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STUDIES FRENCH AND ENGLISH

BY

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TO MARIE MAURON

NOTE

Of the essays that follow, the majority are reprinted, in a revised form, from Life and Letters. *Those on Beddoes and Crabbe have served as introductions to anthologies of their work, published by the Cambridge University Press, Of those on Montaigne and Proust a small part originally appeared in the* Observer; *also the verse translations from Ronsard. The rest of the book is new.*

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'SWEET ENEMY'

'That sweet enemy, Fraunce.'
Sir Philip Sidney.

'L'Angleterre est une He, mais il y a des jours ou, comme Delos, elle voyage et se baigne dans la

Louis Gillet, *Shakespeare.*

Anniversaries soon become nuisances. Like those small dogs for whose diversion one is rash enough to throw the first stone, they come rushing back again and again with merciless assiduity. They can be almost as bad as birthdays. And yet, but for this odious way they have of recurring, I could almost wish to add yet another to their number—the Fourteenth of October.

And what, it may be asked, happened on October 14th? One of the half-dozen events that even English education succeeds in really beating into the Enghsh head—the Battle of Hastings, in the year 1066. It is not unusual to regard that date with a touch of pique. We tend to identify ourselves with the natives (unless, indeed, we had an ancestor on the winning side); we dislike being conquered. Certainly our grandfathers felt this strongly; to say nothing of Professor Freeman, it is enough to read the *Harold* of Lord Lytton or the *Harold* of Lord Tennyson. Most moderns have read neither; and honesty must resist the temptation, almost irresistible in such cases, to pretend they have missed one of life's great experiences. But bias against the Norman is emphatically there. It is, indeed, hard for any reader of history not to sympathise with the sheer ill-fortune of the last Saxon king; and yet few readers of literature, who take an interest in racial characteristics, can regret Hastings field. Some of them will

wish, on the contrary, that there had been even more Normans there, or more Conquests since.

This may be fanciful. It may be that in the course of a few centuries climate outweighs race. Double the hours of sunshine in England, and it is probable that we should hardly know our present solemn selves. In any case, it must remain difficult to distinguish the different racial factors in a mongrel stock. And yet, century after century, certain persistent features in English literature seem typically Germanic; others, rather less markedly, French. There is no doubt a Celtic element as well; but there lies a still more perilous quest, in the twilight of which Matthew Arnold himself got sadly lost. For present purposes that can be left on one side. It is enough to suggest that certain English writers, such as Langland, Malory, Ascham (much as he loathed Malory), Spenser, Jonson, Milton, Bunyan, Swift, Cowper, Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens, Carlyle, Ruskin, Browning, Meredith, D. H. Lawrence, by a certain intense earnestness, usually combined with melancholy or violence or hysteria, by an obsession with good morals at the expense, very often, of good sense, good manners, or good taste, by a feeling for righteousness before beauty and even before truth, recall at moments that sombre race which destroyed Latin civilisation in Britain and hammered out on its cold ashes a literature, often vigorous, often dignified in its sadness, but hag-ridden with religion and staggering under a burden of unconscionable boredom. Through that stark Saxon poetry no sun seems to shine, no sea to laugh. Only the white blizzard drives shrieking into the whiteness of the foam; only the black raven and the grey wolf gather from the forest round the human carrion of the battlefield. Those hard Saxon faces seem too scarred to smile; vain to look to those iron fingers for any hghtness of

touch. Few warriors have ever been less 'happy'; they do not laugh like the heroes of Homer or those of the *Chanson de Roland,* whose Emperor bears a sword 'Joiuse' (Joyeuse), whose war-cry is 'Monjoie', and their country 'la douce France'. These Teutons would have been astonished to hear that gaiety was a virtue. It was a toy they had long learned to go without—like their 'Seafarer':

> All the glee I got me was the gannet's screaming,
> And the swoughing of the seal, 'stead of the mirth of men.

Even the cuckoo in their gloomy ears becomes 'the sad cuckoo'. The blue devil of the English Sunday, who can even now muster more than two hundred faithful in the House of Commons to defend his abominations, first floated in some dank sea-fog across the German Ocean on the galleys of those grim rovers from Schleswig, nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

They were more remarkable, it must be added, for melancholy than intelligence. Nations are seldom fair to one another, but there seems no great injustice in the old Irish verse:

> For acuteness and courage the Greeks,
> For overweening pride the Romans,
> For dulness the creeping Saxons,
> For beauty and amorousness the Gauls.

No doubt there was more in the Saxon than mere dulness. But when Langland snarls that he who gives silver to a jester is worse than Judas; when Bunyan draws the dark outlines of the City of Destruction; when Milton, in tones so like Caedmon before him, tells of the fall of its Prince; when Cowper groans that he is that City's eternally doomed and damned inhabitant; when Carlyle rediscovers it in an England where, amongst other iniquities such 'a pitiful abortion' as Charles Lamb, daring like Langland's jester to trifle with this serious world, could be hailed as

a genius; when D. H. Lawrence lets the glowing metal grow cold on his anvil, while he rants out some crazy preachment; at such moments I find rising before me a vision of those brave, but depressing, barbarians who chanted the sombre incoherences of *Beowulf* amid the moss-grown ruins they had made of Roman Bath. And I wonder whether, with a more generous admixture of French blood and Latin influence, English life and letters might not have gained a larger measure of our neighbours' gifts without losing anything essential of their own.

The differences between English and French literature, whether mainly due to race or no, are always a fascinating study. Could we but learn from them, they might be extremely valuable as well. The first great contrast, at least to the English eye, is the supremacy of English poetry and of French prose; but behind that literary contrast lies a psychological one. The Englishman, *one* may say, lives more in his unconscious than the Frenchman; he is more repressed and more in conflict with himself. Accordingly, he clings to a number of ideas that he is unwilling to look at too closely; he is haunted by a number of taboos and senses of guilt that he is afraid to question or to analyse. Not daring to follow freely where either his thoughts or his feelings might lead him if he let them, he runs away from both. He takes refuge either in action or in dream. He constructs an empire or an epic, a business or a ballad. Strange paradox!—the most practical of nations has proved also the most poetical.

No doubt these causes and effects work within the English mind in a virtuous circle. If our countrymen pursue practical activity because they distrust thinking, feeling, and talking, they also disapprove of thinking, reeling, and talking as distractions from practical activity. Action is dear to them for its own sake also; it is the breath

of their nostrils, as well as an indispensable anaesthetic for the too restless intellect. Hence our cult of 'strong, silent men'; hence the clamours of Carlyle for Work, and Production, and shutting up the talking-shop at Westminster; hence the feverish heartiness of Meredith, and his spurning of 'the questions that sow not nor spin'; hence Matthew Arnold's insistence that respectability is essential, and 'conduct', not good states of mind, 'three fourths of life'; hence, too, lines like Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's:

> I would not, if I could, be called a poet.
> I have no natural love of 'the chaste Muse'.
> If aught be worth the doing, I would do it:
> And others, if they will, may tell the news.

It is useless, and graceless, to ask consistency of poets; otherwise we might inquire why, if he felt like that, Blunt wrote, or at all events published, poetry at all. But though one may laugh at, or be irritated by, this carefully cultivated unintelligence of the English, it is more than a mere subject for satire. It has done great things: it can sometimes seem itself a fine one. 'Dans reffroyable mdchancete de Tespece', writes one who knows us, M. Maurois, half smiling and half serious, 'les Anglais etablisscnt une oasis de courtoisie et d'indifference. Les homines se detestent; les Anglais s'ignorent. Je les aime beaucoup.' We do not, in short, much appreciate Proust; but we are very, very nice if you arc in trouble; provided you are not so far round the corner as to be beyond the rather narrow radius of our imaginations. Thus, if you are a German soldier, we shall talk beforehand of putting you, when we catch you, in a dug-out, and throwing bombs on top; actually, when it comes to the point, we shall light you, not a bomb, but a cigarette; whereas the charming French on our right may prove, as captors, less charming. One cannot have everything.

On the other hand, a good deal of freedom in thinking, feeling, and talking is essential for a really intelligent life and a really intelligent literature; that is where the French salon and French prose, which owes much more than ours to the salon, have the better of us. It is strange how constant through the centuries has remained the sullen, self-centred aloofness of our race. For practical purposes, no doubt, for administrative work, or for a football match, our 'team-spirit' is there; but in thought or in amusement we remain for the most part locked up in ourselves. One gasps to read in Froissart, so modem does it seem, how our fourteenth-century countrymen on some occasion, 's'amusaicnt tristement selon la coutume de leur pays'. Was England ever 'Mcrrie', or had it already ceased to be? A century and a half later Jean du Bellay writes to the Grand Master, of the pending reception of Henry VIII: 'Especially I beg you to bar from the court two kinds of people, those who are Imperialists. . . and those who have a reputation of being mockers and waggish fellows; for that is indeed the one tiling in the world most hated by this nation'. Michelet, coming to the trial of Joan of Arc, bursts out into a sudden rage against this race whose one ruling passion is its gloomy pride. The *Imitatio Christi,* he exclaims, has been attributed to a Frenchman, to a German, to an Italian; but never (this is, in fact, not true) to an Englishman. Swedenborg puts English souls in a separate heaven of their own. Taine finds the salient thing about us our 'manque dc bonheur'; and writes elsewhere: 'A ne prendre que les modcrnes, on pourrait dire que, dans chaque Anglais, il y a quelque-chose de Byron, de Wordsworth, et de Carlyle, trois esprits bien diffcrcnts ct pourtant semblables en un point qui est une force et unc faiblessc, et que, fautc d'autres termes, je me risque a nommer 'Thypertrophic du moi" '.

These views are curiously unanimous, despite their very wide differences in date. True, others do not see us quite as we are: their contact makes us feel shyer, and seem grimmer, than normal. But it remains also true that we take life and ourselves, very often, too seriously. Arnold had surely reason when he complained that Carlyle, thrusting earnestness on the English, was carrying coals to Newcastle; and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, when he teased Christina with neglecting art because it 'interfered with the legitimate exercise of anguish*. One of the cardinal deficiencies of our life and literature, as contrasted with French, is a certain lack of grace and gaiety. Johnson's *Rassclas* is a fine thing; but the world has always preferred its typically French counterpart, which a curious coincidence brought to birth in the same year, 1759—Voltaire's *Candide.* The English Heraclitus and the French Democritus agree in essentials; but men turn to the laughing philosopher.

The other age-old charge against us is that of hypocrisy. This, too, is exaggerated; but it has only too good foundation. The truth is not so much that we arc innocent, as that the charge is wrongly worded. We are not hypocrites in the strict sense—Tartuffes deliberately and consciously counterfeiting virtues that we know we do not possess or want to possess. The English are merely intellectually dishonest, and highly skilled at deceiving themselves; it is one more example of their instinctive practicality; it enables them to behave as ill as their interests require, without even being demoralised by pangs of conscience. When the City of London protested, in 1753, against the naturalisation of the Jews, 'as tending extremely to the dishonour of the Christian religion, and extremely injurious to the interests and commerce of the Kingdom in general, and of the City of London in

particular', they were not being hypocrites. Conscious charlatanism would have disguised itself more cunningly; this is the nakedness of innocence. The City of London wanted cash, rather than credit for virtue; and at once genuinely persuaded itself, as so often before and since 'in our rough island-story', that the path of profit was the path of duty. This is, no doubt, intellectually more contemptible than cool fraud; but it is less likely to lead to an unamiable cynicism (except, indeed, in its victims). So today our laws about divorce and public morality are framed and administered in a way that might shake the sides of an intelligent Polynesian. Yet they survive all the industry of reformers, not so much because the English are, or wish to seem, more virtuous than the French as, I believe, because the English mind in its blind, intuitive way feels that love affairs interfere terribly with business. It is better to play golf. Long ago, Montesquieu noted that the English preferred, rather than *galanterie*, 'une debauche qui leur laisserait toute leur liberte et leur loisir'. So Cato praised the young Roman he met emerging from a house of ill-fame (characteristic English circumlocution); in England, even in the eighteenth century, the young man would have been more careful not to be seen, and Cato, unconsciously, more careful not *to* see him; but the principle was the same. Hence that perpetual source of rage to the English intelligentsia, who have to live as foreigners and exiles in their own country—our official tolerance of any amount of frivolous indecency in a musical comedy, while any serious dramatic treatment of a subject like incest is relentlessly banned. Yet there is, again, a certain method even in this madness: it is not conventional joking, but unconventional thinking, that endangers conventional morality. Tennyson and Browning both liked smoking-room stories; there exist

letters from Browning to Miss Isa Blagden filled with a sort of preparatory-school impropriety that, coming from him, takes the breath away; but Tennyson was instant to denounce 'poisonous honey brought from France', Browning deeply perturbed at his wife's meeting a person with a past like George Sand's. Even a supposedly advanced thinker like Samuel Butler becomes so appalled at the obvious situation behind Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as to pervert dates and facts. Fortune was indeed witty the day she made three ostrich-feathers the crest of our heir-apparent; for it is certainly an emblem more appropriate to England than to the blindest king of Bohemia.

The strength of the English instinct to rely on instinct and distrust intelligence comes out nowhere more clearly than in our methods of training and education. We still value for the flower of our youth the playing-fields above the laboratories of Eton; for the flower of our army, Chelsea barrack-square above aeroplane and tank. In the War it was an article of faith in my regiment that our first battalion was invincible in action because, on the march, whatever the heat, the men were never allowed to undo their collars or wear their caps on the back of their heads; even in the first-line trenches, where shaving was agony, we acted on the principle that if our sentries were allowed to remain unbarbered one day, they would run like rabbits the next; and when we came out, we were kept 'sloping arms' and 'presenting arms', as if we were the following week to mount guard at Potsdam. The French might grow shaggy beards, march out of step, and otherwise excite our military contempt, without fighting a whit the worse for it; but with English soldiers, so the theory went, the battle might be lost for an undone button. It was stupid; it was lazy—it became so easy to give the order, 'Handling arms this morning'; and yet,

for English troops, this homemade psychology, though inadequate, remained not altogether false.[1]

The Englishman's character is his castle: inaccessible, lonely, aloof, he gazes out over this world that he has in the past so successfully despoiled; inward he seldom looks —there is a lack of illumination about that massive interior. And yet this frowning fastness has long proved itself a tower of strength—though men are beginning to ask uneasily whether so much instinct is not growing a little out of date before the march of modern science. The English regard the intellectual muddle they live in as a sort of Twilight of the Gods. If they are not careful, it may prove so.

But turn to a typical French book—the atmosphere changes at once to that of an intelligent salon. There is a new world, the home not of earnest and lonely individuals, but of a society where thoughts and tongues run freely. Here are characters self-conscious in a different sense—not with a red embarrassment, or a solemn egotism, but with an amused and unashamed awareness of themselves; with an awareness, also, of others, of the importance of being clear and simple, not a pedant or a bore. For this society

[1]Similarly when, after the War, the English railways were reorganised: a trifling case, yet typical. Instead of some logically simple re-naming, like 'Southern', 'Western', 'North-Western', 'North-Eastern', there emerged the strange quartette 'Southern', 'Great Western', 'London Midland & Scottish', 'London & North-Eastern'. There was no point in calling one 'Great', when it was not even the greatest; in naming 'London' in the titles of two lines when all four served the capital alike; or in calling one railway exclusively 'Scottish' when Scotland is served equally by another. But the English mind is not tidy and remains unworried by such anomalies; sentiment and conservatism were stronger. When, however, it comes to material things like railway engines, it is the English ones, unlike the French, that are groomed and neat in their exterior as racehorses.

is full of satirists, and its quick laughter has little mercy on affectation; it is full of women, and demands its due of gaiety and grace. The answer to that demand is the most characteristic prose of France. Behind the salon lies the boudoir; and women—women like the Marquise de Rambouillet, women like Ninon de FEnclos—have moulded more than any other the civilisation of this country whose emblematic figure in its Art and on its coinage is always so proudly feminine.

Only French prose, indeed, could adequately express that peculiar charm, which makes other races seem thick-ankled in comparison. Forgotten here is the ponderous seriousness of the Saxon, with the world on his shoulders and his head in the clouds. 'L'honnete homme ne se pique de rien'—'les honnetes gens ne boudent pas'—'un homme affaire ne peut etre un honnete homme'. 'Honnete'—'honest'—what a gulf, wide as the Channel, lies between those two words; as, again, between jolly' and joli'! Again, 'to take French leave' is applied by us to a moral lapse, like stealing a holiday; Yen aller a l'anglaisc' is a lapse of manners, to vanish from a party without taking leave. Life is in France more an Art; and less a Mission. And Art in its turn is only a part, though an essential part, of life; not a rather tearful sort of religion.

> C'est peu d'etre agreable et charmant dans un livre,
> II faut savoir encore et converser et vivre.

'Le pauvre enfant, il ne sait pas vivre'—such was the comment of his Swiss guides on Ruskin; and Ruskin himself never uttered a truer. Byron's impatience with 'an author that's all author', with 'these home-keeping minstrels', his contemporaries, would only have deepened, if he had lived longer in nineteenth-century England.

But though letters have always remained, to the typical French intelligence, only a part of life, they have played

a very essential part. If the English traveller ever blushed, he would do so every time he looked at a French railway bookstall or a French provincial bookshop; not because of the audacity of some of the works displayed there, but because of their intellectual level as a whole. It is vain to try to discount their obvious and crushing superiority by the plea that we have more circulating libraries. Where we do excel is in our daily and weekly papers; but whether this is a ground for unmixed triumph is another matter, when one thinks of the amount of time and thought we daily squander in producing and reading what will be out of date tomorrow. But as a charming instance of the general appreciation of serious literature in France, I have always remembered the case of one Laurent, 'dit Coco', accused of burglary in April 1909, who proved an alibi because 'Juste a cette heure-la je me trouvais chez un marchand de vin de la rue de Tracy et je discutais avec un camarade au sujet de la mere de Britannicus dans la tragedie de Racine'. This discussion was proved to have lasted three-quarters of an hour. No doubt, burglars in England *might* discuss the character of Hamlet in a public-house; but no magistrate would believe it. When our lower classes pursue culture, there tends to be about it all a conscientious taint of the philanthropy of the Sunday School. It is, no doubt, difficult to generalise; but I have never forgotten being shown round Carcassonne by the custodian, an ex-soldier of the war. A rather peevish French youth in the party, perhaps taking me for an American, threw out as we went along some casual suggestion that all Americans ought to be charged double; and was instantaneously trodden underfoot by our guide with the cold and curt half-dozen words: 'Ce n'est pas tres intelligent.' An Englishman of the same class might have thought to himself: 'Don't be a bloody fool'; it was

this instant appeal to the intelligence that seemed curiously and typically French.

For this electric energy of the brain, which the Englishman tends to regard as a useful but dangerous means of getting work done, to the French mind seems rather a delightful source of illumination in which also to enjoy himself. He is not afraid of what it may reveal in corners and cupboards. 'Le Francais prevoit parce qu'il se mefie de la vie', says Madariaga,[2] TAnglais ne prevoit pas parce qu'il se mefie de la pensee.' It is this frank passion for the intelligence—the Greeks, too, had it—coupled with a social sense of the politeness of making oneself easily understood, and with an aesthetic love of lucidity of form for its own sake, that gives French writing what Anatole France has called its three crowning qualities: 'd'abord la clarte, puis encore la clarte, et enfin la clarte'.

It is, indeed, time to turn to the more purely literary results of these national differences. The writers of a race are its children, and so share its qualities; but they may also, as exceptional children, be rebels, and in violent reaction against those qualities. This is particularly true of England; both because we are commonly individualists, and because the English artist has so often to fight with both Puritan and Philistine. Often, indeed, the Puritan and the Philistine are inside himself. That is partly why the English have excelled in literature rather than other arts; for literature is closest to the activities of every day, and is also best able to influence these daily activities, by imparting useful knowledge or preaching useful sermons. Literature, in a word, is the least pure of the Fine Arts; and dierefore, to the Puritan, the least impure. But if our passion for the useful and the moral has served

[2] *Anglais, Frangais, Espagnols,* a brilliant book in which I have found much to agree with, much to learn.

English letters by concentrating the English genius on writing, it has disfigured only too many of its works with a mania for improving the reader.

The English novelists, above all, would have produced much more vital offspring had their conceptions been less immaculate. Malory already flounders in an unhappy muddle between ethical disapproval and aesthetic admiration for a love like Guinevere's. With Defoe the thin veil of edification, however violently brandished about, is too transparent to obscure his vigorous outlines; but, by the time it has fallen on Richardson, this mantle has become that stuffy woollen blanket whose folds the eighteenth-century good sense of Fielding indignantly set out to tear aside; as for the English novel of the nineteenth century, who shall number the thickness of petticoats under which a few of its strongest specimens have contrived somehow or other to live and move, even down to our own day? But at what a cost! To pass from Dickens to Balzac, from Thackeray to Flaubert, from Meredith to Stendhal, is like leaving school and schoolmasters for the company of intelligent and untrammelled adults. And I own I find it very hard to go back again. These robust moralists whose stifled emotions burst out, instead, into grotesque extravagances of humour or sentiment, seem so provincial and parochial: caricaturists, not painters, of life. The difference between them and the French is the difference between the Bible narrative of Judah and Israel, interested not in understanding the true character of their Kings, but only in whether they did good or evil in the sight of the Lord, and the passionate dispassionateness of a Thucydides. The first may contain great imagination at moments, and flashes of great poetry; but it is singularly inadequate as a presentation of life. The writer's axe is ground; but the reader's teeth are set on edge. Or consider the contrast

between the two Georges, Eliot and Sand—the Frenchwoman, buffeting her way so recklessly through life, breaking her heart, tearing her reputation to shreds; and yet at least learning life at first hand, discovering about herself truths that only experience can handle, an intensely vital person, not a churchyard angel: while the English writer, with all her humour, her sympathy, her conscientious emancipation, keeps always a touch of the governess about her—we can hear her so well discussing God, Immortality, and Duty, and pronouncing 'with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third'. Emily Bronte, indeed, was not subdued (what, indeed, could have subdued her?) to the atmosphere she worked in; Hardy could write about an English county with the breadth of a Continental mind, until he was silenced by the howlings that saluted *Jude the Obscure;* and yet even amid the licence of today, as we have seen, a writer like D. H. Lawrence is impelled to scribble moral tags across his most vivid painting. It is the curse of English literature that so perpetually its finest harmonies have been accompanied by the cracked bell of some Salem or Ebcnczcr; that its Muse has so persistently imitated the fat white woman seen from the train in Mrs. Cornford's poem, stumping through the summer meadows and armed against the languorous airs of June in the irreproachability of gloves.

This intellectual passion of the French, their disinterested desire, not to approve or condemn, but to understand, with the detachment of the naturalist towards the scorpion, of Shakespeare towards Iago—it is this that most of Shakespeare's countrymen, especially since the Puritan Revolution, have sadly lacked. Taine has pointed out the contrast between Balzac's study of Valerie Marneffe and

Thackeray's handling of Becky Sharp, full of little slaps of disapproval and pinches of virtuous sarcasm; in spite of which she remains so much more human and tolerable than his virtuous offspring. And it is not only in fiction that we still have something to learn in this matter of moral sang-froid; biography and autobiography, criticism and the essay, suffer also with us from our want of it. In biography, whether it is A. C. Benson condemning Rossetti for living with too little 'decorum', or some modern writer condemning Matthew Arnold for living with too much, the same itch for sitting in moral judgement is the besetting malady. To argue that because a man did something he was subsequently unhappy, or that if he had done something else he might have been happier, may be reasonable and interesting; to condemn him by rigid moral formulae that the next generation or the next reader may not accept is merely stupid. It is the same with a great deal of English criticism; even today it is only too easy to open a work, say, on Shakespeare, by some writer with an established name (the two instances that follow shall remain charitably nameless), and read that 'morally Antony has not a leg to stand on', or that 'really' Cleopatra is 'vulgar . . . preposterous, superficial, cruel, and greedy, of the flesh fleshy, with intelligence only enough . . . to practise the arts of a low-born trollop'. What is a moral leg? What do such emotional noises add *to* our understanding? Even Coleridge and Arnold, with all their superiority, fall into the same pit; especially the latter with his dismissal of *Faust* as a 'seduction-drama' and his lamentations over Heine as 'disrcspectable—and not even the merit of not being a Philistine can make up for a man's being that'. Imagine finding such a sentence in Sainte-Beuve! No doubt, in criticism, such utterances of private opinion are less ridiculous than in history or

biography, because criticism is much more concerned with feelings and less with facts. But that is not an excuse for this particular obsession with virtues and vices, sheep and goats. And again, in the essay there is a similarly typical contrast from the first between the fathers of that literary form in France and in England—Montaigne and Bacon: the one so engagingly amused by speculation for its own sake, the other so drily practical and prim and *arriviste*—so much so, that the first French translator of Bacon's *Essays* could give them the title: L'*Artisan de la Fortune.* The Englishman treats his intellect as a serviceable beast of burden; to make it more serviceable still he gives it blinkers also. It has carried him through the gates of many Jerusalems. But blinkers mean a measure of blindness; and in judging life or letters that blindness may become serious.

It might have been thought that prose, especially the novel, as nearer to practical life, might have succeeded better among us than poetry; actually, the reverse has been the case, except in part of the eighteenth century and today. For the English are instinctive, and poetry has in it a larger element of the unconscious, of the dream; they are individual, and the poet may speak for himself alone—may even be, like Milton, the loneliest of men; they are reserved, and poetry provides a magic sleeve on which the heart may be worn unpecked, a mystic mantle in which the shyest soul may somehow stand naked in the marke.t-place, and yet not feel ashamed; they are repressed emotionally, and the airy visions of the poet provide a better outlet for them than the humours and sentimentalities of many an English novelist; they love the loneliness of nature, and l'*ecole buissoniere* is the poet's school; they are melancholy, and poetry, even the popular songs of peoples still in contact with nature, is less often gay than

sad. As early as the end of the seventeenth century Rapin noted the connection between this national trait and our tragic poetry: 'Les Anglais ont le plus de genie pour la Tragedie et par leur esprit, qui se plait aux choses atroces, et par le caractere de leur langue, qui est propre aux grandes expressions.'

Here, indeed, in the language is the last and not the least of the foundations of English poetic greatness. French may be clearer for reasoning, more graceful for conversation, thanks to the polishing of ages, like stones smoothed and rounded by the unresting waves: English, with its mixture of strength and sweetness, of blunt Saxon shortness and undulating Latin sonority, has a wider range and a more mysterious depth; able now to hurl its harsh monosyllables at the poor player—

That *struts* and *frets* his hour upon the stage,

now to settle like a sea-bird on its long ocean-swell and—

The multitudinous seas incarnadine.

A Spanish Ambassador of Elizabeth's day may have complained that he was insulted by being assigned for entertainment to a person of so plebeianly brief a name as *'John* Cuts'; two centuries later one Pinkerton may have proposed to repair this general defect of our tongue by adding to it Italian terminations; but, as de Quincey says, 'luckilissime this proposalio of the absurdissimo Pinkertonio was not adoptado by anybodyini whateverano', and a juster appreciation of our forcible brevity came from Madame de Stael, who observes of Macbeth's 'the table is full': 'Si l'on disait en francais precisement les memes mots, "la table est remplie", le plus grand acteur du monde ne pourrait, en les declamant, faire oublier leur acception commune.' As Chapman puts it:

No tongue hath the Muses' utterance heired
For verse and that sweet music to the ear

> Strook out of rhyme, so naturally as this;
> Our monosyllables so kindly fall
> And meet, opposed in rhyme, as they did kiss.

Equally vain have been attempts from the opposite quarter to do away with our polysyllabic Latinisms. Our wealth lies in possessing both.

It is here in poetry, then, and in prose-poetry like Sir Thomas Browne's, that we need fear no comparisons with France. No doubt the strictures of English critics on the 'monotony' of French metre, particularly the Alexandrine, are mere insular ignorance. But the very clarity of a language may in some ways hamper its poets, as an atmosphere with no sultry gleam of great thunderclouds, no sombre trailing mists upon its mountains, may impoverish a landscape. And again, the tense intellectual alertness which is partly cause, partly effect, of that clarity may lend itself less kindly to the literature of dream. The imagination may feel caged in a salon, with its quick sense of the reasonable and of the ridiculous; the poet finds it harder to forget his audience, and therefore tends to play for it and upon it, instead of looking in his heart and writing for himself. The result is liable to be not so much poetry as rhetoric, though the rhetoric may be magnificent. 'Assurement', says Anatole France, 'nous aimons la poesie . . . mais nous l'aimons a notre maniere; nous tenons a ce qu'elle soit eloquente, et nous la dispensons volontiers d'etre poetique. . . . Dans tous les genres il nous faut des Marseillaises.' It would be easy and absurd to exaggerate this side of a literature which has yet produced Ronsard, Racine, and Baudelaire. But it remains not unnatural that this very reasonableness and analytical power which makes French novelists so masterly in criticising the passions should make French poets sometimes less spontaneous in feeling and uttering them. Despite

instances like Julie de Lespinasse, says Sainte-Beuve, *grandes passions* are rare in France; and Stendhal was never tired of flinging that reproach at his father's countrymen, in contrast with the emotional intensity of his maternal Italy. Here, then, the passionate reserve of the English temper, if it does not break out into wild eccentricity, may show in poetry the proverbial depth of still waters. It may, indeed, as with a Blake, a Landor, or a Byron, be both eccentric and aloof at once. 'Tutti gli Inglesi sono pazzi', observed the Florentines of Landor, ma questo poi ...!'; and Landor, in his turn, said of himself. 'I am alone and will be alone, as long as I live, and after.'

There is yet another way in which a culture that is highly sociable and intelligent may hamper poetry. Intelligent societies quickly develop critical theories about ethics and aesthetics, their La Rochefoucaulds and their Boileaus. They may grow more tolerant about morals, but more rigid about manners; both in life and in letters. In consequence, genius may find itself entangled with rules not of its own making. English literature has suffered from the puritan and the Ten Commandments; French from the purist and the Three Unities. There have been times in France when it was less perilous to break many a moral law than an Alexandrine in the wrong place. We have at least escaped an Academy.

An extreme example, in some respects, of the ways of English poetry is Spenser. He exhibits our Germanic moral earnestness, mingled, often in the most incongruous confusion, with the Latin culture and sensuousness of the Renaissance. His life is an alternation of practical activity with fantastic dreaming, of blood and iron in Munster with the milk and honey-dew of Paradise; he can turn from the stanzas of the *Faerie Queene,* floating like swan after swan down a crystal river, to treatises on the most

scientific method of exterminating the unhappy natives on whose stolen lands he lived like a robber-baron in his castle, till one wild night they smoked him out of it to go and die, starved, in London. He has no sense of construction: the plan of his great poem is a rambling chaos. He has no sense of character: his personages are mere Virtues and Vices, half-animated platitudes galvanised out of the grave of a copy-book. His ideas, behind an iridescent fog of Platonism, are often nothing short of imbecile: seldom has man written who was less capable of the most rudimentary thinking. And yet, such is his inexhaustible vitality of imagination, his genius as a painter and musician in language, that he has survived despite himself. He could not disentangle his ideas; but he could dream, and he could sing. As was said of Lulli, 'II n'a que le genie, il n'a pas le sens commun'.

It is in prose rather than in poetry, that we might learn from France. Perhaps, indeed, no nation can ever teach another much. Nature may be too strong; and certainly the happiest parallels in our literature to the excellences of our neighbours, the irony of Chaucer, the graceful gaiety of Herrick, the perfect precision of Pope and Jane Austen, seem more the result of temperament than of direct imitation. The cruder transplantations of the Restoration bred little but weeds and witherings. And yet I cannot but believe that a closer contact with French might free us from some of the incubi of English prose—our tendencies to ponderousness and pompousness and obscurity and pedantry and cant.

For this persistent trait of the English mind I am tempted to coin the word 'hiboutcrie'. For England is, indeed, a country both of owls and nightingales. Unfortunately the owls arc commoner. Yet our nightingales make up for them, when they can escape their

claws. The Gallic cock in his ruffling pride, gallant and *galant*, divided between love and glory, cannot equal the sweetness of their magic notes. Yet this voice that has always greeted so faithfully the triumph of light over darkness, true national emblem of the country of le Roi Soleil and la Ville Lumiere, can on its own ground challenge the world. France and England, the Art of Prose and the Art of Poetry, need not meet in rivalry; but when it comes to the Art of Life, though there are times, not seldom, when there is no comfort like English poetry, I feel, for myself, a more permanent sympathy with the good sense and the grace of France. Life itself, indeed, contains more prose than poetry. It is seldom lyric or high tragedy. It is often a flatter, sadder, sorrier thing. But in that wilderness the genius of France has raised a more smiling oasis of civilisation than any other since the garden of the Greek Muses ran desolate to seed. Ronsard and Rabelais, Montaigne and La Fontaine, Moliere and Marivaux, Fontenelle and Montesquieu, Diderot and Voltaire, Musset and Merimee, Daudet and Anatole France—it is to you one returns. You never posed as saints or prophets—you knew too well that one does not travel far on a pedestal; from which the view is exalted, doubtless, but monotonous. You did not wave the banner of the ideal, embroidered with the New Jerusalem on one side and your own portraits on the other. You were not pompously oracular, for you saw too clearly that a tripod is the place rather for a bubbling pot than for a wise man. You believed in so few things that one can believe in you and in them, when others grow to seem fatuous and stale—in good sense and good humour, in l'*amour* and l'***esprit.***

TWO POETS of the PEASANTRY

I

> And still the grass eternal springs
> Where castles stood and grandeur died.
>
> John Clare.

King Edward nods silver-haired and senile in his Palace of Sheen. That feeble head has almost forgotten now Crecy and Poitiers. So has France; where the tide of war turns slowly but resistlessly backwards to the sea. So has England; where city-alley and country-tavern are full of moody faces and muttering discontent. The Prince who fought in those far-off victories lies already, with the slow dust settling on his armour, in the Trinity Chapel of Canterbury; and beside the old King watch now only the harpy's eyes of Alice Perrers. She has been chased once from the Court, by the Good Parliament; the wizard, who helped her to bewitch the King, dragged off to prison; the Bishops pledged to excommunicate her, should she dare return. She has returned; but the Bishops are silent; and the acts of the Good Parliament stand expunged from the statute-book of England. Now again she sits watching for the day when she can grab the last rings from the failing hand that once held both France and Scotland in its grip, and be gone. A few months more, and her vigil will be over, and Europe learn:

> Edward the King is dead; at Westminster
> The carvers smooth the curls of his long beard.

Meanwhile, the times grow worse. John of Gaunt has packed the Bad Parliament to replace the Good; has seen the last Speaker, Peter de la Mare, flung into Nottingham Castle and Wilham of Wykeham, the late Chancellor, hunted with writs up and down his own diocese, till none

dare shelter him; has appeared in person to uphold against the assembled Bishops in St. Paul's John Wiclif, open advocate of confiscating the wealth of the English Church. There is rioting in London; robbery and violence throughout a countryside overrun with unemployed soldiers from the wars in France.

And now, in these months of misgiving and disgrace, a new book is being copied to its close by weary scriveners—a vision, a whole series of them. That indeed is nothing new. Poets, especially since the *Roman de la Rose*, have become a guild of dreamers; falhng punctually asleep on the first page of their work, not to wake again, except at moments, till the last. Only this writer lays himself to rest with a simple grace all his own:

> In a somcr seson • whan soft was the sonne,
> I shope (clad) me in shroudes • as I a shepe (shepherd) were,
> In habite as an hcrcmitc • vnholy of workes,
> Went wyde in this world • wondres to here.
> Ac (but) on a May morninge . on Malverne hulles
> Me byfel a ferly (marvel) • of fairy me thoughte;
> I was wery forwandred • and went me to rest
> Vnder a brode banke • bi a bornes (brook's) side,
> And as I lay and lened . and loked in the wateres,
> I slombred in a slepymg • it sweyucd (flowed) so merye.

Strange, this opening vista of soft sun and laughing stream—for there is to be through all the coming cantos hardly another moment of sun or laughter, to break the grey mists of their melancholy. This beginning, at least, must be familiar to many who as regards the whole work have taken Rousseau's general advice about too lengthy poetry—'Rendons-le court en ne le lisant pas.' The lines were indeed well known already, in this year 1377. A briefer first version of the poem had appeared fifteen years before, in 1362. But the work has now more than doubled its size. The old visions are amplified, not always

for the better; and new dream succeeds to dream, sermon treads on the heels of sermon, till the reader too begins to nod on the author's shoulder. One bold addition, however, at the very outset confronts these discontented subjects of a dying king. It is a fable. Not, indeed, even this, a new fable—our author is no lover of new-fangledness. It is the ancient apologue of the meeting of the rats to bell the cat. But at least a new character appears in it—a mouse (suitable disguise for a poor and timid poet), who yet makes bold 'sternly' to warn the 'route of ratones' that, without the cat to check them, they could not rule themselves and would eat everybody else out of house and home. A cat they must have; and the worse for them, if it is only a kitten. 'Vae terrae ubi puer rex est!'[1] Then, mouselike, the author suddenly whisks back into his hole—'What my fable means, you must guess, good readers'—'Devine ye, for I ne dar (dare not) . bi dere god inhevene!'

He belittled either his hearers' intelligence or his own courage; for his mouse-Latin speaks clearly enough. The cat is the King. The kitten is little Richard, his heir often. And the mouse's moral is equally clear—better a strong monarchy, despite all the monarch's faults, than the domination of that fierce and ravening nobility soon to annihilate itself on the battlefields of the Roses.

But the poem is concerned with far more than cats and kings and political crises. They alone could never have made this unknown writer nearly as widely read as even Chaucer was to be.[2] His real theme—too big for him, and yet a brave attempt—is all mankind, and all eternity. The

[1] Woe to the land where a child is king!

[2] Of *Piers Plowman* forty-seven MSS. have been counted (nearly as many as of the *Canterbury Tales);* as against sixteen of *Troilus and Criseyde.*

English have always had a passion for being improved; as with *The Pilgrim's Progress,* as with *The Testament of Beauty* in our own day, they rushed to read this *Vision of Piers Plowman,* where all classes and conditions of men could find their own faces and their own faults pictured, as in a rough-cut, unflattering looking-glass; or rather, perhaps, as in some turbid river, tortuous in its windings, lapping monotonously down long shoals *of* mud, yet imaging in its grey waters all the coloured life of earth upon its banks and, overhead, the eternal clouds of Heaven, on which the Son of Man seems ever about to appear; though meanwhile across their troubled reflections here below drifts at indolent intervals only an empty bottle or a drowned rat. For no author could be more unconscious of the incongruous, more indifferent about mixing the gross and the sublime. He is a preacher, not an artist; he is concerned to be, not pretty, but wide as the world—a sun of righteousness shining alike on diadem and dunghill. His very prologue embraces in its sweep Heaven, Earth, and Hell. Where Satan on the mountain showed Christ the kingdoms only of this world, and Dante visited only in succession his Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise, this dreamer on Malvern Hills (borrowing a hint perhaps from the staging of the Mysteries) sees all three at once, the Tower of Heaven above him, the dungeon of Hell in a 'merke dale' beneath, and before him, as it were at the foot of the Herefordshire Beacon, the field of Earth, with its vast fair of vanities. There eddy in one black whirlpool together the workers of the world, that 'pleyed ful selde', and the rich that exploit them; brewers and beggars; merchants and minstrels; false friars and cheating pilgrims; grave lawyers and vagabond jesters; noble knights and cook-boys calling:

hote pies, hote,
Gode gris[3] and gees • gowe dyne, gowe!

Accordingly, all readers could count on finding themselves somewhere or other in this vast and comprehensive work. At Court perhaps few looked to see. It is not likely that *Piers Plowman* lay in the lap of Alice Perrers; or that she would have taken much pleasure (any more than Mary Stuart sitting under John Knox) in its bitter picture of her type—that Lady Meed (Gain, Remuneration), 'comune as the cart-wey' and daughter of False, whose portion in her marriage with Favel (Flattery) is 'the erldome of Envye' and 'the lordeship of Lecherye', followed by the bitter reversion hereafter of 'a dwellyng with the devel... with al the purtenaunces of Purgatorie • in-to the pyne of Hclle'. And probably her royal lover never turned his eyes from hers to read the stern warning of Conscience to his King, that his power is conditional on his just use of it; or that prophetic vision of the true constitutional monarch which future centuries were more and more to realise in England:

knyghthod hym ladde,
Might of the comunes • made hym to regne.

Indeed the upper classes in general may well have had as little taste for this hedge-poet with his reminders that *noblesse oblige*—that Piers Plowman is for the knight to protect, not to rack-rent, and that 'ye lovelye ladyes with youre longe fyngres' should use them for the poor—as the beauties and gallants of Whitehall for the preachments of John Bunyan. It is unpleasant to be told

In charnel atte chirche . cherles ben yvel to knowe,
Or a knighte from a knave there • knowe this in thin herte.

One knows that only too well already, without being reminded. Or again:

[3]Young pigs. *(Cf.* Grisedale in the Lake District.)

Lo, lo, lordes, lo . and ladies, taketh hede,
Hit lasteth nat longe . that (that which) is lycour (juice) swete,
As pees-coddes and pere-Ionettes (early pears) • plomes and chines!
That lyghtliche launceth (springs up) . htel while dureth,
And that that rathest (soonest) rypeth • roteth most saunest.

He is certainly a poet, this writer. But after all they had a better poet of their own. And yet Geoffrey Chaucer himself, coming home tired from his ledgers in the Port of London custom-house to sit poring over other volumes of a more congenial kind at home in the gate-house over Aldgatc, until, as the Eagle reminds him in his *House of Fame*, 'fully dawsed is thy loke', may well have taken hints for his own future pictures of friar and pardoner, poor parson and poor ploughman, from this humble and embittered contemporary. It is exaggerated, no doubt to take the remark of Chaucer's parson:

I can nat geste—run, ram, ruf—by lettre,
Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettre—

as a serious sneer at the old-fashioned alliterative verse of *Piers Plowman.* The parson is speaking, not Chaucer; and rhyme, he adds, is 'but htel bettre'. Still 'run, ram, ruf is clearly a little mocking—written, we feel, with a smile. And certainly, as in their metre, so in everything else the two writers stand at opposite extremes—the artist and the moralist, the tolerant spectator of the world and its passionate reformer. Though Chaucer became Knight of the Shire for Kent in 1386, no one would guess that from his works; whereas here in *Piers Plowman* members of Parliament could read again and again the very echoes, as Jusserand points out, of their own grievances and petitions to the Crown. It is most curious to find this writer already the complete Roundhead, combining Puritanism and Parliamentarianism, three centuries before Pym and Cromwell. Even those strange appellations like Zeal-of-the-land-busy and Obadiah-bind-their-kings-in-chains

are here anticipated by Piers, with his wife Dame Worche-whan-tyme-is and his daughter Do-righte-so-or-thi-dame-shal-thee-bete. His son's name occupies nearly two lines; and even the brooks in his country do not murmur to be called 'Beth-buxom(obedient)-of-speche'.

But it was, above all, members of the Church that could find their own likenesses illuminating these crabbed pages, from Pope to acolyte. Not flattering likenesses, mostly, in these years when mediaeval Christianity was rotting fast and simony could gather a hundred thousand ecclesiastics, it is said, to fish for St. Peter's loaves and fishes at Avignon, on the election of Clement VI:

God amende the Pope . that pileth holy kirke,
And cleymeth bifor the kynge . to be keper ouer Crystene,
And counteth nought though Crystene • ben culled (killed) and robbed,
And fynt (maintains) folke to fyghte • and Cristene blood to spille![4]

Cardinals are no better:

The contre is the curseder . that cardynales come inne;
And there (where) they ligge and lenge (he and linger) .moste lecherye there regneth.

As for Bishops, God amend them too! They license pardoners to fleece the poor; or wearing sonorous titles to sees *inpartibus infidelium,* like the Bishop of Bethlehem, instead of going to win converts and die martyrs among their heathen flocks,

Hippe (hop) aboute in Engelonde • to halwe (hallow) mennes auteres (altars).

[4]For the frenzy of feeling against the abuses of the Papacy at Avignon, see *S. Brigittae Revelationes,* I, xli, where Christ says to the Pope: 'Tu autem peior es Lucifero . . . tu es injustior Pilato . . .tu immitior Juda, qui me solum vendidit; tu autem non solum me vendis, sed et animas electorum meorum. Tu abominabilior Iudaeis . . .'. Michelet, who quotes the above, relates how at this time the Visconti were not afraid to offer the Papal legates who brought them a bull of excommunication, the choice of eating it themselves, or being drowned.

Priests, again—it is from their arrogant ranks that Antichrist in person recruits his lifeguards. When he besieges Conscience in the Castle of Unity, and Sloth his lieutenant heads the assault, not at all slothfully (for Allegory, alas, is a lame lady in such details), then—

Proude prestes come with hym . moo (more) than a thousand,
In paltokes (jackets) and pyked (peaked) shoes • and pisseres (soldiers') longe knyves.

And as for holy hermits:

Hercmites on an heep • with hoked staues
Wen ten to Walsingham • and here (their) wenches after;
Crete lobyes (lubbers) and longe . that loth were to swynke (work),
Clotheden hem (themselves) in copis • to ben knowen fram othere;
And shopen hem (made themselves) heremites • here (their) cse to haue.

Even worse fare the friars, with their 'fatte chekus'. Hatred for them starts up at every turn. In the middle of a mention of the Nativity at Bethlehem, like a ferocious laugh, comes the author's interjection:

If any frere were founde there • I gif the (thee) fyve shillynges.

A little hard to expect them to be there before they even existed! But no matter; a good time is coming when they shall exist no longer:

And thanne shal the abbot of Abyndoun • and alle his issu for evere
Haue a knokke of a kynge • and incurable the wounde.

Naturally such a prediction made reformers like Bishop Bale rub their astonished eyes, when nearly two centuries later Henry VIII fulfilled it to the letter—*prophetice plura praedixit quae nostris diebtts itnplcri vidimus;* while even Warton in the eighteenth century wondered for a moment, he tells us, if it were not some later interpolation. But of course this is no isolated utterance, either in the poet or in his period. For him, as for Dante, the gift of temporal power to the Papacy, supposed to have been made by Constantine and only later proved by Renaissance

scholarship to be a clerical forgery, had been a root fertile of all evil:

Whan Costantyn of curtesye . holykirke dowed
With londes and ledes (tenements) • lordeshipes and rentes,
An angel men herde an heigh • at Rome crye,
'Dos ecclesie (the dower of the Church) this day . hath ydronke venym,
And tho (those) that han Petres powere • arn apoysoned alle.'

He does not merely predict, he frankly advocates, confiscation. 'Take their lands, ye lords', he cries boldly; 'why should lords give lands away from their heirs to religious bodies that do not care though it rains on their altars?' And there were already precedents as the fourteenth century opened; the Templars, that mysterious body recalling at once the Foreign Legion and the Freemasons, had been stripped bare and stamped out, for little reason, it appears, except their enormous wealth. Kings of France and even the Free Companies had squeezed the Holy Father himself at Avignon, as if he were a Jew. And the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 will, like Wiclif, include disendowment among their demands. The Age of Faith is dying, slowly but inevitably. Louis XI in the next century can still offer Boulogne to the Blessed Virgin; but he will keep its revenues for himself. And yet so snail-like is the pace of History that the process, fatal to the religious orders of England only two centuries after this, to those of Spain only yesterday, to those of Ireland not till tomorrow, first began to ferment seven centuries ago. Montesquieu once gave Christianity another five hundred years. It was wise of him, whether he proves right or not, to be so much more patient than most prophets. 'Le peuple', as he says elsewhere, 'a toujours trop d'action ou trop peu. Quelquefois avec cent mille bras il renverse tout; quelquefois avec cent mille pieds il ne va que comme les insectes.'

But if the lay readers of *Piers Plowman* relished this roasting and basting of their ecclesiastical neighbours, turning the page they were to find their own thatch not out of danger from the same fiery indignation. For the richer bourgeoisie, we learn, are developing habits of horrible luxury—they have private parlours where they dine nowadays, instead of in open hall as their fathers did, to escape being bothered by beggars; and parlours, too, with chimneys! (One is reminded of the seventeenth-century Cameron of Lochiel, having to pass a night out in the snow with his sons and furiously kicking away the snow-pillow which one of the young men, in his degenerate effeminacy, had not blushed to roll for himself—so relative a thing is 'luxury'.) And then, picking their teeth after dinner, these children of Dives have the presumptuous audacity to debate theological difficulties—'why did God allow snakes in Paradise, to entrap Eve and Adam?—and why should we suffer for their doings, anyway?':

Thus thei dryvele at her deyse (their dais) • the deite to knowe,
And gnawen God with the gorge • whan her gutte is fulle.

It is indeed easier to denounce them than to answer their questions. And then, we gather, they contract mercenary marriages, made, not in Heaven, but by Mammon; and lead cat-and-dog lives ever after:

And though thei don hem (betake themselves) to Donmowe • but if the devel help,
To folwen after the fiicche • fecche thei it neuere.

Lawyers in particular are odious to the poet. They have indeed never been regarded as the saviours of society; only society has never been able to save itself from them. It is easier, he growls, to measure the mist on Malvern Hills than get 'a momme of here mouthe' (a word of their mouths), till they have seen your money. It seems indeed

a litde hard to expect them to give advice for love; but nothing will content this idealist, short of the extinction of the whole profession:

> Kynde love shal come yit . and conscience togideres,
> And make of law a laborere • suche love shal arise.

Doctors, again, are largely 'morthereres'—'lorde hem amende!' Merchants and tradesmen build tall houses out of the proceeds of those dark shops where they cheat their customers. Even the poor do not escape this Cato's lash. They have used the scarcity of labour since the Black Death to force up wages, and he talks of their effrontery in demanding meat fresh and hot, in place of bacon and halfpenny ale, with the same tone of righteous indignation as old ladies used during the war about munition-workers daring to buy furs and pianos.

It is, in fact, a grey, wicked world. The voice of blame grows a little monotonous; but a mediaeval writer has always an Old Guard in reserve, to rally the wavering ranks of weary readers—the Seven Deadly Sins. They are such eternally vital creatures—far more so than the Virtues. And few people are guilty of all seven (though the youthful Swinburne did once enliven a party by declaring it his ambition to have seven towers in which to enact one of them on each day of the week), so that the sinful reader, who is feeling depressed by the faults he has, can console himself with the spectacle of those he has not. Two centuries later in Marlowe, when Lucifer and Beelzebub come hot from Hell to entertain Dr. Faustus, their first idea is still this ancient recipe. 'We will highly gratify thee', say they. And Faustus is indeed excessively gratified:

> That sight will be as pleasing unto me,
> As Paradise was to Adam, the first day
> Of his creation.

Nor is he disappointed when the Sins duly appear, dilate on their own extreme wickedness, and depart; 'O, this feeds my soul', is his reply, when Lucifer politely enquires how he has enjoyed it all. And we are left marvelling at our forefathers' idea of a really entertaining evening. It would be priggish to pretend that the Seven Deadly Sins have lost all appeal for us; but we like them a little better disguised, and in a subtler fancy-dress. The Middle Ages, however, nourished a disinterested affection for the Devil which our cold hearts cannot understand. For the same reason in the Morality Play it is the supreme moment when the devil Tityvillus is ramping and roaring behind the scenes on the brink of entry, that is chosen for sending the hat round. Out with your sixpences, 'yf ye wyll se hys abhomynabull presens'! Who could tliink of economy at such a time?

Our author is no exception. He trots in the sacred Seven five times in all; but it is the scene of their repentance that provides one of the most redeeming features of his whole pious but protracted work. Here he becomes for the modern reader not merely, as in many of the passages above, a curious relic of our past, but an artist of the grotesque not unworthy of comparison with Swift, Hogarth, and Dickens. Dunbar's Deadly Sins merely dance a wild Highland fling; Marlowe's are curt and stiff as an Elizabethan woodcut; Spenser's provide a rich fantastic pageant like an Italian fresco; but these, by confessing what they have done, instead of being simply word-painted externally, thereby start with the definite advantage, from a literary point of view, of having a past, as well as being present, and existing in time as well as space. Thus they anticipate the seventeenth-century Character. There is even something of the full-grown novelist's quality about several of them—Envy going to

church only to be distracted from the service by the enraging discovery that 'Eleyne' has bought 'a newe cote'; Wrath, as cook in a convent-kitchen, setting the nuns *to* slap each others' faces by spreading scandals—that dame Johanne was a bastard, and dame Peronelle had one 'in cherry-time'; Avarice, who in the innocence of his heart mistakes 'restitution' to mean 'stealing', knowing, as he pleads in excuse, 'no Frenche but of the ferthest ende of Norfolke'; or Sloth, the hunting parson, far better at finding a hare in a furrow than a meaning in his breviary. Such figures are less picturesque than Spenser's allegorical pageant; but they are far more individual; and their appearances are by no means neglected. Thus Wrath wakes:

> with two whyte eyen
> And nyvelynge (snivelling) with the nose • and his nekke hangynge.[5]

Sloth, on the other hand, comes 'al bislabered with two sly my eighen', and drops heavily into the nearest chair; while Avarice

> Was biterbrowed (beede-browed) • and baberlipped (thick-lipped) also,
> With two blered eyghen • as a blynde hagge;
> And as a letheren purs • lolled his chekes
> Wel sydder (lower) than his chyn . thei chiueled (shivered) for elde;
> And, as a bondman, of his bacoun • his berde was bidraueled (bedraggled).
> With an hode on his hed • a lousi hatte aboue,
> And in a tauni tabard (coat) • of twelue wynter age,
> Al totorne and baudy (dirty) • and ful of lys crcpynge;
> But if that (unless) a lous . couthe haue lopen (leapt) the bettre,
> She sholde noughte have walked . on that welche (flannel) . so was it thrcdebare.

[5]Dr. Coulton, with characteristic thoroughness, has checked this description by Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions*, x, 'Anger': 'The dilated nostrils quiver. . . . According to Gratiolet, the pupils are always contracted in rage… head inclined forwards… this protrusion of the head and body seems a common gesture with the enraged.'

