their voices were always defensive and defiant? What else could they do when they could alter nothing and never get away?

Now in this little segment of the stream of consciousness, as it passes through the mind of Miss Richardson's Miriam, we may note that, as in the case of Joyce's priest-educated Stephen, the author identifies himself completely with the character's thoughts.

But although there are passages in Proust where the author, like a cloudy deity hovering over the head of the "I" of the story, *does* almost attain a similar identification, his more usual way is to let this secondary "I" bustle into the situation, and then to take the matter out of his hands, and to deliver, as it might be out of the air, an all-knowing generalization upon the situation in question, a generalization that might, or might not, be *over the "I's" head.*

It is for this reason that the whole of *A la Recherche* comes to resemble one long subtle and serpentine *essay*, a soliloquy not of the little "I" of the plot but of the ubiquitous "I" of the inventor of the plot.

For instance when the little "I" comes for the first time to Balbec, the big invisible "I" in the background allows its inexhaustible soliloquy, which is the salt tide of the whole book and which is now dealing with the magic of place-names and to what false conclusions they often lead us, to be interrupted, as if by a stream of fresh water coming suddenly to the surface, by the physical proceedings of the little "I," who, plunging into the town from the station, is horrified to find its precious church, with the name that had swallowed up everything in its Persian

syllables and its suggestion of the mystery of the sea, situated close to a café with the word "Billiards," an omnibus-office, a tramway, and a bank.

And again in connection with the silly stories related by the clever, good-natured but not over-sensitive Bloch, whose humour it is, sometimes in season but much more often out of season, to parody Homer, we find the little "I's" impulsive admiration severely corrected by the big "I" seated in the clouds above his head, who—and the passage has much significance in regard to Proust's whole method—refers to the flatness and dullness of certain aspects of Saint-Simon's historic gossip.

> Saint-Simon's portraits composed by himself (and very likely without his admiring them himself) are admirable, whereas what he cites as the charming wit of his clever friends is frankly dull where it has not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so pointed or so coloured when said by Mme. Cornuel or Louis XIV.

And the ubiquitous *essayist*, whose vivid soliloquy upon contemporary life contains all the characters of *A la Recherche* like flies in amber, proceeds to add, in connection with his admired Saint-Simon that "in the state of mind in which we 'observe' we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create."

Alas! there is a good deal in these wonderful volumes where Proust himself is "observing": that is to say, is making *his* portraits say things more worthy of Mme. Cornuel and Louis XIV than of their chronicler.

Dyed-in-the-grain Proustians will defend this on the ground of "truth to nature"; but others among us know too well their own weakness for this treacherous truth to nature to be led astray by such talk.

No, it isn't on the ground of truth to nature that I would defend as essential to his main design the duller

pages in Proust. I don't enjoy them. I have been guilty of wishing they weren't there. Many passages would be far pleasanter to read without them. But the book as a whole *would not be so great or so convincing a work.*

The pleasures of reading are not confined to the immediate excitement of reading. There are also afterthoughts; and when an exciting book leaves no afterthoughts we know well what has been wrong. *The author has been afraid of being dull.*

But the grand secret of Proust, that sacred "message," which I, as a good Lollard of literature, so obstinately seek for, has to do with that madeleine dipped in tea and with the two or three other occasions of the same revelation, until the culminating one at the end rounds off the book.

And to what does this really amount? Surely to the conclusion, daring and startling as it is, that the mood in which we arrive at the kind of ecstasy described by Proust and without which, he admits, many people go through their entire life, is not a mood connected with what we call "beauty," nor with what we call "truth," nor with what we call "love." It is a mood, or let me say *a moment*, when we are made rapturously happy by what Wordsworth calls "the pleasure which there is in life itself."

Now beauty does not have this effect; and in any case beauty is something that a really lofty and magnanimous spirit finds it *must do without;* not because it isn't inspiring in itself, but because its cult makes us unsympathetic and inhuman.

Truth, again, by its inherent nature, cannot reconcile us to life. The more truly we face life, the more seriously, as our oft-quoted Russian says, we return our Creator His ticket.

Nor, when you consider the nature of what the great

ascetics and the great founders of religion have taught about spiritual love and the sacrifice of the self to other selves, can it be said that Proust's madeleine has anything in common with the "highest" of all historic ideals.

Nor has this madeleine feeling anything to do with the reason, or the intellect, or metaphysics, or science. *It is a sensation;* but a very rare and a very singular sensation.

Speaking with respectful nicety, it might justly be called the Miracle of the Mass in the Natural World. It is something that *happens by chance*; and could occur to a selfish person, a criminal person, to a devilish person, just as easily as to a saint.