But, deservedly, the best known of these gargoyles is Gluttony, whose steps churchward are somehow diverted into a tavern full of very strange company; drunken and vomiting, in the end, he is lugged home by wife and wench, only to wake after two days' torpor and stutter, as he wakes, 'Where is the wine-bowl?'

I have dwelt on these passages because the general reader finds *Piers Plowman,* with its linguistic difficulties and its prolixities, usually too formidable. But anyone who wonders what life was like in those mediaeval hovels past which Chaucer rides with quick eyes averted and Froissart with polite finger to nostril, should follow Glotoun to his pot-house. It is no perfumer's; its description is revolting enough to move the envious admiration of a certain type of modern writer:

> His guttis gunne (began) to gothcly • as two gredy sowes;
> He pissed a potel . in a *pater-noster-while.*

And there is yet worse to follow. But it is worth seeing for once this grey and seamy underside of the cloth-of-gold of chivalry. When Chaucer handles fraud and vice, it is with such a delighted curiosity and interest in life that the sting is taken out of them. When his swindling alchemical canon rides after his pilgrims:

> But it *was joye* for to se him swete,
> His forehed dropped as a stillatorie;

when his perfectly unconscionable pardoner preaches to his simple-hearted dupes:

> Than peyne I me to strecche forth my necke,
> And est and west upon the people I bekke,
> As doth a dowfe, sitting on a berne (barn);
> Myn hondes and my tonge goon so yerne (eagerly)
> That it is *joye* to se my busynesse.

For us it is indeed; but to the author of *Piers Plowman,* poor, oppressed, puritanical, such tilings are not at all a joy; they are past a joke—matters rather for rage and fury.

He was no japer', to find laughter in such things. He has little use indeed for laughter in general: 'iapers and ianglers' for him are 'Judas' chyldrcn'.

Has his vast poem then no heroes, no praise, no sympathies? Yes; but these all belong to the humblest upon earth:

Souteres (cobblers) and shepherdes • suche lewed Iottes (humble creatures)
Percen with a *pater-noster* • the paleys of hevene.

Amid all his wanderings and maunderings, his preachings and prosings, the courage of his pity for the poor, for 'the wo of these women that wonyeth (dwell) in cotes (cottages)', stands out to do this strange writer honour and lend him flashes of passionate eloquence:

Lo! briddes and bestes • that no bhsse ne knoweth (that know no happiness),
And wilde wormes in wodes • thorw wyntres thow hem grevest,
And makest hem welnyegh mekc . and mylde for dcfaute (through privation),
And after thow sendest hem somer • that is her (their) sovereigne Ioye,
And blisse to alle that ben . bothe wilde and tame.

Shall the poor, then, never have their turn? After all, even Angels that in helle now ben . hadden Ioye some tyme.

And again:

Pore peple, thi prisoneres . lorde, in the put (pit) of myschief,
Conforte tho creatures • that moche care soffren
Thorw derth, thorw drouth . all her (their) dayes here,
Wo in wynter tymes . for wantyng of clothes,
And in somer tyme selde . soupen to the fullc;
Comforte thi careful • Cryst, in thi ryche (kingdom),
For how thou confortest all creatures . clerkes bereth witnesse.

Five years before the first version of the poem appeared in 1362, the villeins of France, maddened at length past bearing by having the Hundred Years' War fought upon their trampled carcasses, rose to inflict on their oppressors cruelties even more fiendish than they had endured. They

chose for their king one whom they renamed by the general nickname given to them all—'Jacques Bonhomme'; whom in mockery of his kingship the victorious Dauphin crowned with a red-hot trivet in the end, before hanging him. So here the English peasant likewise finds a leader, an incarnation, an ideal—Piers Plowman; whose humble stature grows, as dream merges into dream, until he is boldly revealed as no other than Christ Himself. It is only this simple ploughman who can guide the pilgrims who seek the road to Truth; just as in real life and in years soon to come another peasant, Joan the Maid, was *to* lead France along the road to Liberty.[6]

And the new Gospel of this new Messiah? It is the same as the old. Love is all 'the triacle (treacle, salve) of hevene'.

> *Disce,* quod (quoth) he, *doce • dilige inimicos.*
> Lerne to love, quod Kynde (Nature) • and leve of allc othre'.

For, without love—

> Ye ne have no more meryte • in masse ne (nor) in houres,
> Than Malkyn of hire maydenhode • that no man desireth.

It is deeds that matter, more than any creeds. It is Truth himself who sends Piers a pardon of un-Roman simplicity—'Those who have done good shall go into eternal life, those who have done evil into eternal flame.' A

[6]To modern readers of the poem this pilgrimage to find Truth, led by a ploughman, seems the extreme of unreal allegory; it is worth remembering that it would seem far less fantastic in a century which had witnessed that strange movement of the 'pastoureaux' (shepherds) from Northern France through Paris to the south in 1320. Led by an unfrocked priest and an apostate monk, leaving their flocks and herds of swine to look after themselves and carrying only staff and scrip, they set out to recover the Holy Land—a task diey believed reserved for them alone. After religiously massacring all the Jews on their way, they were cut to pieces by troops at Toulouse and strung up by twenties and thirties on the trees. (Michelet, v. 6.)

priest whom he meets, indeed, with professional jealousy laughs at such home-made salvation; so that poor Piers tears up his pardon in despair and the dreamer wakes, full of perplexity. Yet Truth, he cannot but believe, spoke truly after all. Goodness remains what matters; and his own charity spreads out beyond the barriers of the Church, with a tolerance rare in his day, to embrace, if it may be, even Jews and Saracens and noble pagans like Trajan, whose just dealing according to the legend (again we are reminded of Dante) saved him from among the lost, though unbaptized. Indeed the poet's troubled sense of justice leads him into the very doubts he so angrily attacks the rich for indulging at dessert—'why should Aristotle and Solomon be "ydampned" for all their wisdom, while evil-doers like David, Mary Magdalene, St. Paul, or a thief even, are given a chance to repent and redeem themselves?' He cannot understand it at all. His charity in its anxious tenderness will even cheat and quibble like Portia's. 'Iustus vix salvabitur' he twists to mean, not 'hardly shall the just be saved', but 'the just *shall* be saved, though it *may* be difficult'. For a moment this grey face even grows radiant, as he dreams of Palm Sunday and how

> Olde Iuwes of Ierusalem • for Ioye thei songen.

Yet always the clouds return; till at the end the hosts of Antichrist close in on the Fortress of Unity, Contricioun is stupefied by the treachery of a flattering friar, and Conscience left to trudge alone across the world in search of Piers Plowman—in how anguished and endless a search, the Reformation was to find.

Almost always this sadness returns to the poet, each time he awakes from his dream to reality—whether in Cornhill, thinking how little he is esteemed, how little indeed he deserves to be; or 'metelees and monelees on

Malvern hulks'; or sad because the priest in his dream jeered at Piers' pardon; or, on other occasions, 'witles nerehande (almost)'—'wo-werie and wetschod'—'hevy-chered'. Only once is he wakened happily, by the pealing of the Easter bells. He can scourge mankind; he can exhort them; but when the fit is over, the dreamer's chin sinks brooding on his breast again.

Who was he, and what? About himself he tells us little: others tell us less. In 1377 he speaks of his age as forty-five. 'Long Will' he calls himself, 'a moche (tall) man' and too lank to stoop at farm-labour; which is one reason for his avoiding it and taking the tonsure as a clerk of the lowest order in the Church. In that humble station he can marry; but, having married, he must be content to keep his station. His wife, we gather, is called Kitte, his daughter Kalote. Migrating from Malvern to Cornhill, he subsists by singing masses for the dead; also by begging invitations from the living; perhaps too by copying documents. For his father and friends had sent him to school and he speaks in the proud tone of one who knows, about accurate transcription. Happy monastery school!—it remains a heaven on earth in his way-worn memory:

> In cloistre cometh no man • to chide ne to fighte,
> But allc is buxumnessc (obedience) there • and bokes to rede and to lerne.

This regret is characteristic. He is one of those who find the adult world hard to cope with and sigh for their happy nonage back again. But though school-loving, he is not learned. The curse of Reuben has followed him even there—'The (thee) were lef (you would like) to lerne' says Clergy reproachfully, 'but loth for to stodie'. He cannot resist sometimes a little innocent ostentation of his culture—he could quote, if he liked, so many authorities in praise of poverty:

Porfirie and Plato,
Aristotle, Ovidius • and ellevene hundred,
Tullius, Tholomeus • ich can nat telle (count) here (their) names.

Aristotle indeed with his insistence on leisured competence, not poverty, as a necessity of the good life might have been rather taken aback, like Ovid, to find himself here; and we need not ask Cicero's opinion of a Latinist who can elsewhere translate 'tabescebam' as 'I said nothing', as if it were 'tacescebam', and 'non mechaberis' as 'Thou shalt not kill', as if it were 'non necabis'. This incompetence too is typical; life likewise was more than this troubled heart could construe. In his own words, of theology:

The more I muse there-inne • the mistier it semeth,
And the depper I devyne • the derker me it thinketh.

Outside sources add little to our knowledge of him. Manuscripts entitle the first part of his poem *Visio Willelmi.* Notes in two of them add the surname by which the world has come to know him—'Langland'. One of these notes adds that he was born at Cleobury Mortimer, ' within viii myles of Malborne hylles'; another states that he was the son (presumably illegitimate) of a gentleman *(generosus)* called Stacy de Rokayle. The de Rokayles are known to have been dependents of the Despensers, who had a castle at Hanley between Malvern and the Severn. And recently the enterprise of Mr. A. H. Bright has unearthed a field known as 'Langland (s)' near Ledbury; which *is* 'within viii myles' of Malvern, whereas Cleobury is twenty-three. In its neighbourhood are to be found all requirements for Langland's vision—a brook; the Herefordshire Beacon of the Malvern Hills, with, once, a castle on its top; a dale beneath, with another castle; and even a local tradition that this was the place of the poet's dream.

However, while research on the one part is busy finding where the vision was seen, research on the other has been busy destroying the man who saw it. We are told he was five different people; or four essentially, the fifth being insignificant.

This is not the place, nor am I the person, to deal in detail with this large and prickly proposition of Professor Manly's. I can only say that these 'schismatics' who 'the plain believers quit' may be right, but that they have done very little to prove it. The futile dust of bickering which obscured for a century and a half the fame of Homer has apparently failed to teach English experts at this process of splitting authors the essential lesson that their very premisses are arbitrary. They never consider how much evidence is really needed to disprove unity of authorship in general. They assume, for the purposes of their game (which would indeed otherwise often become impossible to play) that the creative mind works with all the noble precision of their own—that authors cannot be inconsistent, or contradict themselves, or misunderstand their own work in revision, or catch temporary tricks of style, vocabulary, metre, only to lose them again a little further on, and in fact be generally will-o'-the-wisp. Add to this that the learned are almost as good at inventing inconsistencies as at discovering them. No doubt the later versions *of Piers Plowman* with their chaotic labyrinths of digression and irrelevance do seem the work of a mind as incapable of clear, connected thinking as a kitten with a cotton-reel of sewing a sampler. But it has yet to be shown that this mind was not William Langland's.[7] He

[7] An astonishing instance of the general vagueness of the mediaeval mind may be seen in 13 71 when Parliament voted a tax on **the** assumption that there were 40,000 parishes in England; and had hastily to reassemble a quorum and vote a new measure on

was really, I think, not so much incapable of relevance, as reckless about it; his poem, fairly lucid at first, became for him, as for Goethe the second part of *Faust,* a sort of treasured playbox into which he could not resist cramming every new idea as it occurred to him. He could not bear to lose a single crumb of his conceptions. He is not the first writer who has spoilt his work with second thoughts. Did not someone say of Sainte-Beuve's *Lundis* 'il n'a pas le temps de les gater'? Those who contrast their liveliness with the gluey pages of Sainte-Beuve's inappropriately named novel, *Volupte,* can well believe it. *Piers Plowman* may seem at times like the work of Juliet's Nurse turned religious in her old age; but the work of four different men it does not seem to me to be, in spite of the efforts of 'ye lovelye ladyes with youre longe fyngres', researching in women's colleges, to tear it finally asunder. Too vividly there peers between the lines, throughout, the same lank, pale, tormented countenance, with the humourlessness of the struggling self-made man, the bookish severity of the born priest, the pathos and bitterness of another Jude the Obscure.

Obscure his destiny has since remained. Four years after the second version of 1377 Piers Plowman rose in rebellion.[8] The Peasants' Revolt of 13 81 must have horrified Langland, who wanted, not social revolution, but

discovering that the number of parishes was really only 9,000. (G. M. Trevelyan, *Eng. in the Age of Wycliffe,* p. 6.)

[8] It is curious what a wave of proletarian revolt there seems to have been through Western Europe at this time—alike in England, France, and Flanders. The upper classes were seriously frightened; 'on peut bien croire et imagined, says Froissart, 'que toute gentilesse et noblesse eut etc morte et perdue en France et autant bien ens es autre pays', (li, 137.)

moral reform for all within that state into which it had originally pleased God to call them. Yet the outbreak brought with it, frightening yet flattering, a strange tribute to his influence among the masses of his countrymen—the famous letter of John Ball, the insurgent priest, to the men of Essex: 'John Schep, som tyme Seynt Marie prest of Yorke, and nowe of Colchcstre, greteth welle Johan Nameles, and Johan the Mullere, and Johan Cartere, and biddeth hem that thei ware of gyle in borugh, and stondeth togiddir in Goddis name, and biddeth Peres Ploughman go to his werke, and chastise welle Hobbe the robber, and taketh with you Johan Trewman, and alle his felaws, and no mo, and loke schappe you to one heued (shape you to one head, serve one leader), and no mo.

> Johan the Mullcr hath ygrownde smal, smal, smal;
> The Kyngis sone of hevene shalle paye for alle.
> Be ware or (before) ye be wo,
> Knoweth your frende fro youre foo,
> Haveth ynowe, and seythe, Hoo (enough!);
> And do welle and bettre,[9] and fleth synne,
> And seketh pees, and holde therynne.
> And so biddeth Johan Trewman and alle his felawes.'

In the same way it was those whom *Piers Plowman* had most denounced that were now marked out by the rebels for doom—prelates, lawyers, religious houses. The Archbishop of Canterbury was dragged from the Tower and

[9]Allusions to the visions, in the poem, of Do-well and Do-bet. It is interesting, as showing how natural and deep-rooted such allegory was in the popular mind of the Middle Ages, that a century and a half later, when the poor weavers of another rising, that of 1523, were asked by the Duke of Norfolk who their leader was, one John Green replied in exactly the same strain—'My lord, since you ask who is our captain, forsooth his name is Poverty, for he and his cousin Necessity have brought us to this doing.' (Hackett, *Henry VIII*, p. 213.)

decapitated amid the yells and cat-calls of the mob;[10] religious houses were stormed; and lawyers above all found themselves so hunted down that it was death in some places to be seen wearing an ink-horn. Both then and when reaction, that summer, covered the fields of Kent and Essex with their grim harvest of gibbets, Langland must have been glad to lie low. A third and last time in the nineties, with a more cautious hand, he revised his great patchwork quilt. There are signs now of enfeeblement; though in a gallant effort to keep up with the times the old man equips the defences of the Devil against Christ's Harrowing of Hell with 'brasene gonnes'—just a little less incongruous, perhaps, than those Malory gives to Sir Modred in his revolt against King Arthur, or Chaucer to Augustus at Actium. But there is no reference at all in this final version to the rising of the poor serfs who had taken in vain the name of Piers Plowman in

[10]The vocal powers of the rebels seem particularly to have shaken the nerves of their betters. Walsingham, the monk of St. Albans, gives an amazing account of this scene and the behaviour of these 'rustici, ribaldi perditissimi, ganeones daemoniaci'—Piers Plowman seen from a very different angle. 'Factus est clamor horrendissimus, non similis clamonbus quos edere solent homines, sed qui ultra omnem aestimationem supcraret omnes clamores humanos, et maxime posset assimulari ululatibus infernalium incolarum . . . replebantur guttura multisoms mugitibus, vel, quod est verius, vocibuspavonumdiabolicis.' This 'diabolical squalling of peacocks' recalls the even more extraordinary account of the rising by Gower *(Vox Clamantis,* I, xi), which is a curiosity not to be missed. His pen trembles in his hand as he describes the rabble with their hideous names:

> Watte vocat, cui Thomme venit, neque Symme retardat,
> Bette que Gibbe simul Hykke venire iubent.

They sneeze as fiercely as asses, bellow like bulls, grunt still more horribly, like swine—'porcorum grunnitus horridiores'; they bark like dogs, howl like wolves, roar like lions, buzz like wasps, hiss like geese. It all recalls some Bolshevik caricature of a quaking bourgeoisie.

1381. By 1399, before the fall of his ill-fated 'kitten', Richard II, the poet himself seems to have been dead.

His very grave was soon forgotten. His work lived on orphaned of his name. Yet it lived. Piers Plowman became a stock figure, like the now almost equally extinct John Bull during the last two centuries. Nameless hands compose *Pierce the Ploughman s Crede, The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman unto Christe, A lytell Geste howe the Plowman lerned his Pater Noster;* then, as the passions of the Reformation revive interest in this ancient satirist of the Church, *Pyers Plowmans Exortation vnto the Lordes, Knightes, Burgoysses of the Parly ament House* (1547-53) and *A goodlye Dialogue and Dysputacion between Pyers Ploweman and a Popish Preest* (c. 1548). In 15 50 *Piers Plowman* itself attained the dignity of print. Crowley, its printer, admonishes his readers that, its alliterative system once grasped, 'The metre shall be very pleasaunt to reade'; and that the language though 'somewhat darcke' need not deter them, if only they will pull themselves together and 'not sticke to break the shell of the nutte for the kernelles sake'—the kernel being the benefit of finding their own shortcomings 'here most charitably rebuked'. The appetite of our ancestors for being 'charitably rebuked' and also, no doubt, for seeing the Papists rebuked not so charitably, carried the book through three editions in that one year and a fourth in 1561. There are also allusions *to* the poem in Bishops Bale and Ridley, echoes in Skclton and Spenser, a paraphrase of part by Drayton. Stow makes its author a Fellow of Oriel; David Buchanan (?I595-?1652) with Scottish patriotism boldly transplants him, in the frock of 'a Benedictine monk', to Aberdeen. By Puttenham and Meres he is fitted, looking rather lost and uncomfortable, into a place in the polite literary pedigree of Satire, between Juvenal and Bishop Hall; a classification

repeated by Milton the better to annoy the same bishop, who had rashly claimed to be himself the first of English satirists. It is even possible that Milton may also have read the C-text, then only in manuscript, if indeed he borrowed from Langland that infernal artillery which too successfully bowls over the angels, and the reader also, in *Paradise Lost.* But that is not, after all, so happy an idea that it might not have occurred to both writers independently. So too, though Bunyan may have read his predecessor both for *The Pilgrim's Progress* and for *The Holy War,* it has to be remembered that allegories tend of their nature to have a family likeness. To some, indeed, these years when a Puritan farmer of Huntingdon had become master of England and the dread of Europe, may well have seemed the reign of Piers Plowman realised on earth. But with the Restoration the writer whom Fuller could still celebrate as 'the Morning-star' of the Reformation and 'by *Prolepsis* a Protestant' was fast setting out of sight. The eighteenth century leaves him to its learned—Hearne, Percy, Warton, Tyrwhitt, Ritson. Byron indeed, who in 1807 finds him superior to Chaucer (a writer 'obscene and contemptible'), may even have read him. The fact remains that for two hundred and fifty-two years, from 1561 to 1813, there was not a single edition. Since then posterity has made amends, above all by the devoted work of Skeat. And if the poet has been torn limb from limb by Professor Manly and his followers, he has been admirably put together again and his integrity defended by the late M. Jusserand, most cultured and persuasive of ambassadors, and by Professor R. W. Chambers.

Indeed perhaps a little more than due amends have been made to him. When scholars have given, pelican-like, their heart's-blood to reanimate some creation long dead, it is most natural that they should be tempted *to* over-value

the fosterling that has cost them so much. And so when Skeat judges Langland, not indeed (like Byron) greater than Chaucer, but 'equally admirable'; when he cries that 'the supposition of such passages being written by a poet of less power than William is like supposing there may have been two Shakespeares', with such foster-parental fondness one may sympathise but cannot, surely, even begin to agree.

What is there actually in Langland for the ordinary reader, in a world already overcrowded with good literature? As a whole, his poem is impossible—floundering, unintelligent, as out of date as a dinosaur. Allegories and sermons we find to-day almost unreadable at best; certainly when, as here, they topple over one another in seething queues to get at us, there is nothing for it but to run. Allegory indeed is a sort of literary algebra. It can please still, but only when handled with a certain mathematical exactitude, a certain witty neatness of mind; as, for instance, with the Musical Banks in *Ercwhon.* In the parables of the *New Testament,* in a Morality like *Everyman,* in La Fontaine and Bunyan, Swift and Samuel Butler, such symbolism still succeeds, because it is straightforward; in Langland, in Spenser, in Blake's prophetic books it fails because it is muddled, and is redeemed only in part by their other qualities. Allegory is in short a shoe that must fit perfectly, neither too rigid nor too loose, if the work that stands on it is not to limp or shuffle to a lame conclusion. It is in a word no use, like Spenser, making your hero slay Error, only to be led into error by someone else a moment after.

And if Langland's method has lost its appeal, so too, for many of us, has his message. His theology has become mythology. The Seven Deadly Sins have retired from public life; we struggle in their place with seventy-seven

billion particular cases of conduct, too complicated for such simple principles. Dragons have given place to microbes; chariots to internal-combustion engines, which it takes more than hammer and bellows to put to rights. And on the positive side does not a great weariness fall upon the mind at injunctions to love everybody, as a panacea for the world's ills? Is it not strange that men should have been so slow to discover that the verb 'to love' has never existed, outside grammar-books, in the imperative mood? And do we really want to love the inhabitants of Tasmania, or to be loved by them ? Stretched so widely, the word 'love' forfeits all its depth; to gain the world, it loses its meaning.

Why then read Langland? Partly for his human interest. A character like his, which never relaxes its stern sincerity to trifle even for a moment, is always apt to grow boring; yet it is always interesting also. Naked souls are rare; most of them go masked beyond recognition; but Langland, whatever his faults, always rings true. And together with himself he has revealed a great deal of this strange mediaeval world that bred him. But Langland is more than food for historians. He is also a vivid artist in his own way—a poet gifted both in eye and ear. To think that he would one day be read for his style, would doubtless have filled him with rage and despair that human souls could be so frivolous. Yet such is the common lot of preachers and moralists. It has happened to *Ecclesiastes* and Isaiah and Plato, to Dante and Donne, to Bunyan and Jeremy Taylor. It is simply that men's feelings about beauty are more vital than their theories about good. Hence this extraordinary fact, which from its familiarity we take for granted, that we can still enjoy even the expression of ideas (like Donne's, for instance) as obsolete and disgusting, morally, as the old clothes left

by a tramp in a ditch, simply for the sake of their language and their imagery. Ruskin was enraged to find it already happening to him in his own lifetime—he thundered of social injustice, and people applauded his style. It happened, too, long before he died, to D. H. Lawrence. So with Langland. We can still quicken with enjoyment at the homespun vividness of the comparisons in his pages, not unlike the rustic wit of Hardy's peasants or of Synge's—'wroth as the wynde'; 'hende (courteous) as hounde is in kychyne'; 'naked as a nedle'; or, of a woman, 'comune as the cart-wey'; or again, of her opposite, 'chaste as a childe . that in cherche wepeth'; or again when, in a rare moment, the poet himself grows 'fayne (glad) as foule of faire morwe'. And there is a curious lyric lilt at moments about his lumbering, shaggy metre, as in that half-regretful picture of his own abandoned youth:

Concupiscencia carnis • colled (clasped) me aboute the nekke,
And seyde, 'Thou art yonge and yepe (strong) • and hast yeresynowe
Forto lyve longe • and ladyes to lovye'.

Yet he can never be depended on; it would be appalling to think that poetry can contain two lines more hideous in their gobbling cacophony, as of a bad cold in the head, than these from the Parable of the Talents:

And binam hym (took from him) his mnam (Mina, Greek coin) .—
for he ne wolde worche,
And yaf that mnam to hym • that ten mnames haddc.

Taken as a whole, with its drab monotony of manner, matter, and metre (of which brief quotations can give little conception), his work seems at times like a vast undulating desert through which the reader toils from dusty dune to dune, like a Crusader struggling on in pursuit of a mirage and a Sepulchre, by the shores of a Dead Sea. Yet there are instants when this dreamer stops searching his heart for sin and repentance to look up at the world about him, and suddenly we see again the

green England that bred both him and us, with singing birds in its May time and streams that sway merrily:

And thus I went wide-where • walkyng mine one (by myself),
By a wilde wildernesse . and bi a wode-syde.
Blisse of the briddes . abyde me made,
And vnder a lynde (linden) vppon a launde (meadow) • lened I a stounde (while),
To lythe (listen to) the layes . the louely foules made.
Murthe of her mouthes - made me there to slepe;
The merueillousest meteles (dream) • mette me thanne
That euer dremed wyghte • in worlde, as I wene.

It calms him always to contemplate Nature. God feeds at least His other creatures:

Firste the wylde worme • vnder weet erthe,
Fissch to lyve in the flode . and in the fyr the crykat,
The corlue (curlew), by kynde, of the eyre • moste cleanest flessch of bryddes.

But though the curlew may live on air, this poet cannot subsist long on the atmosphere of pure poetry; he has always to stoop earthward to catch his wriggling moral. He will begin:

I seigh (saw) the sonne and the see . and the sonde after,
And where that bryddes and bestes • by here makes (mates) thei yeden (went),
Wylde wormes in wodes • and wonderful foules,
With flekked fetheres • and of fele (many) coloures. . . .

but all this is contrived only to lead up to a contrast between the edifying restraint of these creatures, which make love only in the breeding-season, and the looser habits of mankind. Again:

The fairest foule • foulest engendreth,
And feblest foule of flyght is • that fleegheth or swymmeth;
And that is the pekok and the pohenne • proude riche men thei bitokneth,
For the pekok, and (if) men pursue hym • may nought fleighe heighe;
For the traillyng of his taille . overtaken is he sone,
And his flessne is foule flesshe • and his *feet* bothe,
And unlouelich of ledene (voice) • and laith (loathly) for to here.

There is indeed a blessed relief in such glimpses of the countryside and its creatures, even with sermons appended to peacocks' tails. But such moments are brief. The mists of melancholy soon settle again on Malvern Hills, and the endless procession of grey vapours resumes its march across the world of William Langland.

II

There remains something appealing about this sodden clayland, with its sadly dripping coverts, where Piers Plowman drives his furrow. We have a sense that this is, after all, the England of our ancestry; just as our memories of the neighbourhood where we passed our own childhood, even if sometimes tinged with dislike, keep a certain persistent and clinging vitality of their own. Yet, after an hour or two of mediaeval Malvern, I always find myself longing for a bluer, harder sky and lands less widowed of the sun. There comes back to me, though dim and blurred like a face not seen since long ago, the ridge of Helicon, as it rose to southward, though too far aside to reach, when I walked from Delphi *to* Lebadeia. I had spent two nights sleeping among wood-shavings on the first floor of a half-built house in Arachova, vainly hoping for the mists to lift from Parnassus. I had eaten my hard-boiled eggs at that parting *of* the ways where Oedipus, coming too from Delphi, once met and killed his father. And I can still recall that glen leading up into the heart of Helicon, and the mixture of relief and yet regret with which I turned past it, along the track towards Lebadeia and the railway for Athens. After three weeks alone in the mountains of Northern Greece the longing to hear English speech again had grown too intense; and the sole of my right boot ended an inch short of the toe. And yet, just as intensely, here in these wet green wastes

of Piers Plowman's English Midlands I find myself longing, almost homesick, for that Greek wilderness again—the cloudless clearness of its distances; the clean, sharp sculpture of its limestone mountains, naked but for their scattered pine and holm-oak and pale, spectral asphodel; the blue of its sky at dawn and sunset, bitten into by the hilltops with their hard and splendid line. It was twenty-two centuries before Langland that here on Helicon another ploughman met with his very different vision of Poetry. He too was living dimly in the twilight of a heroic age, a world grown meaner and smaller since the day of seven-gated Thebes and windy Troy. He is as far from Homer's chivalry as Langland from Froissart's. Achilles, like the Black Prince, is a memory, only more remote; and in his place sit 'gift-devouring kings', like John of Gaunt. But it is not for them with their ill-gotten riches, but for the poor that Hcsiod,[11] like Langland, sings. He is no court-minstrel. 'The poet of Helots' King Clcomenes was *to* call him, in after years. Like an old shepherd piping among the fallen, moss-grown columns of a palace of forgotten kings, he uses the splendours of the Homeric hexameter to talk of ploughing and of bullocks. And yet, like Langland, he too writes of loftier things as well, of prayer as well as labour, of Heaven and Hell, of God and man, of good and evil, with all the homespun wisdom, the proverbs, the fables, of the poor.

[11] With Hesiod, as with Langland, doubts have been raised whether he is the author of all the work attributed to him. The *Theogony*, a verse-mythology, and the *Works and Days*, on agriculture, may be by different poets; though it seems to me absurd to argue from the mention of the name hesiod' at the beginning of the *Theogony* that he did *not* write the latter. Poets can and, in periods when authorship is difficult to prove, often do name themselves. In any case both these didactic works belong to a Boeotian rural school; and we are mainly concerned here with the *Works and Days*.

Prometheus and Satan, Pandora and Eve, the Fall of the Titans and the Harrowing of Hell—such minor parallels between Hesiod and Langland are easy to multiply. But parallels in literature are mainly curiosities; it is the differences behind the likenesses that are really revealing. And here they are immense, from the very first lines of the *Theogony:*

Μουσάων Ἑλικωνιάδων ἀρχώμεθ' ἀείδειν,
αἵθ' Ἑλικῶνος ἔχουσιν ὄρος μέγα τε ζάθεόν τε,
καί τε περὶ κρήνην ἰοειδέα πόσσ' ἁπαλοῖσιν
ὀρχεῦνται, καὶ βωμὸν ἐρισθενέος Κρονίωνος·
καί τε λοεσσάμεναι τέρενα χρόα Περμησσοῖο,
ἢ Ἱππουκρήνης, ἢ Ὀλμειοῦ ζαθέοιο,
ἀκροτάτῳ Ἑλικῶνι χοροὺς ἐνετοιήσαντο
καλούς, ἱμερόεντας, ἐπερρώσαντο δὲ ποσσίν.
ἔνθεν ἀπορνύμεναι, κεκαλυμμέναι ἠέρι πολλῇ,
ἐννύχιαι στεῖχον, περικαλλέα ὄσσαν ἱεῖσαι,
ὑμνεῦσαι Δία τ' αἰγίοχον, καὶ πότνιαν Ἥρην
Ἀργείην, χρυσέοισι πεδίλοις ἐμβεβαυῖαν,
κούρην τ' αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς γλαυκῶπιν Ἀθήνην,
Φοῖβόν τ' Ἀπόλλωνα, καὶ Ἄρτεμιν ἰοχέαιραν,
ἠδὲ Ποσειδάωνα γαιήοχον, ἐννοσίγαιον,
καὶ Θέμιν αἰδοίην, ἑλικοβλέφαρόν τ' Ἀφροδίτην,
Ἥβην τε χρυσοστέφανον, καλήν τε Διώνην,
Ἠώ τ', Ἠέλιόν τε μέγαν, λαμπράν τε Σελήνην,
Λητώ τ', Ἰάπετόν τε, ἰδὲ Κρόνον ἀγκυλομήτην,
Γαῖάν τ', Ὠκεανόν τε μέγαν, καὶ Νύκτα μέλαιναν,
ἄλλων τ' ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων.

Αἵ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδήν,
ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ὑπὸ ζαθέοιο.
τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπαν
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
Ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἷον,
ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα·
ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι.
Ὣς ἔφασαν κοῦραι μεγάλου Διὸς ἀρτιέπειαι,
καί μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον, δάφνης ἐριθηλέος ὄζον
δρέψασαι θητητόν.

Let the Heliconian Muses first be sung,
Mistresses of the great and holy Hill
Of Helicon, where with their delicate *feet*
They dance about the violet-shadowed spring
And the high altar of great Cronion.
With beauty new-bathed in Termessus' fountain,
Or Hippocrene, or Olmeios adored,
Round topmost Helicon they drew their dancing—
Lovely, entrancing, the lilt of their rushing feet:
Then, mantled with the mist, they took their way
Across the midnight. Sweet their voices rang,
Of Cronus, the Aegis-wielder, and Hera singing—
Queen Hera, Lady of Argos, shod with gold,
And the Aegis-wicldcr's child, grey-eyed Athene;
Of Phoebus Apollo and arrowy Artemis,
Poseidon, earth-embracer and earth-shaker,
Grave Themis, and Aphrodite dancing-eyed,
And Hebe golden-crowned, and fair Dione;
Of Dawn, and the mighty Sun, and bright Selene,
Leto, Iapetus, Cronus crooked in counsel.
Earth, and vast Ocean, and black-mantled Night,
And the rest of the sacred race of the Undying.
Fair was the song they once taught Hesiod
Feeding his flock on holy Helicon;
Thus to me then the goddesses began,
Daughters of Zeus, the Muses of Olympus:
' Shepherds of the upland, names of shame, mere bellies,
Many a lie[12] our lips like truth can utter,
But true things, too, at will our tongues can tell.'
Thus spoke the daughters of God, the true of tongue,
And gathered for my staff a branch of laurel,
With leaf that does not die, a far-seen sign.

[12] An allusion to the heroic or romantic epic like *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as contrasted with Hesiod's own didactic epic. For this sense of rivalry between the two, *cf.* the legend that Homer and Hesiod contended at Chalcis and Hesiod was crowned victor, on the strangely modern ground that the songs of peace are better than those of war.

Here leaps to life a different world from Langland's. A new sense of colour comes flowing from that Violet-shadowed spring'. A new sense of beauty dances after, to the great rhythm of the hexameter, with these figures on the mountain-side,' soft-footed', 'fair and lovely', 'fair of song'. Langland's Holy Church docs indeed meet him, too, on Malvern Hill, in the shape of 'a loveli ladi of lere (face) • in lynnen yclothcd'; but there her concern with earthly beauty ends and turns abruptly to a sermon. And elsewhere Langland casts only a Puritanic frown at the stained glass with which the friars are so busy to bedeck the white radiance of her eternity. Certainly, quite apart from his belief that the deities of the pagan were really devils, he would have been bewildered at the grace and gaiety that flower in this religion of a yet poorer peasantry than his, in a more barren and distracted land. Whatever darker superstitions from the past persisted late into Greek history, this eternal miracle remains, that the genius of the Greek race, working through story-tellers already nameless and forgotten before Homer was born, could symbolise the forces of life in shapes so lovely and so apt that civilisation has never equalled them again. Abandoned by faith, by their sheer beauty the gods of Hellas have re-conquered immortality. Whom priest and worshipper deserted, poet and painter have saved. It is possible that the names of Phoebus Apollo and the golden Aphrodite may still have a power to stir the pulses of posterity at some remote date when Jehovah is no more to Western civilisation than Marduk and Amcn-Ra. This first great contrast at all events needs no stressing, between the pale abstractions of *Piers Plowman*—Clergye, Studye, Contricioun, Conscience, or Ymaginatif—and shapes like 'Dionysus rich in revelry' or 'Aphrodite of the dancing eyes' or, most typical of all, the Graces:

> Euphrosyne, Aglaia, fair Thalia,
> With eyes that glance such looks of loveliness
> As loose man's limbs. So fair their glances are.

Only the danger of writing about the Greek sense of beauty is that readers come to picture them as a nation of aesthetes, devoting their lives to Art for Art's sake and floating about draped with white sheets, in the intervals of preciously inscribing on waxen tablets a few phrases of elaborately simple maundering. But they were not aesthetes. They cared passionately about conduct. They lived lives of tireless activity. They would have thought Wordsworth a *faineant.* One must stand on the hill of Athens and look westward across the Saronic Gulf to the horn of Aegina and, beyond it, the couchant lion of the Acrocorinth, and north, again, to Mount Parnes, the frontier of Boeotia, to realise how these people spent every hour of their existences with their ancient enemies looking straight into the very doors of their homes. It was as if Berlin were visible from Montmartre. It was only in Alexandria that Greece bred her first bookworms. In the Greek ideal of active life grace, goodness, and intelligence went, like the three Graces, hand in hand. And so it does not seem incongruous to Hesiod to link here in the same line:

> Grave Themis, Aphrodite dancing-eyed,
> And Hebe crowned with gold.

Justice, Love, Youth—however different, all three are divine. This was the triumph of their sanity. No doubt it was only an ideal and they were only human; no doubt there are dark enough blots on their history. But at least it was their ideal; and precisely the interest to us of a poet like the author of the *Works and Days* lies in seeing how even these hands grown horny on the plough, cunning and grasping sometimes with the hard shrewdness of a

peasant out of Balzac, yet keep their feeling for the saving grace of life.

Who was he? His father had returned, he tells us, to the Greek mainland from the colony of Cyme in Aeolis on the coast of Asia Minor, a fugitive 'from bitter beggary.' For few Greeks shared Langland's faith in the blessings of poverty, though Hesiod knows it has its compensations also—that 'the half may be more than the whole' and contentment can sweeten the poor man's meal of'mallow and asphodel'. But he grumbles grimly enough at his father's choice of a new home, Ascra under Helicon, 'a miserable village, bad in winter, wretched in summer, never good'. Then his father died and his good-for-nothing brother Perses, by bribing those 'gift-devouring kings', the local chieftains, cheated him in the division of their inheritance. However, as our proverb says, 'losers have leave to chide'. Hesiod makes the most of it and addresses to 'foolish Perses' this poem, the *Works and Days:* which first reproaches him with his injustice; next passes to the general theme of human wickedness; then describes the Work his feckless brother must do not to starve on his ill-gotten land (with an excursus on navigation), and the lucky and unlucky Days he must observe. The poem is thus a Treatise on Morals, a Farmer's Friend, a Mariner's Guide, and an Old Moore's Almanac in one. 'Foolish Perses' himself serves as a peg on which to hang this omnibus volume. He may indeed be a mere figure of fiction; but I see no reason to assume it. Some of the autobiographical matter, about the origin of the poet's father, sounds true enough; the rest quite well may be.

This work, then, of probably the ninth century B.C. is no more than *Piers Plowman* 'Art for Art's sake'. Only it is blessed with that golden heirloom, the Homeric hexameter, as against Langland's wooden alliteration; and its

author, grimly as he shakes his head over the world, is less frightened and fretful than Langland. For him too:

The earth is full of ills, of ills the sea.

But he is at least not tormented with still deeper anxiety about Heaven and Hell to come. For him too man is fallen; one of his most famous passages is an account of the Five Ages and the world's decline from the Golden to the Iron. But here too there is at least a sense of fate rather than of sin. For Prometheus the Titan tried to cheat Zeus over sacrifices; then stole fire for men from Heaven. It was in retribution that the Gods created the first woman, Pandora. Of her Hesiod writes rather as an old Norman farmer might view some exquisite and frivolous Parisienne. No doubt she was born for man's curse; no doubt Hermes had given her—

Falsehood, and crooked tongue, and heart of thief.

And yet, crabbed old moralist as he is, Hesiod remains too Greek to forget her redeeming beauty. Langland shows us, of his 'lovelye ladyes', only a passing glimpse of their 'longe fyngres'; but on Pandora each of the Immortals had bestowed some fresh fascination; and, above all, in a line lovely as themselves, lovely as Botticelli might have made them,

Ὧραι καλλίκομοι στέφον ἄνθεσιν εἰαρινοῖσι.

The fair-tressed Hours wreathed her with flowers of Spring.

She was evil; yet how beautiful! The old man half forgives her; like Homer's Trojan elders with his Helen, and far more generous than the God of Eve. So Pandora brought with a smile, as we, twenty-seven centuries after, still read in our nurseries, her Jar of Evils to the house of Epimetheus;[13] and with a curiosity both feminine and

[13] It is typical of the Greek temperament that this figure of Epimetheus—'Afterthought'—should remain dim and insignificant in the legend, unlike Promedieus—'Forethought'. They had that gift of

Greek (we may recall the comrades of Odysseus and their equally fatal curiosity about the skin in which Aeolus had shut the winds) removed the lid, let out the hornet-swarm of human ills to darken earth, and was only quick enough to keep back one of them, Hope—an evil thing, like her companions. For Hope is the mother of Great Expectations and therefore the grandmother of Despair; and yet a sweet cheat, also, one evil more without whom the rest would be more than man could bear. We are far here from the Hope of St. Paul, one of the three Graces of Christianity. But the Greeks were not a hopeful race. Being intelligent, they did not pretend things are better than they are; and being, like the Icelanders of the Sagas, indomitably vital, they may have made something much better, in consequence, of things *as* they are. They might not 'percen with a *pater-noster* • the paleys of hevene'; but there was no neurotic melancholy about the race that produced Homer and built the Parthenon.

No doubt this religion of Hesiod shows, even as compared with Langland's, a savagery and immorality that for some readers will outweigh the happier sense of beauty in the Greek. Yet was paganism really as absurd in theory and immoral in practice as we have been brought up to assume? For with figures in Hesiod like Chaos, Earth, and Love (Attraction) appears a first glimmer of scientific symbolism. And as poetic symbols of the forces of life are Aphrodite or Dionysus, beautiful, terrible, beyond good and evil, further from what we now suspect to be the truth, than a single all-wise, all-righteous, all-loving Mind? Are we not tending more and more to say of this Universe which gives life and joy with one hand, agony

lasting youth, of looking always forward; the opposite of the mediaeval Christian insistence on backward-brooding Repentance and Contrition, on Remorse and the Worm of Conscience.

and death with the other, 'It knows not what It does'? Certainly with the Nature of many a modern poet, or the Spirits and the Immanent Will of Hardy's *Dynasts*, we are nearer once more to the Zeus of the *Prometheus*, or the Aphrodite of the *Hippolytus*, to the Dionysus of the *Bacchae* or the Venus and the 'Nature' of Lucretius, than to the Trinity of Langland. It has become far harder for a humaner world to believe at once in good and God.

None the less in certain ways Langland does remain more sympathetic. The Greek is healthier, but harder; less censorious, but less compassionate; just, but over-canny. 'Sacrifice to the gods, and you will end by buying your neighbour's field instead of his buying yours'—'even with your brother, smile but have a witness to his word' (after all Hesiod had gained bitter experience here with his own Perses)—'the farmer needs (note the order) a house first of all, a wife, and an ox to plough'. This tone of 'devil-take-the-hindmost', one must in fairness admit, is very inferior to Langland's pity for the poor. Yet it is impossible not to be amused by some of the old Boeotian's mother-wit. 'Decline with thanks a small ship, and load your freight on a large one'—'take your fill of the wine-jar at the beginning and at the end, but be sparing in the middle; it is a poor thing to be thrifty in the dregs'[14]—'get a labourer of forty to 'plough and sow; a younger man's wits go hankering after his mates'. It is the voice of a man himself past forty, the individualistic peasant whose heart is in his stocking with his hard-won savings rather than looking for companionship in life. Human relations for him are business relations. No doubt, it is good to have friends, they may always come in useful; but it is still more important to be friends with your relatives, and

[14]Cf. Samuel Butler's analogous precept of eating one's largest grapes first.

with your neighbours. For 'if there's an accident in your house, neighbours arrive in their shirt-sleeves (to give the modern equivalent), while friends wait to put on their coats'. You must also keep a jag-toothed dog and feed him well. And then be sure to get servants without any children—servants' children are a nuisance. As for your own marriage, marry, about thirty, a girl of twenty; not a widow, so that you can train her properly; and let her be a neighbour's daughter—but keep your eyes open so that you don't suddenly find you have made yourself the village laughing-stock.

> οὐ μὲν γάρ τι γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ λήΐζετ' ἄμεινον
> τῆς ἀγαθῆς, τῆς δ' αὖτε κακῆς οὐ ῥίγιον ἄλλο,
> δειπνολόχης· ἥτ' ἄνδρα καὶ ἴφθιμόν περ ἐόντα
> εὖει ἄτερ δαλοῦ καὶ ὠμῷ γήραϊ δῶκεν.
>
> For man can find no prize more worth the winning
> Than a good wife; nor grislier than a bad—
> Some giddy thing, that will roast the best of husbands
> Without a fire into a raw old age.

The good wife has here her word of praise; but it is the bad who makes Hesiod bitterly witty. We may remember Pandora. Again and again in these pages we seem to be listening to the shrewd common sense of Benjamin Franklin or Jeremy Bentham or, still more, of William Cobbett with his *Advice to Young Men.* It is all a little repellent; yet, somehow we go on listening to this sunburnt wrinkled figure, who seems, as he speaks, to keep shaking a sad and disapproving head at life; for there is a sincerity in this worn face, not altogether unlike Langland's, a quiet enjoyment of his own irony, a flicker, at moments, of dry humour in the eyes that have seen, and seen through, so much in life. 'If you must go sailing', he says to 'foolish Perses':

> If you must turn your feckless heart to trade
> By sea, to escape from debt and unlovely hunger,

I will tell you, too, the ways of the echoing deep—
Although small skill is mine in ships or sailing.
For I never sailed in ship the waste of waters
Save to Euboea from Aulis . . .

Here to the northern reader it must be explained that to pass the tiny strait from Aulis to Euboea is about as adventurous as crossing Woolwich Ferry. Yet Hesiod, despite his humour, remains a solitary figure. We may take his advice or leave it; he does not ask us to like him—what good would that be? He sings to please himself. Even his little picture of happiness is a lonely one.[15] It is summer; between the sweat of harvest and the sweat of vintage there comes a brief breathing-space for men. Then:

ἀλλὰ τότ' ἤδη
εἴη πετραίη τε σκιή, καὶ Βίβλινος οἶνος,
μᾶζά τ' ἀμολγαίη, γάλα τ' αἰγῶν σβεννυμενάων,
καὶ βοὸς ὑλοφάγοιο κρέας μήπω τετοκυίης,
πρωτογόνων τ' ἐρίφων· ἐπὶ δ' αἴθοπα πινέμεν οἶνον,
ἐν σκιῇ ἑζόμενον, κεκορημένον ἦτορ ἐδωδῆς,
ἀντίον ἀκραέος Ζεφύρου τρέψαντα πρόσωπον,
κρήνης τ' ἀενάου καὶ ἀποῤῥύτου, ἥ τ' ἀθόλωτος.

Then give me a great rock's shadow and wine of Biblis,
Milk-bread, and milk from goats just going dry,
And flesh of a forest heifer, that has not calved,
Or a first-born kid's, and shining wine to drink,
Deep in the shade, with hunger satisfied,
With on my face the West wind blowing free
Across some spring, unfailing, undefiled.

[15]Contrast the parallel picture in Theocritus VIII, 53-6.

μή μοι γᾶν Πέλοπος, μή μοι χρύσεια τάλαντα
εἴη ἔχειν, μηδὲ πρόσθε θέειν ἀνέμων·
ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τᾷ πέτρᾳ τᾷδ' ἧσομαι, ἀγκὰς ἔχων τυ,
σύννομα μᾶλ' ἐσορῶν, τὰν Σικελὰν ἐς ἅλα.

Not all the realm of Pelops, nor treasure past appraising,
Nor feet more fleet than wind are anything to me:
Let me sing beneath this boulder, with my arms about you, gazing
At our flocks together grazing and the sea of Sicily.

Here at last we are suddenly far from the Franklins and Benthams. We realise again that this rustic Worldly Wiseman is, all the same, a poet. Cobbett jeers at Shakespeare; Hesiod, though infinitely distant, remains his kin. Being so solitary, he is indeed little interested in drawing full-length characters, in creating other human beings—far less so not only than Shakespeare or Chaucer or Homer, but less than Langland with his Seven Deadly Sins. Hesiod's human figures, even Pandora, pass in a single flashing phrase and are gone. *His* Wife of Bath roasts one husband for a lifetime; but she only takes one line to do it in. Where Langland spends a page on his Sloth, who like Falstaff at Gad's Hill, is also a robber, Hesiod merely says with terse innuendo 'get a dog lest some *sleeper by day* steal your goods'; and, elsewhere, with one of his most vivid laconisms:

> Πὰρ δ' ἴθι χάλκειον θῶκον καὶ ἐπ' ἀλέα λέσχην
> ὥρῃ χειμερίῃ, ὁπότε κρύος ἀνέρας ἔργων
> ἰσχάνει, ἔνθα κ' ἄοκνος ἀνὴρ μέγα οἶκον ὀφέλλῃ,
> μή σε κακοῦ χειμῶνος ἀμηχανίη καταμάρψῃ,
> σὺν πενίῃ, λεπτῇ δὲ παχὺν πόδα χειρὶ πιέζῃς.
>
> Shun the seat in the forge and the warmth where gossips gather
> In winter, when the cold keeps men from work.
> But the man that does not flinch can still find profit;
> Lest want should grip you in the darkened days,
> Nursing a swollen heel in your thin hand.

Never has poverty-stricken tramp been painted with more artistic economy than in those last five Greek words. There stands misery, vivid, but not sordid. Langland would have given us several lines about his rags and the lice walking on them; Mr. Joyce, several paragraphs. But this peasant, with no pretensions to 'nobility', is free from that morbid preoccupation with squalor which plays on the frayed nerves of modern intellectuals, like a slum-cat walking on the keys of a piano. Yet the way to paint

mud is not to smear it on one's canvas. It is strange that we should still need lessons in taste from a Boeotian ploughman of 850 B.C.

Yet those who read Hesiod do not go to him so much for his brief glimpses *of* other human figures, nor even for his visions of the Gods, lovely though some of these are; as when he meets the Muses, or in a moment of despair foresees the final flight of goodness from a distracted world:

> καὶ τότε δὴ πρὸς Ὄλυμπον ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης
> λευκοῖσιν φαρέεσσι καλυψαμένω χρόα καλὸν
> ἀθανάτων μετὰ φῦλον ἴτον προλιπόντ' ἀνθρώπους
> Αἰδὼς καὶ Νέμεσις.
>
> Then to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth,
> Wrapping white mantles round their loveliness,
> To join the Immortals, from the sons of men
> Honour and Righteousness shall flee away.

This poem lives partly because its author has left us, unintentionally and by the way, one vivid portrait—his own. It lives still more, I think, because this man who seems so loveless towards brother or countryman, wife or friend, had yet one hidden passion, hidden perhaps even from himself; a passion for the hard earth and the harsh calling to which in return for a niggard livelihood he devoted a life of perpetual toil. The ordered march of the seasons, the earth which he does not idly call 'divine' —Χθόνα δῖαν—the cunning framework of the plough that furrows it, the little signs and voices from cloud and hedgerow that mark the farmer's calendar—all these he describes with a sober, yet eager earnestness that may look prosaic, but makes seem almost frivolous and amateurish, beside its grey reality, even the passionate herdsmen of Theocritus and the perfect cadences of the *Georgics*, the shepherds of Spenser and the countryfolk of Wordsworth. Most of these last indeed have a little straw of

picturesque or moral sentiment in their hair—except only Michael. But Hesiod has more of Michael about him, than of Michael's creator. This man, one feels, has himself put his hand to the plough, like Burns and Clare; but not, like them, looked back towards other callings. His farmer's year has for its very beginning a roll of religious music, a line for which Marlowe would have given his ears, a peal of thunder beyond the compass of our tamer tongue.

> Πληϊάδων Ἀτλαγγενέων ἐπιτελλομενάων.
> When rise in Heaven the Atlantic! Pleiades.

A sacred service, for him, his labour remains always; rendered to that 'fair-crowned Demeter' who had not refused, so legend said, to give her divine body of old to Iasion among the furrows of a thrice-ploughed field, and whose broken statue three thousand years later was still being used by the peasants of Eleusis, its magic virtue not yet wholly faded, to fertilise their midden.

> φράζεσθαι δ', εὖτ' ἂν γεράνου φωνὴν ἐπακούσῃς
> ὑψοθεν ἐκ νεφέων ἐνιαύσια κεκληγυίης·
> ἥτ' ἀρότοιό τε σῆμα φέρει, καὶ χείματος ὥρην
> δεικνύει ὀμβρηροῦ· κραδίην δ' ἔδακ' ἀνδρὸς ἀβούτεω.
>
> Take heed whenever you hear the crane's voice crying
> High in the cloudy heaven her yearly cry,
> Her warning of winter's rains and the time for ploughing,
> Piercing his heart, that has no ox to plough.

Already in that last line is it fanciful to see a regret that goes even deeper than mere fears of famine—the wretchedness of the countryman who sees Nature, like a lost mistress, going her way without him; and suffers in some dumb instinct like a caged migrant bird?[16] Nothing is

[16]Here, indeed, a touch of nature suddenly unites the poor peasant Hesiod and the embittered aristocrat, Theognis of Megara, (6th century B.C.) when he too cries in exile:

better in Hesiod than these signs given to the farmer by fowl and beast and tree:

ἦμος δὴ τοπρῶτον, ὅσον τ' ἐπιβᾶσα κορώνη
ἴχνος ἐποίησεν, τόσσον πέταλ' ἀνδρὶ φανείῃ
ἐν κράδῃ ἀκροτάτῃ . . .

When first the topmost leaves upon the fig
Open as wide as the footprints of a crow . . .

ἦμος δὲ σκόλυμός τ' ἀνθεῖ, καὶ ἠχέτα τέττιξ
δενδρέῳ ἐφεζόμενος λιγυρὴν καταχεύετ' ἀοιδὴν
πυκνὸν ὑπὸ πτερύγων, θέρεος καματώδεος ὥρῃ . . .

When the wild artichoke flowers, and the shrill cicada
Perched on his tree pours down his piercing song
From wings a-quiver, in summer's toilsome time . . .

ἀλλ' ὁπότ' ἂν φερέοικος ἀπὸ χθονὸς ἅμ φυτὰ βαίνῃ,
Πληϊάδας φεύγων . . .

When up green stalks climbs the House-carrier
To shelter from the sultry Pleiades . . .

ἦμος κόκκυξ κοκκύζει δρυὸς ἐν πετάλοισι
τοπρῶτον τέρπει τε βροτοὺς ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν,
τῆμος Ζεὺς ὗοι τρίτῳ ἤματι, μηδ' ἀπολήγοι,
μήτ' ἄρ' ὑπερβάλλων βοὸς ὁπλὴν μήτ' ἀπολείπων.

When Cuckoo!' cries the cuckoo from the oak,
Gladdening men's hearts through all the endless earth,
On the third day let God give rain, nor cease
Until it fills, not more, a bullock's footprint.

Ὀρνίθος φωνήν, Πολυπαΐδη, ὀξὺ βοώσης
ἤκουσ', ἥτε βροτοῖς ἄγγελος ἦλθ' ἀρότου
ὡραίου· καί μοι κραδίην ἐπάταξε μέλαιναν,
ὅττι μοι εὐανθέας ἄλλοι ἔχουσιν ἀγρούς,
οὐδέ μοι ἡμίονοι κύφων' ἕλκουσιν ἀρότρου,
τῆς μάλα μισητῆς εἵνεκα ναυτιλίης.

I heard, O Polypaides, I heard the bird's shrill crying,
That comes to tell the tiller that time has come to plough;
And it stabbed the heart within me, to think my lands were lying,
My own fair fields, in keeping of other masters now;
That no team of mine is straining against the yoke today,
Because by its cursed pilots our city's cast away.

The misery of the unemployed is nothing new.

ἤματι χειμερίῳ, ὅτ' ἀνόστεος ὃν πόδα τένδει,
ἔν τ' ἀπύρῳ οἴκῳ καὶ ἤθεσι λευγαλέοισιν . . .
In the winter weather when No-bones gnaws his feet
By the fireless hearth within his grisly lair . . .

This last reference to the winter-diet of the polyp, supposed to live then like a bear on his own paws, is playfully fantastic. But how vivid are all these descriptions (only the more so for their air of only being admitted strictly on business, not for pleasure or mere ornament)! How exact is the picture of the opening fig-leaf, with its eager look of clutching like an opening claw at the air and warmth of spring! Hesiod is no St. Francis; and yet in his quiet nicknames for the wild creatures that seek their livelihood beside him through sun and storm—'the House-carrier', 'No-bones', 'No-hair' (the snake), 'the Wise One' (the ant), 'the Forest-sleepers' (wild animals)—there is a reticent touch of *camaraderie* quite different from the conscious tenderness of a Virgil or a Burns. Virgil lays a cuckoo's egg of pantheistic speculation in his rookery; Burns, like Langland, fastens a moral, though a charming one, upon his mouse. They are not necessarily the worse for it; but they become less simple. Langland himself, though his hero is a ploughman, reminds us rather of a country lad migrated to a town. He has indeed seen for himself, birds'-nesting perhaps, how the magpie builds where the thorns grow thickest; but most of his 'wild worms in woods' and 'fowl of many colours' are as generalised as embroideries on a tapestry. His interest in the courtship of peacocks suggests to us, not field and coppice, but the gardens of the great; and to him, as we have seen, a sermon on continence. Crabbe, again, has at times something of the Greek's directness; but he is wordier and he indulges that botanical preference of his for the weeds in a landscape.

Clare is closer to Hesiod. He too speaks as a labourer bred upon the land, not a polite poet on a holiday from town, pursuing a few touches of nature along the hedgerows with a pencil and notebook. But Clare is a labourer out of work, a charming idler—Hesiod's man 'that has no ox to plough'. The old Boeotian merely flings a glance from his keen thousand-wrinkled eyes at his snail, as he goes to work; while Clare broods over his, with a memory of Shakespeare and of other poets before him, as he lingers—

> To note on hedgerow baulks, in moisture sprent,
> The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn,
> With earnest heed, and tremulous intent,
> Frail brother of the morn,
> That from the tiny bent's dew-misted leaves
> Withdraws his timid horn,
> And fearful vision weaves.

The picture is almost painfully lovely in its delicacy. So with the snail of Walter de la Mare. Hesiod's rough hands never wove such filigree as theirs. And yet—'frail'—'timid'—Tearful'—do we not feel that Clare is here drawing himself also—pathetic product of an age when the Muse too easily grows pale and consumptive? Clare's work is perfect at its best. Yet *it* is better to be Hesiod than Clare, both for oneself and for one's race.

But it is time to leave Helicon, with one last backward glimpse. It is winter now; Cyllene and Cithaeron, Helicon and Parnassus, and the mountain-walls that guard the Gulf of Corinth westward into Aetolia, are white-capped with snow.

> μῆνα δὲ Ληναιῶνα, κάκ' ἤματα, βούδορα πάντα·
> τοῦτον ἀλεύασθαι, καὶ πηγάδας, αἵ τ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν,
> πνεύσαντος Βορέαο, δυσηλεγέες τελέθουσιν,
> ὅς τε διὰ Θρήκης ἱπποτρόφου εὐρέϊ πόντῳ
> ἐμπνεύσας ὥρινε· μέμυκε δὲ γαῖα καὶ ὕλη·
> πολλὰς δὲ δρῦς ὑψικόμους, ἐλάτας τε παχείας,

οὔρεος ἐν βήσσῃς πιλνᾷ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
ἐμπίπτων, καὶ πᾶσα βοᾷ τότε νήριτος ὕλη.
θῆρες δὲ φρίσσουσ', οὐρὰς δ' ὑπὸ μέζε' ἔθεντο,
τῶν καὶ λάχνη δέρμα κατάσκιον· ἀλλά νυ καὶ τῶν
ψυχρὸς ἐὼν διάησι, δασυστέρνων περ ἐόντων.
καί τε διὰ ῥινοῦ βοὸς ἔρχεται, οὐδέ μιν ἴσχει.
καί τε δι' αἶγα ἄησι τανύτριχα· πώεα δ' οὔ τι,
οὕνεκ' ἐπηεταναὶ τρίχες αὐτῶν, οὐ διάησιν
ἴς ἀνέμου Βορέου. τροχαλὸν δὲ γέροντα τίθησι.
καὶ διὰ παρθενικῆς ἁπαλόχροος οὐ διάησιν,
ἥ τε δόμων ἔντοσθε φίλῃ παρὰ μητέρι μίμνει,
οὔπω ἔργ' εἰδυῖα πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης·
εὖτε λοεσσαμένη τέρενα χρόα, καὶ λίπ' ἐλαίῳ
χρισαμένη, νυχίη καταλέξεται ἔνδοθεν οἴκου
ἥματι χειμερίῳ, ὅτ' ἀνόστεος ἂν πόδα τένδει
ἔν τ' ἀπύρῳ οἴκῳ καὶ ἐν ἤθεσι λευγαλέοισιν.

But the month Lenacon, foul days that would flay an ox—
Beware of it, and the killing frosts that cover
Earth, when the blast of Boreas from Thrace,
Home of swift horses, whips the waves to foam,
While coast and woodland bellow, and many an oak
High-topped and many a pine with sturdy stem
In glens of the hills he flings to the kindly earth,
Till the multitudinous forest roars together
Under his onset. Then the beasts all shiver,
Their tails beneath their bellies—even those
That go warm-coated. Through their shaggy breasts
The cold blast pierces, through the bullock's hide
It goes, and the goat's long hair; and yet it blows not
Through the sheep's thick fleece. It makes an old man run,
The north wind's violence; and yet it blows not
Through the soft skin of the girl that sits indoors
By her dear mother's side, too young as yet
To know the deeds of golden Aphrodite;
Bathing her fair face and anointing it
With oil of olive, soft she sleeps at home
In the winter weather when No-bones gnaws his feet
By the fireless hearth within his grisly lair.

It is strange, this glimpse of the young girl seen from the storm-swept ploughland through the door of her warm

home. A momentary tenderness?—or a grudging bitterness at the capricious inequalities of existence for warm sheep and shivering goat, for the old man running in the blizzard and young beauty in its soft bed? Both feelings, I think, are present to the poet, a sense of wrong and yet a sense of beauty; as with his picture of Pandora, that fair bane of men.

Let us leave him there in the December darkness, falling early across the snows of Helicon. Some may well feel he was not worth so long a visit. To me these poets who have handled things, Hesiod the ploughman and Hardy the architect, are a relief after the soft, white, unwarlike fingers of writers who have never wielded anything sharper or heavier than a pen. It is good to feel underfoot the stones of this real Helicon, so different from the shadowy mountain of the poets' dreams. To read the *Works and Days* is to come back to the land from the hurrying futility of cities and see silhouetted against an evening skyline the straining team and bent back of him who bears up, patient Atlas, the weight of us and our frivolities—the ploughman, the most essential of us all, yet paid the least. 'Il y a un plaisir bien preferable a tout cela; c'est celui de voir verdir de vastes prairies, et croitre de belles moissons; c'est la veritable vie de l'homme, tout le reste est illusion.' Who wrote that? You will never guess. Voltaire. Unfortunately through most of human history the life of Piers Plowman has been and remains a poor and brutish business. Yet precisely here lies the lesson of Hesiod, and of that marvellous race to which he belonged—how marvellous, though he at least knew Homer, was only to be revealed long after he was gathered to the dust of Ascra. Hesiod died in the dawn of Greece, Langland in the twilight of mediaeval Christendom; both ages have left immortal things to art; but for the greatest

art of all, without which the others quickly die, the art of living, I come to feel more and more that the world needs perpetually to go back to Greece. Yet Greece does not mean simply Athens. That is too often assumed. Athens became the intellectual capital of Hellas. But the best things are not always to be found in capitals. There is much that is silly and squalid in Attic, as in all, history; much that betrays a meaner sense of the poetry of life, once the Persian Wars are over, than the annals of the Roman Republic. And of poetic literature, with the magnificent exception of the Attic Drama, hardly anyone seems to realise how sterile Athens herself always remained. The Islands, Ionia, Magna Graecia, even the despised 'hoggish' Boeotia of Hesiod and Pindar, even academic Alexandria, were the real sources of that great and unfailing stream of non-dramatic poetry to which Athens contributed only such trifles as the worthy political verses of a Solon. It is in those little cities, happily ignored by history, remembered today only for a poet's name, or for a temple still lovely in its ruins upon some barren hill, diat the imagination loves, swallow-like, to build.

Such a city was Thespiae, to which the Ascra of Hesiod belonged; its daily life through centuries is forgotten now as if it had never been. We know only that there Love and the Muses were honoured with special festivals; and that strangers came from far to see its Eros by Praxiteles. We know also that when the armies of King Xerxes swept flooding over Othrys, and at Thermopylae

The Spartans on the sea-wet rock sat down and combed their hair,

alone of Greeks north of the Isthmus seven hundred from Thespiae chose to die beside the three hundred of Leonidas. 'Fair their fate', wrote Simonides in his dirge for the fallen; and in that one word 'fair'—καλός-—with its

double sense of 'lovely' and 'noble', stands epitomised the wisdom that the modern mind, I think, most needs to learn from the land which bred the men of Thespiae thus to honour equally both Eros and Ares, beauty and bravery, art and life.

Not the Grace of Langland, then, but the Graces of Hesiod seem to me, even in moods of depression, the only powers that can save life, now as then, from its worst enemy, the sense of its own futility. There have been societies, since Greece, which have not invoked them in vain—the Japan of Genji, the intellectual aristocracy of eighteenth-century France. Yet how can our own distracted age, with its vulgarity and its Philistinisms, its lack even of lost causes, hope to regain some of their sense of 'style' in life, when so many of its writers take for their theme the barbarous, the sordid, and the trivial; and so many of its critics write of art itself with the emetic jargon of the laboratory and the fanaticism of the conventicle? It is not that we cannot honour our own generation, with its scientific prodigies. But what is life with these alone? Half-broken with the killing research of *L'Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu one day took breath and wrote: 'Vierges du mont Pierie, entendez-vous le nom que je vous donne? Inspirez-moi. Je cours une longue carriere; je suis accable de tristesse et d'ennui. Mettez dans mon esprit ce charme et cette douceur que je sentais autrefois, et qui fuit loin de moi. Vous n'etes jamais si divines que quand vous menez a la sagesse et a la verite par le plaisir.

'Mais si vous ne voulez point adoucir la rigueur de mes travaux, cachez le travail meme; faites qu'on soit instruit et que je n'enseigne pas; que je reflechisse et que je paraisse sentir; et lorsque j'annoncerai des choses nouvelles, faites qu'on croie que je ne savais rien, et que vous m'avez

tout dit.' It is not like this that our modern 'scientific historians' write; and because they have forgotten, so many of them, that without this saving grace the history of human life, like human life itself, remains a futile old curiosity-shop, they will themselves be forgotten in one-twentieth of the time for which the world has treasured the 'unscientific' annals of a Herodotus or a Tacitus. And as with our historians, so with our own history—it too will drop from the memories of an indifferent posterity, if we can fill it with nothing but the noise of splitting atoms. I sometimes wonder if it is the fate of Europe to lapse into a sort of barbarism each time it forgets Greece and that Greek grace prayed for by Montesquieu. It is indeed the proudest glory of his France that of all the European peoples she has always stood nearest in courage and clarity of intellect to the classic tradition of the Mediterranean; and I know no better summary of the attitude to life I mean—the attitude, however spontaneous and unconscious, which makes, for me, Hesiod seem so much more vital than Langland—than these words of Faguet on Montaigne and the landscape of Montaigne's chateau in Perigord: 'C'est dans ce cadre admirablement artistique que Montaigne a pratique cette maxime que depuis si longtemps j'ai formulee, peut-etre apres une lecture de Montaigne—"L'art de la vie consiste a faire de la vie un objet d'art." Il a fait sa vie et l'a modelee au patron de la beaute artistique. Il l'a dressee a etre calme, equilibree, et souriante comme une statue de la sante ou de la jeunesse. Sa conscience fut le bon gout. Ses remords furent des repentirs de peintre ou de sculpteur. . . . Le propre du vice lui parait etre d'offenser et de faire souffrir "une nature bien nee." Une faute, c'est une dissonance . . . la vie est la beaute vecue.' Perhaps Montaigne would have smiled at this.

It is a little presumptuous and a little precious, perhaps, for mortals to talk so. For the Graces are Immortals; and we, all too human. But in essentials, I think, he would have agreed; being, indeed, far nearer in his Perigord, despite time and space, to Hesiod than to Langland, to Helicon than to the Malvern Hills.

The PRINCE of COURT-POETS

In the hall stands an old chimney, with pilasters on each side of it, adorned with viol and lute, with Roman arms and heraldic beasts, with stars and suns and little Loves grotesquely carved. Above its lintel are medallions and coats of arms; higher still the stone branches into a sweet-briar among sculptured flames; the whole is crowned by a crest of three fishes with the device *Non fallunt futura merentem,* a band of fleur-de-lys, and the escutcheon of France. Time has not spared much else in the old manor-house. For a hundred years sheep nibbled in one of its courts, corn grew in the other. Not till the mid nineteenth century were its crumbling rooms inhabited again. To-day even the hills on whose first slopes it stands have lost their ancient look, for the forest that covered them is felled, leaving only scattered copses to keep its memory green; and in the house itself the past survives only here and there in a pentagonal tower, a corkscrew staircase, a rose or star in mouldered stone, or the old mottoes in-scribed upon the walls like relics of some vanished Bel-shazzar—*Abstine et Sustine—Voluptati et Gratiis—Veritas Filia Tetnporis—Domine Conserva Me—Avant Partir. 'Par-txr?*—whither? To that place, was the old carver's mean-ing, whence there is no return.

And yet its dead master has come back to La Pois-soniere. Altered and disfigured, but now restored to him in men's memories once more, this manor that his father built with the help of some Italian sculptor in the day of Louis XII and Francois I, remains an apt emblem of his destiny, just as its burning eglantine is the symbol of his race and name: 'Ronce ard'—'Ronsard'. His own life was

to be like the sweet-briar amid its flame—fragrant, truant-flowering, yet sharp with thorns and scorched with passion; and the after-life of his reputation might have had for its motto *'Non fallunt futura merentem',* distant though the future was that gave him due honour at last. For he who had been the Prince of Poets was banished after his death by the usurper, Malherbe. For two and a half centuries hardly a voice named him except in scorn: not a publisher printed an edition of his works. His house stood desolate, bats darkened the windows through which he had seen the light. It was about 1850 that life came back to his old house; and in 1857 appeared the first edition of his works since 1629. Even the ancient mottoes on these walls seem full of him—the pagan *Voluptati et Gratiis* side by side with the Christian *Domine Conserva Me;* the Greek wisdom *of Respice Finetn* and *Nyquit Nymis,*[1] so congenial to the artist who loved the middle style; the humour of *Ahstine et Sustine* set above the kitchen; the melancholy of *Avant Partir,* so often to be echoed by the poet of love's fading rose.

To most English readers, indeed, Ronsard means 'Quand vous serez bien vieille' and 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose.' That is too little. He sang best of gathering roses. But he gathered a great many other things. He prided himself on 'souplesse et variete', in life as well as in verse. He remains one of those poets who have not regarded ink as holy water, nor yet turned it to gall; who have succeeded in being healthy and lovable human beings, not two-headed monsters, half genius and half maniac or bore. Deafness made him a singer, as blindness is said to have made 'blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides', by cutting him off from the bustle of the world.

[1] **'Consider the end'—'Nothing too much'. Both were attributed to Solon; the second was carved on the temple of Apollo at Delphi.**

But it made him no recluse in his Vendomois; he kept his place as courtier, as well as poet, in the Louvre of the last Valois. He never lost himself, or his touch on the pulse of life, in some Grasmere or Croisset or Farringford.

Even about Ronsard's cradle poetic traditions wreathed themselves. He himself believed his family derived from a romantic Balkan marquis.

Il a tire sa race
D'ou le glace Danube est voisin de Thrace.

The country of Orpheus was certainly appropriate for a poet's ancestor. The marquis's elder son, we gather, came like the blind King of Bohemia *to* help France against the English in the Hundred Years War, and found there a new home. But research has made short work of this Ruritanian marquis. Ronsard's real ancestors, as far as they can be traced, were simply country-gentlemen, with sometimes a turn for soldiering, of the Bas Vendomois. But his father, Loys de Ronsart, was not merely a soldier; he was one who had seen Cinquecento Italy and fought beside Bayard. He was not only the man of action who had fed on rats in besieged Novara and borne a great part in the taking of Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan; who had won the Order of St. Michael at the overthrow of the Venetians under Bartolommeo Alviano and, as *maitre d'hotel des enfants de France,* shared in the young princes' Spanish Captivity after Pavia; he was also a patron of the poet Jean Bouchet and a poet himself, whose verses his famous son was sometimes in after years to quote and whose theory of the value of alternate masculine and feminine rhymes that son was to make his own.

There were adventurous memories too on his mother's side. Through her Poitevin family, nobler than his father's, he could claim distant kinship with the Plantagenets and with that Elizabeth of England who was one day to

repay his praises with a diamond of as pure a water as his verse. Jeanne de Chaudrier herself had been left an orphan and defrauded by a wicked uncle; had eloped for two months with Jacques de Fontbernier, Seigneur de la Riviere; had been wrested from him by order of Louis XII and remarried to Guy des Roches; and finally, widowed of him, settled down as the wife of Loys de Ronsart and mother of his six children.

Pierre, the youngest, was born in 1524, the year before Pavia—a consolation to France, says de Thou, for that great overthrow. We are told that on the way to his christening his nurse let him fall, as if prophetically, among the meadow-flowers; and that a girl with her bearing a vessel of rose-water, in trying to lift the little Ronsard, spilt it all no less symbolically upon his head. Yet when he was destined like many a younger son for the Church and sent *to* the College of Navarre, the future scholar so kicked against masters and books in his eagerness *to* be a soldier, that he was allowed to go to Court instead as page to the Dauphin Francois. At the time (1536) Charles V was laying waste Provence; and when, six days later, the Dauphin of eighteen suddenly sickened and died, it was the universal cry that he had been poisoned by the Emperor. Ronsard never forgot how as page of twelve he had watched the autopsy of his young master's body:

> Six jours devant sa fin je vins a son service:
> Mon malheur me permeit qu'au lict mort je le veisse,
> Non comme un homme mort, mais comme un cndormy,
> Ou comme un beau bouton qui se panche a demy,
> Languissant en Avril alors que la tempeste
> Jalouse de son temt, luy aggrave la teste . . .
> Je vy son corps ouvrir . . .

He may have seen too in that October the suspected poisoner, Count Montecuculli of Ferrara, torn asunder

by horses. Life was not long in stamping on the boy's memory its lesson of transience and mortality. And now the lesson was repeated. Ronsard passed to the service of the dead prince's brother, then to their sister, Madeleine of France, who had fallen in love at sight with James V of Scotland, come to help France against the Spaniard; and refused, consumptive though she was, to forgo a passion which was foreseen to be certain death for her in the bleakness of mediaeval Scotland—'ung pays barbare et une gent brutelle'. 'Pour le moins', said she, 'tant que je vivray, je seray reyne.' Wedded she was; and her young page must have listened to the naively charming *Chant Nuptial* of Clement Marot:

> Brunette elle est, mais pourtant elle est belle . . .
> Mesme la-bas les nymphes escossoyses
> Avec grand joye attendent ton venir,
> Et vont disans qu'elles seront francoyses
> Pour le grand bien qui leur doit advenir.

The joy was brief enough. Two months after her triumphal entry into Linlithgow, still uncrowned, the queen of sixteen was quietly dead in her husband's arms at Holyrood. 'Helas', said she, j'ay voulu estre reyne.' To mourn her they wore black for the first time in Scotland. And for a second time Ronsard saw the warning his poems were so often to repeat:

> Nous ne tenons en nostre main
> Le temps futur ni le lendemain,
> Le vie n'a point d'asseurance;
> Et pendant que nous desirons
> La faveur des rois, nous mourons
> Au meilleur de nostre esperance.

For two years he stayed in Scotland. To the King the boy was a relic of the dead. And for Ronsard himself the time was not idle; a Scottish friend, 'le seigneur Paul', read with him, so that he could afterwards render them

in verse, Homer and Virgil, two of the great masters of his future poetry. Then once again on funeral followed marriage:

> Et des amours desquellcs nous parlons,
> Quand scrons morts, n'en sera plus nouvelle.

A year from Madeleine's death James wedded Marie de Guise, who was to bear him the princess praised by Ronsard in after days more passionately than any other, even in her English prison—Mary Stuart. The dead queen's page returned to France; then, revisiting Scodand almost immediately in the train of Claude d'Humieres, was all but lost to us. For three days and nights his ship was on the point of foundering, only to split at last without loss of life in the harbour-mouth. Six months of his homeward journey spent in England at least left him (unless he is being merely a pleasant flatterer) kindly memories of—

> ces grands Mylords
> Accorts, beaux, et courtois, magnanimes et forts.

But he who had travelled so much so young was now to finish all his travels in his teens. A visit in the train of the humanist Lazare de Baif to the conference of Catholics and Reformers at Haguenau in 1540 was the end of his journeys out of France; the end also of his hopes of a public career. Just when all were beginning to notice the handsome boy of fifteen with his aquiline nose, his chestnut hair, his gently serious eyes—'tant pour Fair et les traicts du visage qu'il avoit tres-agreable, que pour sa taille et sa stature extremement auguste et martiale'—he returned from Germany with broken health, never to be completely restored, and a partial loss of hearing. Resigned now to the Church, in 1543 he received the tonsure. The sacrifice of golden curls could buy golden benefices then. If he found those prizes slow in coming,

we cannot altogether share his indignation. Ronsard had hardly a rehgious vocation; and he had not even kept strictly to his bargain; the same locks as fell under the scissors of the Bishop at Le Mans were dedicated by the pagan young ecclesiastic, in a poem, to Phoebus Apollo.

It was typical of the days when, drunk with all they found in the cellars of antiquity, men piled Parnassus and Olympus upon Sinai and, like Zwingli, peopled Paradise in their imagination with Jesus and Hercules, Adam and Theseus, Moses and Cato. And now Ronsard set himself to study antiquity as eagerly as before he had refused. Lazare de Baif had acquired the learned Daurat to tutor his son of twelve, Antoine; in Antoine's lessons he allowed the older Ronsard to share. The first two stars of the Pleiad had met.

Ronsard's father had died in 1544, leaving him more at liberty to pursue his bent; in 1547 Lazare de Baif died also; the two young men followed Daurat to Paris University, where he was now made head of the College de Coqueret. There they both shared the same room and, by turns, according to the familiar story, the same chair: 'Ronsard estudioit jusques a deux heures apres minuit et, se couchant, resveilloit Baif que se levoit et prenoit la chandellc et ne laissoit rcfroidir la place.' About this same time, in a wayside inn, Ronsard met another of his future fellow-poets, likewise young and revolutionary in his poetic theories and likewise deaf, Joachim du Bellay, who soon joined the others in Paris and two years later sounded the first trumpet-call of the 'Brigade'. In 1549 appeared his *Defense et Illustration de la Languefrangaise.*

It is the signal for an attack on two fronts at once—on the learned pedants who were trying to hold the Roman Capitol against a new Gallic uprising, on the ground that literature could live only in Latin; and, at the same time,

on the unlearned poets of the older school who were content to go on pigging in their native Gallic barbarism, instead of enriching French literature with the plunder of Greece and Rome. In part the young rebels succeeded. They drove the pedants off the field. From the ancients they were able to capture a good deal. But many of them were themselves to perish staggering under the weight of their classical acquisitions, grown pedants in their turn; while others of them, including Ronsard himself, were only to prevail by compromise—by throwing away most of their erudite baggage and returning to that gay and charming French simplicity they had mocked at in Marot. Sooner or later the genius of France always comes back to see that the subtly simple—the secret of French greatness as of Greek—outweighs all the ponderous complexities that take in the Teutonic mind.

The dangers of becoming overloaded with classical lumber showed themselves clearly enough the very next year in the first volume of Ronsard. The French Pindar of these pompously elaborate *Odes* of 1550 is never Pindar and often is not French. But the value of war-cries like that of the young 'Brigade' seldom depends on their truth. They rally rather than teach. It is not information, but inspiration, that they have to give. To head a charge a red rag serves just as well as silk. Second thoughts follow in time to secure the ground that has been won. By 1553 Ronsard was reconciled with Mellin de Saint-Gelais, the leader of the older school. Henceforth his happiest writing was to strike a mean between the old French tradition and the new learning.

But that wise compromise was helped by lessons learnt from brighter eyes and voices more musical than are found in libraries. Already about 1545, in attendance on the Court where he still kept the post of ecuyer, he had

watched at Blois a young girl with the dark looks of the South—'une beaute de quinze ans enfanrine'—singing to her lute a song he was not to forget:

> le branlc de Bourgongne
> Qu'elle disoit, le jour que je fus pris.

Cassandre Salviati was half French, half Florentine. A little later she married a neighbour of Ronsard's home, Jean de Peigne, Seigneur de Pray—a barren *pre* for the poet, as a punning sonnet sighed. Still he had found his Laura, as l' *amour courtois* demanded, in the wife of another. The *Odes* of 1550 made him the French Pindar; *Les Amours* of 1552 made him the French Petrarch. Until the present century, indeed, commentators had imagined, as with a sort of instinctive hatred for real life the learned are apt to do, notably in Shakespeare's case, that the object of these sonnets was herself imaginary—an idea as Platonic as her love. Her real identity has however been proved beyond cavil; the first love of Ronsard was an ancestress of Alfred de Musset.

But Ronsard was pure French, unlike his mistress and his master. His French frankness began to stifle in the mystic vapours of love after the Italian convention. Not for him a lifelong dedication to a dream, whatever Dante or Petrarch might have done. Even of Petrarch he began to have his doubts.

> A voir son escrit
> II estoit eveille d'un trop gentil esprit
> Pour estre sot trente ans, abusant sa jeunesse,
> Et sa Muse au giron d'une vieille maistresse;
> Ou bien il jouyssoit de sa Laurette, ou bien
> II estoit un grand fat d'aimer sans avoir rien.

A little brutal? Perhaps. And yet to some who find it hard to read *La Vita Nuova* without a nauseated contempt, such healthy common sense may bring a sigh of relief.

True, he had promised deathless fidelity:

Si que tousjours, en pcau jcune, ct ridee,
Voire au tombeau, je veux aimer l'idee
De ces yeux bruns, deux soleils de mon coeur. •

Yet his *nymphette* had remained, though fond, yet firm—'opiniastre a garder trop sa foi'. In vain he wrote her poems that were to be immortal, even if his love was not; such as 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose.' He grew bold: she grew timid, and fled. The day came that fulfilled in final severance the words he had written for an earlier and temporary parting in anger:

Ciel, aer, et vents, plains et monts decouvers,
Tertres, vineux, et forests verdoyantes,
Rivages tors, ct sources ondoyantes,
Taillis rascz, et vous bocages vers:
Antres moussus a demy-front ouvers,
Prez, boutons, fleurs, et herbes rousoyantes,
Coutaus vineux, et plages blondoyantes,
Et vous, rochers, escholliers de mes vers:
Puisqu'au partir, ronge de soin et d'ire,
A ce bel oeil Adieu je n'ay sceu dire,
Qui pres et loin me detient en esmoy,
Je vous supply, Ciel, aer, vents, monts, et plaines,
Taillis, forests, rivages et fontaines,
Antres, prez, fleurs, ditcs le luy pour moy.
Sky, air, and winds, hoar peaks, plains at their feet,
And verdant woods, and slopes the green vine fills,
Far-winding rivers and bright-rippling rills,
Shorn copses, emerald forests, you I greet;
And you, O caves, whose mossy mouths nigh meet,
Meadows, buds, blossoms, grass where the bright dew spills,
And yellow sands and vineyard-hidden hills,
And rocks long taught my verses to repeat;
Since, as in rage and grief I came away,
Farewell to those bright eyes I could not say,
That, near and far, vex my tranquillity,
I beg you, O sky and air and winds and mountains,
Plains, copses, forests, caves and streams and fountains,
Meadows and flowers, bid her 'Farewell' for me.

As Dante and Petrarch had in fact done, he turned to more facile embraces; but, unlike them, he turned these too to poetry—sonnets of love triumphant which by some strange perversity he published among those addressed to Cassandre until the reader, but for the accompanying commentary of Ronsard's friend Muretus, would suppose Cassandre herself to have yielded. But it was in 1555, after ten years' fruitless siege, that he finally gave his heart to another:

> Voyant que tousjours elle marchait plus fiere,
> Je desliay du tout mon amitie premiere,
> Pour en aimer une autre en ce pays d'Anjou.

And yet these ten years had borne their fruit. It was Cassandre that first found him his true vocation, as a supreme love-poet. Nor was this parting quite the last of her. Years afterwards, in 1568, when he was forty-four and she the mother of a family, they met again, as first, in spring; and in a last poem Ronsard owned his debt:

> Et si l'age qui rompt et murs et forteresses,
> En coulant a perdu un peu de noz jeunesses,
> Cassandre, c'est tout un! car je n'ay pas esgard
> A ce qui est present, mais au premier regard,
> Au trait qui me navra dc ta grace enfantine.

Now however, in 1555, as if the poet's life were itself in some measure a course of poetry, alike in love and art he left Petrarch for Theocritus. He had already been growing simpler. In the Ode he had forsaken the pomp of Pindar for the ease of Horace and Anacreon. So here, just as his homesick friend du Bellay in the most famous of his sonnets craves beside the Tiber for 'the soft winds of Anjou', Ronsard turned from wooing his fair Florentine fin Italianate *concetti* to courting in plainer French an Angevin country-girl of Bourgueil. But Marie too, if with her simple beauty of fifteen years she gave him new inspiration, did not give him happiness. Remembering

Theocritus, he might send her a distaff with an accompanying poem, slightly sneered at by the ladies of the Court; he might sing at her window in the dawn:

Marie, levez-vous, ma jeune paresseuse,
Ja la gaye Alouette au ciel a fredonne,
Et ja le Rossignol doucement jargonne
Dessus l'espine assis, sa complainte amoureuse.

In spite of all she seems to have remained comparatively cold to him. Perhaps at the end of his life, remembering Cassandre, Marie, Helene, Ronsard might have said with Rousseau: 'Mon peu de succes pres des femmes est toujours venu de les trop aimer.' What was worse,' Marie showed herself less cold to his friend, Charles de Pisseleu, Bishop of Condom, whose name the mortified poet in return struck out of the poems dedicated to him. 'Il l'a fort aimee', says Ronsard's biographer Binet, 'et icelle quittee pour quelque jalousie concue.' But, like Cassandre, she had wrung from him some of his loveliest poetry; and when the day came for a farewell to her more final than to Cassandre, he wrote for Marie dead the loveliest, in its simplicity, of his laments:

Si je n'eusse eu Tesprit charge"
De vaine erreur, prenant conge
De sa belle et vive figure,
Oyant sa voix, qui sonnoit mieux
Que de coustume, et ses beaux yeux
Qui reluisoient outre mesure,
Et son soupir qui m'embrasoit,
J'eussc bien veu qu'ell' me disoit:
'Or soule toy de mon visage,
Si jamais tu en euz soucy:
Tu ne me voirras plus icy,
Je m'en vay faire un long voyage.'

When our poets have learnt to write like that again, there will be new hope, I believe, for our poetry. It is not that good poetry cannot be written in a hundred

ways; there is no law that it *must* be simple; but I know no poet who could not sometimes be simple, who has ever been great.

Meanwhile, if Ronsard could not wholly conquer his peasant-girl, he had conquered France. Henri II favoured nim; Charles IX became his personal friend. Elizabeth of England sent him a diamond, the Floral Games of Toulouse a Minerva in solid silver. Mary of Scotland gave him her portrait and wept over his verse. Chastelard, thrice found hiding in her bedroom and at last sentenced by her to death, went to the block reciting, in place of any ghostly consolation, Ronsard's *Hymne de la Mort:*

> Je te salue, heureuse et profitable Mort,
> Des extremes douleurs medecin et confort.

He had become the Prince of Poets.

Yet these things too passed away. From that day in 1559 when Montgomery's lance pierced the eye of Henri II, a shadow fell across the House of Valois and a France now beginning to glow red with the blood and flame of the Religious Wars. Ronsard, loathing fanaticism and civil war in the cause of any creed, attacked the Huguenots and was attacked in return with all the scurrilities of Renaissance controversy. Du Bellay was dead. The adored Mary Stuart, a few months Queen of France, had gone back to her bleak Scotland. The prince he loved sounded the tocsin of Saint Bartholomew and shot at his own subjects from the windows of the Louvre. Twenty days later, what was to have been Ronsard's life-work and made him the Homer and Virgil of France, the *Franciade,* dropped stillborn from the press (1572). The work contained only four books of the twenty-four destined to tell the rise of French greatness from the inevitable Trojan origin—Francus, son of Hector; but

they proved more than enough. Even the Renaissance refused to be amused by a cento of classical imitations written, in mistaken deference to a prejudice of Charles IX, in decasyllables instead of Alexandrines—the metre whose greatness Ronsard had himself been the first to reveal. For the first time Ronsard had failed.

He was middle-aged now. At Court, after Charles had died haunted by the horrors of Saint Bartholomew and murmuring 'Que de sang!', Henri III, surrounded by his minions, looked coldly on his brother's favourite poet. Colder too had grown the glances of the ladies of the Court—Isabeau de Limeuil, who left him to marry the banker Scipione Sardini, Franchise d'Estrees of whom he never had more than a kiss. Well for him that he had been growing fonder of the quiet country, of looking after his monks in his priories of Montoire, Croix-val, and Saint-Come, planting, building, going to law on their behalf. Yet there still remained for him at Court a final passion, the most famous of his life. The dry log, as he humorously put it, burnt more fiercely than the green.

Legend, probably untrue, has told that Catherine de Medicis herself bade the poet sing a new love with less Petrarchan obscurity than he had used towards Cassandre Salviati, less simple rusticity than had befitted Marie Dupin. At all events it was in the year of Saint Bartholomew, 1572, that in the garden of the Tuileries he sat down beside the pensive Helene de Surgeres. It was to be six years before he tore himself away and bade farewell, with her, to love itself. Like his first love, his last was half a stranger—half Spanish by descent; dark and pale, shivering even in August, and not beautiful, though fascinating when she spoke or danced; for the rest, prude, Platonist, and *precieuse*. Like Cassandre and Marie, she did not bring

happiness into his life. But, after all, it was not the Jeannes, the Madeleines, the Genevres who made him happy, that made him great. So now in vain he swore faith to Helene on a table strewn with laurel-boughs; in vain the ageing poet climbed, breathing hard, up her steep stairs in the Louvre:

> Tu loges au sommet du Palais de noz Rois:
> Olympe n'avait pas la cyme si hautaine.
> Je perds a chaque marche et le pouls et Thaleine:
> Jay la sueur au front, j'ai l'estomac penthois,
> Pour ouyr un nenny, un refus, une vois
> De desdain, de froideur, et d'orgueil toute pleine.

In vain, too, that he wrote constantly *to* her as she followed the Queen-Mother on her restless progresses; that he listened to her expositions of the hateful Platonism of Leon l'Hebreu; that he set flowers to drop before her feet as she opened next morning the door she barred to him; that he snared her arm in a thread of crimson silk; that he wrung from her one evening the half-avowal—'Je vous aime, Ronsard!' She was by birth a nun.

> Vous me distes, Maistresse, estant a la fenestre,
> Regardant vers Montmartre et les champs d'alentour:
> 'La solitaire vie, et le desert sejour
> Valent mieux que la Cour, je voudrois bien y estre.
> A Theure mon esprit de mes sens seroit maistre,
> En jeusne et oraisons je passerois le jour:
> Je desfirois les traicts et les flames d'Amour:
> Ce cruel de mon sang ne pourroit se repaistre.'
> Quand je vous repondy, 'Vous trompez de penser
> Qu'un feu ne soit pas feu, pour se couvrir de cendre:
> Sur les cloistres sacrez la flame on voit passer:
> Amour dans les deserts comme aux villes s'engendre.
> Contre un Dieu si puissant, qui les Dieux peut forcer,
> Jeusnes ny oraisons ne se peuvent defendre.'

> Out of your window gazing, sweet and fair,
> Towards Montmartre and its green fields, you said:

' A life of solitude, a lonely bed,
Are better than the Court—would I were there!
My mind could rule my senses if I were,
In prayer and fasting all my days be sped;
Love's flames and arrows there I need not dread—
To wound my heart the tyrant would not dare.'
And then I answered you: 'Ah, foolish dream
That fire beneath the ashes is not fire!
Even the holy cloisters feel its gleam.
In deserts, as in cities, springs desire.
That God, whom even Gods confess supreme,
No prayers can conquer, and no fasts can tire.'

It was no use—je ne le veux pas'. She made him jealous with young blades of the Court. She grew weary of him. He was growing old—old like the Renaissance round him, once so young and confident, but distracted now with blood and battle that made such a world seem no scene for love,

Quand on vit les Francois sous les armes suer,
Quand on vit tout le peuple en fureur se ruer,
Quand Belonne sanglante alloit devant pour guide.

Like Proust's Swann with Odette, he had 'gache sa vie' —its latter end, at least—for a woman not even of his type. Better wine, better lawsuits, better the faithful dead—

Aristote ou Platon, ou le docte Euripide,
Mes bons hostes muets, qui ne faschent jamais . . .
Ne pensez plus, Helene, en vos laqs me tenir.

He turned away.

Vents qui soufflez par ceste plaine,
Et vous, Seine, qui promenez
Vos flots par ces champs, emmenez
En 1'Ocean noyer ma peine . . .
Vole, ma douce Tourterelle,
Le vray symbole de l'amour,
Je ne veux plus ni nuict ni jour
Entendre ta plainte fidelle . . .
Adieu, Amour . . .

Poetry still remained to him—his own works to be revised and polished without end. Yet even in these she haunted him; even these she only half valued, anxious above all lest they should smirch her own good name. 'Monsieur mon antien amy', the old poet wrote bitterly to a friend in 1584, 'c'est (disoit Aristophane) une *[sic]* faix insuportable de servir un maistre qui radoute. Parodizant la dessus, c'est un grand malheur de servir une maistresse qui n'a jugement ny raison en nostre poesie.... Je vous suplie, Monsieur, ne vouloir croire en cela madamoisellc de Surgeres et n'ajouter ny diminuer rien de mes sonnetz s'il vous plaist.[2] Si elle ne les trouve bons, qu'elle les laisse, je n'ay la teste rompue d'autre chose. On dit que lc roy vient a Blois et a Tours et pour cela je m'enfuy a Paris et y seray en bref, car je hay la court comme la mort. Si elle veult faire quelque dessaing de marbre sur la fonteine,[3] elle le pourra faire, mais ce sont deliberations de femmes, qui ne durent qu'un jour, qui de leur nature sont si avares qu'elles ne voudroyent pas despendre un escu pour un beau fait. Faittes luy voir cette lettre si vous le trouvez bon.'

Shortly before his death we find him writing to Galland, asking him to pray Helene to intercede for the payment of his arrears of pension. And in the years that followed it, we hear now and then the rustling of her train in the background as she takes little timid steps with one person or another to preserve her reputation from misunderstanding by Ronsard's readers. Almost at the close of the century Cardinal du Perron was begged by her to add an epistle to a new edition of the poems, attesting (what was not true) that Ronsard's

[2]In the interests, that is, of supposed chronological accuracy.

[3]A fountain he had dedicated to her. See the *Stances de la Fontaine d'He\ene.*

passion for her had been Platonic. 'I replied', says the Cardinal, ' "It would be enough to include your portrait." ' It was an ugly gibe. Perhaps the Cardinal was bitter for Ronsard's sake; for Ronsard's sake it would have been well to be less bitter. Curiously enough, it was reserved for our own Ben Jonson to repay the Cardinal in his own coin of discourtesy. Asked by du Perron for an opinion on his translations of Virgil, Ben answered (so he told Drummond) that 'they were naught'. It was a rough age. But as for Helene de Surgeres, she went unmarried to the grave where she and her reputation could rest in peace.

Ronsard had gone long before. He was ready. His final editions of his poems appeared in 1578 and 1584, carefully, perhaps too carefully, corrected to the last. Like the sage of Lucretius, he could rise from the feast of life satisfied, even weary. His poetic counsels to the King had been ill received; his passionate verses of protest against the fellers of his Forest of Gastine had not saved it; his health was finally gone.

> J'ay veu lever le jour, j'ay veu coucher le soir,
> J'ay veu greller, tonner, esclairer et pluvoir,
> J'ay veu peuples et Rois, et depuis vingt annees
> J'ay veu presque la France au bout de ses journees,
> J'ay veu guerres debats, tantost treves et paix,
> Tantost accords promis, redefais et refais,
> Puis defais et refais. J'ay veu que sous la Lune
> Tout n'estoit que hazard, et pendoit de fortune . . .
> Je m'en vais seul du monde ainsi qu'un convie
> S'en va soul du banquet de quelque marie,
> Ou du festin d'un Roy sans renfrogner la face,
> Si un autre apres luy se met dedans sa place.

Dignified, yet bitter, those words carry the memory not only back to Lucretius but forward to the exasperated farewell of another spirit equally sickened of revolutions—to Danton's 'Je suis saoul des hommes'.

But under its dignity the passing of Ronsard was a long agony. Rheumatism racked him, sleepless day and night in spite of every form of opium:

> Je n'ay plus que les os, un Squellette je semble,
> Decharne, denerve, demuscle, depoulpe,
> Que le trait de la mort sans pardon a frappe,
> Je n'ose voir mes bras que de peur je ne tremble. . . .
> Heureux, cent fois heureux animaux qui dormez
> Demy an en vos trous, soubs la terre enfermez,
> Sans manger du pavot qui tous les sens assomme.
> J'en ay mange, j'ay beu de son just oublieux
> En salade, cuit, cru, et toutefois le somme
> Ne vient par sa froideur s'asseoir dessus mes yeux.

On the eve of a journey that had suddenly to be postponed, he preferred to remain dressed through three days of waiting, rather than endure the agony of being undressed again. Yet his spirit and his genius were unbroken. Through the tossing nights his Muse stayed by his pillow. Through the hours of darkness he still composed—now some hymn for relief to Mercury, like the old pagan Peacock calling reproachfully in his last illness to 'the Immortal Gods'; now, classic as ever, some reminiscence of the dying Hadrian's address to his soul:

> Amelette ronsardelette,
> Mignonnelette, doucelette,
> Tres chere hostesse de mon corps;

now, in a vein of repentant piety, sonnets that recall the last of Sidney's. He fell asleep, all Christian rites performed, in his priory of Saint-Come two days after Christmas, 1585, when the last roses had fallen in the gardens of France.[4] His final words had been to beg his

[4] On the same day, by an odd coincidence, was strangled at Venice with a cord of crimson silk Lodovico Orsini, who had murdered five days before at Padua Vittoria Accorombona, the heroine of Webster's *The White Divel.* So chance brings together two utterly different, but equally characteristic sides of the Renaissance.

nurse to rouse him, should his mind begin to wander; but no unworthy delirium fell in parting from the tongue that through life had been so perfect in its utterance.

Ronsard, like Montaigne, remains typical of those rare ages of transition when literatures flower—those ages when a nation, in the words of Taine, is 'en train de quitter le gout du grand pour le gout de l'agreable—entre les moeurs heroiques et les moeurs epicuriennes'—between Bayard and Catherine de Mddicis. Bred by and for a soldier; a skilled rider, fencer, and dancer in his youth; churchman, scholar, controversialist, and poet; the ornament of Courts and lover of the wild, he reflected the eagerness for life of that versatile and vital age. It is an easy mistake to picture him as a pale and wan lover of ladies and of letters, delicately decadent. But if we think so, that is at least not his fault.

> Je ne suis pas paresseux, ct ne l'ay point *cste:*
> Tousjours la harquebuze, ou la paume champestre,
> Ou rescrime qui rend une jeunesse adextre,
> Me retient en travail tout le jour arreste.

In a debate before Henri III he upholds, *in* tones that might well be Montaigne's, the moral against the intellectual virtues—'On ne laisse pas d'estre homme d'honneur et vertu . . . sans scavoir telles curieuses vanitez ... dont Teffect n'est que vent. Voyez-vous pas nos laboureurs, qui n'ont jamais apris que Tart de la charue? Toutefois ils vivent en gens de bien et d'honneur.'

Agrippa d'Aubigne describes him as 'a gentleman of courage, whom poetry had not deprived of the use of his sword'. Though as passionately learned as poet has ever been, he knew when to pitch his books out of the window

> J'ay l'esprit tout ennuye
> D'avoir trop estudie

Les Phacnomcncs d'Arate:
II est temps que je m'esbate,
Et que j'aille aux champs jouer.
Bons Dicux! qui voudroit louer
Ceux qui collez sus un livre
N'ont jamais soucy de vivre?

He may shut himself up to read the whole Iliad in three days; he may be at home to nobody; and yet 'if a message from Cassandre . . .!' Desmond MacCarthy once sketched an imaginary day in the life of Voltaire, which has always remained my most vivid picture of him; it ended—'Love hke fools when you are young: work like devils when you are old. Good-night, my children.' Young and old, Ronsard did both together. And if, as he lay dying, he murmured 'Vanite des vanites', that does not prove he might have done better. Is it not well to be tired, when the time comes to sleep?

Further, it is fair to remember that this poet whom the world pictures a mere amorist, had glimpses further ahead than many a politic statesman of his time, towards the liberalism of later days. Like Montaigne he pleads for tolerance in reply to the Huguenots, who preach their pistol-bearing Christ—His face blackened with powder and a reddened cutlass in His hand—and forget that God made Paradise for all His children. And even more clearly than Montaigne, he foreshadows at moments the Nemesis which in 1789 and 1871 was to requite the extravagances of French monarchy:

J'ai veu trop de massons
Bastir les Tuileries
Et en trop de facons
Fake les mommeries.

And again, of Catherine de Medicis, with a boldness that, in a poet of the Court, takes the breath away—

Mais que nous sert son lieu des Thuileries?
Dc ricn, Morcau, cc n'est que vanitw;
Devant cent ans sera deshabite,
Et n'y aura ny fenestre ny sallc,
Leton entier, corniches ny ovalle,
Son plus certain, son palais le plus beau,
C'est Sainct Denis, quand aupres du tombeau
De son mary dormira trespassed,
A joinctes mains, a clos yeux renversee.

Still it is as a lover, above all, that the world remembers him. Love was to him the poetry of life; it was the life of his poetry.

Il fault aimer, maistresse, au monde quelque chose.
Celuy qui n'aime point, malheureux se propose
Une vie d'un Scythe.

Cassandre me ravit, Marie me tint pris:
Ja grison a la Cour, d'une autre je m'espris.
Si elles m'ont aime, je les ay bien aimees.

And no lover in poetry has ever been more charming; playful, reproachful, tender, irritated, passionate, idealistic—there is no mood he has not called to life, and turned back into music.

Apres fay luy sa rondelette oreille
Petite, unie, entre blanche et vermeille . . .

A mon retour (he, je m'en desespere)
Tu m'as receu d'un baiser tout glace,
Froid, sans saveur, baiser d'un trespasse,
Tel que Diane en donnoit a son frere;
Tel qu'une fille en donne a sa grand'mere,
La fiancde en donne au fiance,
Ny savoureux, ny moiteux, ny presse;
Et quoy, ma levre est-elle si amere?

Bonjour, mon coeur, bonjour, ma douce vie,
Mon doux printemps, ma douce fleur nouvelle,
Ma toute simple et toute fine,
Toute mon ame et tout mon coeur.

Maistresse, je n'ay pas les chevcux si grisons
Qu'une autre de bon cocur ne prennc vostre place . . .
Rentrer en mon Avril desormais je ne puis:
Aimez moy s'il vous plaist, grison comme je suis,
Et je vous aimeray quand vous serez de mesme.

Ma petite colombelle,
Me petite toute belle,
Mon petit oeil, baisez moy . . .

O beau yeux, qui m'estiez si cruels et si doux . . .
Vous m'ostastes du coeur tout vulgaire penser.

Often we may apply to his verse his own words of Cassandre—'le trait qui me navra de ta grace enfantine'. Catullus himself is not so young; and soon becomes more brutal. Ronsard can be bitter; but there is nothing in him like the Roman poet's farewell to Lesbia: 'Cum suis vivat valeatque moechis.' The noble frankness of Sappho is less varied. Propertius remains, except at supreme moments, too pedantic; Petrarch, too mawkish. Even Shakespeare in his Sonnets seems to me less at his ease alike with grave and gay. Donne is cleverer, not better; often worse, I feel, as an inferior human being—a human corkscrew, that draws now intoxicating wine, now blood, now mere aerated water, flashy with metaphysical bubbles and biting on the tongue for a moment, but flat tomorrow. With all his perfection, Herrick lacks passion. Alfred de Musset, so bewitching while he remains playful, is never out of danger of the hysterics and histrionics of his age. The Meredith of *Modern Love* cuts deeper, but with little charm and some vulgarity. The passionate melancholy of Dante Gabriel Rossetti suffers from the tendency to mystical rhodomontade which besets the Italian mind. Perhaps the nearest English love-poet to Ronsard, on his serious side, is Sir Thomas Wyatt, who has the same power, because he too was 'une ame bien nee', of ennobling simple speech by passionate sincerity. But

Wyatt's range in comparison is narrow; and is it not a little destructive to set even his finest verse beside Ronsard?

> Perchance thee lie withered and old,
> The winter nights that are so cold,
> Plaining in vain unto the moon;
> Thy wishes then dare not be told;
> Care then who list, for I have done.

Read by itself, Wyatt's poem seems hard to better, immeasurably superior as it is to the lines of Horace that suggested it—lines in which Horace's usual charming urbanity nods into a most disenchanting sleep. But Ronsard's sonnet rises above the horizon, after Wyatt's quivering star, like some golden autumn full-moon.

> Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir a la chandelle,
> Assise aupres du feu, devidant et filant,
> Direz, chantant mes vers, en vous esmerveillant,
> Ronsard me celebroit du temps que j'estois belle.
> Lors vous n'aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
> Desja sous le labeur a demy sommeillant,
> Qui au bruit de 'Ronsard' ne s'aille resveillant,
> Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle.
> Je seray sous la terre et, fantaume sans os,
> Par les ombres Myrtheux je prendray mon repos:
> Vous scrcz au fouyer une vieille accroupie,
> Regrettant mon amour, et vostre fier desdain.
> Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez a demain:
> Cueillez des aujourd'huy les roses de la vie.

> When you are old, and in the candle's rays
> You wind your thread, by the fire, at eventide,
> Singing my songs, you will say with wondering pride
> 'Ronsard wrote of me, in my beauty's days.'
> Then never a maid whose tired head nods and sways
> Drowsily over her labour at your side,
> But at the sound 'Ronsard' will open wide
> Her eyes and bless your name's immortal praise.
> I shall be under earth, a phantom laid
> To my long rest beneath the myrde-shade;

You, huddled by your fireside, old and grey,
Regretting my lost love and your proud scorn.
Ah, trust me, live!—wait not tomorrow morn,
Gather the roses of your youth today.

It is astonishing, where Wyatt's poem fills eight stanzas, how much more Ronsard gives in fourteen lines—the double vision of the white-haired Helene in candle-light beside the fire among her drowsy maids, and of his own phantom in the myrtle-shade; the faint yet definite outline of her character, and of her maids', and of his own; the admirable leading-up to the dramatic 'Ronsard', like a trumpet-call, in the fourth line and again to its echo in the seventh; the proud sadness of tone, not exulting like Wyatt, over the ignominies of old age, but uttering, as with the dignity of a voice from beyond this world, the pity of mortal transience, the splendour of immortal poetry.

Here, in many memories, a more modern echo will awake—'When you are old and grey and full of sleep.' In Yeats this fireside twilight has become a typically Celtic one. Where the English poet bids his mistress remember, not his poetry—that is over—only the bitterness of unfulfilled desire; and the French poet bids Helene remember both; the Irish singer bids his love think only:

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true;
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows in your changing face.
And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

In Ireland it is the sorrows in a face that are beloved; and enjoyment is less than memory. The Irish will never learn that the river they most need to harness is called,

not Shannon, but Lethe. Again, the unmystical eyes of the Frenchman, still more of the Englishman, do not look for Love's flying footsteps in the remoteness of mountain or star. Literature would be poorer without any one of these three poems; yet one may value Ronsard's most of all, not only for its poetry, but also for the truer balance of its attitude to life. There at least most Greek poets, I think, would have agreed.