What, therefore, are we to think? Shall we say it seems exactly the sort of ironic trick that a Janus-faced First Cause might play upon its creatures? or shall we say that it goes deeper even than that? Shall we say that the madeleine sensation of Immortality, and of Universal Reconciliation, is a momentary consciousness, levelling every mortal living thing to the same level and proving the wisdom of evangelical humility, of being one with the First Cause?

This is certainly what Miss Richardson's Miriam implies in the sweet blasphemy of her "profane" secret.

> She thought of the autumn sunlight, held it in her mind, thought of it as existing in their minds and in the minds of everyone in London to-day; the hint of an answer, the moment one paused to look at it, to every problem in the world."

For the point is—according to these streams of consciousness in Paris and London, growing as they both do, Miss Richardson in her *Pilgrimage*, Proust in his *A la Recherche*, into an impersonal secular protest against our modern futility and our modern brutality—the point is that this madeleine feeling does go beyond death. It

resembles the strange and unexpected emotion produced in the mind by the way the best short story ever written, *The Great-Coat* by Nikolai Gogol, goes beyond death.

Philosophy can help us to bear up under life and even to be cheerful, but to be able to do more than that, death must be *brought into it*; and brought into it in some other way than as a ghastly Cimmerian Epilogue or a "blackening-out" of the whole business.

Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is like a dance of the glittering mackerel of the sea, who, as they dart and gleam in the element of Time, are unaware that all the while their dorsal fins are not in the sea at all, but in the Timeless air above.

Thus, if we regard Marcel Proust and James Joyce as the two most formidable writers of the present epoch, it is interesting to note that, while the Irishman treats all his characters except Stephen as a titanic Gulliver of satire and parody who is enjoying a Burlesque Show of Lilliputians with a mixture of disgusted relish and relishing disgust, Proust keeps up his serpentine progress through the hearts, nerves, and brains of all his people with an intensity of analysis so exquisite, so fine-spun, so *levelling*, that instead of feeling the mixture of puzzled and respectful awe that we feel in the presence of Joyce and even of his alter-ego Stephen, we are prepared to argue with him in our own minds, so real have his people become to us, and expostulate with him as to his treatment of them, as if all he had done was just to introduce us to them, and that formality once safely over we could take our own view of their proceedings and their fate.

But so frightening, so disturbing, so difficult, to an old-fashioned sentimental-romantic mind is the style of Joyce, that many of us feel as "rattled" in reading him as Panurge felt when the Pantagruelian ship happened "in Land-

loper's phrase to be temporising it," and they were hailed across the water by Harry Cottiral with a strange crew "qui tenoient de la Quinte."

It is Proust's secondary hero, however, our good Swann, who in his fits and his furies about Odette is brought nearer to the entelechy of humanity's *bon espoir* than the bitterest throb of poor Stephen's "agenbite of the inwit" could make *him* come; for the "little phrase" of old Vinteuil's Sonata, while it takes upon itself the infirmity of our mortality, brings to us something of its own pre-existent immortality.

> Its destiny was linked, for the future, with that of the human soul . . . perhaps it is not-being that is our true state; but if so we feel that, it must be that these phrases of music, these conceptions which exist in relation to our dream are nothing either. We shall perish, but we have for our hostages these divine captives who shall follow and share our fate. And death in their company is something less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps even less certain.

In this passage one cannot help catching, as if on the wireless of a special Proustian announcement for modern ears, our age's inherent scepticism, scepticism of every kind of wisdom that cannot be checked up by chemical or electrical or mathematical support.

The feeling that the "little phrase" in its mysterious perfection comes down to us from the realm of Platonic Ideas, and that in what we call Beauty we can get support for our hope of surviving death, does not weigh one quarter as an argument compared with the "madeleine."

And why is that? Simply because at every single point this madeleine phenomenon can be verified by sensible evidence. Proust, in fact, *plays* with Plato; but in the matter of memory in relation to the Timeless he is as serious and scrupulous as a literary Einstein.

Our present generation, in the Literature of Europe and America, have no men of genius that even approach Proust and Joyce. I am old enough now to have lived through three great literary dictatorships. When I was at college, Dostoievsky and Nietzsche were the rulers of our spirit. When I first visited America, Anatole France and Thomas Hardy were our masters. But all the way through the decade that is now closing, the more serious book-lovers among us, I mean those who are concerned with real original genius and not with mere skilful craftsmanship, have turned, perforce, whether we go deeply into their work or not, to Proust and Joyce.