But perhaps the only real parallel with Ronsard's poetry is not poetry at all. It is the music of Mozart. There alone have I felt the same delicacy of touch alike in gaiety and sorrow. To strictly religious persons, such as Communists, love-poetry is no doubt an idle thing and a life like Ronsard's a wasted one. It was not a very happy one, even though he had a great fund of gaiety—as Pontus de Tyard wrote, 'blessee cent fois, ta passion est gaie'. At heart, Ronsard felt too strongly to be a care-free Don Juan. But the fertility and flexibility of his genius to the end does bring to mind that curious theory of Proust's, that a writer needs a scries of love-affairs, like some magic steed fed on roses in a fairy-tale—they will prevent him from wasting his time on the hollow stupidity of social relations; and, though they will not bring him happiness, the very unhappiness they bring will keep his intelligence alertly speculating on the reasons why human happiness is impossible. Contrasting Goethe, say, with Wordsworth, we may admit that this view contains some truth; though, remembering Socrates or Montaigne or Hardy, we must add that it is far from containing the whole truth. A writer may surely keep his youth by voyaging through strange seas, without having a new love in every port. He may have other passionate interests. Ronsard himself had. He has sung Nature as well as any of his human mistresses.

Sainte-Beuve has described how Rousseau brought a touch of green into the pages of hterature. Stendhal found the first trace in French of that touch of Nature, that sense for landscape, in a certain poplar-alley where Monsieur de Nemours walks in *La Princesse de Cleves.* He forgot Ronsard.

Antres, et vous fontaines
De ces roches hautaines
Qui tombez contre-bas
D'un glissant pas:
Et vous forests et ondes
Par ces prez vagabondes
Et vous rives et bois
Oyez ma vois . . .
Je defens qu'on ne rompe
Le marbre pour la pompe
De vouloir mon tombeau
Bastir plus beau:
Mais bien je veux qu'un arbre
M'ombrage en lieu d un marbre,
Arbre qui soit couvert
Tousjours de vert.

As in this choice of his sepulchre, so it had been in his boyish days:

Je n'avois pas douze ans qu'au profond des valines,
Dans les hautes forests des hommes reculle'es,
Dans les Antres secrets de frayeur tout-couvers,
Sans avoir soin de ricn je composois des vers:
Echo me respondoit, et les simples Dryades,
Faunes, Satyrcs, Pans, Napees, Oreades,
Aigypans qui portoient des comes sur le front,
Et qui ballant sautoient comme les chevres font,
Et les Nymphes suivans les fantastiques Fees,
Autour de moi dansoient a cottes agraffes.

Deafness only deepened his love of the lonely silence of the woods:

Les rochers, les forests desja scavent assez
Quelle trampe a ma vie estrange et solitaire.

He has left his malediction on the first hunter that broke that dignity of stillness with the yelp of hounds. And years at Court only intensified his fondness for the countryside. Though he smiled at Helene's wistful longing to escape, as she gazed through the palace-window out to the green fields round Montmartre, he shared it himself; till at one moment he breaks into a passionate cry to her, strange indeed on the lips of a Court-poet, to break the golden chain and flee with him away to some quiet obscurity:

> Laisse de Pharaon la terre Egyptienne,
> Terre de servitude, et vicn sur le Jourdain:
> Laisse moy ceste Cour, et tout ce fard mondain,
> Ta Circe, ta Sereine, et ta Magicienne.

Even the Noble Savage is no idea unknown to him. Like Montaigne, he has devoured the voyages of Villegaignon; like Rousseau, he laments Europe's poisoned gift of 'civilisation' to the native. Even the savage beauty of the Alps excites him, two centuries and a half before Wordsworth crossed the Simplon or Coleridge sang of Chamonix:

> le froid des Alpes haut-cornues
> Qui soustiennent le cicl de leurs croupes chenues,
> Nourrices de maint fleuve et de maint gros torrent
> A gros bouillons enflez descendant et courant,
> Qui portent en tout temps sur leurs doz solitaires
> Les neiges, les frimats, les vents hereditaires.

How fine is the hint of immemorial nobility in that one last word!

But naturally his affection is deepest for the countryside that bred him in boyhood and saw, in youth, his long love for Cassandre—his own Vendomois, with its little Loir, its long slopes of green vineyard and yellowing corn, and the long glades of that Foret de Gastine against whose destruction he wrote lines as splendid as Emily Lawless's *Dirge for the Munster Forest:*

Soon shall my silvan coronals be cast;
My hidden sanctuaries, my secret ways,
Naked must stand to the rebellious blast;
No Spring shall quicken what this Autumn slays.
Forest, haute maison des oiseaux bocagers,
Plus le Cerf solitaire et les Chevreuls legers
Ne paistront sous ton ombre, et ta verte criniere
Plus du Soleil d'Este ne rompra la lumiere.

So too with the rivers of his home. No poet ever rendered more liquidly the beauty of running water. Even Horace's Bandusia must yield to Ronsard's Bellerie:

sans cesse vagabonde
Caquetant sur ton gravois
D'une floflotante vois;

or his other Fountain of Hylas, where

Un ombre lent par petite secousse
Erroit dessus, si que le vent pousse,
Pousse et repousse et pousse sur les eaux
L'entrelassure ombreuse des rameaux.

Frozen, its beauty in his hands grows only more sparkling, as it becomes

oyseux crystal de la morne gelee.

Still more lively is his pleasure in living things—the crane with its jerky' flight towards warmer lands; the lark mounting 'in little leaps' only to drop earthward again, like the spindleful of wool that a lass lets drop from her distaff as she nods at evening by the fire; the diminutive frog croaking so loud as to startle the thirsty bullock away from its pool; the snail who carries on his back 'his bed and his palace'; the 'gentil' hawthorn, with two camps of red ants in garrison beneath its bole. And **the** ants themselves, Heavens, how good they are to see!

Mon Dieu! quand un ost de Fourmis
Aux champs de bon matin s'est mis,
Qu'il fait bon voir par la campagne
Marcher ceste troupe compagne
Au labeur ententivement!

As for the wild deer:

Je mourrois de plaisir voyant en ces beaux mois
Debusquer au matin le Chevreuil hors du bois.

One more illustration must suffice—the most masterly he-goat that pen—or pencil—ever drew:

Je gage mon grand bouc, qui par mont et par plaine
Conduit seul un troupeau comme un grand Capitaine:
It est fort, hardy, corpulent et puissant,
Brusque, prompt, esveille, sautant et bondissant,
Qui grate en se joiiant de Tergot de derricre
(Regardant les passans) sa barbe mentonnierc:
ll a le front severe et le pas mesure,
La contenance fiere et Toeil bien assure':
II ne doute les loups, tant soient ils redoutables,
Ny les mastins armez de colliers effroyables,
Mais plants sur le haut d'un rocher espineux
Les regarde passer, et si se mocque d'eux.

One of the most famous works of the Greek sculptor Myron was a cow; Ronsard's view of Nature is extraordinarily Greek—I know nothing like it before Chenier—not merely in its resurrection of Aegipan and Oread, but in this simple directness of vision. On the misty green world of Langland the Mediterranean sun of Hesiod has risen again. Ronsard does not break his ants' backs with drawing ponderous morals. He does not vaporise his lark from a bird into a spirit. These brooks have no books soaking in them; these stones no dog-eared sermons. If they have a message ever, it is the simple and eternal one of man's transience and Nature's careless immortality. This in itself is no small blessing. With all Wordsworth's merits, one may be haunted in his nature-poetry by the feeling of being shown round a very large cathedral by a very solemn verger who never forgets to point in the register to Nature's highly respectable marriage-lines. And Nature is not respectable.

On the other hand, Ronsard remains absolutely free from that stiff over-formahty that was to prevent men seeing any green thing with their own eyes in the two centuries of landscape-gardening that follow Malherbe. Ronsard has plenty of convention. His garden contains all the classic nymphs and flowers that by tradition should be there; but suddenly he sees also what is really there. Just as, amid the vague and conventional imagery of the sonnet, we are suddenly transported into the very room where Helene lies sick and weary, by the single line:

Et ta main qui le lict nonchalante traverse.

Most learned of poets as he was, he soon saw the danger of becoming a library-owl.

J'aime fort les jardins qui sentent le sauvage.

And so his love of Nature balanced and kept sane his love of Art. For a moment in his career the depths of pedantry had yawned for him as for Ben Jonson. No poet has been a more conscious and conscientious artist. If he remained a human being, instead of dwindling to a man of letters, it was thanks partly to his love of beauty, in women and in Nature; but partly also to the Court. For however he came to hate ante-chamber and back-stairs, however we may grudge the weeks he wasted, like Goethe at Weimar, on Court-entertainments, it was not an unmixed evil when—

Perrot laissa les bois et aux Rois s'en alla.

Study, forest, salon—all helped to give him balance; and the Court did its share to make him the Prince of Poets.

It is worth turning for a moment to the history of his style. Before he came, the fifteenth century had burnt itself out in flamboyance of technique, in verse as in dress and in architecture. Poetry had become an empty cupboard, with only a few old bones rattling inside it, itself

a skeleton worm-eaten into meaningless intricacies—*rimes batelees, equivoquees, fraternisees, ballades balladantes, rondeaux jumeaux.* We read of poems in strophes alliterated throughout, of masterpieces able to be read in thirty-two different ways. Though Charles d'Orleans can be delightful at his rare best, the monotony of even his collected works weighs like lead upon the reader.

With Marot this tangle of mist and moonshine had been penetrated by new light both from the older past—he edited Villon—and from the Classics. He too was a poet of the Court—the Renaissance Court of Francois I; and he developed a new style, a typically French, simple, yet sly candour to be perfected hereafter by La Fontaine. For Marot's

> Lors le lion ces deux grands yeux vetit
> Et vers le rat les tourna un petit

is exactly the La Fontaine of the *Fables;* just as

> Quand les petites vilotieres
> Trouvent quelque hardi amant
> Qui veuille mettre un diamant
> Devant leurs yeux riants et verts,
> Coac! elles tombent a Tenvers.
> Tu ris? Maudit soit-il qui erre!
> C'est la grand vertu de la pierre
> Qui eblouit ainsi les yeux

is exactly the La Fontaine of the *Contes.* At moments indeed Marot can closely anticipate Ronsard himself:

> Adieu amours, adieu gentil corsage,
> Adieu ce teint, adieu ces friands yeux!
> Je n'ai pas eu de vous grand avantage.
> Un moins amant aura peut-etre mieux.

But he could not satisfy the passionate young of 1549. With their humanist contempt for the *'epiceries* of the Middle Age, for *balade* and *virelai,* they found him on the other hand too ignobly plain—like Wordsworth after

Erasmus Darwin. For seven years Ronsard set himself to learn the secret

> du haut honneur d'Athenes
> Et du savoir de F antique Rome.

The fruits of that long apprenticeship are shown in borrowings from Homer, Pindar, Anacreon, Mimnermus, Theocritus, Plato, the Anthology, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Ausonius, Petrarch, Ariosto, Sannazar, Bembo, Pontano, Navagero, Flaminio, Secundus, Marullus, as well as from Jean de Meung, Jean Lemaire, Mellin de Saint-Gellais and Marot himself. Generations of scholars have sorted and labelled all this stolen property; no doubt much more of it will never be identified. It is amusing that even the learned and delightful Jusserand should pick out of the deserts of the *Franciade,* as a lovely gem of Ronsard's own 'qui n'a rien d'antique', his comparison of two silent lovers to two mutely standing trees which is really borrowed from Valerius Flaccus, who borrowed it in his turn from Apollonius Rhodius. A modern poet who dared to be so derivative would be treated as a complete fraud. The less real originality we have, the more touchy we grow about it. But even Ronsard did not escape unscathed from the danger of just that false elaboration which he despised in mediaeval writers, when he stoops to phrases like 'les Amycleans flambeaux' for Castor and Pollux; or, for poets, 'ceux qui font l'amour aux Neuf Soeurs'. A hyacinth is not really prettier disguised as 'la lettre teinte au sang Du Grec marry pour les armes'; and few without assistance can identify 'the daughter of the nephew of Atlas' as Fame. Nor has posterity accepted his attempt to enrich them with new coinages, in imitation of Greek, like 'desli-soucy, donne-vie, oste-soin', or 'tu-geant', or 'desrobe-fleur avettes'. In imitating Pindar, again, Ronsard

forgot the advice Pindar himself received from Corinna after she had defeated him—to sow his mythological detail 'with the hand, not by the sackful'. Yet in the end the French poet came home from his outlandish Greek wanderings to the native good sense of his own land. Typical is his alteration of

> Ny la *Sicile* de moissons
> Ny l'Afrique n'a tant d'arenes
> Ny le mont d'Ide de fonteines

in his last edition of 1584 to

> Ny la Beauce . . .
> Ny la Bretaigne . . .
> Ny l'Auvergne . . .

So Francis Thompson, equally rash, repented his neologisms in his last days.

> Ny trop haut, ny trop bas, c'est le souverain style,
> Tel fut celuy d'Homere et celuy de Virgile.

> Me loue qui voudra les plis recourbez
> Des torrens de Pindare a noz yeux desrobez,
> Obscurs, rudes, fascheux, et ses chansons cognues
> Que je ne scay comment par songes et par nues,
> Que le peuple n'entend: le doux Anacreon
> Me plaist . . .

So Ronsard in the end digested his ancient learning, and the overflow of the Tiber only left richer in native green the field of French poetry. Instead of *Gradus* extracts, he learns at last to write lines like

> Amour ne regne point sur la troupe blesmie
> Des morts, qui sont sillez d'un long somme de fer;

where those who know the χάλκεος ὕπνος of Homer and the Terreus somnus' of Virgil have the thrill of seeing a familiar thing made yet finer; and those who do not know them, have the thrill of strangeness; and in either case the result is magnificent. That is the way to use one's predecessors in poetry; not the modern method of plastering

poems with pretentious quotations in half a dozen languages.

In this happy mean, then, Ronsard found his final ideal—'ce n'est pas le tout que d'ouvrir le bee grand'. Spontaneity was what mattered. It was folly for him, he realised, to try to write long works to the order of princely patrons. He could not command at will his inspiration—his 'fureur'. Better, as Callimachus had said long ago at Alexandria, a little stream of crystal lyric than some great turbid torrent of epic.

> Petits sonnets bien faits, belles chansons petites,
> Petits discours gentils, sont les fleurs des Charites.

So Goethe too pronounced large poems a mistake—all verse should really be occasional verse. And it must be written, Ronsard came to feel, for its own sake, *with joie d'erire.*

> En riant je compose, en riant je veux lire,
> Et voila tout le fruict que je recoy d'escrire.

It is always a relief to find writers who refuse to mistake poetry for a sort of holy communion. In his youth Ronsard had been ravenous for fame. He had looked forward to the day a thousand years hence, when pilgrims should come to drink of his little Loir as reverently as of Permessus:

> Et, voyant mon pays, a peine pourra croire
> Que d un si petit heu tel Poete soit ne.

He had fully gained the only kind of glory that is not a ghost—glory in his lifetime. Within ten years of his first volume he was the leading poet in France, if not in Europe. But one with so quick an eye for mortality could not fail to see the vanity of fame; one so proud, its vulgarity. Homer and Anacreon are dead and ask no longer what men say of them; as for the crowd, 'le plus

grand desplaisir que je saurois avoir en ce monde, c'est d'estre estime ou recherche du peuple'.

The last sentence protests too much; and it was well for Ronsard through the next two centuries that the dead are deaf. For the history of his reputation is one of the most curious episodes in the annals of poetry, and one of the most ridiculous in the annals of criticism. In his lifetime Marguerite of Savoy had told Charles IX he was lucky to have at his Court one who was the first man of his age; at his death in 1585 L'Estoile wrote that 'the first and the last of French poets' had passed away. The younger generation had indeed knocked at his door, headed by Philippe Desportes; yet not very formidably. But the Devil's Advocate appeared with Malherbe (1555-1628) who regarded Ronsard's style as not even French. The story is well known of someone finding Malherbe's copy of Ronsard and remarking that he had at all events not struck out some of the lines—whereupon Malherbe forthwith struck them out too. For Chapelain (1595-1674) Ronsard is still a born poet, but 'sans art'—a mason, not an architect, in the house of poetry; for Balzac (1594-1654) he is still a considerable stream, but 'l'ordure empeche de couler l'eau'. Then the severity increases. La Fontaine (1621-95) calls him 'dur, sans choix, sans gout'; Arnauld (1612-94) speaks of his 'pitoyables poesies'. La Bruyere and Fenelon are less crushing—Ronsard, they feel, had genuine enthusiasm, but he tried to do too much at once to the French language. But the general attitude of the eighteenth century became utter contempt. 'Il gata la langue', growled Voltaire; 'he is unreadable', echoes La Harpe; 'au nom de Ronsard', says Marmontel more elaborately, 'on croit voir fuir les Graces, et surtout les graces anacreontiques'. Chenier tried to do again what Ronsard had done, but the guillotine put an end to that.

In mid nineteenth century Michelet is the most ferocious of all: 'un maniaque enrage de travail, de frenetique orgueil . . . le nez sur les livres latins, arrachant des griffes et des dents les lambeaux de l'antiquite. . . . Il frappait comme un sourd sur la pauvre langue francaise.'

How could they think it? Partly, no doubt, by simply not reading Ronsard himself. Partly, once the tradition of abuse was established, by mere suggestion. Also, he wrote far too much; there are deserts. But the critical history of Ronsard remains a prodigy of obtuseness; and critics might well re-read it, once a month, as a chastening and penitential exercise.

It was Sainte-Beuve who in 1828, by way of providing the young Romantics with an ancestor and pedigree, produced an anthology of Ronsard, together with what seems today some damningly faint praise. The result was to make a poet like Alfred de Vigny write je frappe sur le livre et je jette des cris de plaisir a me faire passer pour fou' Sainte-Beuve himself must have been a good deal surprised. But he had relighted a candle not soon to be put out. In 1857 followed the first of many new complete editions. Since then Ronsard's greatness has passed beyond question.

I have not set out to give a new view of him; simply to find him new readers. In England Ronsard is far too little known, apart from a few stock pieces. He is not indeed in the modern fashion; that is only one more reason for reading him. We like brutality and strong spirits; and there is no absinthe in Ronsard. We have gone back, like the Egyptians, to worship dung-beetle and baboon; he cared for Faun and Dryad, for the grace of Greece and the gravity of Rome. They are out of date, according to the yapping of our nine days' deities.

Paganisme immortel, cs-tu mort? On le dit.
Mais Pan tout bas s'en moque, ct la Sirene en rit.

But Ronsard is long; and life, as he perpetually repeated, is not. That is a reason for reading him at once; but also for beginning, not on his collected works, but on the admirable selection of Pierre de Nolhac, which has no fault except one which many will find no fault at all—that it modernises Ronsard's spelling.

I write this in my garden, under a plum tree, with Ronsard's roses laughing before me in the brief splendour of June; behind rises the gaunt skeleton of the new University Library, gaping for the coming deluge of books in their lorry-loads, of massed periodicals briefer in their life, and far less lovely, than a rose. How many of the writers that scribble in the one and squabble in the other, know Ronsard? Yet, irresistibly, we are drawn to read these things in their fussy novelty, knowing quite well that in the states of feeling they will give us they cannot compare with him. Doubtless one must live in one's own age too; he would have been the first to echo that. But how fantastically we allocate our days! When I think that till a couple of years ago Ronsard was not much more than a name *to* me, and recall the shelves of learned trash I read instead, and that such is the common way of our world, I wonder if secretly we are half dead and shun living things, lest they should shame our shallowness. Until by some chance we suddenly hear again one of the Immortals; and ask ourselves wonderingly in what frivolous and somnolent owl-light, among what fugitive cobwebs of futility we have wandered so long, deaf to Dionysus dancing by our blindly shuttered walls.

Io qu'on boivc, qu'on chantc,
Qu'on cnchantc
La dent des soucis felons:

La vicillesse larronncssc
Ja nous presse
Le derriere des talons . . .

Ha Vesper! brunette estoile,
Qui d'un voile
Par tout embrunis les cieux,
Las! en ma faveur encore
Ne decore
L'arche du ciel de tes yeux . . .

Va va jalouse, chemine,
Tu n'es digne
Ny tes estoilles, d'ouyr
Une chanson si parfaite
Qui n'est faite
Que pour les Dieux esjouyr . .

Jamais l'homme tant qu'il meure,
Ne demeure
Bien-heureux parfaitement:
Tousjours avec la liesse
La tristesse
Se mesle secretement.

THE MASTER-ESSAYIST

'I'aymcroy mieulx m'entendre bien en moy qu'en Ciccron.'

Four hundred years have passed since Montaigne was born. It is hard to realise that this adorer of the Ancients is already becoming so ancient himself. He remains so modern—the first modern man, more advanced in many ways than this distracted world we live in, which only too closely resembles his in its fanaticism and brutality, and has so much still to learn from him. Today he seems nearer to us in mind than Shakespeare, who was younger and is as immortal; than Rousseau, who imitated his ideas and his self-revelations two centuries later; than our own grandparents. Generations have peered over Montaigne's shoulder into the little mirror where he studied himself, to find their own features looking back at them; generations to come, for whom the most flashing novelties of 1933 have grown dull and rusty, will bend over that mirror still. That a gaily self-indulgent old gentleman in Perigord once loved scratching his ears is and will be remembered where lives, by the thousand, of desperate industry and devoted idealism leave not a ripple on the inky waters of oblivion. Such is justice. He would have been the first to smile at the irony of it. And yet it is not unreasonable. Montaigne has done more to civilise Europe by quietly recording what he was, than they by all they do. That quiet voice has filled our whole world with echoes. They meet us, disguised, in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest.* Webster wove its sentences into his bitter verse. Ben Jonson remarked in verse as bitter how good Montaigne was to steal from. Bacon followed in his tracks (Montaigne had been familiar

with Anthony Bacon at Bordeaux); then Burton, and Addison, and Sterne. His influence has crossed the Atlantic as easily as the Channel, to mould Emerson and Thoreau. And in his own country, unlike Ronsard, he has never lost his place: admired as 'l'incomparable auteur de Tart de conferer' and detested as a pagan by Pascal; a still living friend for Madame de Lafayette and Madame du Deffand; a master for La Bruyere and La Rochefoucauld, for Montesquieu and Rousseau; the sceptic ancestor of Sainte-Beuve and Renan and Anatole France. He has appealed to men of all sorts and conditions. 'A peine trouverez-vous un gentilhomme de campagne', writes Huet (1630-1721) 'qui veuille se distinguer des preneurs de lievres, sans un Montaigne sur sa cheminee.'

Why? Partly because he dared to wear his heart—not a golden model, but his own natural one—on the sleeve of his dressing-gown. Many have tried to do that since. But Rousseau and Chateaubriand pose, like most of their fellow-autobiographers; the one in a white sheet with a bottle of vitriol underneath, the other in imperious purple. And yet nakedness is not everything. Pepys exposes himself still more completely than Montaigne, not realising that the world is watching; but he has not exerted a tithe of Montaigne's influence. He gives himself most charmingly away; but it is a simpler self and a smaller gift. Montaigne brings us a richer personality, a subtler brain, a more fascinating tongue; for he is three things in one—the unashamed Adam, but also the thinker and, third, the artist.

Yet if we ask what this thinker thought, we shall find that all his honesty and all his style have failed to give the world an unambiguous impression of what he actually believed. For some he has been the Sceptic; for some, the Epicurean. But it is better to avoid such labels. They are

both too rigid and too ambiguous. A sceptic, for instance, may be one who rejects all beliefs, or only other people's; who thinks that truth has not yet been found, or that it cannot ever be. But the soul of Montaigne is a living butterfly; nothing that can be pinned down in a glass case is really he.

Thus, he distrusted and despised most convictions; yet he retained strong ones. How utterly he distrusted them stands most clearly written, not in his pages, perpetually as they repeat it, but on the rafters of his library in the tower which is all that fire has left today of his chateau of Montaigne. There he had inscribed half a hundred of his chosen mottoes (we may recall and contrast those in the house of Ronsard), mottoes, above all, that express an almost nihilistic exultation in human purblindness—**οὐδὲν ὁρίζω** (I take no definite view); **ἐπέχω** (I suspend judgment); **ἀκαταληπτῶ** (I do not commit myself); **ἀρρεπῶς** (with nothing to choose either way); **παντὶ λόγῳ λόγος ἴσος ἀντίκειται** (to every reason there is as good a counter-reason); *vae qui sapientes estis in oculis vestris* (woe to you that are wise in your own eyes); *ne plus sapias quam necesse est ne obstupescas* (be no wiser than you must so as not to be paralysed); **ἐνδέχεται καὶ οὐκ ἐνδέχεται** (it is possible and yet impossible); **οὐ μᾶλλον οὕτως ἔχει ἢ ἐκείνως ἢ οὐδετέρως** *(it is* not *more* this way than that way, *or* neither way). This room is the very shrine of Doubt. The fence seems to Montaigne a pleasanter seat than any arm-chair. It is as if he felt the Universe capable of anything; and the human mind of nothing, except mares'-nests. There are passages in the *Essais* where he amasses *betises* almost with the misanthropic exultation (though more impish and less enraged) of the author of *Bouvard and Pecuchet,* and with the same moral: 'II ne faut jamais conclure.' 'Ma maistresse forme est Tignorance'—'II me

semble que nous ne pouvons jamais estre assez meprisez selon nostre merite.' Like some delighted water-fowl he dives again and again into the depths of nescience and uses his wings to splash its dark waters with gusto over his shaking head.

And yet Montaigne was not really a sceptic; on most days, at least. What did he believe in? Christianity? What, indeed, is belief? It is quite false, I think, to picture him as a disguised Voltaire, sneering in his sleeve. No doubt, he might well have conformed outwardly through his life, merely to save it; he might have made a Christian death simply, as Gide suggests, for his wife's sake; but if an essay like that on Prayers, with its casual allusions to his own special fondness for the Paternoster and for the sign of the Cross, is all merely a cunning piece of stagecraft, then instead of the sincerest he was the insincerest of men. And why should he tell us, unless it were true, that he always receives the rites of the Church at the beginning of any attack of illness, to set his mind at rest? Sainte-Beuve has pictured him as a demon or enchanter leading the unsuspecting Christian on and on into the labyrinth of opinions by the light of the lamp of faith; then suddenly he blows it out and through the pathless darkness Ton n'entend plus qu'un petit rire'. So Port-Royal may have seen him; such, in effect, for some readers he may have been; but he surely did not see himself as this sort of 'Sphinx moqueur'. So much the worse for his head, perhaps; so much the better for his heart. Irony is fair enough; dissimulation may be necessary; but wanton hypocrisy is no part of the Montaigne we know. He tells us how astounded he was by the confession of an acquaintance that he had continued all his life to pretend beliefs he did not hold, in order to keep some position. Are we to think this too a pretence?

And yet how could he regard life and death with such pagan eyes? Always the heroes of Plutarch, not the Bible, are his models in practice; the heathen sages, not the Fathers, his masters in theory. His book is largely an *Imitatio Socratis*, the very antithesis of *The Imitation of Christ*. He writes of being himself 'ny ange ny Caton'—a juxtaposition that both Cato and the angel would have found equally surprising. Of death he speaks calmly as a half-pleasant sleep; he praises Roman suicides; in a crisis of illness he seems to have contemplated that way of escape as not impossible for himself. 'Sentiments tout paiens', groans Pascal. Could such a man believe in Hell? Certainly for repentance he has little use; he would live, he says, very much in the same way if he had his life over again. For him health is the most precious thing in the world, 'un plaisir solide, charnu et moelleux', the only object worth taking pains to win; whereas for Pascal it is a sin to desire it. True, Pascal was a religious maniac. But the Papal censors who found no fault with the *Essais* except such trifles as too frequent references to Fortune in place of Providence, or the monstrous suggestion that a heretic like Theodore Beza could be a good poet, were blind owls straining at gnats. When Rome put Montaigne on the *Index* under Louis XIV, she had been a century too slow in the uptake.

It is indeed an extraordinary picture of inconsistency. But Montaigne has given us, I think, the only answer. Man is 'merveilleusement divers et ondoyant'. He was a born pagan: yet he believed that he believed. In religion, one half of his brain did not really know what the other half thought. Reason was one thing, faith another. Sometimes the wall between these watertight compartments dwindles to such eggshell thinness that we cannot believe it will hold. Yet it does. Montaigne may find it

easy to disbelieve in witches, devoutly accepted by Sir Thomas Browne a whole century later; or in doctors, who are for him much in the same category as witches; he may jettison the Ptolemaic astronomy for the Copernican, while perfectly prepared to see, as we have seen it, the Copernican abandoned in its turn. But though his mind is so critical and so elastic; though he talks often like a pagan theist; though Nature is his true God; the faith of his childhood, I believe, always kept its hold on one corner of that restless, agile brain.

But Montaigne is not immortal as a sceptic who lived ingeniously balanced on the hither side of the last ditch. There were more important and less muddled exceptions to his scepticism. In religion he might be capable, in his own phrase, of carrying a candle in one hand for St. Michael and in the other for the dragon. But in his scale of moral values, though he saw vividly how such things vary with years and frontiers, there were principles about which he never faltered. That marks him off from many a modern intellectual who regards Montaigne as a brother in disillusion. He never forgot his hero-worship, not less real, though better balanced, than Carlyle's, for the great of antiquity; he never forgot his strong sense of what is becoming, and what is not, for 'une nature bien nee'. Whatever he doubted, he kept his faith in sincerity and tolerance, in courage and mercy. This faith was largely instinctive; he had an aesthetic loathing for the 'laideur' of their opposites. But the man whom no risk of infection could drive from the bedside of La Boetie; who read and re-read the stoic pages of Seneca; who admired above all characters that of Epaminondas and above all professions that of a soldier, was no more a pure Epicurean than a pure Sceptic.

Is there then any unifying principle behind the beliefs

of Montaigne, any 'forme maistresse' under this contradictory character? The master-key to the chambers of his mind may be found, I think, not as he himself suggested, in a disdain of all supposed knowledge, but in a wider impulse—a horror of all constraint, a passion for independence which, in one on the whole so calm and easy-going, is at moments almost a claustrophobia. Whatever else might happen, he loathed the very idea of being caught, cramped, confined by any kind of bond or tie—by theories, principles, or formulae; by the obligations of a profession, or of a favour; by any sort of pedantry or even specialisation in knowledge; by passion for person or thing; by marriage, 'were it with Wisdom herself; by the cares of property; or by any other compulsion from without or enthusiasm from within. Hence his passion for the escape of travel, his ideal of living 'le cul dans la selle', his irritation at the idea of being told there was some corner in the Indies, even, he must not go to; hence, too, his intellectual vagabondage, the studied dilettantism of this gipsy mind. He was half glad, he tells us, if an acquaintance was ungrateful, because it loosened the bonds between them. 'Extremement oysif, extrcmement libre', he calls himself; 'enncmy iure d'obligation, d'assiduite, de constance.' 'Sij'ay autre guide que ma pure et librc volonte, je n'y vaux rien.' He would rather be cheated than face the drudgery of reading through a business-contract. An entry in his annual accounts runs: 'Item, pour mon humeur paresseuse, mille livres.' This untameable creature simply cannot live in captivity. 'On n'est bien que dans Farrierc-boutique.'

But what then is one to do there? Freedom is a merely negative thing. *One* cannot live simply by being 'agin' the government', with no ruling principle but anarchy. What Montaigne wanted was not to be idle, nor a mere

spectator, watching the world with wide, curious eyes till it is time to close them in sleep for ever; but to be, naturally and fully, himself—jouir loyalement de son etre'. If Freedom is for him one ultimate ideal, Health, of mind and of body, sanity and 'same', is really the other. Here he forgets all scepticism; and here he becomes completely un-Christian. His world does not groan and travail. His Virtue wears no rue: 'cette vertu supreme, belle, triomphante, amoureuse, delicieuse pareillement et courageuse, ennemi professe et irreconciliable d'aigreur, de desplaisir, de crainte et de contraincte, ayant pour guide Nature, Fortune et Volupte pour compagnes'. 'Il n'cst rien plus gay, plus gaillard, plus enioue, et a peu que ie ne die folastre'—thus he would have Virtue painted to the young; not 'd'un visage renfrogne, sourcillcux, et terrible'.

It is a strange morality, even now, to English ears. But Montaigne is a child of his race. He comes from further south than Ronsard. I shall never forget staying at Saint-Remy and meeting on a farm there a local character—'le poete'. He was an elderly countryman, sunburnt to the very image, in terracotta, of a laughing faun. From his twinkling eyes one looked down involuntarily at his feet as if to find a pair of twinkling goat's hoofs. His latest composition, I gathered, had been inspired by the refusal of his kitchen-fire to light. So he had sat down and extemporised some verses to the effect that nothing mattered now, since France had regained Alsace-Lorraine. Such hilarious irony was too much for any fire. From that moment, he assured us, it burnt like mad. In that happy Midi the art of writing letters, so dependent on the gift of gaiety, still survives; and Montaigne takes my memory back to one received from my hostess in Provence a little later: 'Nous sommes trop tannes, noirs et recuits ici, pour permettre au vent d'est de nous rendre

durs, fins et penches vers l'abime. Le soleil nous fait des coeurs sans ombre. C'est degoutant d'etre si vulgaires—voila pourquoi les Parisiens nous meprisent tant.' In his gay courage, in his unembittered irony, in the smiling shrewdness that conceals a capacity for intense and enduring feeling, Montaigne with all his originality remains also, I believe, a typical child of his country at its best. Rousseau, his dour Genevan descendant, craved as passionately as Montaigne for freedom; but freedom, not for sane and gay vitality, but for neurotic self-torment.

There can be little doubt, however, that nurture strongly reinforced nature in making Montaigne so passionate for independence. Most know well enough the story of his education-—the solicitude of the best of fathers (another parallel between Montaigne and Horace) for his one surviving son; the fostering of the child in a poor family, to make him both robust and compassionate; the use of soft music, after the child's return home, to wake him each morning; his acquisition of Latin in the nursery at Montaigne, not a syllable of French being allowed there; followed by some play-method of learning Greek, which was at least so effective that when Montaigne's sister had grown up and a friend of her husband's proposed to him in discreet Greek before her 'une debauche d'amourette', the astonished tempter found himself ordered out *of* the house. No modern parent with Freud upon his mind could have been more conscientious than Pierre Eyqucm de Montaigne, more anxious to avoid repression or constraint. Only twice did the little Michel feel the rod. Then after some years of this audacious experiment his father's courage faltered and he was sent like others to college at Bordeaux; but the effects were lasting. Not only was Montaigne a Latinist and classicist for life, the envy of his fellows and the terror of his masters; his dislike

of subjection, of pedantry, of drudgery had become equally inrooted and, some will think, exaggerated. Even at the College de Guyenne all he learnt was by truant reading in stolen hours.

But if freedom and health were his ruling passions, there still remains the essential question of the use to be made of them. Without activity freedom is empty, and health impossible. More than half his life had passed before he found the final answer, in literary creation.

At first he studied law. Very young he became a counsellor in the Parliament of Bordeaux. Special missions took him to Court. He admits that he had felt the prickings of ambition. He admits that he felt also and indulged far more freely an appetite for gallantry. But he was too frank, too critical, too easy-going and too humane for a successful career in the ruthless France of the religious wars. In 1570, after his father's death, he resigned his magistracy and retired to his estate. He was thirty-seven. After sixteen years of service, the remaining half of his life should be in his own. On his next birthday a quaint Latin inscription in his library recorded how 'Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the bondage of the law and of public office, had withdrawn to rest on the bosom of the learned Virgins'.

But inactivity is not rest. He found his mind, left fallow, was beginning to grow weeds and whimsies. He realised what I believe is true of all lives, and certainly of bookish ones, that well-being depends, for individuals as for states, on a proper balance of imports and exports. Passively to absorb, without some corresponding activity to keep things even, can only leave a mind stuffed yet unsatisfied. Then came the idea of writing down his own stray thoughts. The balance was restored. Montaigne was safe for life: he was safe for immortality.

His first attempts are half commonplace-book, half commentary on it. The *Letters* of Seneca and the *Morals* of Plutarch provided his models. In part he was indulging his eternal curiosity; but he was also in search of thoughts to guide and sustain him on the downward slope to old age and death. But as time passes, he becomes less interested in growing a shell of Senecan stoicism, more in himself and in expressing himself. In 1580 his first two Books appeared. It was time for a change of activity. In 1578 he had been attacked by the stone, of which his father died ten years before: la plus soudaine de toutes les maladies, la plus doulcureuse, la plus mortelle, la plus irremediable'. An excellent reason for travelling, to see if spas are any less futile than doctors. And so there follows that seventeen-month excursion through South Germany, Tyrol, and Italy recorded in his *Journal* by this invalid who leaves his robuster travelling-companions half prostrate, rushing off the route in every direction to see some new thing; hating, in his eagerness to get on, the very sight of the place where he had passed the night; and ready to go riding off all the way to Greece by land, instead of Rome-wards, if they would but let him. He examines with equal curiosity Swiss stoves and Swiss pastors; appreciates the mountain-scenery of the Brenner; visits the mad Tasso at Ferrara; dines with the Grand Duke (the Francesco de' Medici of Webster's *White Devil)* and the notorious Bianca Capello at Florence; sees at Rome horse-races and processions of flagellants, the circumcision of a Jewish infant and the casting out of a Christian devil; kisses the Pope's toe and argues about his *Essais* with the Papal censors; gives a ball with prizes for pretty peasant-girls at the Baths of Lucca; then learns that he has been elected Mayor of Bordeaux, with a special letter from the King forbidding him to refuse; and so home by the Mont

Cenis. All this in the intervals of agonies from the stone, which drove him to groan and yell without restraint, but could not break his energy.

As Mayor his term of office lasted two years. He made it clear with his usual frankness at the outset that he proposed to do his duty but not, like his father, to be a martyr to it. He kept his word; Bordeaux re-elected him for two more. The troubles of the League grew worse; he had to spend days and nights in arms; but his boldness mixed with conciliation kept the peace in Bordeaux. At the end of his second term came the plague which swept off half the population of the city. He was in the country outside at the time; he had no further duties within the walls; he could have done nothing; he stayed where he was. It was not heroic. It was merely sensible. But he had faced calmly enough a case *of* the pestilence in his own household at Montaigne; and no one who remembers his quiet courage in other crises will join those who accuse him of having lacked it now.

He went back to his pen. The fruit appeared in a new edition of the *Essais* in the year of the Armada, 1588. The second and third editions of 1582 and 1587 had been little changed. But this contained some six hundred additions and the new Third Book. Then *on* the margins of this new issue the restless pen of this disbeliever in revision began anew to accumulate fresh additions—more and more improper and frivolous, many of them. For as the shadows darkened over his old age, he felt the need of more and more gaiety; just as the closet off his library was bright with gay paintings of the loves of Mars and Venus, of Cymon and Pero. He refused the invitation of Henry of Navarre, the laughing prince after his own heart who had now become King at last, to be his confidential adviser. He was too old and broken

now. In 1595 his 'adoptive daughter', Mile, de Gournay, a young lady of Picardy who had been thrown into such raptures by discovering the *Essais* some ten years before, that her relatives dosed her with hellebore, saw through the press a final edition. But Montaigne himself did not see it. Three years before, he had quietly closed at home the Book of Life.

What does he still offer the modern reader? First, himself—the most vivid portrait we have from four centuries ago. With his gift and his passion for intimacy he sets himself body and mind before us—a short man, with a high and loud voice, even in talking to princes, and easily excited to exaggerate; fidgety, even on the most ceremonious occasions, so that he likes a stick to gesticulate with; given to scratching ('des gratifications de nature des plus doulces'), particularly to scratching his ears; riding rather than walking, the more so as little men get hustled in the streets; eating only twice a day, but so eagerly as to bite tongue and fingers (for he uses knife and fork little and needs his napkin the more); especially fond *of* high game, of sauces, of melons, and of fish (so that fast-days are no fasts to him); not content with less than eight or nine hours' sleep, usually dreamless, with plenty of bedclothes, and his bed to himself, *a la royale;* given to wearing all white or all black; fond of reading (through a coloured glass), but without having read a book for as much as an hour on end in twenty years; delighting in conversation, except after meals when he needs to be quiet and prefers to listen, but hopelessly clumsy and incompetent at any game or practical occupation—such (not to mention various other peculiarities now scarcely mentionable) is Michel de Montaigne, prepared to talk endlessly about himself and life. Are not the two subjects, in fact, the same; and one man the epitome of all?

And what talk it is! He pretends to be quite artless. He even affects a certain contempt for scribbling. It is perhaps partly due to a foible not unknown among eminent writers—such as Meredith, Hugo, Proust, perhaps even Shakespeare—snobbery. For this candid Montaigne, while poking great fun at people who preen themselves about their pedigrees, is distinctly disingenuous in suggesting that his own ancestors had held their lands for centuries instead of trading, as his grandfather and great-grandfather did, in dried fish and wine at Bordeaux. In the same way he speaks rather disdainfully of correcting and revising; though we still have elaborate corrections and revisions in his own hand. He knows nothing, he says, of orthography; yet he left minute instructions about it to his printer. He knows nothing of punctuation; yet death finds him still altering his own—notably commas into full stops. He pretends that he is irritated by praise of his style; let us take leave not to believe him. It is rather the attitude of Congreve; or of Heredia—'Ecrire, ce n'est pas mon metier, c'est unc de mes elegances.' This sage, this mocker so akin to Molicre, is at moments not without traces of Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.

Certainly he owes a great deal of his effect to this same despised gift of style; 'sa vraie baguette d'enchantement', as Sainte-Bcuve has called it. There is no better example of its qualities than his own description of the style he likes in others: 'Le parler que i'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naif, tel sur le papier qu'a la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serre; non tant delicat et peigne, comme vehement et brusque . . . non pedantcsque, non fratesque, non plaideresque, mais plutost soldatesque.' And again: Tayme Failure poetique, a saults et a gambades.' Nine English readers out of ten read him in Florio or Cotton; vivid and excellent translators as they are (though

Florio can render 'poisson', for example, by 'poison'), they are not Montaigne. He *must* be read in French. Pasquier may have reproached him to his face with his Gasconisms; the seventeenth-century Balzac may have regretted that Montaigne did not come after Malherbe had swept and garnished the French tongue. We cannot share their regrets. Perhaps with the milk of his peasant foster-mother Montaigne sucked in some of the energy of that popular speech which, like his own, gains so much force and frankness from calling things by their blunt names; to the preciousness of the literary he preferred the male language of 'les hallcs de Paris', just as we find him centuries ahead of his time in appreciating popular poetry like the *villanelles* of Gascony. He will be nothing if not natural: 'Si avons nous beau monter sur des eschasses; car sur des eschasses, encores fault-il marcher de nos iambes; et au plus csleve throsne du monde, si ne sommes nous assis que sur nostre cul.' Such in their laughing bluntness are almost his final words to us, in the closing paragraph of his last book. He would rather lack even delicacy than force; as when he speaks of 'les estroicts baisers de la ieunesse, savoureux, gloutons, et gluants'. But it is seldom indeed that he fails to combine them both. Like a man of the people, again, he has whole queues of epithets standing ready at his disposal. It is, I think, a possible principle of style, not more riddled with exceptions than such principles at best must be, that adjectives are best either very numerous or very few. The manner of the typical eighteenth-century poet where every noun tends to be monogamously married, though seldom happily, with a single epithet serves only to illustrate Voltaire's remark about the adjective being the noun's worst enemy, even though it does agree with it in number and gender. But there is an exhilaration in

watching Montaigne produce whole strings of them (he loves them in threes), hurrying in breathless eagerness on one another's heels and yet each admirably suited for its work. A third quahty which he shares both with poets like Shakespeare and with peasants like Synge's is his concretencss of imagery. His language has not been vaporised into a mist of abstractions, like so much modern writing, by stewing in a study or by journalistic pot-boiling. He loathed the jargon of philosophic pedantry, which flourished as greenly then as now: 'Si i'estoy du mestier, ie naturalizeroy Tart, autant qu'ils artializent la nature.' He loathed the affectations of young literary revolutionaries that pestered his time like ours: 'Pourveu qu'ils se gorgiascnt en la nouvellete, il ne leur chault de l'efficace; pour saisir un nouveau mot, ils quittent l'ordinaire, souvent plus fort et plus ncrveux.' He knows that a single new image is worth pages of new words; and shows it in his own practice: Tayme mieulx forger mon ame, que la meubler'—'la vieillesse nous attache plus de rides en l'csprit qu'au visage'—(of his mind in old age) 'qu'il verdisse, qu'il fleurisse ce pendant, s'il peult, comme le guy sur un arbre mort'—(of public office) Vest assez de s'enfariner le visage, sans s'enfariner la poictrinc'. Cato again, he will say (and he prefers Socrates accordingly), 'est tousiours monte sur ses grands chevaulx'; or he describes how he goes his own way in humorous obstinacy, 'baissant ioyeusement les aureilles'. Even reason and spirit take flesh in his hands, as 'cette raison trouble-feste', 'nostre esprit maladif, rabat-ioye'. Even dead things at his touch leap up and come alive: 'Le iour de iugement nous prend au collet.' And he speaks, again, of the heavenly spheres 'venants a se lescher et frotter l'un a l'autre en roulant'; whence arise 'les contours et changements des carolles des astres'. Of the less heavenly noise

of the clock in his chateau, he will observe no less vividly—'ce tintamarre estonne ma tour mesme'; and of the less heavenly connexion of appetite with indigestion: 'Ie hay ce sot accouplage d'une deesse si saine et si alaigre, avecques ce petit dieu indigent et roteur, tout bouffi de la fumee de sa liqueur.'

There are, on the other hand, few purple patches of poetic fine writing in Montaigne; though occasionally some spectacle like the universal flux of tilings will wring from him a deeper note. Bacon, with much less poetry in his soul, put more of it into his prose. When Bacon writes of 'extreme self-lovers' that they will 'set an house on fire, and it were but to roast their eggs', that is precisely Montaigne's manner; when he denounces 'the detestable and extreme pleasure that arch-heretics, and false prophets, and impostors are transported with', he is exactly of Montaigne's mind; but when he says, of friendship, 'a crowd is not company; and faces arc but a gallery of pictures; and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love', though Montaigne felt the same, there is a poetic stateliness in the language, with its Biblical echoes, that is foreign to the Gascon. But, for that very reason, there is no intimacy in the tone. Bacon, even when writing of Friendship, never made reader feel his friend, as Montaigne does. Nor in real life can we imagine Montaigne treating a friend like Essex, as Bacon treated him. Nor on the other hand can we imagine, as a superscription of the *Essais,* anything like the proud aloofness of 'These are the meditations of Francis of Verulam, which that posterity should be possessed of, he deemed *their* interest.'

This impression of easy familiarity in Montaigne's manner is completed by the 'wild civility' and artful artlessness of the *Essais* as wholes. Wholes indeed they

seldom seem to be; leaping about from ships to sealing-wax with a garrulous disorder that, in their final form with all Montaigne's successive additions incorporated, sometimes grows perhaps a little too disorderly and long-winded. But he does succeed admirably in making his pen, not write, but talk. He is his own Boswell. Way-ward as Sterne, without Sterne's crudity or silliness, whether he is gossiping about 'the elephant that in the love of an herb-wife, in the city of Alexandria, was co-rivall with Aristophanes the Grammarian', or quietly discussing his own death, he creates the illusion of a living voice, ironic, whimsical, sincere. The first of essayists remains the master of them all.

And, after his art, his matter—what has that for us today?

It is too easy to think of Montaigne as rather a carpet-philosopher, an old Gallio in dressing-gown and slippers, nibbling at life in the snug security of his library, like a wise mouse in a cheese. 'I do not greatly tliink about Montaigne', wrote Clough, who had learnt from Dr. Arnold a less compromising idealism. But Montaigne's was more than fair-weather wisdom. 'I have a thousand times', he casually records, 'gone to bed in mine house, imagining I should the very same night either have beene betrayed or slaine in my bed.' His house escaped pillage, indeed, just because he had the audacity to leave it open and undefended. Few remember how in the Religious Wars, once when it was treacherously seized, and again when he was captured out in the country by masqued marauders and robbed, his frank serenity somehow touched the ruffians to forgo their advantage and release him. Few remember how many of these calm pages come from a man tortured, without hope of relief, by incurable disease. Montaigne was no Horace safe on his Sabine farm in the peace of Augustus; no Fitzgerald in

the country quiet of Woodbridge. This Epicurean had not, like Socrates, a Plato to record his fortitude. And because he painted himself so smilingly and unheroically, the world has taken him at his word as smiling and unheroic. He would not have minded. He was not proud of his philosophic calm. He had seen how quietly the poor could die. But for us who sometimes wonder today whether our world will last another year, who exist in an insecurity that would have appalled our grandparents, he remains also a magnificent example of how life can be lived calmly and fully in the midst of earthquakes and on the lap of volcanoes.

He would indeed have found nothing very unfamiliar in an age torn between Communist and Fascist instead of Calvinist and Papist; ready to kill and torture in the name of 'dialectical materialism' or 'the Nordic race' instead of 'the real presence' or 'sanctification by grace'. He would have found little to attract him in the dogmas pontificated on either side by zealots knowing what is best for everybody without even knowing their own selves. He would have been irritated by their impossible positiveness: 'ricn nc me despite tant en la sottisc, que dequoy elle se plaist plus que aulcune raison ne se peut raisonnablcment plaire'. He would have been horrified by the vomit of brutality and unscrupulousness to which Europe has returned in the last twenty years: Tmhumanite surtout et desloyaute, la pire cspece des vices, que ie n'ay point le courage de conccvoir sans horreur'. But he would not have sat breaking his heart over them, like some noble idealists one has known—as Lowes Dickinson sometimes did. He could live his life 'saincment and gaiement' even in a France which was falling to ruin during more than half of it. There is always Tarriere-boutique'—the garden of Candide. It is depressing that

the world should be what it is. But that is nothing new. We should know life by this time. People whose faith waited to be shattered by the War, had either read little history or had read it with little imagination. Indeed life may be all the intenser under the shadow of death: 'scjachons gre au sort de nous avoir faict vivre en un siecle non mol, languissant, ny oysif'. Those brave words might often recur to us today.

Not that, as some imagine, Montaigne's creed of conduct was purely passive. He was moderate and so abused by both parties: 'au Gibelin, i'cstoy Guclphe; au Guelphe, Gibelin'. But, like Solon, he held that in an actual civil conflict the good citizen cannot refuse to take sides; that is 'ny beau ny honneste'. It is easy, but absurd, to mistake Montaigne for *a faineant;* forgetting that he thought the finest profession was a soldier's; forgetting, too, how contemporaries like Henri IV, de Thou, or Florimond de Rocmond admired his practical competence and knowledge of affairs. But it is true, I think, to say that his courage and his disposition had a tendency to be somewhat passive. He knew this himself: 'le danger n'estoit pas que ie fcissc mal, mais que ie ne feisse rien'. But that would not have weakened a jot his belief that to replace voting by violence, argument by apostolic blows and knocks, is a relapse from civilisation to barbarism. If there remains one thing clearly worth fighting against in the modern world, it is surely this; if there remains one thing worth fighting for, it is freedom of thought and of speech, the rights of the individual intelligence against the new and monstrous chimera of the state. Montaigne himself exists as a perpetual witness to the benefits of tolerance; for had France not opened her doors to the outcast Jews of Spain and Portugal from

whose race his mother sprang, the world would never have been enriched with the *Essais.*

But a more serious drawback, some will feel, to Montaigne's attitude towards life is a certain lack in him of passion, a slightly Oriental fatalism. It is part of his general defensiveness. Here too he dreads entanglements. In many ways he is what a modern psycho-analyst might call 'normal', to a quite extraordinary degree; just as physically in his youth he so glowed with health that a doctor recommended an old consumptive to get Montaigne to live with him, so as to absorb some of this outflow of vitality. That is his life's triumph. But it is possible to feel also that he analysed himself a little too much; that he dried and hardened his heart by excessive dissection. Pity he felt intensely: 'i'ay une merveilleuse laschete vers la misericorde et mansuetude'. Knowing so little, he felt, we know at least that pain is an evil. He would not have joined some of our delicate gentlemen of letters in deriving a vicarious virility from contemplating the 'mystic and aesthetic beauty' of bull-fights. 'I cannot well endure', he says in Florio, with an echo of Shakespeare, 'a seelie dewbedabled hare to groane when she is seized upon by the houndes, though hunting be a violent pleasure.' And he is filled with rage by the exploitation, then as now, of the native by the European: 'the richest, the fairest, and the best part of the world topsiturvicd, ruined, and defaced for the tramck of Pearles and Pepper'. But there remains about him a certain lack of affection. His wife seems, on the whole, to have been little more than his housekeeper (though we know that his feelings varied and that she took devoted care of his writings after his death). His mother who survived him, he never mentions. His daughter seems equally a matter of indifference. He refers to having lost 'two *or* three children'

in infancy. He would prefer to die in an inn rather than at home (and yet is that so strange?). He speaks fondly of friendship; but little of friends—with one exception. And that one is long dead.

We should have a different impression, I think, had we known Montaigne younger. Like Johnson, he is elderly —far older indeed than his years—when we first come to know him intimately. Yet for his father, it is clear, he had felt deep affection; it was to please him that Montaigne married and that he translated Ramond Sebond. And as for the one perfect friend, Eticnne de la Boetie, let Montaigne speak for himself of what his life has been since death ended that: 'Si ic la compare aux quatre annees qu'il m'a cste donne de iouyr de la douce compaignie et societe de ce pcrsonnage, ce n'est que fumee, ce n'est qu'une nuict obscure et ennuyeuse.' Some will be horrified that he deliberately set himself to distract his misery at the time with love-affairs; and some will understand. Seventeen years later, at the Baths of Lucca, a reminder of that lost friend is still enough to plunge him in a fit of melancholy. Montaigne was not cold; but he had grown afraid of warmth. He will not or cannot, like Ronsard, fly back and back *to* the flame.

But there is wisdom which is wise for mankind at large and wisdom which is wise only for certain individuals. Montaigne's hatred of brutality, fanaticism, and the baseness unworthy of 'unc nature bien nee' is valid for the whole world. But it is for those who are so built themselves as to find his personality sympathetic, that he becomes, what he sometimes seems to me, perhaps the wisest man who has ever written. He has that calm and dignified sanity which distinguishes some Chinese poetry, some eighteenth-century prose. 'Strong feelings, but no violent beliefs, no wild enthusiasms'—that is surely one

possible ideal of what human character should be. Strong feelings, for nothing great gets done without them; but no violent beliefs, for all violent beliefs involve both bad thinking and bad manners. One should have the strength of mind to act, knowing exactly the odds against one; and not need faith, to pretend they are really in one's favour. Gaiety; health of mind and, for long, of body; courage; affection; good sense; the ceaseless curiosity of a scientist; the passion for beauty and the genius of an artist; the wit and humour of a man of the world; the vigorous shrewdness, on occasion, of a man of action—all these qualities Montaigne possessed. I do not know many others worth possessing. He owed them, largely, to France, to Greece, and to Rome. He is an enduring example of what humanism can do. Today we have lost faith in humanism. We are marvellous scientists, excellent engineers; and our art seems to me largely vulgar, our poetry pitiable. In ancient Alexandria, too, they invented steam-engines and measured the earth's diameter; but it is Athens men remember. Today Montaigne would rather have lived in a garret, alone with his own thoughts, than have earned his living in many of our occupations, or joined many of the movements of the modern world. After all, would he be wrong? If only we were wise, I believe that among the essential text-books of our schools, and of our schoolmasters, would be the *Lives* of Plutarch and the *Essais* of Montaigne.

THE POET OF ANGLICANISM

Church. **To be summoned reluctantly from a bear-**hunt in the garden; to walk, washed and brushed, across a sunny heath, full of the wicked enjoying themselves, into a white solemnity of neo-Gothic; to sit beneath a covey of uncomfortable saints in stained glass of 1880 (St. Augustine of Hippo, who sounded ridiculous; St. Hilary of Poitiers, who looked like a papist); to read for the thousandth time the red letters below: 'Unto Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry' (how the heart sank to think what Heaven must be like!); to watch a little militantly round man polishing his pince-nez on his surplice, while he denounced a perverted world that preferred to listen to 'the braying of a brass band'; or a gaunt, bearded man who unfolded with a sombre satisfaction the mystical symmetries of Providence—how 'Man was lost in a garden, Eden, and redeemed in a garden, Gethsemane' (that was rather fascinating); *to* pass, years after, escaped from school and hot with riding, out of the Warwickshire sunlight into a sudden silence, heavy with the dust of generations, and broken only by the great heart-beat of the clock high up the tower; to climb the crazy belfry-ladder, up through bells and birds'-nests, until the world of sunlight re-appeared, with the mowers among the tombs below, and all the hushed green happiness of an English June; to stand, years later still, by an open grave, listening to the passionate protests of the Apostle against mortality, while round the summer skyline rolled the indifferent mutter of the guns.

Such are the pictures that the pages of George Herbert always call to memory for me; tragic or lovely or ridiculous—he has counterparts for all of them. No English

poet gives so faithfully the atmosphere of the churches of England, and of its Church—the gentle austerity, the propriety, the false culture and the true, the quaint mingling of the sensible and the fanciful, the quiet beauty, the eloquent attempt at a concordat with Destiny. Coleridge, indeed, has said of *The Temple:*

'To appreciate this volume, it is not enough that the reader possess a cultivated judgement, classical taste, or even poetic sensibility, unless he be likewise a *Christian,* and both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and *devotional,* Christian. But even this will not quite suffice. He must be an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church.'

So the Cumaean Sibyl in her cave cried 'procul este, profani' to the comrades of Aeneas, before she unveiled the mysteries of eternity. Obedient, the profane withdrew. But here they may be less docile. If Coleridge meant that only a fervent Anglican can find in Herbert the fullest enjoyment, he is hard to contradict; but if he meant that no one else could really appreciate him, that is another matter. Belief makes a difference, but not so much as this.

Some, indeed, will deny that it need make any difference at all to the reader with a taste for poetry; just as they pretend that Milton, being 'a classic' and 'immortal', and all the other tilings great poets are called by critics, has lost no jot *of* his force with the change of centuries and creeds, and can mean as much to us today as if we were still passionate Puritans. It is the usual cry of those who make 'Art' a last religion in place of all the rest, withdrawing it from the world of dust and sweat into a sort of Platonic heaven of pure form, where a love-lyric becomes just an exquisite flow of noise and images, and a High Mass merely an elaborate ballet. Coleridge represents one extreme; these aesthetic persons the other. But

surely we may admit on the one hand that time has taken something from Milton and Herbert, so that they can never mean as much *to* those for whom their cherished beliefs mean little; and yet that *The Temple,* like the Parthenon, can appeal to those also who do not believe; that even minds more at home with the quiet smile of Montaigne can feel sympathy with this other figure, as self-searching though so different, who entered life the year after Montaigne died.

The life which thus began in 1593 is bare for us today of those small details which are often the really significant things in a biography. Izaak Walton's portrait gives us, not the living man, but the dead saint's memorial; beautiful in its marble tranquillity, but with life's characteristic wrinkles smoothed lovingly away. Still the bare facts of his existence at Westminster, at Cambridge, and at Bemerton arc in perfect keeping both with the poetry of Herbert and the spirit of his Church. The Church of England has never been a democratic body; it comes far less of the people than of the University; and Herbert sprang from a race both noble and lettered, as kinsman of that house of Pembroke whose name stands on so many pages of English literature, and as son of her whose autumnal beauty won the praise and the friendship of John Donne. Again, the Church of England, if it has never grasped a temporal power like that of Rome, has always been reluctant to sever itself entirely from the State; and Herbert, as Public Orator at Cambridge, the favourite of James I, the friend of Bacon, the relative of Pembroke, the brother of an Ambassador at Paris, and of a Master of the Revels, dreamed for years of worldly eminence such as several of his predecessors in his Cambridge office had actually attained. In his own charming, but poignant, cry of regret:

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the Town;
Thou didst betray me to a lingring Book,
And wrap me in a gown.

In two sonnets as early as 1610 he had dedicated all his verse henceforth to God. But his life proved a harder thing to give. Even when his earthly hopes had sunk into the grave of King James, he drew back as unwillingly as Donne from that religious vocation which he was one day to fulfil so fervently. Yet again, just as his Church has never cared to push asceticism to the point of celibacy, so Herbert, on the very eve of ordination, wedded a lady whom he had only seen three days earlier, and who had herself fallen in love with him not at, but before, first sight. And lastly, when Herbert's life flickered out at Bemerton in 1633, that curious mind of his may, one imagines, have dwelt with a momentary sense of consoling appropriateness on the thought that his course had closed, like his Master's, with a three years' ministry; and that, like God's people, he was entering the Promised Land after just forty years in this world's wilderness.

But what was the real man behind this bare outline? Walton reveals little—Mr. Herbert was holy; he endured bad health; he loved music; he took off his coat and helped a poor man whose 'poorer horse' had fallen *on* the road to Salisbury. Herbert's few extant letters are dull, and tasteless in both senses of the word. It is his poems and the one good portrait that tell us most. They give the impression of a fragile, sensitive, fastidious personality. Cover up the eyes and the long, refined nose in the drawing—that mouth, repressed and tightened now, might have been sensual once. It has watered for the apple of this world, and tasted it, unsatisfied, and a wrinkle of distaste recalls it still. There is distrust in those suffering eyes.

False glozing pleasures, casks of happiness,
Foolish night-fires, womens and childrens wishes,
Chases in Arras, guilded emptinesse,
Shadows well mounted, dreams m a career,
Embroider'd lyes, nothing between two dishes;
These are the pleasures here.

He had been passionate in 'my fierce youth' (though saints have generally had a very human tendency to whiten their present by blackening their past); impulsive he remained. At thirty-six he married in as much haste as others at eighteen; and after long hesitation on the threshold of the Church, he was suddenly so swept away by an interview with Laud, who had been summoned from London for the purpose, 'that a tailor', says Walton, 'was sent for to come speedily from *Salisbury* to *Wilton*, to take measure, and make his canonical clothes against next day'. Had Jane Dan vers or the Church had to wait a little longer for Mr. Herbert, they might, perhaps, have waited long indeed. He had his touch of Hamlet—the weakness of those who lack, not so much the will to act, as the will to stop thinking how to act.

O raise me then! poore bees that work all day
Sting my delay,
Who have a work, as well as they,
And much, much more.

As he himself has said, 'He had too thoughtful a wit: a wit, like a penknife in too narrow a sheath, too sharp for his body.' Perhaps it is fanciful to note that it was the edge that was so sharp, not the point: Herbert's mind could dichotomise, not penetrate nor strike. The same image recurs, much less poetically, in the poems:

My thoughts are all a case of knives
Wounding my heart
With scatt'red smart,
As wat'ring-pots give flowers their lives.

No doubt physical fragility was a further cause of his irresolution, of the morbidity that sometimes mars his work, of the lapses from faith that he bewails.

> How should I praise thee, Lord! how should my rymes
> Gladly engrave thy love in steel
> If what my soul doth feel sometimes
> My soul might ever feel.
>
> Although there were some fourtie heav'ns, or more,
> Sometimes I peere above them all;
> Sometimes I hardly reach a score;
> Sometimes to hell I fall.

But, after all, if such heart-searchings racked his life, they were often the making of his poetry. That alone matters now. Herbert had that indefinable gift for phrase and image which enabled him to wring sweetness out of his own weakness, as well as out of his strength. The mind behind these poems is, indeed, less strong than delicate—subtle yet simple, sensible yet illogical, clever but not profound. Herbert plays with Donne's crooked and twisted weapons, but he does not strike home. He was at bottom neither mystic nor metaphysical; simply a typical English figure, pacing sedately between the rose-beds of Wilton Hall and the vegetables of the vicarage, with a great deal of the homely practical sense of Englishmen, with a little too much, perhaps, of the gentle sweetness of some Englishwomen. This practical side is clear enough in him: it would be hard even to imagine Vaughan or Crashaw making collections of popular saws, like *Jacula Prudentum,* or versifying them, as in *The Church-Porch.* But though he liked common sense, he docs not give the impression of greatly enjoying common humanity. No doubt he was an exemplary parson; no doubt he practised his own precept *of* visiting his flock and finding them 'most naturally as they are, wallowing in the midst of their affairs'; but one of the most striking things about his

poetry remains its sense of solitude. Like Donne's, it is intensely individual, but in a quite different way; he is a gentler Moses, alone with God on the mountain, not Aaron among his congregation; alone with God as completely as an anchorite of the Thebaid, in the world-forgetting passion of a lover for his love.

> Ah my dcare God! though I am clean forgot,
> Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

To feel the full force of this spiritual loneliness, it is enough to turn back to the Elizabethans—not only to the dramatists amid their audiences; even one of their sonneteers, wooing his mistress in her closet, will speak as if the whole world were listening at the keyhole; while Herbert is as solitary, even amid his flock, as if he were wrestling for his single soul in the lonely darkness of Penucl. But certainly it is not our loss if, instead of hymns, he wrote the most personal of lyrics in consequence.

For it is this lyric cry that lasts in his work. If his other writings are even remembered, it is only because they are the prose of a poet. *The Country Parson* is hardly enthralling; and if his rendering of Cornaro's *Of Temperance and Sobriety* is quaint and readable, the credit for that is Cornaro's. This gentleman of Venice, after shattering his health by intemperance at thirty-five, died in 1566, aged ninety-eight, having written four treatises on diet, in his eighty-fourth, eighty-seventh, ninety-second, and ninety-sixth years respectively. It was the first of these that Herbert translated, and, no doubt, put in practice also. But one man's sparing of meat may be another man's poison; Herbert went young to a consumptive's grave. Cornaro, however, remains pleasant, and very likely profitable, still: it is at least something to find an old man of eighty-three so satisfied with life and so well able to express his satisfaction:

'I enjoy also my gardens, and those divers, parted with rills of running water, which truly is very delightful. Some times of the year I enjoy the pleasure of the *Euganean* hills, where also I have fountains and gardens, and a very convenient house. At other times, I repair also to a village of mine, seated in a valley; which is, therefore, very pleasant, because many ways thither are so ordered, that they all meet, and end in a fair plot of ground; in the midst whereof is a church suitable to the condition of the place. ... In former time it was moorish and unhealthy, fitter for beasts than men. But I drained the ground and made the air good. Whereupon men flocked thither, and built houses with happy success. ... So that I can truly say, That I have both given God a Temple, and men to worship him in it: The memory whereof is exceeding delightful to me.'

But there is another prose work attributed to Herbert, which has a much more definite flavour—-*Jacula Prudentum,* 'Darts of the Wise', a collection of adages. It may be only partly his; in any case, it is mainly a compilation; yet this short, sharp wisdom of the people possesses more true originality than many a work that flaunts it. So often their utterance retains a Shakespearian concretencss of imagery, which the educated have lost: and sometimes, even in England, it is lit up for a moment by a ray of poetry. Only the other day I heard one of them remark 'An only child makes three fools'—an aphorism exactly resembling, in its tart brevity, many another in this collection of three centuries before:

'I gave the mouse a hole, and she is become my heir.

'Whether you boil snow or pound it, you can have but water of it.

'Stay till the lame messenger come, if you would know the truth of the thing.

'He that comes of a hen, must scrape.

'Building is a sweet impoverishing.

'To be beloved is above all bargains.

'No barber shaves so close but another finds work. (This—alas!—is no longer true.)

'If the mother had not been in the oven, she had not sought for her daughter there.

'Better a snotty child than his nose wiped off. (Sometimes forgotten by dictators.)

'The great would have none great, and the little all little.

'Lawyers' houses are built on the heads of fools.

'Cities are taken by the ears.

'Saint Luke was a saint and a Physician, yet is dead.

'Choose none for thy servant who has served thy betters.

'If the brain sows not corn, it plants thistles.

'He that wipes the child's nose, kisses the mother's cheek.

'Old camels carry young camels' skins to market.

'He is a great necromancer, for he asks counsel of the dead (books).

'Here is talk of the Turk and the Pope, but my next neighbour doth me more harm than either of them both.

'We bachelors laugh and show our teeth, but you married men laugh till your hearts ache.'

What a light lies here on the soul of a people! The cynicism, the shrewd observation, the sardonic smile, the cheerful disillusion, the rare flashes of poetry—all take the memory back to the casual daily utterances of the men with whose squandered flesh and bone was built for four years the wall of England from the Channel to the Somme. Clearly this horse-sense had a special appeal for Herbert, who repeats some of these adages in his verse, and could even perpetrate as a line of poetry:

Wouldst thou both eat thy cake, and have it?

The whole of *The Church-Porch* consists simply of such gnomic verses, more wittily strung together: and to this day every schoolboy of St. John's, Hurstpicrpoint, is compelled by the statutes to get by heart this compendium of the sort of wisdom Polonius most loved:

> Yet in thy thriving still misdoubt some evil;
> Lest gaining gain on thee, and make thee dimme
> To all things els. Wealth is the conjurers devil;
> Whom when he thinks he hath, the devil hath him.
> Gold thou mayst safely touch; but if it stick
> Unto thy hands, it woundeth to the quick.

Herbert allows the tables of the money-changers to remain in this 'Porch' of his *Temple;* but they must be honest brokers, kept straight by the wittiest of sermons. His wit, indeed, ill-controlled by an uncertain taste, is liable to break out appallingly in charades on 'Jesu', anagrams on 'Mary', and descriptions of bones jogging one another at the Last Day. But in the background he retained an artistic conscience, as well as a religious one:

> When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention,
> Such was their lustre, they did so excell,
> That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;
> My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
> Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
> Decking the sense as if it were to sell. . . .
> As flames do work and winde, when they ascend;
> So did I weave myself into the sense.
> But whde I bustled, I might heare a friend
> Whisper, *How wide is all this long pretence!*
> *There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd:*
> *Copie out onely that, and save expense.*

He was right. Not cleverness, but the simple sincerity of his hope and his sorrow, has preserved his memory. He sees the day break; but already the dew weeps for the coming evenfall. He gathers his roses:

But Time did becken to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away
And withcr'd in my hand.

He seeks for peace; but, on earth, in vain:

Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,
Let me once know.
I sought thee in a secret cave,
And ask'd, if Peace were there.
A hollow winde did seem to answer, No:
Go seek elsewhere.

It is these notes of a pure and silver sadness, like Christina Rossetti's, not his porridge-bowl epigrams, that matter. He is unhappy, too, when he passes from the wit of proverbs to attempt a higher wisdom; to justify, for instance, the ways of 'Providence' in the poem of that name. Efforts to draw edifying lessons of divine wisdom from a universe that too often seems more like the work of a Leonardo da Vinci gone mad, are always liable to end in grotesqueness; but Herbert's evidence for God's glorious versatility from the crocodile's jaw deserves to rank high among such curiosities, both as science and poetry:

To show thou art not bound, as if thy lot
Were worse then ours; sometimes thou shiftest hands.
Most things move th' under-jaw; the Crocodile not.
Most things sleep lying; th' Elephant leans or stands.

This crocodile is worthy of Bcrnardin de Saint-Pierre himself, standing rapt before that Almighty Wisdom which made fleas black so that they might the more easily be caught. Happily Herbert realised the danger of metaphysics, as of metaphors. Wit and wisdom alike in the end he throws aside. His true language is a cry. After all, why should Christianity be made a tangled subtlety?

Love God and love your neighbour. Watch and pray.
Do as ye would be done unto.
O dark instructions, ev'n as dark as day!
Who can these Gordian knots undo?

Quia multum amavit—that is his claim to immortality, in either world. Like Racine, he turned to God as if to a last mistress; like Coventry Patmore, he turned to Him as in a mystic marriage. Lovers' quarrels, hope, or despair, reproaches for scorn, or repentances for infidelity; above all the yearning for a union that no more partings shall break—all these changeful phases of human passion are here. 'Love'—the final reconciliation—is the final poem in *The Church.*

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guiltie of dust and sinne.
> But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack,
> From my first entrance in,
> Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
> If I lack'd anything.
>
> A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
> Love said, you shall be he.
> I, the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah, my deare,
> I cannot look on thee.
> Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
> Who made the eyes but I?

There may be moments when Herbert grows mawkish; moments when he grows morbid enough to write:

> The growth of flesh is but a blister;
> Childhood is health—

or:

> All Solomon's sea of brasse and world of stone
> Is not so deare to thee as one good gronc;

moments when the reader turns, stifling, from the pious sophistries of'Providence' to the immortal blasphemies of *Atalanta in Calydon,* from these praises of sheep-like meekness to the healthy hatreds of some pagan unredeemed like Theognis:

Now fall the height of heaven in headlong ruin above me,
Where it hangs its brazen menace o'er the earth-born heads of men,
If I give not love and helping to all the hearts that love me,
If to all that hate I give not havoc and hate again!

Yet we find ourselves returning once more to this tiny sanctuary, with the quiet candles flickering on its simple altar, lying at peace through the sunlit Sundays of its English countryside—that same gentle, unemphatic country on which a century later Gray watched the shadows of evening fall. Here are none of the too gorgeous glories of Crashaw's Roman altar-pieces; none of the mystic grandeurs that light the grey shrine of Vaughan, girt with the cloud-raked summits of the West. But here above the grave of Herbert, those who love the Church of England, and those who love only her rare poetry, may meet for a moment, in spite of Coleridge, before they part on their eternally divergent ways.

THE PERFECT LETTER WRITER

'Jamais toute la morale d'un pedagogue ne vaudra le bavardage affectueux et tendre d'une femme sensee pour qui l'on a de rattachement.'—Rousseau.

We are in the year 1648. General Cromwell is rising steadily to power in England; beyond the Channel, Cardinal Mazarin is already seated on the neck of France; Louis XIV is a neglected little boy of ten; Charles I lies prisoner in the Isle of Wight, in the keep of Carisbrooke; and from an inn in that island a party of young travellers is just setting out—two youths and a girl. At the last moment one of the young men turns round, goes back into the inn, and there writes something with a diamond on the window-pane. It is a sentence from the Bible, from the *Book of Esther*, 'And Hamman was hang'd upon the Gallows he had prepar'd for Mordecai.' That done, he hurries after his companions. A moment later someone notices the writing. Its meaning is as transparent as the glass it is written on: 'Hamman' is Colonel Robert Hammond, Governor of the Isle of Wight for the Parliament, and gaoler of King Charles. This insolent young devil of a Cavalier has been quoting Scripture very much to his purpose. There is a hue and cry; horsemen go clattering off; the three young people are brought back and led before the Governor himself. 'Which of you did this?' Before the real culprit can answer, the girl, his sister, has broken in: 'I did.' A woman?—that is different; even in the England of the Civil War all chivalry has not perished with the Cavaliers. Probably with a smile, the Governor

let his prisoners go.[1] The incident was closed—no, not quite; not finally closed until, just half a century later, in Westminster Abbey the last flagstone was lowered into place above the body of Sir William Temple, the builder of the Triple Alliance and Privy Councillor of Charles II, laid now to his rest beside Dorothy Osborne, the wife of forty years.

But the course of this love that had so long to run, was far from running smooth at first. William Temple was just twenty when he watched the woman's wit of Dorothy Osborne, herself twenty-one, thus save her brother in the Isle of Wight. That day, if she set one prisoner free, she made another. How the lovers' acquaintance had first begun, we do not know; but a long period of trouble was still to pass before it ended happily in marriage. 'The accidents for seven years of that amour', writes Temple's sister, Lady Giffard, 'might make a history, and the letters that passed between them a volume.' At this moment Temple, the son of Sir John Temple, Member of Parliament for Chichester, Master of the Rolls and a Privy Councillor for Ireland, was just going abroad to travel after two not very profitable years at Emmanuel College, Cambridge; where he had found tennis and other occupations more amusing than Dr. Cudworth's 'harsh studies of logick and phylosophy'. 'I have heard him say', continues his sister in her Memoir, 'if it had bin possible in the two years time he past there to forgit all he had learn't before, he must certainely have done it.' Dorothy Osborne, on her side, came of a northern family which had settled in Essex in the mid fifteenth

[1] *It* throws an odd light on "Progress" to reflect that in the Germany of 1933 she would probably have been paraded round the town with her head shaved and a placard round her neck, before being sent to five years' imprisonment.

century. At the close of the sixteenth her great-grandfather, John Osborne, six times Member of Parliament, husband of a niece of the famous scholar Sir John Cheke, and father of twenty-two children, bought Dorothy's future home, Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire, a dissolved monastery of Gilberrines. Her mother, Dorothy Danvers, was a sister of Sir John Danvers, the future regicide who at the age of twenty married Magdalen Herbert, mother of ten children, including the poet; so that George Herbert and Dorothy Osborne were cousins of a kind. Her father, Sir Peter, had been Lieutenant-Governor of Guernsey for twenty-one years when the Civil War broke out; then, when the island declared for the Parliament, he maintained Castle Cornet for the King. After holding out for three years, cheated of supplies by the royalist Governor of Jersey and sickened with empty promises by the Court, he was superseded and withdrew to St. Malo. Thither Dorothy and her brother were now travelling to join the old Cavalier, when they fell in with Temple, whose father was a member of the hated Parliament. The lovers were crossed from the first, like another Romeo and Juliet, by the factions of their parents. Further, each family thought it could make a better match elsewhere. So that Temple, lingering on enchanted ground at St. Malo, was soon sent packing on his travels by a stern message from home. But it was too late. A sympathy, stronger than fathers or brothers or any worldly considerations could ever break, had already sprung up between the handsome, passionate, egotistical youth with his brown curling hair, and the 'stately' young woman whose oval face with its long, straight nose and great dark eyes, full at once of humour and melancholy, still gazes from the portrait at Broadlands. They were parted now; but down the long Paris road he carried with him the

memory of their days together, and of the lonely little house on the isle of Herm, by Guernsey, that they had seen from their ship sailing to St. Malo; as Dorothy was to remind him years afterwards in one of her most charming passages: 'Do you remember Arme and the little house there? Shall we go thither? That's next to being out of the world. There we might live like Baucis and Philemon, grow old together in our little cottage, and for our charity to some ship-wrecked strangers obtain the blessing of dying both at the same time. How idly I talk; 'tis because the story pleases me—none in Ovid so much. I remember I cried when I read it. Methought they were the perfectest characters of a contented marriage, where piety and love were all their wealth, and in their poverty feasted the gods when rich men shut them out. I am called away—farewell.'

What happened in the next few years remains obscure. At some point the lovers came to regard themselves as plighted; though Temple laughingly wagered ten pounds against Dorothy's constancy, to be paid him on the day she married some one else. He stayed in France two years (1648-50), saw Dorothy again in London, was sent abroad by his anxious father to the Low Countries for another fifteen months (1651-2). Meanwhile, since 1649, she had been living mainly at home, in a quiet broken only by the indefatigable efforts of her brother Henry to get her married. Perhaps she had faded in Temple's memory. After a letter from Breda in March 1652, there followed a silence of nine months; but at last, as the year drew to its close, word came to Chicksands announcing the wanderer's return to England. On Christmas Eve Dorothy sat down and wrote in answer the first letter we still possess, beginning: 'Sir,—You may please to let my old servant *(i.e.* lover), as you call him, know that I

confess I owe much to his merits . . .; but for the ten pound he claims, it is not yet due, and I think you may do well to persuade him (as a friend) to put it in the number of his desperate debts, for 'tis a very uncertain one.'

With this reference to Temple's old wager against her constancy opens, that correspondence, containing some eighty letters of hers and one of his, which covers the period of exactly two years and a day till the lovers were wed at Christmas, 1654. There are no more delightful letters in English. Love-letters—and indeed letters in general—are a province of literature for which no spectacled Aristotle has yet laid down the laws. But we may have views about them; as we shall see, Dorothy herself had. The writing of letters is an applied art which turns into a pure one, when they lose their original purpose; the readers for whom they arc written come to die, the matter they express grows obsolete and immaterial, and yet by charm of manner alone they may still enthral an eavesdropping public for which they were never meant. The embroidery preserves the dress, when the stuff itself is long threadbare with the years. True, the subjects are not always ephemeral; a Pliny may watch Vesuvius engulfing five cities, a Sevigne see Fouquct on his trial. But these are lucky chances; good letters remain immortal though they chronicle the smallest beer, and describe merely the visits of cousins and the maladies of aunts. Nor is this simply because time gives back with interest the value it at first takes away from little things, so that hairpins grow precious in a thousand years and we would give its weight in gold for a laundry-bill of Augustus; it is because the real interest of good letters is one that years cannot lessen—the attraction of human personality. To preserve the charm of some character with vivid responses to life—that is their achievement. A diary like Pepys's may be

even more intimately revealing; but how many books are there in the world like his? Besides, a good correspondent, like a good conversationalist, is better when addressing others than in soliloquy; and we may little guess how charming people can be, until they try to charm. The art of letters is, indeed, the most social and *one* of the most civilised of literary forms. It stands nearer even than sermon or moral essay to the art of life. The eighteenth century knew its value; and it does small credit to our modern culture that we have so suffered it to decay. To combine sensitiveness and good sense; to be Spontaneous yet delicate, natural without vulgarity and negligent without slovenliness; to show at once gaiety and grace; to possess a mind of one's own, a style of one's own, one's own way of seeing and describing life's brief trifles—that was the eighteenth-century ideal of conversation; and those seem to me, in all ages, the essentials of good letter-writing.

Small wonder, then, that women, with their keener sense for the graces of life, should have excelled since the days of Helo'isc in this branch of literature, so that it is dominated by figures like Dorothy Osborne, Madame de Scvigne, Madame du Deffand, Madame d'Epinay, Mademoiselle de Lcspinasse, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Maria Edgcworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Jane Welsh Carlyle (both of whom write so much better than their more famous husbands). Even their most successful male rivals, like Horace Walpole and poor Cowper winding his worsted, have sometimes been markedly feminine. I have noticed the same thing in my own experience; and I have certainly known women who, with that remarkable power their sex sometimes shows of withstanding any amount of education, could only spell precariously, and yet wrote far better and more vivid letters than some very distinguished writers, alive and dead.

This is not simply, I think, because women tend by nature to have more grace, as men more strength; or because they have a greater need, and a greater wish to please. They have tended also, ever since civilisation allowed many of them a good deal of leisure, to have their originality and their natural spirit less worn down than men, whether in the mill of education or on the grindstone of active life. It is easier for hands unroughened by labour to keep their lightness of touch. This is not merely a vague generalisation; it has been noticed in widely different ages and countries what a natural command women may possess over their native tongue in its most living and unpedantic purity. It was remarked under the Roman Republic; it was remarked again in the France of Louis XIV, by Vaugelas: 'II vaut micux consulter lcs femmes/ says he, 'et ceux qui n'ont pas etudie, que ceux qui sont bien savants en la langue grecque et en la latinc.' A century later Diderot is even more downright: 'C'est que le bon style est dans le coeur; voila pourquoi tant de femmes disent et ecrivent comme des anges, sans avoir appris ni a dire ni a ecrire, et pourquoi tant dc pedants diront et ecriront mal toute lcur vie, quoiqu'ils n'aicnt cesse d'etudier sans apprendre.'

Here lies part of the charm in the letters of Dorothy Osborne; but only part. Letters need more than style; particularly love-letters. For these last are apt to be dull reading; theirs is at once the most eternal and the most ephemeral of all subjects. They have indeed two essential themes—the facts of the situation and the feelings of the lovers; and the facts have all the more need to be vivid since the feelings, however thrilling for the persons concerned, tend to be so monotonous for everyone else. The cooing of turtles is agreeable; but exciting it is not. Accordingly love-letters are the better for a love that does

not run smooth, but has to fight its way through alarms and despairs, surprises and vicissitudes. The feelings, too, need variation. One remedy is to quarrel; but there are less drastic methods: lovers can easily—none more easily—be scolded or mocked, tantalised and teased. In a word, the two great dangers of love-letters are sentimentality and boredom; the two great safeguards, with these as with other letters (and with every tiling else in life), are gaiety and grace.

So much for the art of letter-writing; it is time to return to Dorothy Osborne, whose romance we have delayed almost as long as her obdurate relatives. Certainly in these love-letters struggles with circumstance are not wanting. Her brother Henry in particular (not the same brother, it seems, as was with her in the Isle of Wight—that was probably a younger one called Robin) set his face violently against her marrying Temple, whom he disliked and despised as being an adventurer and an atheist; although it looks almost as if the real crime of Dorothy's lover was his love for her, and her brother's real motive a passionate jealousy. Eight years her elder, he was intensely possessive in his feeling: 'he is much of your sister's humour', writes Dorothy to Temple, 'and many times wishes me a husband that loved me as well as he does (though he seems to doubt the possibility on't), but never desires that I should love that husband with any passion, and plainly tells me so. He says it would not be so well for him, nor perhaps for me, that I should; for he is of opinion that all passions have more of trouble than of satisfaction in them.' (This seems rather a flimsy excuse.) 'But, seriously,' she goes on, 'I many times receive letters from him, that were they seen without any address to me or his name, nobody would believe they were from a brother; and I cannot but tell him sometimes that, sure,

he mistakes and sends me letters that were meant to his mistress, till he swears to me that he has none.' It is a curious coincidence that the equally devoted sister of Temple here referred to, the future Lady Giffard, was destined, after losing her husband in the first month of her marriage, to spend most of her life with her brother as almost a second wife to him. Meanwhile, at all events, Henry Osborne gave Dorothy no peace; until, if she ever read Webster (as she certainly read Shakespeare), she must have found the relations of the Duchess of Malfi with her brother, Duke Ferdinand, painfully like her own. He lectured her, he tried to intercept her lover's letters (only to be defeated by the trusty carrier's stout denials that he had any), he besieged her with rival suitors, he lost his temper with her for rejecting them. 'I could tell you such a story ('tis too long to be written) as would make you see (what I never discover'd in myself before) that I am a valiant lady. In earnest we have had such a skirmish, and upon so foolish an occasion, as I cannot tell which is strangest. . . . All the people that I had ever in my life refused were brought again upon the stage, like Richard Ill's ghosts, to reproach me withal; and all the kindness his discoveries could make I had for you was laid to my charge. . . . Well, 'twas a pretty lecture, and I grew warm with it after a while; in short, we came so near an absolute falling out, that 'twas time to give over, and we said so much then that we have hardly spoken a word together since. But 'tis wonderful to see what curtseys and legs pass between us; and as before we were thought the kindest brother and sister, we are certainly the most complimental couple in England.' Nine months later the battle is still raging: 'He renounced me again, and I defied him, but both in as civil language as it would permit, and parted in great anger with the usual ceremony of

a. leg and a courtesy, that you would have died with laughing to have seen us.'

Unhappy as she was, it will be seen that she had a very saving sense of humour. In the same way though as weary of her suitors as any Penelope—she 'would live in a hollow tree to avoid them'—she manages to get as much amusement as any Portia out of them too; alternately laughing at them because they are so ridiculous, and teasing her lover with them because they are so attractive. The most engaging is Henry Cromwell, son of die Lord General, described by the grim Mrs. Hutchinson as a 'debauched ungodly cavalier'; he is kept busy getting Dorothy Irish greyhounds on which her heart is set; and when his father dissolves the Parliament in April 1653, she cannot resist reminding Temple with a smile: 'if I had been so wise as to have taken hold of the offer was made me by H. C, I might have been in a fair way of preferment'. What would the Protector, one wonders, have made of diis ironic daughter-in-law? But an even grander suitor is Sir Justinian Isham, Bart., of Lamport, whom she generally refers to as 'the Emperor' on the strength of his Christian name; a county magnate, Solomon and Daniel in one, with four grown-up daughters. She promises Temple, by way of consolation, to put in a good word for him with one or other of these young women, in case she becomes their step-mother. But it was as well for Sir Justinian she did not. 'Oh, my conscience! we should all have joined against him as the common enemy, for those poor young wenches are as weary of his government as I could have been. He gives them such precepts as they say my Lord *of* Dorchester gives his wife, and keeps them so much prisoners to a vile house he has in Northamptonshire, that if once I had but let them loose, they and his learning would have been sufficient to have made him

mad without my help; but his good fortune would have it otherwise, to which I'll leave him.' Justinian's learning had indeed led him into one unlucky composition not meant for his mistress's eye. 'Lord! what would I give that I had a Latin letter of his for you, that he writ to a great friend at Oxford, where he gives a long and learned character of me; 'twould serve you *to* laugh at this seven year.' The worst of her faults, as there described by this seventeenth-century Sir Willoughby, was 'a height (he would not call it pride) that was, as he had heard, the humour of my family; and the best of my commendations was, that I was capable of being company and conversation for him'. Not that this sage could not also be gallant: hearing Dorothy had an ague, he forthwith had one himself, 'so natural a sympathy there is between us'. But at last finding even agues unavailing, Sir Justinian turned elsewhere: 'it was not mine, it seems, to have an emperor; the spiteful man, merely to vex me, has gone and married my countrywoman, Lord Lee's daughter. What a multitude of willow garlands shall I wear before I die! I think I had best make them into faggots this cold weather, the flame they would make in a chimney would be of more use to me than that which was in the hearts of all those that gave them me, and would last as long.'

Other wooers as provokingly went and died. 'Never anybody had such luck with lovers; what with marrying and what with dying they all leave me. Just now I have news brought me of the death of an old rich knight that has promised me this seven years to marry me whensoever his wife died, and now he's dead before her, and has left her such a widow, it makes me mad to think on't: .£1,200 a year jointure and -£20,000 in money and personal estate, and all this I might have had if Mr. Death had been pleased to have taken her instead of him.

Well, who can help these things? But, since I cannot have him, would you had her! What say you? Shall I speak a good word for you?' The old knight in question seems to have been of the modest age of fourscore and four; three months later there is another victim, Sir Robert Cook, aged a bare sixty-seven: 'ah, that good old man, I would so fain have had him! But I have no luck to them, they all die. If he would have married me first, and then have died, 'twould not have griev'd me half as much as it does now. Yet I was offered a new servant t'other day, and after two hours' talk and that they had told me that he had as good as two thousand pounds a year in present, and a thousand more to come, I had not the curiosity to ask who 'twas; which they took so ill that I think I shall hear no more on't. Never a man made worse bargain than you, when you played for the ten pounds I am to pay you when I marry. In conscience now, what would you give me *to* be quit on't?' Her wooers did not, however, always die. James Beverly survives, though his heart is quite broken for her. He had been at Emmanuel with Temple; and now, falling in love with Dorothy, put into her hand a love-letter from himself, pretending it had come out of Northamptonshire. Her reply was to throw it unopened on the fire, whispering (for she had kept her maid and the rector's wife in the room for her better protection) that she thought that 'the quickest and best way of answering it'. It was in vain that 'poor James' persisted; a fortnight later 'he says 'twould pity you to hear what sad complaints he makes; and, but that he has not the heart to hang himself, he could be very well contented to be out *of* the world'. Six weeks later still he is pitying Dorothy for giving herself 'to the proudest, imperious, insulting, ill-natured man that ever was; one that before he has had me a week shall use me

with contempt and believe that the favour was of his side'. With which parting fling at his rival he is out of our story.

Other people's husbands escape hardly better than her own suitors from this lively tongue. One 'pretty gentleman' of her acquaintance has been transformed by marriage 'into the direct shape of a great boy newly come from school. To see him wholly taken up with running on errands for his wife, and teaching her little dog tricks! And this was the best of him; for when he was at leisure to talk, he would suffer nobody else to do it, and by what he said, and the noise he made, if you had heard it, you would have concluded him drunk with joy that he had a wife and a pack of hounds. I was so weary on't that I made haste home, and could not but think of the change all the way, till my brother (who was with me) thought me sad, and to put me in better humour, said he believed I repented me I had not this gentleman, now I saw how absolutely his wife governed him. But I assured him, that though I thought it very fit such as he should be governed, I should not like the employment by no means.' Then there is Mr. Smith who has wedded my Lady Sunderland, Waller's 'Sacharissa', and treats his grand wife with such punctilious deference 'that they say 'tis worth one's going twenty miles to see it. All our ladies arc mightily pleased with the example, but I do not find that the men intend to follow it, and I'll undertake Sir Solomon Justinian wishes her in the Indies, for fear she should pervert his new wife.' Then, too, there is Lady Sandys, who went to Winchester races with Colonel Paunton, the biggest gambler of his day and the eponymous hero of Panton Street in Piccadilly; and there meeting her husband was modestly invited by him to his house near by, as more comfortable than a crowded inn. But,

no, she would not leave her Colonel and his friends. Would they not come too? No, they would not. 'Only my Lady grew kind at parting and said, indeed if Tom Paunton and J. Morton and the rest would have gone, she could have been contented to have taken his offer.' (Life, we may note, does not seem to have been always quite so grim in Puritan England as is sometimes supposed.) Another unfortunate husband is Lord Leicester, who after forty years of wedlock has suddenly taken it into his head to try to get the mastery of his lady; with poor success, however. 'What an age do we live in', Dorothy concludes, 'when 'tis a miracle if in ten couple that are married, two of them live so as not to publish to the world that they cannot agree.'

She has indeed very definite views on the whole subject of matrimony. Optimistic she is not. Quite a short while back, indeed, she 'was quite out of love with a thing called marriage'. She sees with a pitying mockery the decay of love it brings. Her cousin Franklin used to have the fault of 'kissing his wife before company, a foolish trick that young married men, it seems, are apt to; he has left it long since, I suppose'. Yet she cannot resign herself to face such a falling-off. 'I could be infinitely better satisfied with a husband that had never loved me, in hope that he might, than with one that began to love me less than he had done.' And she grows bitter in her contempt for marriages that are mercenary and loveless from the first. Her neighbour, Lady Grey de Ruthin, is engaged to a Mr. Yclverton: ' 'tis the most troublesome, busy, talking little thing that ever was born; his tongue goes like the clack of a mill, but to much less purpose. . . . You would wonder to see how tired she is with his impertinences, and yet how pleased she is to think she shall have a great estate with him. . . . Two or three great

glistering jewels has bribed her to wink at all his faults, and she hears him as unmoved and unconcerned as if another were to marry him.' That so many marriages end in tears is mainly, she thinks, the women's fault; seeing that they usually show themselves more quarrelsome within their own families than men. Even when a husband is unsatisfactory, his wife can and should at least save appearances (we shall meet again this curiously strong dread in Dorothy of public ridicule); 'as a kinswoman of ours that had a husband who was not always himself; and when he was otherwise, his humour was to rise in the night, and with two bedstaves tabour upon the table an hour together. She took care every night to lay a great cushion upon the table for him to strike on, that nobody might hear him, and so discover his madness. But 'tis a sad tiling when all one's happiness is only that the world does not know you are miserable.' But this view of the wifely duty of providing cushions docs not prevent her having a high standard for husbands. She has indeed drawn a full-length portrait of her ideal, in a letter which can compare for wit and style with any of the Characters in Earle or Overbury:

'There are a great many ingredients must go *to* the making me happy in a husband. First, as my cousin Franklin says, our humours must agree; and to do that he must have that kind of breeding that I have had, and used that kind of company. That is, he must not be so much of a country gentleman as to understand nothing but hawks and dogs, and be fonder *of* cither than his wife; nor of the next sort of them whose aim reaches no further than to be Justice of Peace, and once in his life High Sheriff, who reads no books but statutes, and studies nothing but how to make a speech interlarded with Latin that may amaze his disagreeing poor neighbours,

and fright them rather than persuade them into quietness. He must not be a thing that began the world in a free school, was sent from thence to the university, and is at his furthest when he reaches the Inns of Court, has no acquaintance but those of his form in these places, speaks the French he has picked out of old laws, and admires nothing but the stories he has heard of the revels that were kept there before his time. He must not be a town gallant neither, that lives in a tavern and an ordinary, that cannot imagine how an hour should be spent without company unless it be in sleeping, that makes court to all the women he sees, thinks they believe him, and laughs and is laughed at equally. Nor a travelled Monsieur whose head is all feather inside and outside, that can talk nothing but dances and duels, and has courage enough to wear slashes when everybody else dies of cold to see him. He must not be a fool of no sort, nor peevish, nor ill-natured, nor proud, nor covetous; and to all this must be added, that he must love me and I him as much as we are capable of loving. Without all this, his fortune, though never so great, would not satisfy me; and with it, a very moderate one would keep me from ever repenting my disposal.'

By the greatness of such expectations she irritated all the young men at a country house in Kent into 'a custom of expressing any tiling that is nowhere but in fiction by the name of "Mrs. O——'s husband". . . . They laugh to hear me say that one unkind word would destroy all the satisfaction of my life, and that I should expect our kindness should increase every day, if it were possible, but never lessen. All this is perfect nonsense in their opinion; but I should not doubt the convincing them if I could hope I should ever be so happy as to be

Yours.'

Was she disappointed? A little, we must believe; but not, perhaps, essentially. She was a realistic young woman as well as a romantic one. In that lies part of her charm. For the purely romantic character and the purely realistic are equally chilling in their opposite ways. In one respect, indeed, she will slightly shock her more romantic admirers. She is inflexibly resolved not to wed Temple in the teeth of the whole world's disapproval: 'I confess that I have an humour will not suffer me to expose myself to people's scorn.' She is prepared to keep her faith to him; to refuse all the matches her friends can find her, all the wealth the world can give; but she will not be 'esteemed a ridiculous person', making a love-match in a cottage 'to satisfy a giddy humour'. She does not want praise. She does not fear anger. But she flinches at contempt.

There are even times when she takes a touch of primness. She finds extremely shocking the idea of a woman loving before she is loved. She will launch out into little sermons that yet possess a strange charm in their half-childish gravity and the sudden laughing apology that cuts them short: 'what think you, might I not preach with Mr. Marshall for a wager?'; or again: 'One would think it were I that had heard the three sermons and were trying to make a fourth; these are truths that might become a pulpit better than Mr. Arbry's predictions. But lest you should think I have as many worms in my head as he, I'll give over in time.' All the same, she means what she says. She has even a morbid sense of guilt at moments about their passion as 'but a refined degree of madness', which reason and religion should have better controlled. And she is outraged at her brother's suggestion that Temple is an infidel: 'it must suppose one to be a devil in human shape'.

And yet in religion she herself finds not so much joy,

as a rather wistful comfort in a bleak and bitter world. Behind all her gaiety lies a confirmed sadness about life, based both on reason and temperament. She has learnt not to expect overmuch on earth, where with so much sorrow goes so little joy 'that one may see 'tis merely intended to keep us alive withal'. Strengthened as this strain in her must have been by her unhappy youth, it is clear, I think, that she was born with it; 'my mother, I remember, used to say I needed no tears to persuade my troubles, and that I had looked so far beyond them that, were all the friends I had in the world dead, more could not be expected than such a sadness in my eye'. She is not 'apt to hopc'. Good fortune comes to her 'like the sun to the inhabitants *of* Greenland' who, when it goes, look for six months of night to follow.

Little wonder, then, if under the strain of loneliness and persecution, with her mother dead and her father dying, her courage broke at one moment and she begged Temple for his own sake *to* give her up. 'She's happier by much', she writes of a frivolous friend at this time, 'than I shall ever be, but I do not envy her; may she long enjoy it, and I an early and a quiet grave, free from the trouble of this busy world, where all with passion pursue their own interests at their neighbour's charges; where nobody is pleased but somebody complains on't; and where 'tis impossible to be without giving and receiving injuries. You would know what I would be at, and how I intend to dispose of myself. Alas! were I in my own disposal, you should come to my grave to be resolved; but grief alone will not kill.'

Happily she possessed in Temple a lover with the essential gift of knowing when not to take his mistress at her word; or at least the determination not to do so now. He would not hear of renunciations—would she, in

her heart, ever have forgiven him if he had? For genuine as was her despair, no less genuine was the passion for him that she keeps half veiled beneath a mixture of mockery and modesty, mischief and reticence. 'Love is a terrible word', she will write back, when he has seized ardently on some unguarded phrase of hers, 'and I should blush if anything but a letter accused me on't. Pray be merciful and let it run "friendship" in my next charge.' Yet she lives for his letters. 'Your last letter came like a pardon to one upon the block'; or 'never anyone was so defeated as I was to find none'; or 'I chid my maid for waking me in the morning, till she stopped my mouth with saying she had letters for me. I had not patience to stay till I could rise, but made her tic up all the curtains to let in the light; and amongst some others I quickly found my dear letter that was first to be read, and which made all the rest not worth the reading.' As for writing to him: 'nothing that is paper can 'scape me, when I have time to write, and 'tis to you'. One night her brother and a friend are talking by the fire and 'amongst other things (which I did not at all mind) they fell into a discourse of flying; and both agreed that it was very possible to find out a way that people might fly like birds, and despatch their journeys so: I, that had not said a word all night, started up at that, and desired they would say a little more in it, for I had not marked the beginning; but instead of that, they both fell into so violent a laughing, that I should appear so much concerned in such an art; but they little knew of what use it might have been to me'.

And so in the end such fondness and persistence triumphed,[1] and Dorothy Osborne came, without need of

[1]There is an entry in her brother's diary, belonging to the period just after she had yielded to Temple's absolute refusal to give her up,

wings, to her lover's arms at last. Adversity dogged her to the close: she caught small-pox just before her marriage should have taken place, and with it lost her beauty; but on Christmas Day, 1654, she and Temple were wedded in St. Gilcs'-in-the-Ficlds.

For us it is not quite such a happy ending; for with it end her letters also, except for a few stray ones of minor interest. But before we leave her correspondence, a word may be said of its merely literary qualities; for every time I read her, I am struck afresh by these. They matter less, indeed, than the personality they reveal, one of the most lovable in all literature; but her character we learn once for all, her gift of language is a perpetual surprise. Enough has been quoted to show her power; but it is worth concentrating for a moment on this matter of pure style, and her ideas about it. These are definite enough. 'In my opinion these great scholars are not the best writers (of letters, I mean); of books perhaps they are. I never had, I think, but one letter from Sir Justinian, but 't was worth twenty of anybody's else to make me sport. It was the most sublime nonsense that in my life I ever read; and yet, I believe, he descended as low as he could to come near my weak understanding. . . .' 'All letters, methinks,' says she, 'should be free and easy as one's discourse; not studied as an oration, nor made up of hard words like a charm. 'Tis an admirable thing, to see how some people will labour to find out terms that may obscure a plain sense. Like a gentleman I knew, who would never say "the weather grew cold", but that "winter began to salute us". I have no patience for such coxcombs, and cannot blame an old uncle of mine that

which makes pleasandy ironic reading: 'Jan. 13, Friday mominge. I came to Chicksands before dinner. I found Mr. Temple here and my sister broke with him, God be praised.'

threw the standish (ink-pot) at his man's head because he writ a letter for him where, instead of saying (as his master bid him) that "he would have writ himself, but that he had the gout in his hand", he said that "the gout in his hand would not permit him to put pen to paper".'

Certainly she practised her own theory. But her writing is not simply honest English; in her lighter vein she often recalls the vivid prose of Elizabethan comedy, until one feels at moments as if she had been brought into the world, not by Sir Peter Osborne, but by Shakespeare, at some date between Beatrice and Rosalind. She complains, for instance, of her goldsmith's utter lack of invention: 'What a strange fellow this goldsmith is, he has a head fit for nothing but horns. . . . It makes me think of the fellow that could paint nothing but a flower-de-luce who, when he met with one that was so firmly resolved to have a lion for his sign that there was no persuading him on't, "Well," says the painter, "let it be a lion then, but it shall be as like a flower-de-luce as e'er you saw."' Surely this touches Bottom! Similarly in her serious moods she has a literary quality that echoes the wistful quietness of Trahcrnc, or of Izaak Walton, whose *Angler* came out in this same year 1653. One such passage is well known, in which she describes 'a common that lies hard by the house, where a great many young wenches keep sheep and cows, and sit in the shade singing of ballads'; but no less lovely is her picture of a summer evening's loneliness: 'Last night I was in the garden till eleven o'clock. It was the sweetest night that e'er I saw. The garden looked so well, and the jasmine smelt beyond all perfume. And yet I was not pleased. The place had all the charms it used to have when I was most satisfied with it, and, had you been there, I should have liked it

much more than ever I did; but that not being, it was no more to me than the next field, and only served me for a place to roam in without disturbance.'

I confess that to preserve these letters I would gladly sacrifice all the haystacks and wagon-loads of theological and political controversy which that quarrelsome age produced, including the prose of Milton himself.[2] Real grace like this is so rare a thing in English prose, as compared with French. It is extraordinary that the late Sir Walter Raleigh could write: 'We have no one in English to compare with Madame de Sevigne for the combination of wit and tenderness. Dorothy Osborne was an exceedingly amiable and admirable lady, full of sound sense, but if you take away from her letters that flavour of antiquity that gives a heightened interest to all her allusions and to her descriptions of the life of the time, you would have to admit that there are a thousand writers of letters alive today who equal or excel her.' We would admit no such thing. 'Amiable lady—flavour of antiquity'! It is a judgement worthy of Sir Justinian in person.

But there is another wider issue that these letters raise. How enormously, one feels after reading them, culture matters up to a certain point! And beyond that point, how little! Dorothy Osborne's charm is essentially that of a very delicate and sensitive personality, taught to write by reading a few good books—the Bible, Shakespeare, Cowley, and her beloved Jeremy Taylor. French romances, like those of Mademoiselle de Scudery, she

[2]This blasphemy when first published brought an indignant protest from an admirer of Milton's prose. I am afraid I am unrepentant. 'Eagles mewing their mighty youth' are monstrous fine; but I would not give this charming human being for a wilderness of mewing eagles.

also devoured; but how ill-read and ignorant she would be thought by many a modern miss! And yet how often do we meet today as good a writer and as attractive a human being? Are we surfeited, comes the misgiving question, with the good things, not only of the material, but of the intellectual world as well? Do we travel through the realms of gold in too American a fashion, with no time to digest a tenth of what we swallow, or are forcibly stuffed with? For this scantily educated young woman possessed all the essential things—the secret of style, not only in letters, but in life. She had never heard of Botticelli; she very likely thought the sun went round the earth; and yet———It is a lasting wonder how little difference, beyond a certain point, the increase of knowledge seems *to* make. May not the modern educationalist have grounds for heart-searching here?

But there remains little more to tell of Dorothy Osborne from the point where her letters end and her married life begins. Her husband rose rapidly in the world of diplomacy. He concluded, with an unexampled quickness due to the impression of frank honesty he gave, the Triple Alliance between England, Holland, and Sweden—the first of that great series of coalitions which for the next century and a half were to curb the dominance of France, and in Pepys's judgement 'the one good public thing that hath been done since the King came into England*. He was a main instrument in that momentous wedding of Princess Mary to William of Orange. In his triumphs Dorothy Lady Temple shared, admired to the last for her letters and in her old age a trusted friend of Queen Mary; but, as she foresaw, life brought her its share of sorrow too. Seven of her children died in infancy. Her one remaining daughter, Diana, was carried off by smallpox in her youth. Her one

remaining son, John, having risen to be Secretary at War under King William, threw himself a week later, his pockets filled with stones, from a boat that was shooting London Bridge, because he felt too deeply that he had ill advised the King. Her own death was hastened by sorrow for the Queen's (1695). So after forty years William Temple was left once more alone. There in the shades of Moor Park, where a new and very different love from his was springing up between his moody Irish secretary, Jonathan Swift, and young Esther Johnson, could he find after all, one wonders, in the long career he looked back on, any other piece of diplomacy that had really mattered so much to him as a girl's quick tact in the Isle of Wight, half a century before? For kingdoms pass, and treaties snap like rotten threads, and all our tortuous statecraft is only a cumbrous machinery to help make man's life worth living, only one precarious means to that elusive end; the best it can achieve is to keep alive a civilisation in which human beings as lovable as Dorothy Osborne can find, and be, and forget themselves.