Joyce is the most difficult great writer we have ever had, and Proust is the most non-moral; so that those of us who have been caught by our less initiated friends chewing the sweet cud of snobbish satisfaction that we can enjoy what is caviare to others, will do well to remember that neither a gnomic style throwing alluring and tantalizing stumbling-blocks before un-erudite and unphilological minds, rousing snobbish satisfaction in some and infuriated facetiousness in others, nor long-winded struggles to find the secret of the Eternal in our Memory, are absolutes in the art of writing.

Neither literature nor philosophy began with these discoveries; nor will they end with them. Hear the words of Rabelais upon this point.

> Pray, why is it that People say that Men are not such Sots now-a-days as they were in the days of Yore? Sot is an old word that signifies a Dunce, Dullard, Jolthead, Gull, Wittal, or Noddy, one without Guts in his Brains, whose cockloft is unfurnished, and in short a fool. Now would I know, whether you would have us understand by this same Saying, as indeed you logically may, that formerly Men were fools, and this generation has grown Wise?
>
> How many and what Dispositions made them Fools? How

> many and what Dispositions are waiting to make 'em Wise? . Pray, how came you to know that Men were formerly Foo How did you find out that they are now Wise? Who Devil made 'em Fools? Who a God's name made 'em Wi . . . Why did the old Folly end now, and no later? Why the Modern Wisdom begin now and no sooner? What w we the worse for the former Folly? What the better for succeeding Wisdom?

Well, for myself, for these things are always person I can only say that I have been "the better" for Prous "Modern Wisdom" in the sense that I have learnt fr him a certain trick of taking the unpoetic details of da life as if they were just as extraordinary, and just as sig ficant of the Méséglise way of our soul's planetary sojou as any Venetian palaces or Alpine peaks.

But poetic or unpoetic, they are as they are because are as *we* are.

> She thought of the autumn sunlight, held it in her mi thought of it as existing in their minds and in the minds everyone in London to-day; the hint of an answer, the mom one paused to look at it, to every problem in the world.

CONCLUSION

DO lovers of books overestimate the influence of literature upon the world? I fancy it depends upon what particular race and epoch you have in your mind. The Chinese must have been more influenced by books than by anything else except sex and starvation. Our old English Puritans must have been more influenced by the Bible than by all the heredity and environment you could name. Homer, whether read or recited, must have permeated the ancient Greek mind; so must the Koran the Mahommedan; and as for the Jews, from the days when Moses flung down his tables of stone to the days when Heine mocked at omnipotence, books have moulded their thoughts, their character, their feelings, their whole attitude to life.

It is true that except for Homer these are all religious books; but when you put Shakespeare aside, who is, I suppose, the only thoroughly secular genius of all great writers, the problem of religion, that is to say the problem of good and evil in connection with the supernatural, enters into all the books by which men have lived, whether mystically as in *Faust*, humorously as in Rabelais, critically as in Lucretius, or with esoteric universality as in Walt Whitman.

In the stirring up of social revolutions it must be allowed that books have had serious rivals in those terrible concretions we so smoothly and glibly call "economic forces."

And religion itself, quite apart from books, along with

anti-religion apart from books, has played a formidable part in most bloody upheavals; for though both sides are always appealing to books, the real urge, for or against the religious instinct, comes much nearer to sexual emotion than to anything intellectual or aesthetic.

And the personal genius of individual revolutionaries and individual reactionaries is something else that is independent of books. Indeed, one sometimes feels as if the American, the French, the Russian, and certainly the Spanish revolution could be explained without introducing Rousseau or Tom Paine, or even Marx or Bakunin.

I speak of the fact that these things happened at all; but of course, once started, books *are* brought upon the scene. Hunger and oppression, assisted by the magnetic hypnosis of eloquent leaders, would probably have produced *some* sort of violent change in all these cases; but it is still possible to doubt if they would have taken the particular form with which we are familiar had it not been for literary articulation.

And one can say the same of all the convulsions and reactions, the stiffenings and the weakenings, the new lives and the incredible conversions, that occur in individual human souls.

Our personal character—in its impact with chance and circumstance—is no doubt our fate; but I fancy there are many among us who, if they were brought to the confessional, would be compelled to admit that the deciding influence in the crises of this fate was the effect of certain books.

And this leads to another question. Is it in our youth or in our maturity that books affect us the more? Some would say at once that as year follows year in our normal lives, and we continue in pain and disillusion and weariness and disgust to harden our hearts, we grow less and less

responsive to books and more and more cynical as to the effect of books upon society.