NOTE. There are two excellent editions of Dorothy Osborne's *Letters,* by Judge Parry (1888; reprinted in *Wayfarer's Library* and *Everyman's Library),* and by G. C. Moore-Smith (1928). Admirable as the latter is for the student, the ordinary reader may, I think, get more enjoyment from the other with its modernised spelling and punctuation, which suits the essential modernity of Dorothy.

THE POET OF PROSE

It is extraordinary what prosaic people poets can be; or, if you like, what prosaic people can be poets. This paradox has long become a platitude; yet there are moments when it can still make us rub astonished eyes. We may remind ourselves that even Byron is most unlikely to be pacing his chamber in the throes of *Manfred* the morning we meet him; as Byron himself said: 'I never can get people to understand that poetry is the expression of excited emotion, and that there is no such thing as a life of passion any more than a continual earthquake. . . . Besides, who would ever shave themselves in such a state?' It is obvious; and yet we can sympathise so well with Mr. Coolidge of Boston in his ill-concealed disappointment at the author of *Childe Harold*, 'having expected to meet a misanthropical gentleman in wolfskin breeches, answering in fierce monosyllables, instead of a man of this world'. Yet, in fact, few poets have lived their part as romantically as Byron; shall we ever grow used to the far wider contrast between *Tintern Abbey* and the humdrum, horse-faced personage who wrote it, between the *Ancient Mariner* and the flaccid, snub-nosed countenance of Coleridge?

There is often an equally incongruous contrast between peoples or landscapes and the literature they produce. How much more poetry the reader of history might naturally expect from the country of Francois I and Bayard, of Napoleon I and Napoleon III, than from the country of Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell, of George IV and Queen Victoria! No doubt such generalisations are too easy; by choosing one's examples tactfully one can

prove almost anything. Matthew Arnold, discussing in this way the Celtic and Teutonic elements in our literature, reached the most curious conclusions by contrasting, as racially characteristic, the worst doggerel he could find on an English tombstone with some elaborate triad from early Welsh poetry. Still, it is surely not too rash to say that *'John* Bull' has always been a far more prosaic, far less passionate and imaginative figure than 'la belle France'; and yet, for some reason, it is from north of the Channel that the richer poetry has come.

Or consider the effect of landscape. To generations the Alps have seemed the embodiment of the sublime and beautiful; few would claim that for London and the Midlands. And yet, name the six chief poets of Switzerland—there indeed would be a test of general knowledge. And how many poets have ever lived in the real Arcadia, heartrendingly beautiful as its mountains remain to this day? Whereas Cambridge, set in the grey sobriety of its fenlands, has, as we all know, been a nest of nightingales for centuries.

Is there some law of reaction to explain this paradox? Is it like the tendency of the dwellers in flat lands, from Babel to Venetia and Flanders, to pile up heaven-piercing towers? Shall we say that, as only the hardiest of plants can survive in a Sahara, so there are no poets so poetic as those born into some Philistia; and retire with a glowing sense of having added to the great store of general truths?

Alas, they are half-truths at best. If the prosaic English have produced great poetry, the prosaic Swiss have not; and if the natural beauty of Switzerland has failed to produce it, what on the other hand of the natural beauty of Greece—which seems so naturally reflected in the beauty of Greek literature? Our generalisations collapse;

all except this simple one—that however dull and prosaic a country, a race, or an individual may at first sight seem, we can never be sure that they will not suddenly blossom into poetry. For it is a wild flower, that sows itself in the most unlooked-for places; like an ash-tree springing up on a chimney-stack, or a swallow nesting in the cab of a railway-engine. Picture, for instance, a human being with not much imagination, not much ear for verbal music, not much passion for the beauty of nature—fonder, by his own admission, of watching faces in the street; in temper a scientist rather than an artist, and indifferent to painting, music, or architecture; preferring 'in botany grasses, the most useful but least ornamental; in minerals, the earths and sands; in entomology the minuter insects; and given at one time to roaming the sea-shore (Parnassian occupation!) in search of drowned dogs to dissect. See him, to complete the picture, as by profession an unsuccessful surgeon, then a clergyman of the Church of England, noted for his strong sermons against 'enthusiasm'. How many of us would subscribe very hopefully to a forthcoming edition of such a person's poems? Do you ask more details—his origin? He was the child of a tax-collector with mathematical leanings, and *of* a publican's widow. The surroundings of his childhood? A drab and straggling street, bounded by a monotony of grey shingle and grey sea on one side, on the other by a barren heath and a mud-bound marsh, with dark brown water oozing slowly down its dykes. The society he mixed with—by necessity, if not by choice? The provincials of a petty port; London tradespeople; the stiff correctness of an eighteenth-century ducal castle; or else such country types as these described by his son: 'One was a jolly old farmer, with much of the person and humour of Falstaff, a face as rosy as brandy could make it, and an eye teeming with

subdued merriment; for he had that prime quality of a joker, superficial gravity: the other was a relative of the family, a wealthy yeoman, middle-aged, thin, and muscular. He was a bachelor, and famed for his indiscriminate attachment to all who bore the name of woman—young or aged, clean or dirty, a lady or a gipsy, it mattered not to him: all were equally admired. He had peopled the village green; and it was remarked, that, whoever was the mother, the children might be recognised in an instant to belong to him. Such was the strength of his constitution, that, though he seldom went to bed sober, he retained a clear eye and a stentorian voice to his eightieth year, and coursed when he was ninety. . . . Another of the sisterhood was Miss Waldron, late of Tamworth—dear, good-humoured, hearty, masculine Miss Waldron, who could sing a jovial song like a fox-hunter, and like him I had almost said toss a glass: and yet there was such an air of high *ton,* and such intellect mingled with these manners, that the perfect lady was not veiled for a moment—no, not when with a face rosy-red, and an eye beaming with mirth, she would seize a cup and sing "Toby Fillpot", glorying as it were in her own jollity.' Here, to be sure, were haunts for Fielding; but hardly for Apollo. And yet after a century crowded with the work of younger writers George Crabbe still keeps his place and his power to please.

No wonder if he was often a prosaic poet: the wonder is that, with such antecedents and surroundings and qualities of mind, he was a poet at all. How prosaic he can be, had better be admitted at once. Those who explore him must be prepared *to* drop at any moment into abysses of bathos. Again and again he invites that gibe of Alphonse Daudet at some poetaster: 'Ca un poete!—tout au plus de l'infantcrie montee';:

A quiet, simple man was Abel Keene,
He meant no harm, nor did he often mean:
He kept a school of loud rebellious boys,
And growing old, grew nervous with the noise.

The timid girls, half dreading their design,
Dip the small foot in the retarded brine.

And I was thankful for the moral sight,
That soberised the vast and wild delight.

It is as bad as Wordsworth at his worst. Yet there is a great deal more in Crabbe than doggerel. His poetry and his life are both alike in this: they seem monotonous and dingy. They are. But look closer; mixed with their grey texture are threads of deeper and of brighter colour—flashes of quiet heroism; sorrows felt passionately, though the words are few; and a lifelong loyalty to truth, sometimes sad, sometimes sardonic. Truthfulness—that is Crabbe's master quality, and the secret of his lasting appeal. He did not deal in beatific visions: he trailed no clouds of glory: he has no claims to be called 'great'. But whether it was a dyke of muddy water in a marsh or the brooding memories of an old woman at her cottage door, he had no common power of sight, and of insight, and of saying what he saw.

His life, indeed, is very like one of his own tales. Under its sober surface lie both grimness and romance. Already as he grew into boyhood his quiet home was darkened by the sombre rages which began to grow upon his father, to the point of throwing the crockery about the room, until his wife came to dread the sound of his returning footsteps. Strange destinies, too, awaited the poet's younger brothers. The third son became captain of a slave-ship; one day his black cargo broke loose, mastered the vessel, and set their white captors adrift in an open boat; Captain Crabbe and his men were never heard of

more. A younger brother still was captured by the Spaniards, settled in Mexico, and grew rich; his wealth reminded the Church that he was a heretic; he was forced to leave his wife, children, and all he possessed, and flee to Honduras, where he founded, if not a new fortune, at all events a new family. For it appears from the *Belize Advertiser* of January 1840 that, fantastic as it sounds, the author of *The Parish Register* was the probably unsuspecting uncle of a colony of little black Crabbcs beyond the Atlantic. His own boyhood was uneventful; but the touch of poetry was already there. His father, though by profession a revenue-collector (like the father of Horace, two thousand years before) and in charge of the salt duties at Aldborough, had tastes not only for mathematics, but for verse as well, and would read Milton and Young in the evenings to his family; further, he took in *Martin's Philosophical Magazine,* a journal with a Poet's Corner which the father flung aside and the son learnt by heart. This boyish habit has left its mark on that curious poem Crabbe wrote years after, called *The Newspaper,* with its description of such newspaper poets:

> This Poet's Corner is the place they choose,
> A fatal nursery for an infant Muse;
> Unlike that Corner where true Poets lie,
> These cannot live, and *they* shall never die.

Fortunately, Crabbe's own 'infant Muse' found a healthier nursery than this elsewhere in Aldborough, among its old wives and ancient mariners. From them the future story-teller was already in his boyhood gathering his material:

> They told of days where many goes to one—
> Such days as ours; and how a larger sun,
> Red, but not flaming, roll'd with motion slow,
> On the world's edge, but never dropp'd below.

Nor was it only the old who found in this quiet child a listener:

> There were fond girls that took me to their side
> To tell the story how their lovers died.

In the same way, with the same already eager human interest, he picked acquaintance with lonely shepherds on Aldborough Heath, and with smugglers down the coast. If Crabbe's schooling was scanty and his culture never wide, he early learnt things that books could never have taught him,

> And all that boys acquire whom men neglect.

Next followed apprenticeship to a series of surgeons; a rough experience, apt to include helping the surgeon's ploughboy at odd moments. Then, at seventeen, came romance. He fell in love with Sarah Elmy. The poems he addressed 'To Mira' seem starchy and sickly enough to modern taste; it only shows how rash it is *to* accuse writers of 'insincerity'. Seldom has love proved truer. To win her he battled for twelve years in a harder fight even than Dorothy Osborne, against discouragement, poverty, and debt. Twice he tried to make his way in London. His first attempt was in 1776-7, as a surgeon; but he was too poor to pay for proper teaching, and his efforts at self-help led to little result—except that his landlady, finding he had a dead baby in his cupboard, became convinced that he had dug up her William, buried the week before, and was only prevented from haling him to the Mansion House by the production of the child with its face, fortunately, still intact. It is clear that Crabbe was even less made for medicine than Keats. The idea of being called on to do a serious operation was a nightmare to him; and after struggling two years more with his profession at Aldborough he decided to abandon it and take the decisive step, as it proved, of his whole life.

Here again the prose of Crabbe's career is lit up for an instant by a flash of poetry; for this decision was made by him on a gloomy winter's day in 1779, on the bleak Marsh Hill above Aldborough, as he stood and gazed at a muddy pool there, called 'the Leech-pond'. On that spot, with as much 'Resolution and Independence' as Wordsworth's own Leech-gatherer, Crabbe determined to stake all on his poetry. The next April, aged twenty-five, with three pounds in his pocket, he sailed *011* a smack for London, where, just ten years before, Chatterton had likewise sought his fortune, and found his fate. Fortunately Chatterton was not even a name to Crabbe until after his arrival.

In that Purgatory he suffered a whole year. His journal makes moving reading, with its mixture of a simplicity that hopes to conquer the world of letters by means of Epistles to Prince William Henry and Epistles from the Devil, and a courage that refuses to despair at the obdurate deafness of peers and publishers alike, of North and Shelburnc, Dodslcy and Becker, even when the writer is reduced to fourpence halfpenny in the world. Only at moments there is wrung from him a cry of wretchedness. 'Oh Sally, how I want you!' Summer came. Amid its heats he watched the flames of the Gordon Riots licking up the walls of Newgate. A barren winter followed; then a hopeless spring. A debtors' gaol was gaping for him, when he played his last card and wrote an appeal to Burke. He left it at Burke's door, together with a copy of his poem, *The Library;* then in the anguish of his suspense paced up and down Westminster Bridge (again we think of Wordsworth) all night long. That night the tide had turned.

Struck by the letter (as well he might be), still more by the man himself, Burke took instant action, although

himself in the thick of a political crisis. He introduced the young surgeon from Suffolk to the greatest of the day, to Fox, to Reynolds, to Johnson; arranged for the publication of *The Library;* arranged for the ordination of its author and his appointment to a curacy at Aldborough. Then, when Crabbe's native town showed itself ill-disposed to take the returned salt-master's son for its spiritual shepherd, this ever-patient patron had him made instead chaplain to the Duke of Rutland. Thenceforth Crabbe's long life flowed evenly to its close. *The Village* appeared successfully in 1783; the same year saw him wedded at last to the woman he had toiled so patiently to win. In 1785 followed *The Newspaper.* Then for twenty-two years, from the age of thirty to fifty-one, he published nothing. Glad to escape from his too aristocratic chaplaincy to a country parsonage, he spent his quiet days in botanising, preaching against the enthusiasm of the Methodists, rearing a family, and delighting its youthful members with periodical bonfires in his garden of massive manuscripts of verse, to say nothing of three novels—mountains of paper whose bulk, if burnt indoors, would have endangered the house. Sermons he composed with less ardour; in later life, at least, he would preach the same ones at two-year intervals—a characteristically common-sense arrangement. 'As like Parson Adams' (said Lord Chancellor Thurlow) 'as twelve to the dozen', he maintained calm, but firm relations with his parishioners; tithe-days called from him no elaborate ceremony, but a blunt 'I must have some money, gentlemen.' His life makes a sleepy record, even without the opium he took for his digestion in his latter years. And yet under this tranquillity there still lurked deeper feelings—wild impulses like that sudden uncontrollable longing for the sea which made him one day mount his horse, ride sixty

miles to the Lincoln coast, enter the waves, and so return; and secret troubles, like the melancholia which attacked his wife at intervals from 1796 till her death in 1813. There is something very pitiful in the words written by him on one of her old letters: 'Nothing can be more sincere than this, nothing more reasonable and affectionate; and yet happiness was denied.' Yet a truer epitaph on his long love-story lies, perhaps, in those other lines he wrote on the paper wrapping of his dead wife's wedding-ring; clumsy, yet moving in their sincerity:

> The ring so worn as you behold,
> So thin, so pale, is yet of gold;
> The passion such it was to prove—
> Worn with life's care, love yet was love.

Had Crabbe died at fifty, he would be today as obscure a figure as Tickell or Parncll. *Inebriety, The Candidate, The Library, The Newspaper,* and even *The Village* would scarcely have kept his memory alive. But in 1807 this poet of a past age suddenly presented himself before the new generation with a volume of poems containing, besides his previous work, *The Parish Register* and *Sir Eustace Grey.* Success encouraged him; *The Borough* followed in 1810, *The Tales* in 1812, *Tales of the Hall in* 1819. With surprising ease and swiftness this old man, who had been born under George II, established his position as a leading poet in the world of Napoleon and Wellington, Scott and Byron. He made the acquaintance of Scott, Campbell, Rogers, Bowles, Moore, and Wordsworth; he had become rector of comfortable Trowbridge, with his grandchildren growing up round him; and yet all was not well. He suffered from being too old, or else not old enough. The lover, long ago, of Sarah Elmy still felt women's charm; he seemed terribly alone in the bustling streets of his prosperous parish. 'I cannot bear

to belong to nobody.' He tried to satisfy himself with feminine friendships, but they had a way of hovering unhappily on the brink of something more. 'I have', he writes to Mrs. Leadbeater, 'though at considerable distances, six female friends, unknown to each other, but all dear, very dear to me.' The distances did not always remain so considerable. In his sixtieth year he was even accepted by one young woman, only to recoil himself on second thoughts. That was unfortunate; but he was needlessly contrite, one feels, at having thereby caused Miss Ridout to reject a young man, who was 'an excellent match in every respect except a certain weakness of intellect'. He did not, however, escape the criticism of others. 'The cake was no doubt very good', observed one lady, 'but there was too much sugar to cut through in getting at it.' An old squire was blunter: 'Damme, Sir, the very first time Crabbe dined at my house, he made love to my sister.' It is an old story—laurelled age and laughing youth, Corneille and Mademoiselle du Pare, Goethe and Bettina, Ibsen and his Princess of Orangia: it would be very comic, if it were not tragic. Yet it is strange to find something so naive and *doucereux* in Crabbe of all men, 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best.' So much harder is it to sum up a human being than biographers often suppose. It was no mere softening of old age; the sturdy resolution of forty years before was still his; in 1818, when he supported the unpopular candidate at Trowbridge and a hostile mob threatened to tear his chaise and him to pieces if he went to the poll, the old rector replied that they might kill him if they chose, but while he lived he would vote, and passed through their midst unharmed. A common-sense Liberal to the last, he died on the eve of the Reform Bill in 1832.

Naive, yet shrewd; straightforward, yet sardonic; blunt,

yet tender; quiet, yet passionate; realistic, yet romantic—such was the man, and such is his poetry. The first impression is of a prosaic naturalist, both in the scientific and in the literary sense of that word. He botanises and cntomologiscs, so to speak, in his observation of nature and human nature; with a preference for hemlock over roses, for moths over butterflies. He is more interested in a flatworm than a python. He shows the absorption of an eager student of medicine in a really bad case. Hence the familiar phrase about 'Pope in worsted stockings'; hence the complaint of Wordsworth that 'Crabbe's verses are in no sense poetry' and 'nincteen-twentieths of his pictures are mere matters of fact'; of Coleridge, that there was in him 'an absolute defect of the high imagination'; of Landor's Porson that he 'wrote with a twopenny nail . . . on mud walls'.

It is an understandable attitude. Crabbe is more than a verse Defoe, but he is that in part. It is not necessarily a weakness: Crabbe's romantic contemporaries and successors would have been none the worse if their own pictures had more often been 'matters of fact'. He may lack 'the high imagination'; but at least he had, what they often wanted, that lower imagination which can see and make others see, not things that never were, but things that are. Crabbe, indeed, belonged to that class of human beings of whom we may say that pink spectacles make them see red. They would rather face the worst truths than pretty illusions:

> Come, search within, nor sight nor smell regard;
> The true physician walks the foulest ward.

So Crabbe set out to tear the honeysuckle off Goldsmith's Deserted Village.

> Since vice the world subdued, and waters drown'd,
> Auburn and Eden can no more be found.

It was not that Goldsmith had never known hard times himself; he had fiddled his vagabond way across Europe; it was a difference, not of experience, but of temperament. In this reaction against Goldsmith Crabbc first discovered himself, just as Fielding had begun by loathing and parodying Richardson.

> Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
> In tinsel trappings of poetic pride? . . .
> By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
> As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.

The style is the faded convention of a hundred and fifty years ago; the sentiment might be that of a modern poet rebelling against Tennyson, or against the Georgians. We can understand how Johnson then, and Hardy a century later, felt at once the appeal of a mind so cleared of cant; indeed, I had already found myself wondering whether Crabbe must not have been one of Hardy's favourite poets, even before biography disclosed that from him Hardy derived his own first impulse toward realism. After all, this is an ancient school of writing—older, no doubt, even than the day when the Muses met Hesiod keeping sheep on Mount Helicon and taught him that they could tell truth as well as fiction, and paint life's harsh realities as well as Homer's high romance. Indeed, it is worth opening Crabbe and Hesiod side by side to see how vigorously a certain type of rustic temper can persist across the division of seas and centuries—disillusioned, sharp-tongucd, shrewd-witted, yet with a sense of beauty of its own. The bleak Thracian gale that pipes across Hesiod's Boeotia echoes the north-easter that nips East Anglia; the Greek shrew

> Who, though her wedded husband be a stout man and a sage,
> With never a fire will roast him into a raw old age,

bears a family resemblance, despite three thousand years, *to* her Suffolk sister:

> Twelve heavy years this patient soul sustain' d
> This wasp's attacks, and then her praise obtain'd,
> Grav'd on a marble tomb, where he at peace remain'd.

Much nearer home, Crabbe invites a more obvious comparison with Cowper: there is the same fondness for quiet English country, the same fondness, alas, for mere prose in metre. As a letter-writer, Cowper must stand far higher: as a poet of landscape, and of human character, he seems to me inferior. He lacked both Crabbe's knowledge and Crabbe's strength; indeed, the mixture in him of maiden lady and hunted sheep, despite all its pathos, ends by exhausting the patience. Then there is that other far greater poet of the country and the poor, who in his flights of inspiration soars into heavens far out of sight of Aldborough Heath, but also, when inspiration leaves him, flounders almost lower, even, than Crabbe himself—Wordsworth. Little comparison is possible, but there is one difference of some interest in its effects—the difference between Wordsworth's blank verse and Crabbe's couplet. For grand moments in the grand manner, blank verse is doubtless unsurpassable; but for general purposes it tends to lapse, as Goldsmith already saw before Wordsworth's day or Cowper's, into 'a disgusting solemnity'. With all its faults, the couplet is far less subject to that failing. Crabbe was slovenly. He wrote too fast—six times as fast as Virgil—thirty lines a day. He never learnt what Boileau taught Racine, not only to rhyme, but 'rimer difficilement'. As sure as fate, a 'boy' in Crabbe is doomed, if to no other 'employ', then to a 'hoy'. None the less for his purposes he chose the right measure.

He also learnt, more slowly, to choose the right method for his gifts. It was in vivid and individual detail, not in vague generalisations, that his power lay. The sublime may be vague, as the mountains and the heavens seem but

the vaster for mist and cloud; but the village brook, the woodland pool, need clarity to be at their best. From *Libraries* and *Villages* and *Boroughs* he passed more and more to tales of individual lives—from the general to the particular, from the static to the dynamic. Even in his earlier work the most vital passages had been, apart from the landscapes, the sketches of characters like Phoebe Dawson or the Widow Goe; and the later letters of the *Borough* are indistinguishable from the *Tales.*

In these it is not the plots that are striking—they are adequate, seldom more; a village girl is seduced by a footman, a village coquette passes through all the slow stages from ballroom to almshouse, a young man is entrapped by a young minx in a nobleman's household. What remains outstanding is the truth of detail in the characters; especially the pictures of degeneration, 'little by little'—for instance, the prim Parish Clerk, a sort of Malvolio, who stoops in the end to steal from the offertory-bag. Such gradual progresses of a soul, upward or downward, are too long *to* quote; but Crabbe's gift of catching a situation or a human type in a couplet or so lends itself better to the purpose. There is, for instance, the lovers' quarrel:

> The youth, repulsed, to one more mild convey'd
> His heart, and smil'd on the remorseless maid;
> The maid, remorseless in her pride, the while
> Despis'd the insult and return'd the smile;

or the village gossips:

> Theirs is that art, which English wives alone
> Profess—a boast and privilege their own—
> When they engage the tongue, the eye, the ear,
> Reply when listening, and when speaking, hear;

or the charity-boy in the workhouse:

> There was he pinch'd and pitied, thump'd and fed,
> And duly took his beatings and his bread;

or again, we see the gardener's wife standing proudly upon her privileges:

> 'Why "Lonicera" wilt thou name thy child?'
> I asked the Gardener's wife in accents mild.
> 'We have the right', replied the sturdy dame,
> And Lonicera was the infant's name.

Miranda the blue-stocking aspires to mathematics:

> She thought indeed the higher parts sublime;
> But then they took a monstrous deal of time.

The tactful wife leads her husband with a velvet glove:

> She only begg'd to rule in small affairs,
> And ease her wedded lord of common cares,
> Till he at length thought every care was small,
> Beneath his notice, and she had them all.

The toad-eating nephew waits to inherit from his aunt:

> 'They taught you nothing; are you not at best',
> Said the proud Dame, 'a trifler and a jest?
> Confess you are a fool!' He bow'd and he confess'd.
>
> This vex'd him much, but could not always last:
> The Dame is buried, and the trial past.

This simple country clergyman, it appears, was something of a wit; at times, a bitter one:

> 'I speak my mind, I love the truth', quoth he;
> Till 'twas his fate that useful truth to find,
> 'Tis sometimes prudent not to speak the mind.
>
> 'How well my father hv'd!' she says. 'How well,
> My dear, your father's creditors could tell.'

To those who do not know Crabbe intimately, it must always seem most extraordinary that Jane Austen should have said she could imagine herself as Mrs. Crabbe.[1] It

[1]Prof. Elton quotes an amusing passage from one of her letters: 'I have never seen the death of Mrs. Crabbe. . . . Poor woman! I will comfort him as well as I can, but I do not undertake to be good to her children . . . she had better not leave any.'

seems too like a silk-gloved hand clasping a woollen one. And yet, after reading a piece like *Flirtation: A Dialogue*, the wonder is rather where this blunt parson acquired such malicious lightness of touch. This piece is a conversation between a young lady, who has not been precisely a Penelope, and her confidante, pending the return of her betrothed Ulysses; and its disquisition on the Art of Weeping makes a pretty pendant to that on the Art of Swooning or Running Mad in Jane Austen's *Love and Freindship:*

> To touch him nearer, and to hold him fast,
> Have a few tears *in petto* at the last;
> But this with care! For 'tis a point of doubt,
> If you should end with weeping or without.
> 'Tis true you much affect him by your pain,
> But he may want to prove his power again;
> And then, it spoils the look, and hurts the eyes—
> (A girl is never handsome when she cries.)
> Take it for granted, in a general way,
> The more you weep for men, the more you may.
> Save your resources; for though now you cry
> With good effect, you may not by and by.
> It is a knack; and there are those that weep
> Without emotion, that a man may sleep;
> Others disgust—'tis genius, not advice,
> That will avail us in a thing so nice.

But, alas, these silken nets are spread in vain—all ends with the arrival of a letter announcing that the errant Ulysses has himself succumbed in marriage to a Circe in Guernsey. It is worth noting what a way the couplet has of begetting wit; imagine the above in blank verse, or recall the mountainous gambols of *The Prelude.* Not that Crabbe cannot be atrocious; only, when a writer shows such conscious humour, it is hard to be sure how far the humour is unconscious even when he writes:

> Something had happen'd wrong about a bill
> That was not drawn with true mercantile skill;
> So to amend it I was told to go
> And seek the firm of Cluttcrbuck and Co.;

or again:

> We saw my Lord, and Lady Jane was there,
> And said to Johnson, 'Johnson, take a chair.'

Impossible, you may say—the bathos must be absolutely deliberate! The reader of Crabbe at large, however, and of those almost illiterate letters of his old age (so hard *to* reconcile with the fine letter to Burke), can never feel sure, as with Jane Austen we feel sure, that he knows what he is doing. At times it seems as if literary English were something of a foreign tongue to him. There are lapses in his grammar. So there are, for that matter, in Jane Austen's; but where she paints on her 'two inches of ivory', he works more crudely on a tile from the domestic hearth. There is, however, still another link between him and the authoress of *Northanger Abbey*, in the fun both make of romantic extravaganzas and the goblin posterity of Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe:

> banditti who, in forest wide
> And cavern vast, indignant virgins hide;
> Who, hemm'd with bands of sturdiest rogues about,
> Find some strange succour, and come virgins out;

(which reads—so little do human appetites change—strangely like an account of a modern film melodrama). Yet there is also a difference. Crabbe mocked romanticism of this sort, but he had also loved it in his time, and devoured it. He is a realist, like Jane Austen, but the realist of a wider, as well as lower, world; and a realist far less single-minded and content to take life as it is. He laughs at dreams; but he envies them.

> Go on, then, Son of Vision! Still pursue
> Thy airy dreams; the world is dreaming too.

Ambition's lofty views, the pomp of state,
The pride of wealth, the splendour of the great,
Stripp'd of their mask, their cares and troubles known,
Are visions far less happy than thy own.

The lesson of life, in talc after tale of his, is simply to forget romance and accept reality; one of his heroines will deliberately school herself out of an unwise passion:

I sought my remedies for these;
I suffer'd common things my mind to please,
And common pleasures; seldom walk'd alone,
Nor when the moon upon the waters shone;
But then my candles lit, my window closed,
My needle took, and with my neighbours prosed:
And in one year—nay, ere the end of one—
My labour ended, and my love was done.

How sensible, and successful; and yet what a sad success, though not without its dignity! But such success was not *to* be Crabbe's own. He could not always draw his own curtains so firmly against the moonshine's lure. At sixty he was to woo a girl. In consequence, his view of life, despite his stoicism and his humour, remains intensely sad:

Ah, world unknown! How charming is thy view;
Thy pleasures many, and each pleasure new!
Ah, world experienc'd, what of thee is told?
How few thy pleasures, and those few how old!

His landscape lies under a grey light, very different from the dappled sunshine in Miss Austen's morning-room. Perhaps women are less often pessimists—or passionate pessimists—than men. Madame Ackermanns are rare. Crabbe has his English faith in the ultimate goodness of God, as a sort of universal Landlord, rather absentee, who can be trusted to behave like a decent Englishman when the final audit comes. But this life, meanwhile, is not gay to watch. It is not the high tragedies that are hardest to bear: they come seldom, and he does not write of those.

It is the long littleness of the common lot, the silent suffering, the growing weakness and squalor of the body, the progress of prose in the soul. 'Il y a horriblement de mal sur la terre'—the sense of that pressed harder on Crabbe than on Voltaire; but it also wrung from him some of his most real poetry. Set this picture of pauper graves beside Gray's *Country Churchyard;* it need not shrink from the comparison:

> There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,
> And the glad parish pays the frugal fee.
> No more, O Death, thy victim starts to hear
> Churchwarden stern or kingly overseer;
> No more the farmer claims his humble bow;
> Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou.

But a closer and clearer parallel is, of course, with Gray's enemy, who encouraged Crabbe's beginnings, Samuel Johnson. Both men had the same uncanting sense of the world's real sorrows and the same impatience with the imaginary ones of hypochondriacs:

> Who with mock patience dire complaints endure
> Which real pain, and that alone, can cure.

And how easily might lines like these come from *The Vanity of Human Wishes—*

> The rich man built a house both large and high;
> He enter'd in, and set him down to sigh;

or:

> *Of* Hermit Quarll we read, in island rare,
> Far from mankind, and seeming far from care;
> Safe from all want, and sound in every limb;
> Yes! there was he, and there was care with him;

or this picture of unrepentant age (though here, perhaps, the actual source is Dry den's *All for Love)*:

> Like a sad traveller who, at closing day,
> Finds he has wander'd widely from his way,
> Yet wanders on, nor will new paths explore,
> Till the night falls and he can walk no more.

But Crabbe, with the strain of romance in his nature, is also in time a generation nearer than Johnson to the Romantic Revival. He is less afraid of letting his imagination go. Like a plebeian cousin of Landor, he too, stands at the meeting of two centuries, between reason and dream. Johnson would never have written *Sir Eustace Grey,* that opium-stimulated nightmare which, however inferior to *Kubla Khan,* is a strange work for this solid Anglican; even though in deference to good sense he puts it in the mouth of a haunted lunatic:[2]

> They forced me on, where ever dwell
> Far-distant men in cities fair,
> Cities of whom no travellers tell,
> Nor feet but mine were wanderers there.
> Their watchmen stare, and stand aghast,
> As on we hurry through the dark;
> The watch-hght blinks as we go past,
> The watch-dog shrinks and fears to bark.

But even when Crabbe rides away over the hills of romance, his grim realism rides behind him. He takes the road, not towards Xanadu, but towards Wuthering Heights. He never travels so far; but talcs like *Smugglers and Poachers* or *Peter Grimes,* with its description of the spectres that haunt the fisherman who has murdered his apprentices, show both sides of Crabbe. If his romanticism calls up the accusing phantoms, it is his minutest realism that paints the setting—the slimy channels in the salt-marsh, the blighted tree, the melancholy stakes with their sun-blistered tar, the tepid, muddy waters,

> Where the small eels that left the deeper way
> For the warm shore, within the shallows play;
> Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,
> Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood.

[2]Scott applied a quotation from it to himself when his mind was beginning to fail.

Here, dull and hopeless, he'd lie down and trace
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race,
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,
Gave from the salt ditch side the bellowing boom:
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice,
Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,
Ran with a dull, unvaried, sadd'ning sound.

The last two lines might be a description of Crabbe's own verse; and certainly the 'muscles' arc a little difficult to swallow; but then we are meant to see the scene, not to like it. Those who are amused by contrasts should turn to the picture of this same Dunwich coast in Swinburne's *By the North Sea.* Nothing could be more different; there, on the contrary, we are meant to admire much more than to see.

Miles and miles and miles of desolation!
Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change!
Sign or token of some eldest nation
Here would make the strange land not so strange.
Time-forgotten, yea since Time's creation,
Seem these borders where the sea-birds range.

Crabbc indulges in no such flourishes—he is down on his knees among the bugloss and sea-lavender; but his landscapes are, perhaps, the most permanent part of his work. Here, too, he stands between two ages: Pope would have thought him too mean, Johnson too minute and precise, while Wordsworth and Coleridge found him too unimaginative. And yet even his portraits of human character will perhaps be outlived by these still-lifes and landscapes—such as that favourite of Tennyson's (whose *Enoch Arden* was indebted to Crabbe's *Parting Hour)*:

But now dejected, languid, listless, low,
He saw the wind upon the water blow,
And the cold stream curl'd onward as the gale
From the pine-hill blew harshly down the dale . . .
Far to the left he saw the huts of men
Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen.
Before him swallows, gathering for the sea,
Took their short flights and twitter'd on the lea;
And, near, the bean-sheaf stood, the harvest done,
And slowly blacken'd in the sickly sun;

or again:

Cold grew the foggy morn, the day was brief,
Loose on the cherry hung the crimson leaf;
The dew dwelt ever on the herb; the woods
Roar'd with strong blasts, with mighty showers the floods;
All green was vanish'd, save of pine and yew,
That still display'd their melancholy hue;
Save the green holly with its berries red,
And the green moss that o'er the gravel spread;

or better still:

And void of stars the angry clouds look down
On the cold earth, exchanging frown with frown.

Yet more desolate, perhaps, than all his wintry landscapes is that still-life from a workhouse death-bed:

A yellow teapot, standing at his side,
From its half-spout the cold black tea supplied.

It is ludicrous, and yet it is also grisly, that teapot; and its tea seems venomous.

Crabbe wrote far too much (*The Borough* alone contains ten thousand lines), and rewrote far too little; but he is in himself a typical representative—more typical than most of our poets—of that nation of shopkeepers which has yet produced the finest body of poetry in the world. The stiff Saxon clay, the saving spark of Franco-Norman wit, the moral grimness of Langland and the humorous insight of Chaucer—we may fancy we can trace that

double ancestry in him, as in many another **writer of our** race. His thick-ankled style has none of the grace of the pure French artists he sometimes distantly recalls—such as Guy de Maupassant, or the creator of Madame Bovary, whose tragedy of thwarted romanticism would have at once appealed to Crabbe. Even Balzac is elegant beside this homespun Englishman. He presents a complete contrast to the poetry of his fellow priests, the lyric delicacy of Herbert, the starry visions of Vaughan. And yet Fitz-Gcrald's beloved 'old Man' keeps still some of the grey power of the native countryside he fondly painted—the quiet murmur of its lowland rivers with their willows, like his couplets, two and two; the desolate appeal of its wind-warpcd pines and lonely-blooming furze; the silver light of sunset on its still estuaries. It changes little with the passing of the seasons and the years; it endures where beauties of a more artificial culture wither and vanish without a trace.

TheSTRANGE CASE of Dr. BEDDOES

'You know Beddoes?' The answer will be some murmur about *Death's Jest-Book.* 'But his father?' A shadowy vision may rise in the memory of an eccentric old gentleman leading a cow up his patients' staircases to improve the air in their bedrooms. This much of immortality blesses the human clay which has had the good fortune to be imprinted in passing by the light toe of Lytton Strachey. The author of *Books and Characters* has wedded poor Dr. Beddoes to that cow. Man cannot put them asunder now, nor death part them. And yet Dr. Beddoes was famous once. Kant admired his *Essay on Consumption.* Southey wrote of him: 'From Beddoes I hoped for more good for the human race than from any other individual.' Coleridge, the doctor's patient at one period in his long struggle with opium, was overwhelmed at his death: 'I felt that more had been taken out of my life by this than by any former event.' Dr. Beddoes docs indeed deserve a little twig or two of laurel on his own account; the son-in-law of Richard Edgeworth, brother-in-law of Maria, and father of the most macabre of English poets, was also remarkable in a less relative way and a very strange figure indeed himself.

Thomas Beddoes was born at Shifnal in 1760. Even as a small child he refused to play games. At school his companions wondered 'why he was always thinking', without however taking the steps usual in places of education to prevent such behaviour: 'for his silence', says Dr. Stock, his fellow-physician and biographer, 'was not the silence of moroseness, but was frequently interrupted by some friendly remark which he made to one playful group after another, as he passed them in succession'. From this scene of precocious condescension he

passed, aged thirteen, into the hands of the Rev. Samuel Dickenson, Rector of Plymhill, who testifies: 'During the period (two years) that Dr. Beddoes was under my care, his mind was so intent upon literary pursuits, chiefly the attainment of classical learning, that I do not recollect his having devoted a single day, or even an hour, to diversions or frivolous amusements of any kind. His vacant hours were generally employed in reading Reviews.'

Either the Rev. Dickenson did not know all, or did not choose to say it; for it appears that the young Beddoes was not quite such a dazzling white as he is here painted. He had acquired one passion—whist; so violent, that he might have encountered Mrs. Battle with a mutual fervour. Indeed, he looked forward to being grown up mainly for the prospect of being able to play whist all day long. But perhaps the Rev. Dickenson himself did not count that noble game as a 'diversion or frivolous amusement'. At all events, at Pembroke, Oxford, whither Beddoes next proceeded at sixteen, he was thought as good a player as any in England, and could recapitulate at the end of a game when and by whom each card had been played. He also shot. But all this did not prevent him from mastering first Classics, then Modern Languages (which he taught himself), then Natural Science. Even from his shooting expeditions he returned loaded, if not with game, with mincralogical specimens. It is needless to add that as an undergraduate 'he still preserved the same equanimity which had characterised his earlier years, and although exposed to the contagion of intemperate and licentious example, his moral conduct was believed to be irreproachable'.

After taking his medical degree, he became Chemical Lecturer at Oxford, drawing, it is said, such multitudes as the University had not seen since the thirteenth century.

But it was not all work and no play; for instance, there were fireworks. 'Last night I astonished this part of England with sending up an air-balloon; filled partly with light, partly with heavy inflammable air. I was desirous to try whether such a mass of inflammable air, burning at a considerable height in the atmosphere, would produce any imitation of fiery meteors.' The experiment was perfect; the balloon burnt ravishingly, a mile high. Since, however, Dr. Beddoes goes on to add 'I have never beheld an igneous meteor, and as descriptions of such objects are very ill calculated to convey accurate ideas, I cannot pretend to ascertain the resemblance or difference', he does not seem to have ended much wiser than he began. But it remains a very characteristic experiment. All his life he was to pursue the remarkable; all his life his ruling passion was to be for gases and 'Factitious Airs'. He ran after a hundred other things, but to them he returned, as if his little round person had been itself a sort of balloon. With them he tried to bleach negroes. For their sake he escorted cows into bedrooms, while the enraged lodging-house keepers of Clifton called Heaven to witness that they had not let their stairs for hoofed traffic. In their name he wrote works and founded 'Pneumatic Institutions'. And when the end came, he seems to have died feeling sadly that they had been after all only an *ignis fatuus.*

Meanwhile, however, he pursued also, it must be admitted, a multitude of lesser loves. He produced papers on Basalts, on the conversion of cast into malleable iron, on the abuses of the Bodleian Library, and on the Curl in Potatoes; he planned a set of Botanical Dialogues; he penned *Observations on the Nature of Demonstrative Evidence, with Reflections on Language* and *A Letter to a Lady on the Instruction of the Poor.* Nor was his mind limited

to the merely utilitarian; no one could show more sensitiveness, even in that age, to horrid scenery. He visited Rhayader in Wales, and found the wildernesses round the Devil's Bridge 'worthy of a gang of Salvator's banditti'. 'The sensations excited by this combination are terribly sublime; in nervous people they would be painful. One of our party, as he was crossing the bridge after a moonlight view of these woods and waters, felt as if a murderer was at his heels, with intent to throw his body into the depths below.'

No one can be surprised after this to find the Doctor mountaineering on Parnassus itself. The result was a poem on Alexander's Expedition into India, in the style of *The Loves of the Plants.* A work of no less purpose than art, it had two main objects: first, to prove what some of Dr. Darwin's friends had denied, that the style of *The Love of the Plants,* however sublime, *could* be imitated; secondly, to denounce the British domination of India, as neither moral nor expedient. To this end the poem was accompanied by excursuses, nearly as long as itself, on the character of Alexander the Great; on the institutions of the Hindoos and 'that torpid state which is peculiar to Asia'; on Explosive Compositions; on the Antiquity of the Hindoos (here the author audaciously asserted, in the teeth of Moses, that geology 'proves the earth to have existed for millions of years, perhaps of ages'); on the complexion of the natives of Hot Countries; and lastly on the iniquities of British rule in India, with documentary evidence. 'If these documents be correct', remarks Dr. Stock, anxious but discreet, 'a review of them camiot but excite both grief and apprehension.' Only one thing was wanting: the great work was never published.

It was, however, privately printed, woodcuts to illustrate it being cut by a parish clerk and the type *set* up in a

remote village by a young female. 'I know not', says the Doctor with some complacency, 'if women be commonly engaged in printing, but their nimble and delicate fingers seem extremely well adapted to the office of compositor, and it will readily be granted that employment for females is among the greatest *desiderata* of society.' As so often, in his own odd way he was on the track of something perfectly sound; it is sad that the Doctor could not forehear across a century to come the clatter, like an army of cavalry, of a hundred thousand typists, their 'nimble and delicate fingers' at last so well employed!

But the poem—we cannot leave that unquoted. The armada sails:

> By moss-grown clifts where infant fountains weep,
> By cataracts thundering down the shattered steep;
> Where from the rocky pier and stream-worn cave
> Umbrageous forests span the lucid wave,
> Sail after sail they trace the mazy way,
> Their clamours mingle and their state display.

The army takes the road:

> With deep-felt tread the sounding march disturbs
> The dark recesses of the matted herbs;
> Uncoiling serpents rear the towery crest,
> Point the dire hiss, and swell the speckled breast.

Thus wrote the friend of the Ancient Mariner; and yet the author of these lines had some ear for the sonorous, if he had small sense of the ridiculous. Strange age of poetry, when it was hardly decent for a lady-noun to stir abroad unlackeyed by an epithet, and the right tone remains so frigidly impersonal that a possessive adjective is hardly decent. 'Point *the* dire hiss and swell *the* speckled breast'—one would think they were two different kinds of games!

And did the poem succeed? To Dr. Beddoes, as to Achilles, Heaven granted part, and part refused. He

proved that *The Loves of the Plants* was not utterly inimitable, for he successfully palmed off fragments of his poem on his opponents as unpublished work by Dr. Darwin. The English, on the other hand, are still in India. At all events, Dr. Beddoes was not inspired to pursue poetry much further. To us, indeed, when he mounts Pegasus, he has rather the air of the White Knight, so covered is he with danglements and excrescences, with appendices on Explosive Compositions and discussions whether black men are black owing to 'lack of oxygene in the *rete tnuscosutn,* and why it is that they smell. But a few other fragments of verse survive, including a not unamusing parody (1795) of the new style in poetry as seen by a staunch Darwinian. It is a description of a cottage and, though older than *Lyrical Ballads,* satirises a type of verse that Wordsworth was soon to make famous:

> Here, when silently
> Coating the green and lozengcd panes, thick snow
> Bedims the scanty daylight, nestles the snug
> Family, delighted up the chimney's shaft,
> Illumining the chasm, *to* trace the spark's
> Ascent; or touch with timid finger-tip
> The faggot's hissing ooze, and sniff the fumes.
> I knew an Irishman; to England he
> Came every spring a hay-making; and much
> Would praise his cabin. By a bog it stood,
> And he had store of peats. Without a chimney
> Stood the little cabm. Full of warmth and smoke,
> It cherished its owner. The smoke he loved,
> Loved for the warmth's sake, though it bleared his eyes.
> Now when the North-East pinches, I bethink me
> Of this poor Irishman; and think 'how sweet
> 'It were to house with him and pat his cur,
> 'And peel potatoes mid his cabin's smoke.'

A little ear her, in 1793, he had assailed *belles lettres* in yet another direction, that of fiction. And there the Muses

smiled more kindly: *The History of Isaac Jenkins,* relating 'the reform of a drunken labourer and his return to habits of sobriety and industry', sold *ten* thousand copies in a few weeks, and forty thousand by the end of 1796. But Dr. Beddoes, always seeking some new thing, never followed up his triumph; though it is true that there was found among his papers at his death a fragment intriguingly entitled 'Simple Stephen And His Friend the Double-Faced Cook'. One recognises there the father of the author of 'The Oviparous Tailor'. Meanwhile, however, his prancing pen had galloped him into trouble in quite another quarter.

The French Revolution had broken out. Dr. Beddoes became Jacobin in his sympathies. The University of Oxford, on the other hand, did not. During the autumn of 1792 an advertisement had appeared in a Shropshire paper near his home, appealing for charity for French Emigrant Clergy. Dr. Beddoes at once countered by distributing a political handbill in which he denounced the said Clergy and complained, it may well be with truth, that their advocates were 'tending to inflame the people of England to a thirst of blood against the French'. This attitude and the outcry it provoked were a main cause of his resigning his lectureship at Oxford. The next two years were occupied with *Isaac Jenkins,* Factitious Airs, and the first schemes for the Pneumatic Institution; but he was not yet silenced as a political pamphleteer, and from 1795 to 1797 he continued very busy making things hot for Mr. Pitt. His principles were far, indeed, from blood-red. He became bitterly disgusted and disappointed as the Revolution went on, 'losing that amiable aspect which it bore in the beginning'. But he very reasonably hated both war abroad and repression at home; and he said so. The best-known of his attacks was his *Essay on*

the Public Merits of Mr. Pitt, a work of an irony so subtle that it was at times in danger of being mistaken for panegyric. Indeed, his friend Dr. Darwin, in acknowledging a presentation copy, suggested the use of a new mark of punctuation to indicate irony: 'as, for instance, a note of admiration inverted, or some other mark which should admonish the cursory reader of what he had to expect'. There is no reason to suspect Dr. Darwin in this of being himself ironical. But his suggestion was not adopted.

This pamphlet was to have been embellished with two etchings; one of them 'a column decorated with death's heads, leaning on one side, with a gaping fissure at its base, threatening to crush the bystanders in its fall; and containing a short inscription to Mr. Pitt'. But this excursion of Dr. Beddocs into pictorial art was for some reason never carried out. There followed, however, in the same year (1796) a second onslaught on the Government, *A Letter to Mr. Pitt on the Scarcity,* in which he put forward the ingenious project of guarding against famine by feeding our cattle on carrots and potatoes instead of grass and hay. If this seems at first sight a scheme worthy of the Island of Laputa, it may be explained that by this means, in case of scarcity, we could feed not only on our cattle but on their food. However, this brave plan seems to have gone the unregarded way of Dr. Darwin's inverted marks of admiration. And in 1797, with a final pamphlet entitled *Alternatives Compared; or, What shall the Rich do to he Safe* (a point in which the Rich have seldom needed much instruction), the Doctor laid aside the mantle of Demosthenes.

There had been yet other side-shows in these years, such as a design for Rational Toys (geometrical forms and models of machinery) to be financed by subscriptions, of

one hundred pounds for each share—a sum so ambitious that no more came of this 'scheme of boundless utility', with its anticipations of Meccano and Montessori. But even with Dr. Beddoes it is necessary to come back in the end *to* his real business in life—medicine. After leaving Oxford he began to project a Pneumatic Institution, for the curative use of gases, at Clifton Hotwells. He had already been interested in the production and use of what he elegantly calls 'Factitious Airs'; and this interest had taken strange forms. We have seen him in his poem on Alexander speculating about the complexions of negroes. Nor did he only speculate. 'At Oxford', he writes, 'in 1790, I proposed to a distressed negro to try to whiten part of his skin with oxygenated marine acid air.' He was to exhibit the appearance, if it should be curious, for the relief of his family. Curious as the appearance must certainly have been, it cannot have brought his family much relief, for in ten or twelve days he was once more as black as ever. But Dr. Beddoes was a persistent character; years afterwards, at Bristol, he caught another distressed negro, but with even more disappointing results. For when the creature's arm was put into the chlorine, some scratches on it smarted so violently that he hastily snatched it out again; 'and was afterwards sufficiently artful', says Dr. Stock, 'to station himself in the neighbourhood of the Institution, and to appeal to the compassion of all he met by telling them he had been decoyed thither, and made, without his knowledge, the subject of a cruel and unheard-of experiment'. From the point of view of charity, at all events, Dr. Beddoes' second attempt would seem to have been more successful than his first.

But he was mainly concerned with more serious objects than making Ethiopians change their skins; he had great

hopes of curing the sick by giving them modified air or gases to breathe. Hence the cows. Their use for consumptives was not his own idea. In his *Considerations on the Medicinal Use and on the Production of Factitious Airs,* he quotes several cases, among others that of a young lady of Sweden, who had been given over as hopeless and was placed by a certain Dr. Bergius in a large hall with stables for four cows. A stage was constructed to hold a bed and chairs for her, on a level with the cows' heads. By the next summer she was cured; in the winter following she grew tired of her cows and abandoned them. But this infidelity was duly requited. In the spring she caught cold; her malady returned; still she refused even to sleep with the cows; and soon after perished miserably. Whether this remarkable effect was due to the cows subtracting oxygen from the air, or adding alkaline exhalations *to* it, or simply *to* their maintaining an even and genial warmth, as a kind of central heating, Dr. Bcddoes seems *to* have remained in doubt.

He also experimented with nitrous oxide or laughing-gas; the curious effects of which were now first discovered by the young Humphry Davy, whom Beddoes had unearthed as an obscure surgeon's apprentice of nineteen at Penzance and made superintendent of the Pneumatic Institution. This strange gas produced, as may be imagined, much excitement at the time, and a good deal of scepticism; witness a story in the reminiscences of Cottle, the Bristol publisher and friend of Southey and Coleridge: 'It became now an object with Dr. B. to witness the effects this potent gas might produce *on* one of the softer sex, and he prevailed on a courageous young lady (Miss———) to breathe out of his pretty *green bag* this delightful nitrous oxide. After a few inspirations, to the astonishment of everybody, the young lady dashed out of the

room and house, when, racing down Hope Square, she leaped over a great dog in her way, but being pursued by the fleetest of her friends, the fair fugitive, or rather temporary maniac, was at length overtaken and secured, without further damage.' After this, Mr. Cottle himself wisely refused a trial inhalation; as for the ladies of Bristol 'not one, after this time, could be prevailed upon to look at *the green bag*, or hear of nitrous oxide, without horror'.

But in spite of such diversions the Pneumatic Institution, when at last opened in 1798 by the financial aid of friends, did not prosper. After beginning with the brightest hopes the patients grew disgruntled; what was worse, they grew suspicious that they were being experimented on; as indeed they were. Death and doubt thinned their numbers; until at last, says Cottle, the Doctor was driven to pay his poorer patients sixpence a day 'so that when all hopes of cure had subsided, it became a mere pecuniary calculation with the sufferers whether, for a parish allowance of three shillings a week, they should submit, or not, to be drenched with these nauseous gases'. In 1801 Humphry Davy went to London; the Institution gradually transformed itself into an ordinary hospital; and was finally abandoned by its creator in 1807, the year before his death.

But that restless brain was really happier framing propaganda than prescriptions. His medical writings provide a formidable and sometimes entertaining list of titles; nor did he stop at writing. In 1797 he arranged in Bristol a course of lectures on anatomy by two local surgeons; for which he himself penned an introductory lecture full of pompous but sensible observations on the dangers to public health that might be diminished by public knowledge. It proved a success; and Dr. Beddoes, passing from audacity to audacity, now instituted 'a more select

course, adapted for a female audience'. He was fully aware of his peril. 'People', he writes, 'less easily resist temptations to be witty than to be wicked; and in case of failure, the wits of Bristol would doubtless have vied with one another in reporting them as *would-be tutors to the ladies in anatomy'* However, the brave were fortunate and the wits of Bristol remained silent. According to Dr. Stock: 'a prospectus of lectures was drawn up, from which every topic which might, by possibility, afford room for a perverted imagination to lay hold of, was sedulously excluded. To ensure a select audience, tickets were issued for ladies only; but each lady was at liberty to introduce a gentleman. About forty ladies of great respectability entered their names; and they expressed the greatest satisfaction with the course, which consisted of *ten* lectures.' From first to last, in fact, 'no circumstance occurred that could give alarm to the most timid female delicacy, or excite disgust in the most refined mind'.

But the pen remained the Doctor's favourite medical instrument. He had a large practice; but he loved even better to preach. He wrote for members of his profession on technical subjects like Digitalis or Sea-scurvy; he wrote for the general public such works as his *Popular Essay on Consumption* and his *Manual of Health, or The Invalid Conducted Sajely through the Seasons;* he wrote for the poor *A Guide for Self-preservation and Parental Affection* and *Good Advice for the Husbandman in Harvest and for All Those who Labour Hard in Hot Births*[1]*; as also for Others who will Take it in Warm Weather.* Throughout these strangely entitled works there persists the same characteristic mixture of humour and pomposity, eccentricity and sense. He attacks the sentimental neglect of the consumptive. 'The

[1] *I.e.* berths, situations, occupations.

personal charms of young females have occasioned them in all countries to be compared to flowers. Hence a young woman whose lungs are fatally affected is a blossom nipped by untimely frost. The imagination proceeds with the metaphor; and, in virtue of such poetical logic, it seems to be concluded that the drooping human being feels no more than the drooping vegetable expresses.' While quite aware how grotesque such an innovation must seem, he even wants girls to take exercise and play games. After all, what could seem more ridiculous than dancing, 'if familiarity had not taken away its power to produce laughter?' Similarly, in his *Hygeia* he spares neither girls' schools with their mental overstrain and their melancholy crocodiles, nor the vagaries of women's dress—'as if there existed a solemn compact in virtue of which one set of persons had engaged to destroy their health in making what the other set should destroy their health in wearing'. 'Sugar', he continues, 'is not the only luxury moistened with human tears, or spotted with human blood. Let the dress and equipage of a birthday-lady be analysed. Let the processes, by which they have been wrought into splendour, be brought before the imagination. . . . A course of lectures on the bodies of only ten young people murdered by the preparation of the articles of luxury, and of ten others murdered by the use of those articles, might more improve the present age in its individual and relative capacities, than all the elementary treatises of morality that have ever been composed.'

There is vigorous sense in this. But the reformer in him was liable to turn fanatic. Drink he regarded as the brew of devils, and publicans as priests offering human victims to Moloch: 'every apartment devoted to the circulation of the glass, may be regarded as a temple set apart for such sacrifices'. Even tea is frowned on; even

novels, to this brother-in-law of Maria Edgeworth, are depraving, and indeed the source of certain diseases. Fortunately, he never lived to read his son's wild poetry. But it was to narratives of passion that he really objected; for he admired Sterne, and could himself be sardonically playful on occasion, as when in his introduction to Brown's *Elements of Medicine* he sketched an Iatrologia, or Linnaean classification of physicians into genera and species 'according to their salutary, their neutral, or their noxious qualities'. 'It is said', records Dr. Stock, 'that this publication had not long appeared, before the friendly zeal of some of its readers had traced among some of their medical acquaintance the supposed archetype of every sketch, the features of which were unfavourable.' Even the friends of modern novelists could hardly have a brighter time.

As a person Dr. Beddoes seems to have shown the same combination of solidity and oddity, gravity and humour. Unattractive *to* look at ('so short and fat that he might do for a shew' was the hearsay account of himself he was once given by a lady who did not know him, at breakfast in an inn) and indeed almost forbidding in his manner, he could yet relax to a charming smile. Behind his rolling periods lurked a strange and wayward imagination; behind his coldness, a great warmth of affection. In 1794 he fell very much in love with, and married, Anna the daughter of Richard Edgeworth, who had helped him in various ways at Clifton. There was a good deal of the same solemn yet shuttle-witted ingenuity about both men, and the author of *Practical Education* was doubtless interested in the projector of Rational Toys. They must, indeed, have made the oddest pair—the stocky, poetical physician and the chubby Irish squire who marched so purposefully from scheme to scheme, from self-improvement to self-improvement, from wife to wife, beginning

with an undergraduate elopement and concluding with four families. Time has been kinder to him than to his son-in-law; he has been preserved by his daughter, as Dr. Beddoes could not be by the son whom he left a child of six. So that Richard Edgeworth still looms through the haze of a hundred years as the inventor of the heliograph', and perambulators for measuring land, and carriages on one wheel, and carriages with sails, and new kinds of locks and clocks, not to mention an iron-framed spire with tiles painted to look like Portland stone, which rose on to its church-tower at the call of a bugle—'with a slow majestic motion', says Maria, in her enthusiasm quoting Matthew Arnold before his birth. He is remembered too as the friend of Sandford-and-Merton Day (up to the death of that educator by being thrown from a young horse which did not appreciate his admonitions), and the triumphant husband of two sisters whom Dr. Day had successively wooed in vain; until he ended as a patriarch surrounded by nineteen children, together with a sprinkling of sisters of wives past and present. His daughter Anna Beddoes remains a vaguer figure—'the best and most amiable woman in the world', says Humphry Davy; she seems to have been as gay and witty as her husband and, in after years, her son were shy and reserved.

There is, however, one relationship where Dr. Beddoes can be seen at his ease—in the correspondence with the sister of a young lady (not, so far as I can tell, the heroine who leapt over the great dog, but another) who had a hysterical attack through smelling his nitrous oxide. He became a great friend of both, and these letters to the younger show quite a new side of him, with their stress on the importance of gaiety and their teasing of her and of himself. Yet the end of his life, which came suddenly on

the Christmas Eve of 1808, when he was only forty-eight, found him depressed by the feeling of having wasted his gifts in pursuing too many wandering fires. From his deathbed he wrote sadly to Davy describing himself as 'one who has scattered abroad the *avenafatua* of knowledge, from which neither branch nor blossom nor fruit has resulted'.

It was largely true. The same judgement is passed on him by Atkinson in his *Medical Bibliography*[1] of 1834: 'His works embrace the most extended surface of queries and inquiry; touching, like a vessel of discovery at every little topic or island; but yet, with topsails set, as if stinted to time. For as an author he appears to have been always in a hurry to reach the mart of novelty and invention, lest others should arrive there before him; so that it became through life a perpetual tilt and tournament for fame.'

This verdict of one eccentric on another exaggerates, I suspect, the Doctor's thirst for mere notoriety. It is difficult to feel sure what he was really like, for the good Dr. Stock is no Boswell. Coleridge wrote that he was filled with pain and shame at the prospect of such a biographer, and Southey suggested beforehand as a vignette

[1]This is a most curious compilation. It is dedicated to 'All Idle Medical Students', and its author, who had been surgeon to the Duke of York, shows all the frcakishness that could be expected even from the son of a friend of Sterne. 'Wanting better amusement', he explains, 'I stumbled on this dry, dusty, tedious, accursed, hateful bibliography.' He certainly did not take the task too seriously. He only covered the letters A and 13; and he adds: 'I have studiously avoided much communication with the Germans, or with their most excellent authors, and, in most humble deference, with the dead languages; for everything dead, except victuals, I abhor. And notwithstanding I possess Nochde's German Grammar or Syntax, yet I know not so much of that tongue as of a neat's tongue; or as a child just born. Nay, in point of guttural expression, I know less. The German tongue is to me most odontalgoid and difficult.'

for the work 'a funeral lamp beside an urn, and Dr. Stock in the act of placing an extinguisher on it'. But both in this *Life* and in his own writings Beddoes seems possessed much more by a disinterested passion for good, and, it must be added, for novelty, than for notoriety. He was no fool, *no* mere crank. Many of the views he held—on war, on the age of the earth, on dress and education and health—seem far from foolish now; and if his gases in general disappointed him as means of healing, medicine has, at all events, learnt since then to make abundant use of oxygen and nitrous oxide. With a less restless curiosity he might have succeeded better in life; but he might also have enjoyed himself less. Perhaps he has since found consolation among the shades, in the congenial and no less curious society of Anatomy Burton and Sir Thomas Browne.

To us he remains an interesting creature not only for his own sake, but for his son's. Heredity in biography is a snare; and there seems to have been little enough in common, externally, between the thick-set little doctor and his emaciated, mummy-like offspring. Certainly there was one vital difference: the lack of self-confidence and despondency about his work which attacked the father only at the end of his life, early beset and cramped his far more morbid son. But, apart from that, there are striking resemblances. The same cold reserve masking strong feelings, the same hectic industry, the same oddity of mind are prominent in both. The founder of the Pneumatic Institution bequeathed much, both for better and for worse, *to* his son, the poet who was at the same time the most brilliant medical pupil Blumenbach had known in fifty years; a writer of revolutionary articles, hunted in turn from Bavaria, Zurich, Prussia, and Hanover; and a too versatile worker, perpetually starting and

abandoning new tragedies, to leave in the end only a heap of fragments. Upon them both lay the curse of Reuben: 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.' Seeing them side by side, we may fancy a new meaning in the anguished cry of the poet's Torrismond:

> O father, father,
> Take off my youth, unwrap me of my years,
> And hunt me up the dark and broken past
> Into my mother's womb: there unbeget me;
> For till I'm in thy veins and unbegun,
> Or to the food returned which made the blood
> That did make me, no possible he can ever
> Unroot my feet of thee.

THE PLAYBOY OF THE NETHERWORLD

'Alors s'assit sur un monde en ruines une jeunesse soucieuse. . . . Et ils parlerent tant et si longtemps, que toutes les illusions humaines, comme des arbrcs en automne, tombaient feuille a feuille autour d'eux, et que ceux qui les ecoutaient passaient leur main sur leur front, comme des fievreux qui s'eveillent.' This is not a picture of post-war Europe; at least, not of our post-war Europe. The words are all but a century old. Thus wrote Alfred de Mussct, middle-aged already in his twenties, just as Byron had been 'a perfect Timon, not nineteen'. Even in his impudent little comedies, at moments, the same cry of anguish makes itself suddenly heard. 'Ce que tu dis la', exclaims Fantasio's friend, 'ferait rire bien des gens; moi, cela me fait fremir; c'est l'histoire du siecle entier. L'eternite est une grande aire,d' ou tous les siecles, comme de jeunes aiglons, se sont envoles tour a tour pour traverser le ciel et disparaitre; le notre est arrive a son tour au bord du nid; mais on lui a coupe les ailes, et il attend la mort en regardant Tespace dans lequel il ne peut s'elancer.'

It was no mere affectation. No doubt youth is often affected; but youth is also often bitterly sincere. No doubt it was a mood. It passed as moods do. But it is curious to find that the last century, which we tend to picture as populated by brisk business men with a blind confidence in God, themselves, and Progress, could be in its early twenties, as well as in its nineties, thus *jin-de-siecle.* Yet can we wonder? There are dawns, indeed, when to be young is Very heaven'; the morning after is apt to be less celestial. Then the young pass from excessive enthusiasm

to excessive melancholy, feeling that they have been born out of due time and are making their first bow on a stage where all is over.

It was natural that the generation which came to birth with the nineteenth century should feel this disillusion. There seemed nothing but a puppet-show left in progress in the theatre of the world. It had been otherwise for their fathers. The Werthers had forgotten their own sorrows as they beheld the earth alight with Liberty, and the Rights of Man coming in glory on the clouds of Heaven. Like clouds, indeed, those Rights had vanished; in their place had risen in the same year, 1804, the pale and baleful stars of *Rene* and *Obermann;* but in their place also had ensued for twenty years, terrible and yet magnificently titanic, a Battle of the Gods. Disillusion was kept at bay. War still seemed intoxicatingly romantic then, however mistakenly; a field for genius, not merely for the muddling mediocrities that floundered through the slime of our last conflict. A Picdmontcse private in the Grande Armee has told how, at the mere sight of that short grey-coated figure riding down the line before Moscow, he found himself breathing as hard as if he had been running, and bathed in sweat amid the cold of a Russian winter's day. It was not thus that the armies of 1917 felt about their generals. But after the romantic epic of Napoleon, there followed a poor farce of rejuvenated kings and reactionary governments. This was what the generation that had heard through boyhood the guns of Austerlitz and Jena and Wagram sat down to contemplate, as they and the century together came of age. And so there were other caged eaglets in these years besides the Duc de Reichstadt; other smouldering firebrands, lit too late, besides the heroes of Stendhal. The enormous energy of a Balzac, a Dumas, a Hugo, might go trampling onward under that

leaden sky after the lurid splendour of Byron had fallen from it like a final meteor; but others of the young, endowed with less vitality, felt weighed beneath a load of emotional, as well as political, reaction. Minor writers, like Maxime du Camp, bear out Musset's description; and though in England, so much less touched by the war and now at length victorious, we should not expect the same aftermath, it may be more than coincidence that so few writers are today remembered who were not either over twenty-five or under twelve—too old or too young to be vitally impressionable—when the year 1820 closed. In prose, between Carlyle (born in 1795) and Thackeray (born in 1811) the only names of any note are Macaulay (who would have been hard to damp in any age), Mill, Newman, and George Borrow. Similarly there is a gap in the lineage of English poets between the birth of Keats in 1795 and that of Tennyson in 1809. Such speculation about literary vintage-years must remain fanciful; yet there is one poet born between Keats and Tennyson who was certainly cramped by a despondency like Musset's, due in part, no doubt, to his own temperament, but partly also, I believe, to his time. Thomas Lovell Beddoes came into the world in an evil hour for him, on a July day in 1803.

That the grandson of Richard Edgeworth and son of Dr. Beddoes should be eccentric, can surprise nobody, steadying as it might well seem to have Maria Edgeworth for an aunt; but between him and his elders there is one great difference. He lacked, not their energy—he could drudge like an emmet at anatomy, then throw down his pen to take a vigorous part in revolutions and conspiracies—but their unquestioning self-confidence. To Richard Edgeworth and Dr. Beddoes the world was on the whole a friendly sort of place, to be succeeded here and hereafter

by another better still. They thought well of it; they thought well of themselves; they were all the more successful in consequence. Certainly they were much happier. 'Edgeworth', said a contemporary, 'must write, or he would burst.' Edge worth did not burst. 'Her conversation', wrote Byron after meeting his daughter Maria, 'was as quiet as herself; no one would have guessed she could write her name. Whereas her father talked, not as if he could write nothing else, but as if he thought nothing else was worth writing.' The Richard Edgeworths, if not their hearers, are happy after their fashion. Similarly Dr. Beddoes had bounded about with tireless zest and an undivided soul from bleaching negroes to blackening Mr. Pitt. Like Browning he had been one that 'marched breast forward'. True, it is not easy to march in any other way—a point which Browning seems not to have quite considered; but at all events Dr. Beddoes marched; and discovered on the road many odd, and some useful, things. But when we turn to his son, the author of *Death' s Jest-Book,* the contrast is complete. In every apple of his Tree of Knowledge lay a little black wriggling worm of doubt. Outstanding as an anatomist, dazzling as a poet, he yet perished by his own hand at forty-five, bequeathing to Dr. Ecklin a stomach-pump and to the world only a wild heap of poetic fragments, blood and sawdust mixed with diamonds.

Left fatherless in his sixth year, the boy was sent at fourteen to Charterhouse. Long afterwards, when Beddoes was dead, his friend Kelsall extracted strange tales of his doings there from a certain C. D. Bevan who had been his fag. Two of these details have been repeated by Sir Edmund Gosse and Lytton Strachey—the boy's habit of declaiming speeches from Elizabethan drama at the little Bevan (who was forcibly enlisted as accomplice, enemy,

or mistress) with a rain of kicks or caresses as required; and his vengeance on a certain locksmith, whose bad work was repaid with a dramatic interlude composed and recited for his benefit, and depicting his death-bed or horror-stricken remorse, his funeral, and his consignment by a legion of devils to the Bottomless Pit. But there are other less-known anecdotes from the same source, too characteristic, I think, to be forgotten. The inborn oddity, the rebelliousness, the eldritch humour, the Gothic grotesqueness, the love of Elizabethan poetry, the strange mastery of words—all these qualities of the poet we know, are already foreshadowed here at Charterhouse. Already he dominated his fellows. The nicknames he invented stuck like burs. His defiance, too, of authority had already begun. When the traditional liberty to play hockey in the cloisters was abolished, young Beddoes, who normally never played at all, appeared to lead one side in the now forbidden game, his head bedizened with feathers and his body adorned by a pasteboard shield where shone emblazoned a clenched fist, with the motto: *Manus haec inimica tyrannis.* This demonstration proved too much for the gravity of the authorities and the prohibition was dissolved in laughter. But if Beddoes could uphold the oppressed, he could also do his share of oppression. Readers of *The Newcomes* will recall how the old pensioners at Charterhouse were called 'Codds', and Colonel Newcome himself, 'Codd Colonel'. Three of these old brethren the young Beddoes particularly loved to torment—'Codd Curio', whom he called so because he collected curiosities; 'Codd Frolicsome', a Trafalgar veteran who had St. Vitus's dance; and 'Codd Sine-breech', who was slightly crazed in the head. These old gentlemen, who were attended by the most Gampish of nurses, suffered such persecutions from their enemy that Codd

Sine-breech was fain to hire a drummer of the Guards as reinforcement. Hostilities were not, however, continuous; every now and then both sides indulged in armistice feasts of oysters and lobsters, gin and porter, at which Beddoes would dance or give dramatic recitations. Another prank of his was to purloin all the fire-irons from the kitchen of the preacher's house, so that the infuriated cook went about cursing in a vain search for his pokers, tongs, and shovels; which were mysteriously restored to him at midnight, tied round the neck of Beddoes* fag, who was himself tied to the door-knocker with a resulting din, as the little boy struggled there, like a dozen coal-scuttles falling downstairs.

The same familiar imp of insubordination attended Beddoes to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he treated his fellows with cold aloofness and the college authorities, by Bevan's account, with 'a course of studied impertinence'. On one occasion, we are told, a lecturer, tired of seeing him sitting and glowering in complete inattention, exclaimed: 'I wish you would at least cut your book, Mr. Beddoes.' At once the young man rose, walked out, and returned with the largest butcher's cleaver money could buy, with which he proceeded to do as requested. The ensuing uproar brought the lecture to an untimely end. Few, again, will forget that deadly stab, that poisoned jewel five words long', in one of his Oxford letters: 'Mr. Milman (our poetry professor) has made me quite unfashionable here by denouncing me as "one of a villainous school". I *wish him another son.'*

Such things are trivial, no doubt. But only in such glimpses does Beddoes loom upon us, like a red-hot fogbound sun, out of the mists which have engulfed for ever the secrets of his inner life. We catch sight again of the young poet, with his strange physical resemblance to

Keats, helping to print the posthumous verse of the still neglected Shelley, whose aery spirit held so strange an appeal for his own earthy one; or scribbling imitations of Elizabethan drama, with a power that seems to spring from him full-grown; or stealthily hacking the pages of his first published volume from the bindings of the copies on his friends' shelves. Then there appears for a moment the young law-student, working at Southampton under that most poetic of solicitors, Kelsall, who was to struggle with heroic resistance to keep alive the memory of Beddoes' work for a generation after its author's death and right up to the eve of his own; next, the young doctor, learning to prefer 'Apollo's pillbox to his lyre' and Germany to England; growing into a stoic, prosaic, grim anatomist, and yet still turning at instants from skull and scalpel to retouch the everlasting *Death's Jest-Book;* and last of all the obscure revolutionary, hunted from Bavaria to Zurich, from Zurich back to Germany, then deported in turn from Hanover, from Prussia, and from Bavaria once more. He has by now almost forgotten his country. His rare visits only inflame his indifference into active irritation with 'this dull, idle, pampered isle'. He has become more and more bizarre. His talk shows a morbid preoccupation with death's-heads and skeletons. Sisters and cousins object to his habits of lying in bed all day, drinking perhaps (or, as he called it, 'having neuralgia'); and then prowling like a spectre about the house all night. He arrived at the residence of one relative at Cheney Longville in Shropshire mounted, it is said, upon an ass. Was he sane, this sombre recluse whom the Procters one evening found struggling with the attendants at Drury Lane Theatre, which he had been trying to set on fire by holding a lighted five-pound note under a chair? There must have been sighs of relief among the Beddoeses of

Bristol and Birkenhead when their disreputable relative went back to cutting up dead Germans at Frankfurt. There he now lost his health, by pricking his hand during a dissection; and lost his heart in addition to a young baker called Degen, whom he was set on turning into an actor, hiring the theatre at Zurich for him to play Hotspur. The rest is well known. The inhabitants of Zurich looked coldly on the heroics of Herr Degen; Degen in his turn grew cold towards Bcddoes and went back to his dough in Frankfurt. The poet, bearded now and looking 'like Shakespeare', removed in deep despondency to Basel, where he tried to kill himself, first by stabbing his leg, then by tearing off the bandages in hospital, until the limb gangrened and had to be amputated. He recovered, in body, and seemingly in mind as well. Degen, too, had been persuaded to return to him. Yet as soon as he was well enough to go out, he took the opportunity to procure poison, came back to the hospital, and died unconscious the same night (26th January, 1849). In his bosom lay a pencilled bequest of a stomach-pump and a case of champagne: 'I am food for what I am good for—worms . . . I ought *to* have been among other things a good poet. Life was too great a bore on one peg and that a bad one.'

But though Death's Jester lay now quiet at last in the cypress-shade of the hospital-cemetery at Zurich, the jest was not ended. His works remained, to become in their turn the tennis-balls of chance. His family wanted them safely destroyed—all except those of an innocuous medical nature. Only Zoe King, the cousin who is said to have felt for him an attachment he could not return, and the faithful Kclsall resisted this proposal; and, through Kelsall, *Death's Jest-Book* appeared in 1850, followed a year later by a volume of poems. But a new generation of writers

had appeared by now; and the world of 1850, watching the birth in swift succession of works like *David Copperfield, Wuthering Heights,* and *In Memoriam,* had no eyes for this odd relic of the unknown dead. Only a few observers saw that something new had been added to English poetry; but among them were Tennyson and Browning. Years passed; Kelsall, devoted as ever, heard of Browning's admiration, met him (1867), begged him to write a preface for a new edition, sent him some of the manuscripts, offered to bequeath him all. Browning accepted; he contemplated, at a time when he seemed likely to be made Professor of Poetry at Oxford, giving his opening lecture on Beddoes. But nothing came of it, neither preface nor lecture; Browning had grown bored. And Kelsall, too, was growing old. In 1869 he made, with Zoe King, a pilgrimage to the scenes at Basel and Zurich where Beddoes' life had guttered out twenty years before; in July, 1872, he contributed an article on the dead poet to the *Fortnightly;* three months after this 'last stroke for Beddoes', as he called it, he too was dead.

The manuscripts duly passed to Browning, with a message from Mrs. Kelsall revealing to him what had been hitherto kept dark—that Beddoes had died by his own hand. This grim addition made the poet of optimism more disposed than ever to play ostrich and forget the whole affair. The box of yellowing papers acquired in his eyes a sinister horror. Another decade went by; then he talked of it to his young neighbour, Edmund Gosse; and finally, one day in 1883, led him to the locked box, pressed the key into his hand, and fled. However, once Bluebeard's Cupboard was open, Browning's repugnance weakened sufficiently for him to read over the manuscripts with Gosse; who in consequence produced a new edition of the *Works* in 1890, followed by a volume of

the poet's *Letters* in 1894. But, half a century after his death, misfortune still dogged Beddoes. The edition was perfunctorily carried out; and the manuscripts, returned to Browning's son in Italy, disappeared in the confusion that followed his death. What became of them remains to this day obscure; there seems no basis for the story once told, that 'Pen' Browning's servants ransacked their dead master's house, and that no one knew what scented tresses of some dark Italian beauty, faded now in their turn, the papers of Beddoes might have perished at last to curl. Finally in 1928 Gosse produced a grandiose new edition of the Letters and Poetical Works, ornamented with decorations from Holbein's Dance of Death; but before its completion he too died; and with this new edition reappeared—alas!—the errors and corruptions and mutilations of the old. Beddoes might well have laughed in his grave.

Not that it is much easier to know what the poet was really like, than what he really did. The letters are eccentric, cold, impersonal—all the more impersonal for being filled with a great deal of bitter badinage. His jests serve him, one feels, for shield as well as sword. That sardonic smile makes his face more than ever of a mask. Poetry, Anatomy, Liberty—he pursued each in turn, to disillusion at the last. There is little trace in his life of affection, apart from the mysterious Degen: 'I fear I am a non-conductor of friendship, a not-very-likeable person, so that I must make sure of my own respect.' And yet this coldness has an air of being studied rather than natural. There is a Byronic pose in his saturnine description of his behaviour on a voyage to Hamburg—how he 'remained impenetrably proud and silent every wave of the way, dropping now and then a little venom into the mixture of conversation to make it effervesce';

and this impassivity is belied by passages in his poetry of a quivering tenderness:

> Your love was much,
> Your life but an inhabitant of his.
>
> Cyrano, Cyrano,
> I yearn, and thirst, and ache to be beloved,
> As I could love,—through my eternal soul,
> Immutably, immortally, intensely,
> Immeasurably. Oh! I am not at home
> In this December world, with men of ice,
> Cold sirs and madams. That I had a heart,
> By whose warm throbs of love to set my soul!
> I tell thee I have not begun to live,
> I'm not myself, till I've another self
> To lock my dearest, and most secret thoughts in;
> Change petty faults, and whispering pardons with;
> Sweetly to rule, and Oh! most sweetly serve.

Surely, if the writer of that lived withdrawn into his shell, it was precisely because he was too sensitive, and had suffered. It is as if part of him had perished young. His very portrait, as an undergraduate, has a mummy-like air. He resembles his own Wolfram, a dead thing in a living world, gentle once but hardened now. Certainly his letters show him, if no lover, at all events a good hater. He reveals a particular dislike of British Philistinism, whether in individuals like 'Mr. Milman', or in the nation as a whole:

> Drink, Britannia! Britannia, drink your tea,
> For Britons, bores, and buttered toast, they all begin with B.
>
> O flattering likeness on a copper-coin,
> Sit still upon your slave-raised cotton ball
> With upright toasting-fork and toothless cat!

But, for that matter, the whole world sickens him: 'I am now so thoroughly penetrated with the conviction of the absurdity and unsatisfactory nature of human life, that I

search with avidity for every shadow of a proof or probability of an after-existence both in the material and immaterial nature of man.' One may wonder that a mind which found this life so tedious, should so sigh for eternity; but in such matters the human temperament is seldom very logical. Gnawed by the worm on earth, it speculates hopefully about the worm that never dies.

Still, if the letters throw but a glimmer on the poet's heart, they reveal very clearly those two qualities of his brain which go to make his poetry at times so astonishing—imagination and wit. Even as a child, his first favourite poet had been Cowley. And to read these letters brings home with fresh force how hardy a plant real originality is. Such a mind, read what it may, imitate whom it will, imposes as invincibly as a distorting mirror its own queer quality on all its reflections. It was a gift Sterne had. It belongs in our own day to Mr. E. M. Forster—who else but he would behold the United States, for example, with the most spontaneously innocent air in the world, as a brightly coloured apron tied chastely round the buxom waist of the American Continent? So with Beddoes. He too was born with this gift of seeing in every square a fifth corner; no doubt he cultivated his oddity, finding it succeed; but it always seems a natural part of him, as if he had had a mandrake for comforter in the cradle and made it his youthful hobby 'to chat with mummies in a pyramid, and breakfast on basilisk's eggs'. 'There is nothing of interest in town', he will write, 'except a pair of live crocodiles in St. Martin's Lane.' 'I will sacrifice my raven to you', is his answer when Kelsall recoils from the sinister menagerie of *Death's Jest-Book*, 'but my crocky is really very dear to me.' This is, indeed, one of the few expressions of affection in his whole correspondence. Or again: 'Such verses as these and their brethren, will never be

preserved to be pasted on the inside of the coffin of our planet.' Such excessive preoccupation with the macabre may seem affected; yet the reader who looks back at that cadaverous portrait, and forward to the last scene at Zurich, must surely admit that the affectation, if such it was, went deep. But his fancy does not always glimmer thus coldly like a glow-worm on a grave; its flames can dance gaily enough, though still perhaps with a slight breath of sulphur: 'Dear Kelsall. I have been in the native land of the unicorn about a week . . . I had no time to visit Procter . . . but am told that he is appointed to a high office in the government in the kingdom of ye moon.' Such is Beddoes' way of conveying his own arrival in England and Procter's new Commissionership of Lunacy. Or he will write home of a castle at Gottingen: 'The date of the tower is said to be 963: if this be true, it may have earned a citizenship among the semi-eternal stony populace of the planet; at all events it will be older than some hills which pretend to be natural and carry trees and houses.' Just so might another metaphysical physician have brooded two centuries before; we should feel how characteristic was such an idea if we found it in a letter written home by Sir Thomas Browne to Norwich. But there is a more flashing fancy than Browne's at work when Beddoes turns to describe fireflies at Milan: 'as if the swift wheeling of the earth struck fire out of the black atmosphere; as if the winds were being set upon this planetary grindstone, and gave out such momentary sparks from their edges'. It might be a description of his own poetry. How many poets one might search from cover *to* cover without finding anything as brilliant as that round grindstone of a world!

Those, then, who know the poetry of Beddoes will have no difficulty in recognising the fainter shadow of his

genius that lies across the pages of the letters; but there is one more disillusion here than even the poems show—disillusion about his poetry itself. He early expresses a sense of failure. He feels that he is trying to animate a corpse; that he is but the ghost of an Elizabethan dramatist, squeaking and gibbering in plays that are fit only for audiences long lapped in their winding-sheets. 'The man who is to awaken the drama', he writes of a *remaniement* of Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*, 'must be a bold trampling fellow—no creeper in worm-holes—no reviser even, however good. These reanimations are vampire-cold—we want to see something that our great grandsires did not know.' He must have felt the relevance of that judgement to himself. And if he is severe on his contemporaries, prophesying after Shelley's death 'nothing but fog, rain, blight in due succession', he is still harder on his own work: 'I am essentially unpoetical in character, habits, and ways of thinking: and nothing but the desperate hunger for distinction so common to young gentlemen at the University ever set me upon rhyming' (rather in the same way, it may be remembered, he denied himself a heart). *Death's Jest-Book* he dismisses as 'unentertaining, unamiablc, and utterly unpopular'. He finds himself wanting in the two indispensable qualities of a dramatist, 'power of drawing character, and humour'. Indeed at moments he feels 'doubt of my aptitude for any higher literary or commercial occupation'. He cannot even finish his plays: 'As usual I have begun a new tragedy'; 'a new tragic abortion of mine has absolutely extended its foetus to a quarter of the fourth act'; 'those three acts, which I cannot possibly show to any eye but that of Vulcan, are absolutely worthless'. What wonder if this hesitating Prince of Denmark begot no second *Hamlet*, but only dramatic fragments and brilliant incoherencies?

And yet I know no poet whose poetic moments are more rammed with poetry. How much one values this sort of spasmodic writer depends on temperament—whether one is 'classical' and asks for ordered beauty of form, or 'romantic' and prefers flashes of dazzling colour. But after all, why not love both? Beddoes can only give the second kind of pleasure; but he gives it so intensely, that I feel he is undervalued still. What he needs is a good selection of short passages, often of single lines. The anthologists have merely concentrated on a few of his lyrics, which have the sort of prettiness dear to their pussy-cat mentalities; just as they persist in representing, or misrepresenting, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* by the cockney amenities of 'Sunday up the River'. As a lyric poet Beddoes can be lovely; but it is in his verse dialogue that he shows his strength, not only that power of phrase and image with which his letters vibrate, but something also that they could not reveal—his grip of that Proteus among metrical forms, so simple-seeming, so mockingly elusive in a hundred poets' hands—dramatic blank verse.

The strange thing is that his most living poetry is a pastiche of dead work. As a contemporary of Keats, writing in the manner of 1820, he is usually unreadable; it is as a contemporary of Webster, risen from the dust of two centuries, that he quickens into a quivering vitality. A far more practical surgeon than Crabbe, he had none of Crabbe's power as a poet of treating living subjects. His Muse is a Witch of Endor, her magic a necromantic gift of waking to utterance a tongue long buried. Yet this becomes a little less strange when we remember how Chatterton too, hopeless when he writes in the poetic style of 1770, found himself only by escaping back to an England older still than Beddoes ever revisited. Think,

too, of the whole Renaissance with its aping of the Classics. There are poets who can write vitally of, and in the style of, their own age; there remain others for whom it is equally essential to escape from it. Generations of critics have lost their heads and tempers squabbling which is right. Surely both. Surely it is understandable that a poet may wish to break away to some magic islet of his own, where he can feel himself monarch of all he surveys, because he shares it only with the dead. For they do not cramp our style as the living can. We can learn from them without fearing to become too imitatively like them; and the older the dead, the easier they are to elbow aside when we turn to write ourselves, as if their ghosts wore thinner and more shadowy with the years. Distance can lend enchantment also to the voice.

At all events it is on borrowed plumes that Beddoes soars his highest, and when masquerading as a Jacobean that he seems most himself. No one since Dryden has so recaptured the splendour of blank verse as a medium for dialogue, freeing it from that marmoreal stiffness which Milton imposed. For it is, indeed, almost as if the author of *Paradise Lost* had turned the verse of *Hamlet* into stone; to be carved and built by him and others after him into shapes of monumental nobility, but never again to seem like living flesh and blood, as once in Elizabethan hands. Milton's 'organ-voice' has no *vox humana;* and musical as a Wordsworth or a Tennyson may be, Shakespeare's Cleopatra speaks what has since become a dead language.

Beddoes alone seems to me to have re-discovered the old secrets of varied stress and fingering, of feminine ending and resolved foot, in all their elasticity. His lines run rippling like wind along the corn: his Muse moves with the grace of his Valeria:

She goes with her light feet, still as the sparrow
Over the air, or through the grass its shade.

All the stranger is the contrast which combines with this perfect music such a grimness of ideas; until his verse recalls that tragic conception of the Greek—the Gorgon Medusa, 'the beautiful horror', the lovely lips twisted with eternal pain:

I have seen the mottled tigress
Sport with her cubs as tenderly and gay
As Lady Venus with her kitten Cupids.

So, too, the Muse of Beddoes, dagger and poison-cup in hand, goes ghding on her way with the light feet and swaying grace of Her rick's loves in their wild civility:

The snake that loves the twilight is come out,
Beautiful, still, and deadly.

But now some lamp awakes,
And with the venom of a basilisk's wink
Burns the dark winds.

0 that the twenty coming years were over!
Then should I be at rest, where ruined arches
Shut out the troublesome, unghosdy day,
And idlers might be sitting on my tomb,
Telling how I did die.

You're young and must be merry in the world,
Have friends to envy, lovers to betray you,
And feed young children with the blood of your heart,
Till they have sucked up strength enough to break it.

I will go search about for Comfort,
Him that enrobed in mouldering cerements sits
At the grey tombstone's head, beneath the yew;
Men call him Death, but Comfort is his name.

The poison is given with a caress: the dagger tickles before it plunges home. It is interesting to compare the rhythm

of Beddoes with the dramatic verse of a master of the metre in its statelier narrative form, Tennyson:

> I once was out with Henry in the days
> When Henry loved me, and we came upon
> A wild-fowl sitting on her nest, so still
> I reach'd my hand and touched; she did not stir;
> The snow had frozen round her, and she sat
> Stone-dead upon a heap of ice-cold eggs.
> Look how this love, this mother, runs through all
> The world God made—even the beast—the bird!

Any ear must notice the difference. Not only are the individual lines in Tennyson more regular and so more monotonous, and also slower through their avoidance of the feminine endings or extra syllables which lend speed to a verse like:

> And feed young children with the blood of your heart;

they also for the same reason refuse to coalesce with one another into a verse-paragraph, in spite of the author's deliberate effort to make them do so by ending his lines with words like 'upon'. Each decasyllable somehow persists in scanning itself separately, with a sort of conscious pride in its own virtuous avoidance of any undue licence. It is as if the passage were being written by a poetical typewriter, which very beautifully rang a little silver bell at the close of each line, and pulled itself elaborately back to begin each new one; whereas Beddoes has the sinuous onward gliding of a living adder through the grass. Open Webster:

> O Men
> That lye upon your death-beds, and are haunted
> With howling wives, neere trust them, they'le re-marry
> Ere the worme pierce your winding sheete: ere the Spider
> Make a thinne curtaine for your Epitaphes.

The kinship needs no stressing. Metrically, indeed, Beddoes may often seem even nearer to the slightly decadent softness of Fletcher or Shirley than to Webster's harsher

rhythm; but in his style he shows the same swift and bitter strength:

> I have huddled her into the wormy earth.
>
> Let Heaven unscabbard each star-hiked lightning.
>
> If you would wound your foe,
> Get swords that pierce the mind; a bodily slice
> Is cured with *surgeon's butter*.

Of the two supreme excellences of Beddoes, then, as a poet, this power of rhythm and phrase seems to me one; the other is sheer imagination. He has ideas that are poetic in and by themselves, quite apart from their expression; like the silence of Ajax before Odysseus in Hades, like the symbols of Ibsen in his later plays. Indeed, the cry Beddoes wrings from the lips of one of his characters might well be his own:

> I'll go brood
> And strain my burning and distracted soul
> Against the naked spirit of the world
> Till some portent's begotten.

It is a typically 'metaphysical' conception. Yet he escapes that frigid ingenuity which has so often been fatal to poets of this kind, in the seventeenth century, and in the twentieth—clever persons, who have yet been so simple as to suppose that their creations could live and breathe without a heart. Thus Beddoes, thinking of Noah's Deluge, sees it, characteristically enough, through the eye of the daisy on which its first raindrop fell; but he feels also for the daisy itself with the tenderness of Burns.

> I should not say
> How thou art like the daisy in Noah's meadow
> On which the foremost drop of rain fell warm
> And soft at evening; so the little flower
> Wrapped up its leaves, and shut the treacherous water
> Close to the golden welcome of its breast.

Time itself may be twisted by his visionary hands into a thing of space, with all the tortured ingenuity of a Donne—and yet one does not really have a sense of torture, so much does his mind seem at home in its own strange labyrinths:

> I have said that Time
> Is a great river running to Eternity.
> Methinks 'tis all one water, and the fragments
> That crumble off our ever-dwindling life,
> Dropping into it, first make the twelve-houred circle,
> And that spreads outward to the great round Ever.

Or again:

> I begin to hear
> Strange but sweet sounds, and the loud rocky dashing
> Of waves where Time into Eternity
> Falls over ruined worlds.

It is this unusual power of at once thinking so abstractly and seeing so concretely, that makes him master of the macabre. For the macabre only too easily becomes a little vulgar. Poe can be frightful in quite another sense of the word than he intended. Cemeteries are no very healthy dancing-ground for the Muses, and not much real music has been got from bones. But Beddoes, though he has his lapses, has learnt that the hinted can be far more terrible than the explicit. In one of his scenes, for instance, a festive gathering is haunted by spectres:

> There were more shadows there, than there were men.

Or again, before his vision a plague-infected air becomes

> Transparent as the glass of poisoned water
> Through which the drinker sees his murderer smiling.

What a concentrated brevity of horror—as if the picture were drawn on the thumbnail of the assassin! Or again, the earth's roundness—what is its cause? The answer of Beddoes is all his own:

Ay, to this end the earth is made a ball—
Else, crawling to the brink, despair would plunge
Into the infinite eternal air
And leave its sorrows and its sins behind.

Here is the old melancholy of Burton, with his speculations on the space Hell occupies in the globe's interior, fermenting in a more modern mind. Why, again, have ghosts and apparitions ceased? There is the same fantastic ingenuity in Beddoes' reply, the same wild eloquence:

To trust in story,
In the old times Death was a feverish sleep,
In which men walked. The other world was cold
And thinly peopled, so life's emigrants
Came back to mingle with the crowds of earth.
But, now great cities are transplanted thither,
Memphis and Babylon and cither Thebes
And Priam's towery town with its one beech,
The dead are most and merriest: so be sure
There'll be no more haunting till their towns
Are full to the garret: then they'll shut their gates
To keep the living out.

Such concreteness of vision combined with passionate concentration of speech lends the hiss of an arrow to his single lines of scorn:

The shallow, tasteless skimmings of their love . . .

And scratched it on your leaden memories . . .

And lay thee, worm, where thou shalt multiply.

Indeed, nothing in him has so much the air of being written *con amore,* as these hot gusts from a furnace-mouth of hatred. It is as if he had taken to himself that cry of one of his characters:

Unmilk me of my mother, and pour in
Salt scorn and steaming hate.

The passions he deals in may be often poisoned, but they are at least passion; lack of that might easily have become the besetting weakness of a poet with so much

sheer cleverness, as it is today with the young who set out to imitate Donne's ingenuity without his intensity, in a way that suggests Blake's Lamb trying to frisk itself into the likeness of Blake's Tiger. Cleverness, it seems to me, has its place in poetry, but only a second place, as the tiring-maid of passion or of beauty. The cleverness of Beddoes makes his loveliness not inferior, but a more complex, artificial thing than that of Wordsworth's Lucy or Tennyson's Mariana. Not for him

> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills,

but

> Crescented night and amethystine stars.

A violet is not for him a simple violet; it is like

> Pandora's eye
> When first it darkened with immortal life

(as if life, like death—even more than death, perhaps—threw a sad shadow when it came). A pine-tree across the moon turns into a river before his agile gaze:

> One snowy cloud
> Hangs like an avalanche of frozen light
> Upon the peak of night's cerulean Alp,
> And yon still pine, a bleak anatomy,
> Flows like a river on the planet's disk
> With its black wandering arms.

(And yet there are persons who deny a visual imagination to be needed for enjoying poetry!) Even a moonlit water-drop holds for him within it the semblance of a whole world's unhappincss:

> For what is't to the moon that every drop
> Of flower-held rain reflects and gazes on her!
> Her destiny is in the starry heavens,
> Theirs here upon the ground, and she doth set
> Leaving her shadow no more to delight them,
> And cometh ne'er again till they are fled.

And even a lily of the valley becomes a jester with cap and bells, a symbol that motley is all men's wear. He follows beauty for ever through a maze, like some hidden Rosamond; he is himself

> the bird
> That can go up the labyrinthine winds
> Upon his pinions and pursues the summer.

He can turn to lucid grace the image of ambiguity itself:

> I know not whether
> I see your meaning; if I do, it lies
> Upon the wordy wavelets of your voice
> Dim as the evening shadow in a brook
> When the least moon has silver on't no larger
> Than the pure white of Hebe's pinkish nail.

There is nothing of which he cannot make music; even the streaks of rain seen in dark lines against the blue background of a showery sky become for his fingers the chords of a fantastic lyre. And yet with all his clever elaboration he can also be agonisingly simple:

> They are both dead, and God has suffered it;

or again:

> Now I shall see him
> No more. All Hell is made of those two words.

Still, Beddoes is seldom thus direct. He writes less of what he sees than of his thoughts in seeing it; what he describes is not so much like itself as like something else; and so a great part of both his strength and his sweetness will be found stored in his metaphors and similes. Like the Lady of Shalott, he watches the world remotely, in a strange mirror; like the Emperor Domitian, he walks, with terror about him, in a gallery of looking-glass.

Magic beauty and terror—as in his style and rhythm, so in his mind and soul, these two seem to me his essential qualities, moving inseparably side by side. It might have been of him that Victor Hugo wrote:

A de certains moments toutes les jeunes **flores**
Dans la foret
Ont peur, et sur le front des blanches metaphores
L'ombre apparalt.
C'est qu'Horace ou Virgile ont vu soudain le spectre
Noir se dresser;
C'est que la-bas, derriere Amaryllis, Electre
Vient de passer.

Only with Beddoes such moments are continual. In his own pages there are more shadows than there are men. This dualism moulds all his writing,

As out of the same lump of sunny Nile
Rises a purple-winged butterfly
Or a cursed serpent crawls.

His most characteristic work becomes like a duet between a raven and a nightingale upon a tree in Hell. Now they alternate; now they blend together, as in that lovely picture of a Love who is also Death—a thin, pale Cupid with ragged wings and, for his dart, a frozen Zephyr,

Gilt with the influence of an adverse star.
Such was his weapon, and he traced with it,
Upon the waters of my thoughts, these words:
'I am the death of flowers and nightingales,
Of small-lipped babes, that give their souls to summer
To make a perfumed day with: I shall come,
A death no larger than a sigh to thee,
Upon a sunset hour.' And so he passed
Into the place where faded rainbows are,
Dying along the distance of my mind.

At times, again, this duet becomes a duel. Just as in real life 'he could be delightful if he chose' (said Mrs. Procter), 'but, oh, he chose so seldom', so in his letters the sardonic side of him will sneer at some padietic passage just added to a play, and in his verse his raven will croak derision at his nightingale:

I'll not be a fool like the nightingale
Who sits up till midnight without any ale,
Making noise with his nose.

At war within, he spared neither his country, nor his contemporaries, nor himself—poor dramatist devoid of dramatic gift! But he was too hard on his own work. It is difficult to read through. I have done so twice, and never shall again. But I return with ever fresh astonishment *to* his fragments. The unfinished traceries, the ruined aisles of this gaunt sham-Gothic cathedral that he left half-built and roofless to the scorn of Time, will outlast many a newer and more finished edifice; saved by the almost unearthly perfectness of here a carved line, there a sculptured monster; and by the strange owl-light of its atmosphere in which Death's Jester wandered to his early and disastrous end. There is often more quintessential poetry, I feel, in three lines of his than in as many pages of other poets not without repute. Only wreckage remains of him; but enough to sustain his memory in that sea of Eternity into which he heard Time's river falling, himself so soon to fall.

NOTE. I should like to add that Mr. C. H. Wilkinson of Worcester College, Oxford, to whose kindness I owe a communication on the subject, regards Gossc's story of Browning's horror for the Beddoes MSS. as an unconscious invention in Gosse's later memories. Browning's letter to Gosse inviting him to come and see the papers is extant, and quite calm in tone. The question is a difficult one and not important; it seems clear that Gosse exaggerated; but that he completely-invented his story, even unconsciously or through misunderstanding, I find a little hard to believe.

THE MARTYR OF LETTERS

'J'ai la vie en haine.'
Flaubert.

If the Muse had whispered to the young Flaubert in his teens: You love me? Take care. If you make me your mistress, though you will have the money to be idle, you will find no rest. Though you long to see the world, you will moulder like a hermit in a cell. To me you will sacrifice the only woman that will love you—your heart, your health of body, your peace of mind. You will go *to* the grave "weary", in your own words, "to the very marrow"; not looking for any reward in another world (you will not believe in that) nor for any paper immortality in this (you will not believe in that either). Even in me you will only half believe. You will blaspheme me often. Take care before you choose'—even if the Muse had whispered that, no doubt the young Flaubert would have none the less pursued his destiny, with his usual mixture of rage and resignation. It is not the sort of life that Sophocles would have accepted, or Horace, or Montaigne, or Goethe. It is not an easy life to understand, this drowning of a man's whole universe in his inkpot, this slow suicide on the point of his own pen, while one half of him called the other half a fool for it. But it is worth an effort to understand it. Seldom, indeed, has a life been either duller or stranger. And bound up with its story is the whole question of the proper place of literature in life.

The latest and largest edition of Flaubert's *Letters* has now reached its final volume. Few books are more self-revealing than this correspondence of just over half a century; but if the writer's features stand out so clearly

there, it is partly because they change so amazingly little, through all the years from nine to fifty-eight. For his physical likeness, indeed, we must look elsewhere; we know how much his exterior changed, from a golden young Apollo in red shirt and blue trousers to the bulky, moustachioed, large-nosed Norman, half ecclesiastic, half gendarme in appearance, who would have been as glad as any of his Viking ancestors to harry the waddling bourgeoisie with fire and sword through the streets of Rouen—and yet might be seen after some outburst of apoplectic fury against them leaning from his window to stroke a flower. But if his youthful beauty aged, Flaubert's personality, on the other hand, seems full-grown almost from childhood. To the English mind the precocity of French schoolboys in general is apt to be terrifying; but even so there was something exceptional about this child of nine, whose first extant letter to a little friend begins: 'Tu as raison de dire que le jour de Tan est bete'[1]—an utterance not unworthy of that disillusioned infant of Hardy's *Jude,* 'Little Father Time'; and goes on, with its still childish spelling and punctuation: 'Si tu veux nous associers pour ecrire moi, j'ecrirait des comedie et toi tu ecriras tes reves, et comme il y a une dame qui vient chez papa et qui nous contes toujours de betises je les ecrirait.'

Here, in this earliest letter, appear already not only Flaubert's lifelong hatred of the established world, not only his impulse to turn away from it to literature, but even the future subject-matter of this writer whose perpetual theme was to be, not the tragedy of man's sinful disobedience, but the farce of man's incorrigible fatuity. The next letter plans a whole series of novels; two others, written when the writer was now ten, reveal that he is

[1]Quoted in Thibaudet, *Flaubert.*

already taking notes on *Don Quixote* (which was in his maturity to seem to him 'the book of books') and announce a set of plays, among them one, TAntiquaire ignorant, qui sc moque des antiquaires peut *[sic]* habiles', in which we may see a first faint foreshadowing of the floundering researches, fifty years afterwards, of Bouvard and Pecuchet.

Eighteen months later, at eleven, this strange child is writing: 'Louis-Philippe est maintenant avec sa famille dans la ville qui vit naitre Corneille . . . Courir pour un roi, voter 30 mille francs pour lcs fetes . . . Ah!!! que le monde est bete'; at twelve, 'si je n'avais dans la tete et au bout de ma plume une reine de France au quinzieme siecle, je serais totalcment degoute de la vie et il y aurait longtemps qu'unc ballc m'aurait dclivre de cette plaisanterie bouffonne qu'on appelle la vie'[2]; at thirteen, je travaille comme un demon, me levant a trois heures et demie du matin'; at sixteen, 'vraiment je n'estime profondement que deux hommcs, Rabelais et Byron, les deux seuls qui aicnt ecrit dans l'intention de nuire au genre humain et de lui rire a la face'. Here the child in Flaubert is already the man we know—enraged with life, working himself almost to death, and finding consolation for the revoltingness of the present only in his dreams of far away and long ago. Even the precocity of Chatterton, or Macaulay, or Mill, seems naive beside this boy's rooted and convinced contempt for human existence and everything in it except the world of the imagination.

And yet, stranger still, he had been in earlier childhood eculiarly simple and backward in some ways: crying ecause he could not learn to read until he was nine; dreaming for long hours, like a natural, with his finger in his mouth; and so innocent that an old servant of the

[2]Quoted in Thibaudet, *Flaubert.*

house would get rid of him, when in the way, by saying 'Go and see if I am in the kitchen', whereupon the little Gustave would trot off to the cook—'Pierre told me to come and see if he was here'—and remain dreamily mystified by the laughter that met him in reply.

Why should a person not be in two places at once? Here was a first entanglement with that Reality whose fantastic stupidity and strangeness was to be the passion and the hate, even more the hate than the passion, of all his life. It was not so much that he recoiled from its cruelty, or was enraged by its injustice: it was the grotesque fatuity of life that at once nauseated and fascinated him; just as some scientist might give himself, with mingled repugnance and curiosity, to study with microscope and scalpel the life-history of lice.

For Flaubert lived at war with the world. He both loathed and feared it. From that passion in him comes much of the vigour of his work; much also of its weakness. Throughout these eight volumes of letters runs almost an Oriental mystic's aversion for the wheel of things, for the lying lure of earthly happiness: 'cet horrible mot bonheur'; 'le bonheur est une monstruositc'; 'le diable . . . c'est lui qui a invente cette idec-la pour faire enrager le genre humain'; 'eclui, dit Cakia Mouni, qui a compris que la douleur vient de l'attachement, se retire dans la solitude comme le rhinoceros'. He admires Origen's self-mutilation: one should never marry, nor have children, nor feel (this in a love-letter to his mistress) more affection than one can help. Action is merely bestial. Yet to stop and think is to risk slipping into suicidal melancholy. One should lead the cabbage-life of a bourgeois, burn off one side of one's breast like an Amazon, vow virginity like a priest, in order to live wholly in that ideal world of Art where alone is salvation, or at least forgetfulness—

Lethe, at least, if not the rivers of Paradise. 'L'Hamour', indeed, as the most glittering of all the false jewels with which life tries to allure us, is a particular object of his scorn. A liaison may serve as a sort of armchair for occasional relaxation, when the pen drops from the writer's exhausted fingers; but lovers' ecstasies are ridiculous and degrading. 'Ces deux ans', he writes to his mistress, of Leconte de Lisle, 'passes dans l'absorption complete d'un amour heureux me paraisscnt une chose mediocre. Les estomacs qui trouvent en la ratatouille humaine leur assouvissance ne sont pas larges. Si e'etait le chagrin encore, bien! Mais la joie? Non! non! The best thing in life, after all, is death. 'Quand on a un peu d'humanite, on ne peut s'empecher de souhaiter la mort a ceux qu'on aime. Et on dira que j'ai le coeur durl'

There is in this animosity against all earthly things, all natural desires, more than a touch of the attitude of mediaeval Christianity in its more fanatical forms. Flaubert recognised the resemblance himself: both humorously, as in his self-chosen sobriquet of 'le Reverend Pere Cruchard des Barnabites, dirccteur des Dames de la Disillusion', and more seriously when he calls himself 'le dernier des Peres de l'Eglise' or writes' Moi, je deteste la vie; je suis un catholique, j'ai au coeur quelquechose du suintement vert des cathedrales normandes.' We recall Pascal. 'Ce n'est pas du travail; e'est la Trappe', was the Goncourt comment after seeing him at home in his hermitage at Croisset. And they repeat the legend that his servant was only allowed to speak to him on Sundays, to say 'Monsieur, c'est dimanche.'

But why? Such a lifelong hate of life calls for reasons to justify it, even if the reasons may themselves be often no more than excuses for some sub-rational impulse. The Christian can say at least that he abhors the world as full

of snares laid by the Devil to divert his feet from Heaven to Hell: but Flaubert believed in neither. Nor was he filled, like Hardy or Anatole France, with a rage of pity by the cruelty of the Universe, or its utter injustice. True, at fifteen he had already written *Un Parfum a Sentir*, the story of a good woman hunted to ruin and final suicide simply because she is ugly; and in a letter at the end of his life he writes: 'Anacharsis Cloots disait "Je suis du parti de I'indignation". J'arrive a lui ressembler, ne trouvez-vous pas?' But on the whole, his view of life shows neither the noble indignation of Vigny nor the sorrow of Virgil for a suffering world. Indeed, his work is marred at times by a slightly sadistic love of pain and horrors, disguised as love of naked truth. What does obsess him, with alternate fury and fascination, is first the stupidity, secondly the hideousness, of existence. It is, in both ways, intellectually and physically, so inconceivably grotesque. It nauseates him; yet he cannot help returning to his vomit. 'L'indignation pour moi, e'est la broche qu'ont dans le cul les poupees, la broche que les fait tenir debout. Quand je ne serai plus indigne, je tomberai a plat.' There are times when he stands strangely close to Swift.