But I confess I am myself inclined to take a different view. It is true that youth of both sexes is always ready, as its elders know to their cost, to appeal, with more or less passion and prejudice, to the authority of the written word; and it is true that in its idealism and its arrogance youth tends to repeat what it has picked up from books rather than, as its elders are never tired of reminding it, what it has thought out for itself. I suspect, moreover, that it rarely fails to present itself to youth under these strictures, that what its elders call their "experience" and their "practical common sense," is in reality nothing but a narrow and unenlightened selfishness, due to anything rather than a rich and varied response to a fuller life, due very often to mere frustration and the drying up of the sacred fount.

All this may be perfectly true, and yet I would be tempted to retort that the argument about selfishness is neither here nor there, for every pleasure can be "selfish," and it is an open question whether to be "taken out of oneself" by the "movies" or the "wireless" is a nobler pastime than to "find yourself" in a powerful novel, or to bank yourself up, with all your whims and caprices, in some philosophical work that suits your taste and can buttress you against the catapults of chance.

I certainly think that youth is more addicted than maturity to depend on the passing fashion in its reading, and much more inclined, in its craving for topical subjects, to dodge the *effort of detachment* which is necessary if we are to enjoy, deliberately and quietly, any of the great books of the past. This has been a book about the works that have already received the verdict of posterity; and the fact remains that such works must be judged rather

by their power over the lives of individuals than by their power to produce social upheavals.

We all have to live; we all have to snatch at *some* margin of pleasure as we scramble through life; and while there are plenty of influences, within us and without us, that determine our political and economic convictions, there are only a limited number of books that can permanently increase our happiness, deepen our power of endurance, and touch the whole spectacle with a magic that not only heightens the larger outlines but makes it possible to get extraordinary satisfaction out of all manner of little primitive and elementary things.

But there it is! We cannot *like* to the same degree all the books that have received the "imprimatur" of the generations, and indeed we are perfectly justified in picking and choosing as we go along.

But there is, I think, a natural comprehensiveness of taste in ordinary intelligent readers that ought to be deliberately cultivated as we get older, so that we should not miss, by reason of a little superficial laziness or some trifling and accidental prejudice, any book that might really change our whole life, lifting some unspeakable mental load off our brains or nerves or consciences, and giving us deep draughts of the water of life from one of its original fountain-heads.

The books I have tried to appreciate in this volume are certainly very different from one another; but I have offered them to my readers as the ones from which in my own life I have got the most lasting satisfaction. Had space permitted I would have added others; but undoubtedly for the actual struggle of day-by-day life, I have got most out of the books already included, and the point I want to make now at the end has to do with the possibility of using in our daily life *and with equal*

thoroughness such very different writings as Homer's *Odyssey* and St. Paul's Epistles.

How well I know the peculiar aggravation that my particular way of treating these terrific works will excite in certain minds! But a critic with any spirit at all is bound to evoke contempt and distaste in temperaments antipathetic to his own.

I expect the truth is there is a sort of *odium literarum* that exactly corresponds to the *odium theologicum*; for the teasing, tickling, itching irritation which one type of book-lover feels when he comes in contact with another type, is much more acute, I fancy, than what either of us feel towards a person insensitive to the whole business. I could describe eloquently, and in both Rabelaisian and Pauline terms, my own particular antithesis among bookworms; and no doubt he could, and probably will, describe me, in a style drawn partly from the airier manner of So-and-So, my bête-noir among geniuses, and partly from the obscurer manner of So-and-So, my bête-noir among critics; but I think what really annoys him is that any simple and unscholarly heretic should take a gnomic and oracular tone in place of trying to be ingratiating, whimsical, and entertaining. My seriousness must annoy this type of authority exactly as the peculiar seriousness of an old-fashioned Nonconformist would annoy a disillusioned and witty prelate. It affects him as if a guest at his table should not only commit the impropriety of smoking a cigarette with his port, but of referring in passionate earnestness to the blood of Jesus. He smells the rhetoric of an Extension Lecturer, "throwing his weight about" at a party of College Fellows.

Well! It cannot be helped. I am writing for book-lovers of my own kidney, and what we Lollards of Literature want is the direct application of our scriptures

to the smallest detail of our domestic lives. We want, as Walt Whitman says, to decoy the Muse to our hearth, till we get her installed "amid the kitchen-ware."

Why should not the most unathletic of men enjoy his emergence from sleep and his morning ablution in the very spirit of the sedate Telemachus in the golden palace of the fair-haired Menelaus?

Why should not our first thought be to worship the Four Elements, even if all we see of them be a patch of blue, a smoke-blackened common, a wind-blown water-butt and a smoking-fire?

And because we have allowed ourselves such high and heathen prerogatives, is that any reason why, when we encounter our spiteful or over-loving relatives, we should not practise on them the supernatural malice of St. Paul, and even something of his abysmal and treacherous charity?

And who, I ask you, will be able to protest—for who indeed will know anything about it?—if when you arrive at the scene of your diurnal labour you allow yourself the abandoned and spiritually sexual pleasure of *feeling yourself*, to the most extreme and shameless limit, *into* the jumpy nerves of your companions, both masculine and feminine; drinking in their unspoken confessions—and all in the deepest secret—and sharing their suppressed reactions to one another?

And who is to prevent you, as you pursue your abstracted path homeward, from debouching a trifle out of the rush of the traffic, and from sending Dostoievsky and his psychological mole-runs to the devil, while you share, this time, the patient endurance of a certain familiar thorn-stump by the wayside, or of some sea-weed-covered post by the water, or catch from the long perspective of a remote white road crossing an unknown hill-top a

sudden intimation of immortal race-memories that lie dormant within us all?

And who again is to discover, behind your cautious and propitiatory greetings, as you enter a public-house or plunge into a circle of broad-mouthed cronies, whence it is that you draw your unfastidious appreciations, your immunity to midden-smells, your toleration of the most monstrous sex-lapses, and your gift for catching the huge and royal unction, as if of pantheistic giants, of some profane group of poor jolt-headed loblollies and pitiable scrubs?

Nor, when night descends on your dwelling and your obstreperous family are safe in bed, will anyone be the wiser if, as you rub your shins before the red coals and say to yourself, "So much for *this* day!" and "Sufficient for to-morrow be the worries thereof!" you let "the measureless float" of Time's river bring a more muted and more mystic mood; a mood in which as the night deepens about you you feel the released and Lethe-purged souls of all the sleepers in your quarter of the globe flowing into the great sea of escape in which the chemistry of the darkness anticipates the chemistry of death and the invigoration of death.

Your family will not know, and your neighbours will not know, when the lively dust of to-morrow's "rich-running" life glitters once more in the sun, what it was that you said to the darkness and said to death as those coals faded:

I too pass from the night,
I stay awhile away, O night, but I return to you again and love you.
Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?
I love the rich-running day but I do not desert her in whom I lay so long,

I know not how I came of you and I know not where I go with you but I know I came well and shall go well.

Different as human temperaments are, I cannot help thinking that there are many people who, if they made a definite vow, as Goethe did, to read a passage every day out of some old great book that suits their nature—and I can only pray that your choice, reader, may prove even more effective for your purpose than Homer and St. Paul and Rabelais have proved for mine—would soon begin to tap an unfathomable reservoir of strength and endurance. It strikes me as being the one essential thing in our reading to be absolutely independent of the fashion of the hour, both at its cleverest and at its stupidest.

And we must be good Lollards and Anabaptists of Literature, shameless Nonconformists, content in our pursuit of salvation to appear naïve and solemn and innocent and priggish, devoid of all sense of proportion, devoid, if you like, even of what you call a sense of humour. We must, in fact, be content to take as guides to our real, actual, rough-and-tumble existence, many curious ancient works that our clever young writers "have no use for" and that our witty scholars regard as recondite "matters of breviary," not in any way conceivable as "human nature's daily food."

Oh! how strongly I am persuaded that in our choice of books we should be both eclectic and pragmatic; humble, as Keats says, before the "eternal spirit" that inspires them all, but bold and unscrupulous in giving their most sacred and exclusive eloquence a shrewd twist to suit our present-day hand-to-mouth occasions!

Passing into the souls of those that feed upon them, books are likely enough to outlive all other products of time. Sharing the immortality of their readers—if Sir Thomas Browne, the greatest of all our stylists, is justified

in the orchestral conclusion to his *Hydroitaphia*—they will survive the maggots of the earthliest corruptions as well as the "funeral blazes "of the grandest cremations.

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

Such high assurances may be vain, vain for all Pantagruel's mighty words and the certainties of Walt Whitman, but, even if they are, those who steer their path through life by the gleam of such majestic "lanterns" will have had many intimations before they perish of what in the depths of Being remains imperishable, though this be neither they themselves as individual persons, nor the books they have loved as individual books.

For it may well be that what gives us the deepest happiness we know is merely to touch, though we ourselves and the books that inspire us must sink into oblivion, that level, that dimension, that plane of existence, from which proceeds the inexplicable imperative to follow goodness and mercy in a world built upon a different plan.

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