He has Swift's taste for the repulsive. Like everything else in Flaubert, this showed itself early. Even as a child he would climb up and peer through the window at the corpses in the dissecting-theatre of his father's hospital. By fifteen he had rediscovered for himself Swift's horrible sarcasm about the flayed woman: 'la plus belle femme n'est guere belle sur la table d'un amphitheatre avec les boyaux sur le nez, une jambe ecorchee, et une moitie de cigare eteint qui repose sur son pied'. If the squalor is heightened by contrast, so much the better in his eyes; he loved, on his Eastern journey, the juxtaposition of golden

oranges and dead bodies at Jaffa, or the sight of a bather with a silver bracelet on one arm and a blister on the other. 'Tu me dis', he writes to his mistress, Louise Colet, of a famous prostitute he met in Egypt, 'que les punaises de Ruchiouk-Hancm te la degradent; c'est la, moi, ce qui m'enchantait. Leur odeur nauseabonde sc melait au parfum de sa peau ruisselante de santal.' There speaks the author of *Salammbo.* But even in his own everyday life it was the same with this nature 'bouffonnement amere.' Visitors have described his ink-pot in the shape of a toad, his paper-weights consisting of two feet he had pulled off a mummy in Egypt, just as Beddoes might have done. The sight of an old pair of boots, of his own face in the glass when shaving, filled him with sardonic laughter. He once burst into a friend's sick-room, amid wild uproar, with a five-legged sheep he had specially hired from a travelling showman. As for the human body—'qu'on ajoute a cela les cors aux pieds, les mauvaises odeurs naturellcs, les secretions de toute espece et de toute saveur, ca ne laisse pas que de faire un tableau fort excitant de la personne humainc. Dire qu'on aime tout ca!' And this, too, is from a letter to his mistress.

No less grotesque to him than the human body is the human mind. Its perpetual misreasonings make him feel like a musician condemned to live tortured by listening to an unending concert of discords. He acquired, indeed, a taste for these also. He set about compiling Dictionaries of Accepted Ideas, albums of imbecilities from famous authors. Naturally however, for this child of the bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Rouen, uncharity began at home, in a truceless war with his own class and age—the French equivalent of our Victorianism. He loathed all that they loved, or liked to think they loved—their democracy (je deviens aristocrate, aristocrate enrage')—their

humanitarianism (je crois que plus tard on reconnaitra que l'amour de l'humanite est quelquechose d'aussi pietre que l'amour de Dieu'). He loathed all that they produced; their newspapers came to cause him a physical disgust; and from the conversations of their drawing-rooms he would emerge giddy and staggering as if he had been bludgeoned about the head. As a supreme type of bourgeois mentality, he is fascinated by the exploit at Alexandria of a countryman of ours, one Thompson of Sunderland, who had inscribed his name in letters six feet high, visible a quarter of a league away, on the base of Pompey's Pillar. 'Ce cretin'seems to him the very symbol of the sort of imbeciles, bestially robust, who spring up with an obscene grin in the midst of life's loveliest moments.

Feeling himself a voice thus lost in a wilderness of apes, he invented for himself a patron saint, and for the apes a god. The saint was St. Polycarp, of whom he had found an old portrait with the legend: 'Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, dans quel age m'avez-vous fait naitre!' The god was an earlier conception, prior to Flaubert's eighteenth year; he figured in a vision, a sort of *Faust,* already then 'long-planned'; there, it is not the man, Smar, nor his tempter, Satan, that triumphs finally, but 'Yuk, le dieu du grotesque'. Often, thenceforth, it seems to the reader of Flaubert as if Yuk were the one true God, and Flaubert his prophet. It was Yuk who brooded grinning over the birtn of Monsieur Homais and the deathbed of Emma Bovary; who inspired the too cynical last sentence of L'*Education Sentimentale;* who guided like a will-o'-the-wisp the staggerings after knowledge of Bouvard and Pecuchet; whose spirit, in a gentler mood, is symbolised by the stuffed parrot that the old servant in *Un Coeur Simple* conceives in her dotage to be the Holy Ghost.

It may be that behind this scorn and hatred of reality lay a dread of it, occasioned by some accident of childhood, hidden now beyond the probings of psychology. Such a rejection of life might indeed be attributed to simple lack of vitality and animal spirits in one who once described himself as 'ne ennuye'; but the man who could work continuously for eight days with only ten hours sleep, and read two thousand volumes as a preparation for *Bouvard et Pecuchet,* had more vitality than most, when he chose. There lay also, I feel, a certain fierce timidity behind his 'incommensurable mepris pour On', his scorn for public bodies like the Academy, his horror of public positions such as even that sinecure at the Bibliotheque Mazarine offered him when he was old and impoverished. Even to give his own work to the public half disgusted him; he would as soon have his manuscripts buried with him. It is curious too that, as has been remarked, of the three women who mattered emotionally in his life, one was his mother, of whose death after a whole life spent with him, when he was fifty-one, he wrote that he realised he had lost the being he loved most in the world; the second was Mme. Schlesingcr, the original of Mme. Arnoux in L'*Education Sentimentale,* a woman thirteen years older, whom he loved in passionate silence when he was fifteen; the third was Louise Colet,[3] herself eleven years his senior. Younger women seem not to have

[3]Spacc is here wanting to describe this pathetic, histrionic woman, whose life has been written by Miss Doris Enfield. Surely, the reader feels, it was the hand of Yuk Himself that united Flaubert with this fantastic creature, who called on Alphonse Karr in a cab in order to stab him (quite ineffectively) on his own stairs with a carving-knife; and whose way it was to remark 'Do you know the lost arms of the Venus de Milo have been discovered?' and then, when the innocent hearer replied 'No. Where?', to answer 'In the sleeves of my dress'.

interested him; it is as if he had remained arrested at a stage where he needed a maternal figure in his life. Apart from that, safety lay for him in a savage solitude. It was in vain that Louise Colet tried *to* encroach on his seclusion and draw him from his mother's roof to Paris. He became at every attempt as fierce as a wild thing at bay. It was enough, he exclaimed, if they met once in ten years; and when their relations plunged to the break inevitable with such a lover, Flaubert showed in the final parting at Croisset a 'durete altiere', to use Louise's phrase, that shocked even his mother. 'La rage des phrases t'a desscche le coeur', said the old lady to him once. Yet it was not really so. His friendships were devoted; and when his niece's husband failed financially, Flaubert sacrificed his own fortune *to* save him with the quiet generosity of a prince. His hardness was the ferocity of the woodland creature suddenly in terror for its liberty and its offspring. He *must* write; he *must* be free. Yet Life took its revenge in the end. His niece relates that in later days he was found once kneeling before a child, in tears—'Voila ce qu'il m'aurait fallu'. Significant, too, is his own comment, in a letter, on this loneliness of his last years: 'J'ai ete lache dans ma jeuncsse, j'ai eu peur de la vie. Tout se paye.' The Amazon had not foreseen that the breast she scared in youth might ache in age; and ache the more bitterly with the consciousness that it had been sacrificed, in part, not for battle but for flight. Behind the feud of Flaubert with the world, behind his rational scorn of its stupidity, his aesthetic contempt for its ugliness, lay also, it would seem, an abnormal and unreasoning fear of it.

But it is this rage against reality rather than its causes, and its effect on his works rather than on his life, that matter to posterity. It combined with his passionate love of beauty to drive him from life to art. It might have been

expected to drive him into a wildly idealistic and romantic art. In part it did. He dreamed amid the dinginess of mid-nineteenth-century provincial life, like any other Romantic, of 'la princesse lointaine', whether remote in space or time. All the women he had possessed, he said once, had been for him only 'les matelas d'une autre femme revee'. And again: 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi.' Like his heroine, he sighed for strange lands—'penser que jamais, sans doute, je ne verrai la Chine! que jamais je ne m'endormirai au pas cadence des chameaux! que jamais peut-etre je ne verrai dans les forets les yeux d'un tigre accroupi dans les bambous!' He avers that he had even thought seriously of turning Turk and settling (like Candide with his cabbages on the Bosphorus) in some Oriental town like Smyrna. At other moments his imagination roved back in time across the centuries, haunted by the music of Theocritus and Virgil, or homesick (he liked to fancy he had really lived then, in some previous incarnation) for the lurid magnificence of Imperial Rome. 'Je suis ne lyrique.' It was true, though he could never write verse. He complains to Tourgueneff of writers like Zola and the Goncourts: 'Ne trouvez-vous pas que nos amis sont peu preoccupes de la Beaute? Et pourtant il n'y a dans le monde que cela d'important!' He laments the same lack of it in his own *Education Sentimentale,* because beauty is banished from the modern world, and modern subjects do not admit of it. And so it came about that he sought wildly for escape from the sordidness of Louis-Philippe and the Second Empire in the streets of ancient Carthage, peopled with mysterious multitudes whose secret has died with them beyond even his power to revive, or in the haunted deserts of St. Anthony or St. Julian. The past, gorgeous with the poppies of oblivion, could at least yield him opium-dreams.

Yet they could not satisfy him. For whereas with most writers either the love of beauty tends to blind the love of truth or else the love of truth to deaden the love of beauty, with Flaubert the two were curiously matched. In his eyes, however hungry for beauty, often ugliness was truth, truth ugliness; and with that truth he would not palter. Besides, ugliness fascinated him, as well as repelled. Hence comes that oscillation, often noted, in his successive works between the romantic and the prosaic, between the 'princesse lointaine' and the grisette. *Saint Antoine, Madame Bovary, Salammbo, L'Education Sentimentale, Trois Contes, Bouvard et Pecuchet*—throughout that series the pendulum swings back and forth with a beautiful and mathematical regularity. Every second work Yuk claims for his own. Now Yuk has his adorers among the readers of Flaubert; but I feel him to have been on the whole Flaubert's evil spirit.

It is not that I prefer Flaubert's exotic works; on the contrary. But it was Yuk who drove him so far afield in the struggle to escape. In four ways, I think, this obsession with human ugliness and imbecility was bad for his writing. Sometimes it made him over-romantic by sheer reaction; sometimes it made him indulge in squalid photography or in over-prolonged caricature; always it made him shrink too much from life; and it made him think too much of art. He seems to me to have produced one masterpiece, in which for once his opposite impulses balanced and his drab greys blended with his purples in a perfect harmony—*Madame Bovary:* a masterpiece so great that his fame need rest on little else. A great subject—the death of romance in the human soul; two outstanding characters, one tragic through all her pettiness, the other almost magnificent in his pompous absurdity; the beauty of perfect landscape and of perfect language; a pervading

sense of mingled scorn and pity, all the more intense for being so rigidly restrained—these make that novel one of the great books of the world, the triumph of a poet and a realist happily at one. It must count, indeed, among his realistic works; there were times when he howled with rage at the drabness of the subject he had set himself; but amid all the drabness, as in Ibsen, whose Hedda Gabler is a first cousin of Emma Bovary, the tragic poet, too, is there.

And what a poet! Never has writer made more imaginatively lovely the encroaching ugliness of life.

'Cette lueur d'incendie qui empourprait son ciel pale, se couvrit de plus d'ombre et s'effaca par degres.'

'Lcur grand amour ou elle vivait plonge, parut se diminuer sous clle commc l'eau d'un flcuvc qui s'absorberait dans son lit, et elle apercut la vase.'

'Les plaisirs commc des ccoliers dans la cour d'un college avaicnt tcllemcnt pietine sur son coeur que rien de vert n'y poussait, et ce qui passait par la, plus ctourdi que lcs enfants, n'y laissait pas meme, comme eux, son nom grave sur la muraille.'

'Elle le corrompait par dela le tombeau.'

The echo of the rolling voice of Chateaubriand is here. But far more than an echo goes to the making of prose so magnificent. *Madame Bovary* has more pity in it than most of Flaubert's later work. And pity remains a finer thing than hatred or horror or contempt. It is not, I believe, by any accident that a finer rhythm comes with it into the teller's voice.

But in L'*Education Sentimentale* the poet is missing. That seems to me the fatal difference between the two books. Futility is a dangerous subject for a writer to pursue for long: it has a quiet way of turning and swallowing its pursuer. This life-study of beings who are all

ciphers, painted at a temperature of zero, leaves on me an effect of numb and frozen nullity. Even the background is grey; Paris does not lend itself to glimpses of perfect landscape like the Norman countryside. Even the lovely metaphors and similes of *Madame Bovary* are gone. As for *La Tentation de Saint Antoine, Salammbo,* and *Bouvard et Pecuchet,* all their brilliance and all their perfection of style do not save them from seeming at times like dramatised encyclopaedias of comparative mythology, Punic archaeology, and modern arts and sciences respectively. Flaubert could not resist being exhaustingly exhaustive, until the reader begins to feel he is being subjected to a formula, and that he is doomed to be spared not the obscurest deity, the tiniest antiquity, or the weariest experiment all the way from A to Z. With half the length, these books might have lived twice as long. He confessed himself in later life that he had lost himself in jungles of detail; but he continued *to* do it.

Naturally, the existence of these blemishes, if exist they do, is a matter of feeling and therefore of mere opinion; and a critic has always to remind himself that blame is often blind, far oftener than love. Still, others have felt similarly; and the ultimate root of the evil seems to be in each book the same—Flaubert's grudge against existence and particularly against his own generation. Because he hated life, to pillory the futility of the search for happiness in L'*Education,* the futility of the search for knowledge in *Bouvard et Pecuchet,* was to him a passionate satisfaction; to the ordinary reader, who hates life less, at such length it becomes a bore. To cry 'Vanity of vanities' is always a pleasure to the vanity of the crier; for he is proclaiming also by implication his own superior insight in discovering it. But to the vanity of the hearer it is less appetising. Similarly the ordinary reader, less nauseated by modernity,

finds less of an ecstatic relief and release in the company of ancient Carthaginians or Christian hermits. But, beyond this, rebellion and rage are bad for the intelligence (as may be seen in the militant patriots of oppressed nationalities). They narrow the understanding and destroy all sense of proportion. A writer may get too much gall in his ink. Far better that he should remember the words of Antigone: 'I was born to share men's loves, and not their hates.' In consequence there is a quite unreal scarcity, in Flaubert's pages, of decent or rational beings. It seems hardly worth while settling down on the edge of the Slough of Despond in order to sling mud at it; and to read two thousand books to see in how many ways two fools could misunderstand them, was surely carrying a preoccupation with folly to the verge of it. It is strange to be irritated by human idiocy into making one's home permanently in Gotham, the better to paint it red. Yet there is about *Bouvard et Pecuchet,* at all events, an enormous, half Rabelaisian extravagance that makes much of it live in the memory; the cold, restrained misanthropy of L'*Education Sentitnentale,* though more realistic, seems to me far less alive. Human ugliness is a great deal better caricatured than modelled in wax.

But living at daggers drawn with the world affected Flaubert's work in another way as well. It made him a recluse. It was indeed his idea that every writer ought to be a recluse. But that is far from certain. It is not only that a writer needs experience. For with imaginative minds, no doubt, a moderate amount of experience goes further than might at first be guessed. Trollope wrote superlatively about archdeacons without any clerical acquaintance; he could conceive the behaviour of humanity in gaiters because he had rubbed shoulders with humanity otherwise attired. But there are limits; Trollope

was no hermit. Whereas Flaubert made his books to a great extent out of books. He was never really at home in Paris; even L'*Education* is a picture of the previous generation, not of the present, and was preceded by long poring over old newspaper-files. But apart from this need of experience of life, I believe that the creative impulse itself is not, in the long run, suited by hermitages, and that the imagination seldom continues to breed well in captivity. A man who withdraws wholly from life in order to create greater books is liable *to* be like the owl that bit off the feet of the mice that they might lie still and grow fatter. A Wordsworth may write great poetry in the peaceful seclusion of Grasmere, but only with the tumbrils of the Revolution and the voice of Annette Vallon still ringing in his ears; prolong this cottage-life indefinitely, and maundering supervenes. Whereas a Byron, charging from one escapade into another, writes better and better to the end. No doubt there are exceptions, but I question if Flaubert's life shows him to have been one. In 1849 he read the first *Saint Antoine* to Bouilhet and Maxime du Camp at Croisset, expecting them to be flattened with admiration. After listening for thirty-two hours, their reply was: 'Burn it.' And then one added: 'Tu devrais ecrire Thistoire de Delamarre.' It was a subject at the opposite extreme to *Saint Antoine.* Delamarre had been a doctor known to Flaubert's father; he became the prototype of Charles Bovary. From that germinated the novel. But it is not merely that its subject was thus taken from the actuality of personal experience. Flaubert himself next set off to the East; it was by the Second Cataract of the Nile, in 1850, that, with characteristic indifference to what lay before his eyes, he exclaimed: 'Eureka, eureka! Je Fappellerai Emma Bovary.' Further, the writing of the book after his return coincided

with the second stormy phase of his affair with Louise Colet, who has certainly lent a good deal of her own rage for melodramatic romance to Flaubert's heroine. His greatest work, in a word, seems to me connected with the most eventful part of his personal life. Certainly it was to Louise Colet that he addressed those fascinating letters that must perhaps rank in his production next after *Madame Bovary.* But now he had got rid of his mistress. His travels (except for a trip to Carthage) were over. The hermit could settle down alone with his Muse. Did the Muse respond? I doubt it. He produced *Salammbo, L' Education Sentimentale,* the second *Saint Antoine.* Then, in 1875, his quiet cell was shaken by an earthquake; his niece's husband failed; and in the two following years, amid financial ruin and business interruptions, he produced what I feel to be his second most successful creative work, *Trois Contes.* The rest of his life was mainly employed in grinding out *Bouvard et Pecuchet,* still unfinished when he died.

This suggested connection between Flaubert's periods of best work and his periods of intenscst experience may indeed be really only a matter of coincidence; I should still believe that his rejection of life was bad for his work, and that genius seldom can be healthy for long hidden in a hole. No doubt genius is sometimes diseased, as ambergris is the vomit of a whale. Its peculiar intensity of vision may be like the hyperaesthesia of some maladies; to cure would be to kill. But even morbid genius has usually come in contact, mostly painful contact, with the active world. Poe or Baudelaire did not live in cottages. And if the most lasting work has been produced rather by a type of genius that was not a disease or an eccentricity, such as Shakespeare or Goethe, it is natural to suppose that what is good for the man is often good for

the artist, and that a writer does not write better for trying to become a cherub, all head and wings. To the Greek this seemed obvious. Archilochus and Aeschylus, Socrates and Demosthenes fought in armies, Sophocles and Thucydides commanded them. Long ago FitzGerald lamented the contrast of such lives with the genteelly literary existences of the nineteenth century. When Flaubert says 'Tachez de devenir un ocil', had he not a little forgotten the Fable of the Belly? On a later page of this same correspondence, after years of practising his own theory, he was to write: 'Hardy (his doctor) m'appelle "une vieille femme hysterique", mot que je trouve profond.' So again when he cries to Louise Colet, even in the first fervour of their love: 'Oh! va, aime plutot l'Art que moi', one feels that there was a wiser balance in Alfieri's summary of his own experience: 'Soltanto mold anni dopo mi awidi, che la mia infelicita proveniva soltanto dal bisogno, anzi necessita, ch 'era in me di avere ad un tempo stesso il cuore occupato da un degno amore, e la mente da un qualche nobile lavoro; e ogni qual volta Tuna delle due cose mi manco, io rimasi incapace dell' altra, e sazio e infastidito, e oltre ogni dire angustiato.' And when Flaubert writes in the decline of life 'Je n'attends plus rien de la vie qu'une suite de feuilles de papier a barbouillcr de noir', is there not a saner as well as finer answer in the disdainful epigram of Chateaubriand: 'J'ai asscz ecrit si mon nom doit vivre: beaucoup trop, s'il doit mourir'? And when among the Alps Flaubert cries impatiently: 'Je donnerais tous les glaciers pour le musee du Vatican', is there not here too a rather childish and ill-timed one-sidedness which compares ill with the breadth of vision of a far smaller man, Hippolyte Taine, when he observes: 'Qu'est-ce qu'un musee, sinon un cimetiere, et qu'est-ce qu'une pcinture, une statuaire, une architecture,

sinon le memorial qu'une generation mortelle se dresse anxicusement a elle-meme pour prolonger sa pensee caduque par un sepulchre aussi caduc que sa pensee? Au contraire, devant les eaux, le ciel, les montagnes on se sent devant des etres acheves et toujours jeunes?'

Indeed, one of the worst effects on the artist of thus renouncing the world and the flesh is that it leads, as its corollary, to the exaltation of Art into a religion. The religion of Art is a superstition. Certainly it does little good to Art or artists. Stendhal was doubtless wilfully exaggerating when he attributed the excellence of French literature in the seventeenth century to the fact that the seventeenth century had no great esteem for literature. But this is at least saner than perching the Muses, as the only true Immortals, on the topmost peak of Olympus, and pretending that the only angels are those that can be made to dance on the point of a pen. Such distorted theology leads in turn to distorted ethics in which the artist becomes the one righteous man in a wicked world; and it is not good for anyone to start fancying himself the one righteous man in a wicked world. Flaubert sometimes falls into this moral tone: 'II me semble en ma conscience que j'accomplis un devoir, que j'obeis a une fatalite superieure, que je fais le bien, que je suis dans la justice.' It is strange that one who kept moralising so inflexibly out of his novels should have thus dragged it into the process of creating them. True, he was far too honest and too sceptical to cling to such an attitude; in other moods he will grow as cynical about Art as about everything else. Probably, after all, it is only 'une immense blague', 'un ulcere que je gratte'. He envies the scientist. He is sick of the very name *of Madame Bovary.* He compares himself to Monsieur Binet in that novel, turning out infinite serviette-rings to kill time. None the less, Art remained

his idol, a Moloch to which he sacrificed himself and everything else. A similar streak of fanaticism glows hot and distorting in the cold atmosphere of Proust. He too, amid all his disillusion, speaks of his processes of artistic introspection as a *devoir;* he too regards the world as a mere dust-storm, worthless except as lit up at a distance by the magic lantern of memory. 'L'homme ne peut imaginer ce qu'il possede'—Flaubert wrote that: but it might stand as the motto of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.*

Yet is it really true? Is it necessary thus to sacrifice the real world as a worthless carcass on the altar of the imaginary? Is it not possible to make the best of both? Blake found it so:

> With my inward eye, 'tis an old Man grey;
> With my outward, a Thistle across my way.

Surely there is something morbid in eyes that can only see what the hands cannot reach; in the passion that can only embrace the phantoms of the past? All the gold in the world does not lie at the foot of the rainbow. It seems to me one of the supreme qualities of Hardy that he could find poetry even in the milestone on his road or the log upon his fire. For as Heraclitus said of the pots and pans in the kitchen: 'Here also are the Immortals.' For the Greek, Apollo was a god not only of the arts, but of medicine and battle, dealing real wounds and healing them; what a god thus joined, the real and the ideal, it is folly for man to put asunder. Pegasus cannot live wholly in the air, or on it.

There lies, it would seem, a perversion of primeval instincts behind such manias about Art. Deep in us, since the very birth of life on earth, lie two fundamental impulses—that to preserve ourselves and that to sacrifice ourselves, in order to preserve our offspring, our herd, our race. Without both no species could hope to survive.

For modern man the preservation of his kind is no longer exposed to the same dangers, nor needs the same sacrifices; yet this impulse to self-immolation is still there, still liable to demand its outlet. Some find that in parenthood, some in ascetic religion, some in work. The artist who sacrifices himself to creation as his only god and to his works as hungry offspring, may little guess what ancient instincts, strangely disguised, he is obeying. But ancient instincts, like ancient gentlemen, are not always infallible, though they may feel so. And human sacrifice, even when it is self-sacrifice, is often a relic of primitive savagery, far less noble than it looks.

There is, too, another reason which may tempt a modern writer too much to spurn the world. We suffer today from a great gulf between our ethical and our aesthetic feelings, between actions we think good and useful, and actions we think splendid. That is a very real evil of modern civilisation; and regret for a past when the life of state and citizen rested on a basis of more vivid physical activity, when a man's career could more often seem good to his imagination as well as his reason, to his senses as well as his moral sense, is something more than mere romanticism. The state, lovely to the Athenian 'as a mistress', has become, in the phrase of Anatole France, 'un monsieur piteux et disgracicux assis derriere un guichct'. The individual has found life, as it grows safer, grow also more prosaic. In consequence, the youth of 1914 positively thrilled at the idea of a new crusade, satisfying at last both conscience and imagination at once. It was an illusion: the old consecrated banners dropped to dust above our heads. But the need was real. This sense of the drabness of our age, felt so strongly by Flaubert in writing L'*Education Sentimentale* that he swore never to treat modern life again, increases the tendency of the

writer who cares about beauty to turn anchorite and abandon the real world. An even worse alternative, common today, is to abandon beauty and pretend that Art is concerned with something else. Either is defeat; but it is easier to see the difficulty than cure it. The problem for the modern writer is to mix enough personal experience with his imagination; just as the problem for everyone else is to mix enough imagination with his personal experience.

In Flaubert, then, to resume, one of the fundamental things from the very first was a rage against life. 'J'ai eu tout jeune un pressentiment complet de la vie. C'etait comme une odeur de cuisine nauseabonde qui s'echappe par un soupirail. On n'a pas besoin d'en avoir mange pour savoir qu'elle est a faire vomir.' Out of such bitterness there often comes a strength; and hatred nerved Flaubert to dissect and preserve for ever that undying worm, Homais. But there is a greater strength out of which comes, not so much sweetness (the word has a sickly sound), as a calmer and more smiling irony. The Shakespeare of *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to me a more perfect writer than the Shakespeare of *Lear* and *Troilus.* Though Flaubert preached impersonality in an author, he scarcely achieved it as Shakespeare does, because he lacked Shakespeare's wider, calmer sympathy. This eternal rebel alternately banished himself into far countries on the borders of unreality, and returned home to stab or jeer. In haughty contempt of life, he sacrificed everything to his Muse; but the Muse, like other women, does not love best those who sacrifice most. It was, indeed, a giant who could labour as he did, year after year, wrestling in agonies for twelve or eighteen hours a day to produce perhaps three sentences by the end of it, when another dawn glimmered grey across the Seine

on that great back bent above its endless task; and yet it was, too, something of a blinded giant. Style is not for a foreigner to judge, though to many *Madame Bovary* must seem in that as near perfection as humanity can come; and yet I have heard a countryman of his say that the style of Flaubert in general was better in his letters than in his books, because less laboured. It would be like life's irony if that were true. The double 'de' in 'une couronne de fleurs d'oranger' might cause him agonies; but it did not cause them to the ordinarily sensitive reader. 'He ought to have had to write articles against time', was the comment of Anatole France. He was, indeed, apt to become a little too like a sculptor, meticulously modelling every hair in the head of some statue designed to crown a column a hundred feet high, where only the birds would see them.

Flaubert had a great admiration for Montaigne. For a whole year, at eighteen, he says he read almost nothing else. 'Nous avons memes gouts, memes opinions, meme maniere de vivre, memes manies.' Could he really think so—he who overworked in order to avoid what Montaigne most loved doing—thinking of himself? Surely Montaigne would have considered him as mad as the pedant who kills himself to settle the metre of Plautus. For Flaubert rejected much more of life than Montaigne—not only all belief but also, in theory at least (for he could be heroically self-sacrificing in practice), all duties; except, possibly, the duty of the artist to his art. Women he thought too trivial to love, Nature too vast; even good taste was perhaps a hindrance in some ways. 'Les plus grands evenements de ma vie ont ete quelques pensees, des lectures, certains couchers de soleil a Trouville, au bord de la mer, et des causeries de cinq ou dix heures consecutives avec un ami qui est maintenant marie et

perdu pour moi.' Contrast the Tour happiest days' in the life of one of the most charming figures in a less thought-sicklied age, the eighteenth-century Prince de Ligne—'celui ou j'ai mis pour la premiere fois mon uniforme, le soir de la premiere bataille ou je me suis trouve, le jour ou Ton m'a dit pour la premiere fois qu'on m'aimait, et celui ou je suis sorti apres ma petite verole'. Can we really doubt which of these two lives Montaigne would have found saner and more human? Can we doubt that he would have been right? Had he lived more fully Flaubert would have written less; would he have written worse?

The Goncourts thought so. They held that artists ought to be ill, that great works are only written by neurotics. They have left a fascinating picture, it is true, of Flaubert in his gayer moments; when the weary giant, escaped from the treadmill where he slaved blindly for the unappreciative Pliilistines, would make their room rock with Viking laughter or Berserk tirades. But through their *Journal* the sense of melancholia, of nerves racked to breaking-point, incessantly returns. They record how Zola has hallucinations of mice and sparrows; Flaubert, of somebody standing behind him. 'C'est positif, nous sommes tres malades, quasi fous, et tout prepares a le devenir completement.' 'Notre talent! qui sait? c'est peut-etre Talliance d'une maladie de coeur et d'une maladie de foie.' Surely the critics are themselves diseased who thus demand that authors should be. But this view is far from having died with the Goncourts. It is, indeed, more often felt than stated today. But it has found its most superb expression in the remark, which so amused Proust, of Prince Edmond de Polignac: 'Un tel? Il ne peut pas etre intelligent, il n'est pas malade.'

And yet though Flaubert has been here discussed, in part, as an example of the fatality of trying in the modern

way to divorce life and letters, and throwing the key out of the window of one's ivory tower, it seems, after all, half a sacrilege to have done so. When all criticisms, all reservations have been made, the man remains so great despite his tantrums, so lovable despite his peevishness. His letters in particular are aflame with a passionate disinterestedness, a titanic honesty rare in any age. At his best, he could give alike to his own prose and to the prosaic in life the perfection of poetry. Even his rages were always generous. And if he tended to intolerance he has himself, strangely enough, written also a condemnation of intolerance in words that deserve never to be forgotten by anyone who writes criticism: 'Un homme en jugeant un autre est un spectacle qui me ferait crever de rire, s'il ne me faisait pitie.'

THE MYSTIC OF MEMORY

Was it wise, this wisdom that could never take
Joy in the moment for the moment's sake?
That with eyes backward bent ploughed on in pain
The field of life, and reaped but ghostly grain;
Till of earth's myriads he was left alone,
Friendship a folly, love a frenzy grown?
In the gaunt twilight of a lonely land
So might some broken, strange-scrawled column stand;
Or that one bitter pillar, backward turned
To gaze where Sodom and Gomorrah burned . . .
Who strives with spirits, wrestles for a fall,
And him that calls the dead, the dead shall call.
Vain our deluding arts; all, all in vain
We kiss the pale lips we have raised again.
The more we break, the more we feel Time's power,
Who most have lost the best-remembered hour;
Whose searching hearts find nowhere lasting ease,
Whether in Wittenberg or Meseglise.

'Wtcr-ielly'—that was the verdict on Proust of D. H. Lawrence. 'Ploughing a field with knitting-needles'—that was the verdict of George Moore. It was not often, one imagines, that these two writers found themselves agreeing. And the literary young?—do they read Proust today? Not a great deal, is my impression. They are too busy keeping up to date to find time for a novel in sixteen volumes as much as six years old. Again Proust though in some ways morbid and *maladif,* is highly intelligent and highly cultivated; probably it is hard for him to compete with writers who seem less hampered in either respect, like Joyce or Lawrence. And again Proust is not a manual for Communists. He can never have had anything in common with the modern type of proletarian Galahad who scribbles verse to inform an awed world that he is 'learning to shoot'. Proust does not flatter the

Faubourg Saint-Germain; but of 'the workers' he is hardly aware, and shows not a flicker of interest in Karl Marx. Indeed he is individualistic to the verge of obsession. 'Nous sommes irremediablement seuls.' Eleven years ago (it seems twenty) when Proust died, in 1922, his translator Scott Moncrieff could collect from English writers a formidable tribute of flowers by request; yet five years later, in 1927, when the publication of his vast work was completed, I can recall hardly a whisper of notice this side of the Channel. Today Proust remains a name to quote; but is he read now except by those who read him before? The literary death-rate of our age is terrible.

And yet this book remains very typical of our age: which cannot much pride itself on its good sense, or its artistic nobility; but is excellent at science, and may hereafter be remembered mainly for its advances in physics and in psychology. In psychology no novelist has ever shown a more scientific interest than Proust, with his passion for analysing and classifying the workings of the mind, unconscious as well as conscious. He remained, indeed, not a scientist, but an artist. His general theory of human nature seems to me as fantastic as his particular observations are admirable. But the scientific ambition is there. 'La ou je cherchais les grandes lois', he writes bitterly at the end, 'on m'appellait "fouilleur de details." '

Further, this book is typical of the art, as well as the science, of our age. Perhaps because it *is* the art of a scientific age, the outstanding quality of our literature is its cleverness. We succeed best at biography, at novels, and at journalism. An enemy might say that the first two of these had now become branches of the third. At all events, the praise that rises most often to our lips today is not 'How magnificent!' or 'How tragic!' but 'How

clever!' The works of Mr. Aldous Huxley are an excellent example. Now Proust is, I think, at his best a master of character and description; but not more than Balzac. He is also a poet in prose; but not more than Chateaubriand or Flaubert. What astounds his reader again and again is rather his Mephistophelean and Machiavellian acuteness. It is not, I think, his most valuable quality; but it is his most striking one. He keeps the intelligence strained to the uttermost, as Johnson found with the conversation of Burke. Indeed to read him is in some ways like listening to the conversation of a genius who (unlike most of them) should remain a genius in conversation. It recalls to me the first intoxication, in undergraduate days, of Cambridge talk—a rapture, alas, departed. Stendhal seems naive in comparison. Proust's reader feels the delight of the short-sighted person on whom spectacles suddenly bestow a world of magic definition and brilliance, where all was haze before. One could clap one's hands with pleasure. I have sometimes wondered if to have to pass an examination on this book would not be a better education, and test of education, than most courses at Universities. No one has ever carried to such an extreme the precept of Delplii, of Socrates, of Montaigne: 'Know thyself.'

And yet did he?

To many the philosophy of Proust seems the hearth and central flame of this book, which is itself the story of his acquisition of that philosophy, and his realisation that to unfold it he must write this book. So does this subtle serpent come full circle, tail in mouth. In itself, one may doubt if his view of life is really so important. It does, however, serve its artistic purpose. It gives his work a background, a backbone, a unity. It plays a more essential part in him than in most novelists; so that there might

even be advantage in reading his own exposition of it in his last volume, *Le Temps Retrouve II* before, or immediately after, the two first, *Du Cote de Chez Swann.* But it becomes easier to understand his philosophy with some knowledge also of his life.

At nine the little Marcel was attacked by that asthma which was to overshadow him more and more to the end. By fifteen, he had charmed open the doors of Parisian society. Further, he was the delicate and adoring child of a perhaps too devoted mother. Consequently, as a frail and feminine being in a fastidious, yet pitiless world, he came to learn that for those who value affection and kindliness there could be no wilderness lonelier than this high society. As he grew older, with worsening health he became more and more a hermit; lurking in a cloud of fumigations by day and stealing out, if ever, by night like some shy moth into the lighted brilliance of the Ritz. So a second, material loneliness was added to the loneliness of the spirit. And as this solitary Stylite sat there on his column encircled by the desert of life, he felt the swift moments slipping like sand between his fingers; and felt them, even as they slipped, barren and arid as the desert-sand. It is strange that both he and his one equal in stature in contemporary England, Hardy, should have shared this obsession with the passage of time, this haunted pre-occupation with the irrecoverable past. But for Proust even the present had become not only fugitive, but futile. He could value nothing except what his imagination had first touched to gold; and his imagination could only gild, not present things, but those beyond his reach. The consolations of others dupe him no longer. Friendship, like society, has become in his eyes a hollow fraud—as well conduct a dialogue with a chair. Friendship, indeed, is worse than empty; it is pernicious. It

encourages us to scurry idly to and fro like water-beetles on the surface of ourselves, to skate like society on polished ice, without plunging down to the secrets of the lonely depths.

Better love-affairs than friendship. True, love is only a means of mutual torture. It cannot bring happiness, for fruition automatically breaks the lover's enchantment and the fairy gold turns in his hands to withered leaves. The woman he loves is a dream-princess, not the woman who murmurs 'Yes.'

> For thus men's hearts have ached since man's beginning;
> Beauty may blast, Love cannot wholly bless.
> We stretch vain hands, pure hands alike and sinning,
> But Beauty cannot give, nor Love possess;
> As in old tales, when wraiths of lovers perished
> Glimmered once more on eyes that wept them dead,
> Still from the living arms that vainly cherished,
> Like a thin smoke, the subtle phantom fled.

A love-affair is, indeed, for Proust a quadrille of ghosts—of two insubstantial and ever-changing selves, together with their two imaginary conceptions of each other. And love can only be saved from dying of its own success by a surgical operation that will set the imagination once more passionately to work—by the knife of jealousy slowly twisted in the heart.

But, he would add, it does not matter that love does not bring happiness. So much the better. 'Une femme dont nous avons besoin nous fait souffrir, tire de nous des series de sentiments autrement profonds, autrement vitaux, qu'un homme superieur qui nous interesse.' 'Quant au bonheur, il n'a presque qu'une seule utilite, rendre le malheur possible . . . le dechirement si precieux qui s'appelle le malheur.'

This, to be sure, is a gay view of existence. He admits its grimness. 'Quand un etre est si mal conforme. . .

qu'il ne puisse aimer sans souffrir, et qu'il faille souffrir pour apprendre des verites, la vie d'un tel etre finit par etre bien lassante.' 'Et comme on comprend que la souffrance est la meilleure chose que Ton puisse rencontrer dans la vie, on pense sans effroi, presque comme a une delivrance, a la mort.' In a word, Proust exists like a nightmare tormented by doubts of its own existence. 'Sentio et excrucior, ergo sum'—such a compound of Catullus and Descartes might summarise his attitude. For, he feels, we cannot help doubting even of ourselves, when we find that we each contain hundreds of different selves, that the name of all of us is 'Legion'. We are each like a flight of starlings, wildly rushing this way and that under the leadership now of one of our personalities, now of another, while the rest are swept blindly after.

And yet this is not to say that nothing certainly exists. Ideas exist. And this is not to deny that there is such a thing as duty in life, and salvation for those who do it. For the duty of the intelligent, above all of the artist, is to save the soul not by losing it, but by finding it, through ceaseless introspection. The modern Prometheus on his bleak Caucasus becomes his own vulture. He must see his own heart naked and learn from its blind, frantic flutterings to understand himself, and others through himself. For those who endure to the end, there are blessed moments of consolation and redemption from the eternal transience; islets of refuge where we can rest an instant, like weary swimmers, above this tide-race of time that whirls us all away. It is Memory that can give us those. Not wilful and deliberate memory—that is merely like a wizened family-solicitor bringing out dusty yellow dossiers which can tell us indeed the day we were wedded or came into an inheritance, but can never give again the rapture and the radiance of life. It is the spontaneous

memory, the flash of recollection, that can alone make **the** dead years give up their dead. We cannot conjure this Spirit of the Past. We can only watch and pray for his coming. His chosen instruments are the humblest and most unexpected things—the smell of burning leaves, or the sight of a book unopened since childhood, or the sough of wind in grass that suddenly floods the meadows with the remembered murmur of the waves. A mere unevenness in the flags of a Paris pavement can raise suddenly the vision of Venice (with a beauty the physical reality never knew), like another Venus, from the sea. It is when these moments of revelation are vouchsafed us that we find again the days Time has taken from us, and rise above his power. 'Every Paradise is a Paradise Lost.' But now we see what we have lost with the pure eyes of the artist. We imagine, now, without desiring to possess; we possess without destroying the magic of the imagination. We have found the rainbow's foot. For these images suddenly unlocked from their cells within ourselves are 'reels sans etre actuels, ideaux sans etre abstraits'. What was once a prosaic caterpillar springs now from its forgotten chrysalis as Psyche's butterfly. Memory and Art are at one—

> In that high vision where the heart at rest
> Beholds itself at last possess the unpossessed.

Art can immortalise what Memory reveals only like a lightning-flash; but these are the two gates of Reality.

So life became for Proust an alternation of experience and suffering with recollection and analysis. 'Ce sont nos passions qui esquissent nos livres, le repos d'intervalle qui les ecrit.' And even if he had not written, the three ultimate things in the world for him would still have been the pain of experience, the ecstatic moments of memory, and the perpetual task of analysis and understanding. The

end of Life is, first Truth, then Death. Of the many souls within him, two, he predicted, would be among the last to perish, as his life ebbed away—one, the voice which cried even in his sick-room, 'It's fine today!'; the other, the analysing, classifying observer, whose supreme pleasure lay in discerning some new element in common between two states of mind.

Such is the philosophy that gives unity to this vast work which begins years before the author's birth and leaves him middle-aged. Such is the central theme that knits together its brilliant, but chaotic-seeming episodes—the loves, miserable alike in possession or frustration, of Charles Swann, of Gilberte, of Saint-Loup, of Albertine, of the Baron de Charlus; the slow dissolution of the magic circle of the Faubourg Saint Germain, the 'encanaillement' of the House of Guermantes, which leaves its Princesse displaced by a shabby bourgeoise, its Duchcssc by a prostitute; and all the long havoc of the years which wither the beauty of Odette and the wit of Oriane, and change the great Palamede de Charlus to a timid old man baring a tremulous white head before the woman his arrogance had blistered with insults in other days. 'C'est avec une durete prcsque triomphale qu'il repctait sur un ton uniforme, legerement begayant et aux sourdes resonnances sepulchrales: "Hannibal de Breaute, mort! Antoine de Mouchy, mort! Charles Swann, mort! Adalbert de Montmorency, mort! Baron de Talleyrand, mort! Sosthene de Doudeauville, mort!" Et chaque fois, ce mot "mort" semblait tomber sur ces defunts comme une pelletee de terre plus lourde, lancee par un fossoyeur qui tenait a les river plus profondement a la tombe.' Even Swann, whom once we knew so well, is now one with all these others who are mere names to us, his gravestone lost in the ghastly whiteness of the cemetery, amid the

vast indifference of death. All is dust and ashes—except *to* remember, to understand, and to create.

Almost all philosophies seem very odd; but few odder than Proust's. It is a string for his pearls; but does its author really deserve our awed respect as a philosopher; even if he was related by marriage to Bergson? Is it not comparable with the philosophical thimble-rigging on which Signor Pirandello has built a whole series of intriguing plays? One of the first things, surely, in 'Knowing Oneself' is to know when to stop; as, long before Proust, Hamlet failed to know. We need not rush to the opposite extreme with Remy de Gourmont, crying that 'le "Gnothi Seauton" est peut-etre la sottise la plus deletere qui fut jamais proferee'. But even if both matter and personality seem to slip like phantoms through our fingers, when analysed beyond a certain degree of minuteness, life still has to be conducted at all events *as if both* material bodies and personalities, mutual love and friendship did exist. It can be. After all, we do often successfully predict the behaviour of people, even people we love; and the power to predict remains the best test we have that we are not mistaking fancy for fact. It is not Dorothy Osborne writing to Temple, or Montaigne writing of Etienne de la Boetie, who seem *to* the reader unreal dreamers, but Proust himself. He is inconsistent. He will talk of the impossibility of all human contacts; yet he does not question the reality of his relations with his grandmother, who corresponds in his book to his mother in real life. He will complain that though the mistresses who kissed him good-night could calm him by it as his mother once had done, yet he could not trust them as he had trusted her; he does not suggest that it was a mere illusion to have trusted her. He is capable, in his muddled idealism, of saying on one page that only ideas exist—

'tout est dans l'esprit'; and on the next that, though Germanophils turned a deaf ear to Belgian atrocities, 'pourtant elles etaient reelles'. He may theorise with such sceptical disillusion that modern critics, overjoyed as usual to drive some wedge of unreality between life and literature, can describe his work as showing 'complete indifference to moral values or human justices'. And yet so far is this from the truth that not only do we find in it a fanatical insistence on the 'devoir' of the artist, but 'bonce' is one of the words that he uses with deepest feeling: 'cette bonte, cette distinction morale que maman avait appris de ma grand'mere a tenir pour superieures a tout dans la vie'—'sans doute ce n'est pas le bon sens qui est "la chose du monde la plus repandue", c'est la bonte. Dans les coins les plus lointains, les plus pcrdus, on s'emerveille de la voir fleurir d'elle-meme, comme dans un vallon ecarte un coquelicot parcil a ceux du reste du monde, lui qui ne les a jamais vu, et n'a jamais connu que le vent qui fait frissonner parfois son rouge chaperon solitaire.' It was the poet in him who wrote that; not the philosopher. Proust was surely wiser than his creed. Certainly one may be allowed to wonder a little at the inconsistency which can dedicate to 'mon incomparable ami', Leon Daudet, part of a work which describes friendship itself as not merely futile, but 'funeste'.

However, the new and original part of Proust's view of things is not his disillusion—that is ancient enough—nor yet his sense of the eternal appeal of 'la princesse lointaine' or the consoling power of beauty—these too are commonplaces. To say nothing of Greece, the authoress of *Genji* nearly a thousand years before had little here to learn from him: 'Hopes then the dew-drop upon the wind-swept grasses of the heath to build a safe abode?'—'What know you of sorrow, who wear not the traveller's

cloak, nor on an unaccustomed pillow rest, groping for dreams till dawn?'—'Genji tended to fall in love with those that gave him least encouragement. The ideal condition for the continuance of his affection was that the beloved, much occupied elsewhere, should grant him no more than an occasional favour.'—'And yet I know that even at this moment the sight of something very beautiful, were it only some common flower or tree, might in an instant make life again seem full of meaning and reality.' The only novelty lies in the special value Proust attaches to his mystical moments of *spontaneous* recollection; and in the close analogy he draws between these and the vision of the artist. No one, so far as I know, has suggested this before; though Wordsworth and others have groped round it, they did not distinguish between the two kinds of memory. Yet the suggestion that such moments of recollection arc somehow a triumph over time, an escape from transience, is surely more a figure of speech than a reality; due, it may be, to some psychological peculiarity which gave such moments for Proust the abnormal intensity of the mystic's communion with the Absolute. But even with him such moments passed and Time claimed his thrall again. Proust's was a very Pyrrhic victory. This 'Quest of Vanished Time', in a word, seems to me valuable for quite other qualities than its view of life. Ironically enough, had Proust understood himself better, he might have been less obsessed with the duty of self-understanding. For his philosophy, as so often, seems largely explicable by the physical and psychological peculiarities of the philosopher. Dominated in early years by his mother, he seems to have become one of those who cannot in maturity combine affection and desire for any woman. Again, partly no doubt as an invalid, he gives also the impression of an inordinate

egotism. Loving Albertine, his hero has on the one hand hardly a thought for her point of view; and on the other is possessed by a jealousy so intensely possessive that he cannot bear her to have a single idea or memory outside his grasp, and is happiest watching her asleep. Further, condemned by ill-health to an inactivity only too favourable to endless introspection, he tended, as most of us do, to make his own passion other people's duty. He came to deify his private eccentricity—a Narcissus making his God not only in, but out of, his own image. It was, to be fanciful, as if he who so detested life and so clung to maternal affection, was trying to find in his asthma and his shuttered, fumigated room an escape from this harsh world back to a semblance of the happier days before he first drew die choking bitterness of breath. His mysticism of memory, in short, seems to me one more example of the sanity of Goethe's maxim: 'Mysticism—unripe philosophy, unripe poetry.'

Such, however, is Proust's Universe. It may not be the universe we live in. But he makes it live, and he makes us live in it. That creativeness, above all, is the test of a writer's power. His is a bleak and yet beautiful new world, sordid and tragic at once; not our planet, but like enough for us to be able to breathe there and carry an ineffaceable memory back to our life on earth. There is more oxygen in its atmosphere, so that the intelligence is twice as keen; but also more unhappiness and solitude than in our world even; for its inhabitants have eyes too long-sighted, like those of old age, which can only focus beauty out of reach, so that all they seize grows blurred and dim. And yet their desolation is half-redeemed for them by the splendour of memory and imagination, of all they have lost and all they can never win.

Yet perhaps this scientific novel of a scientific age, with

its search for 'les grandes lois', is after all a lesson of the vanity, for the artist, of trying to encroach as an amateur on science. The answer to so many of Proust's general problems is to be found not in Proust, but in Freud. The qualities that make this novel good remain the same as have made older novels good—its powers of dramatic episode and description, its character-drawing, its poetry, its personality, its style. It is not a new philosophic revelation. It remains fiction, though it annexes the interest and the charm of other literary forms as well—of autobiography in the style of Montaigne and Rousseau, of *pensees li*ke those of La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyere, of prose-poetry like Chateaubriand's. Surely this is enough. Need we also acclaim Proust as a philosopher?

Of the form, again, and the construction of this novel we hear as much as of its philosophy—too much. No doubt the author very ingeniously explains at the end how to Swann, who is a prototype of Marcel himself, all the chains of causation which controlled Marcel's destiny ultimately lead back. But one may prefer forms of construction whose excellence does not need explaining. Proust's whole work, like many of his single sentences, seems to me in danger of bursting from all he tries to pack into it. It tripled its length between 1913 and his death, nine years later. It was unfinished because he died; it might have remained so, if he had lived.

Far more outstanding than the construction of the whole is the brilliance of episodes, like Swarm's love for Odette, or his interview when under sentence of death from his doctor with the Due and Duchesse de Guermantes, or Marcel's nocturnal scene with M. de Charlus when he tears that tyrant's hat to shreds, or his other nocturnal talk with Albertine, which is meant to cut the knot between them for ever and instead leaves him

fettered at her feet. Though the pace of the narrative, even here, is so deliberate as to recall those classical works where every line of text has a whole page of commentary —so deliberate that his Muse might be lame Nemesis herself (as, indeed, she often is)—yet the final impression only stamps itself the deeper. If he had written nothing else but those scenes, they would remain a new revelation in their art.

As with scenes, so with characters—amid much that is vague and episodic and prolix in this search for the vanished past, which seems itself at times to sprawl along like some prehistoric saurian, a few stand out far above the rest. Thus Charlus and Francoise and Tante Leonie live; where Albertine and Odette may be said rather to wreck other people's lives than to convince us of their own. They are more acts of God than his creatures, calamities than characters. Even Swann, in this immense Morality, plays rather the part of Jealousy than of an individual that we can see all round. It is on the innate agony of human passion that is built this masterpiece of satire and elegy in one; not on Charles Swann's individuality. It is Love lies bleeding. But when irony or suffering thus sharpen Proust's pencil, these figures he draws, whether generalised or not, rise up from his page and live. This is not least true when he seems almost parodying himself. Tante Leonie, for example, has little to do with the story; except that, like Swann with his jealousy, she with her valetudinarianism gives a foretaste of what Marcel too will one day become. But, though invalid old ladies are among the most familiar of satiric stock-characters, how new and how real she is; above all, in her dialogues with Eulalie! Thus, whenever Tante Leonie laments her approaching end, Eulalie consolingly replies that, with an illness like hers, she can easily live to a hundred: ' "Je ne

demande pas a aller a *cent* ans", repondait ma tante, qui preferait ne pas voir assigner a ses jours un terme precis.' Masterly indeed is the whole picture of this anile tyrant who drops alike those acquaintances that take her word for the seriousness of her malady, and those that do not take it seriously enough and presumptuously recommend a little fresh air.

Similarly with Francoise. Is there not a suspicion of self-parody in the indifference of this old family-servant, like her young master, to all that is in front of her and her emotion about what is out of sight, in the world of imagination; so that she exhibits a revolting callousness towards the kitchen-maid in agonies of colic, but is found sobbing in the library over the account of the symptoms in the medical dictionary she had been sent an hour before to fetch?—'He la! Sainte Vierge, est-il possible que le bon Dieu veuille faire souffrir ainsi une malheureuse creature humaine! He! la pauvre!'

Similarly with Proust's picture of a whole society—the Faubourg Saint-Germain. How far he distorts that world, as he distorts the world at large, a stranger cannot tell. But the result is an extraordinary impression of love-hate, of glamour gradually giving place to contempt. Anatole France compared the author of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* to 'an ingenuous Petronius'. The young Proust may possibly have had some likeness to Nero's 'Arbiter of Elegance', rather than to the picaresque author of the *Satyricon.* But the parallel has been caught up and overworked by later critics, whom one suspects of a certain vagueness on the subject of Petronius. It is too like comparing Watteau to Breughel. If we seek classical comparisons, there seems to me far more in common between Proust's picture of society and the mixture of mordant psychology and poetic pessimism with which Tacitus has recorded the

decadence of the old nobility of Rome, while on their ruin like ferocious thistles in their purple there towered a new race of upstarts. Tacitus, Saint-Simon, Proust—each has left his record of the brutality and baseness under the magnificence of aristocracy in decline; just as the same spectacle inspired Racine to create for the stage in *Andromaque* or *Britannicus* characters who are like were-wolves in satin. The scene where Swann comes to tell the Duchesse de Guermantes that he has only a few months to live and the Due hurries her jokingly away from this trivial interruption to their dinner-party, has become justly famous; but bitterer still is the irony of the Duchesse's words at another party a little later, where she is carefully avoiding her dying friend for fear he should ask her, as a last wish, to make the acquaintance of his wife Odette and his daughter—little guessing that the mockery of the years will make that wife her own supplanter and her husband's mistress.

'Je vous dirai, me repondit la duchesse, que moi je ne tiens pas excessivement a le voir parce qu'il parait, d'apres ce qu'on m'a dit tout a l' heure chez Mme. de Sainte-Euverte, qu'il voudrait avant de mourir que je fassc la connaissance de sa femme et de sa fille. Mon Dieu, ce me fait une peine infini qu'il soit malade, mais d'abord j'espere que ce n'est pas aussi grave que 9a. Et puis enfin ce n'est tout de meme pas une raison, parce que ce serait vraiment trop facile. Un ecrivain sans talent n'aurait qu'i dire: "Votez pour moi a l'Academie parce que ma femme va mourir et que je veux lui donner cette derniere joie." Il n'y aurait plus de salons si on etait oblige de faire la connaissance de tous les mourants. Mon cocher pourrait me faire valoir: "Ma fille est tres mal, faites-moi recevoir chez la princesse de Panne." J'adore Charles, et cela me ferait beaucoup de chagrin de lui refuser, aussi

est-ce pour cela que j'aime mieux eviter qu'il me le demande. J'espere de tout mon coeur qu'il n'est pas mourant, comme il le dit, mais vraiment si cela devait arriver, ce ne serait pas le moment pour moi de faire la connaissance de ces deux creatures qui m'ont privee du plus agreable de mes amis pendant quinze ans, et qu'il me laisserait pour compte une fois que je ne pourrais meme pas en profiter pour le voir, lui, puisqu'il serait mort!'

Proust's aristocrats are stupid (except the Duchesse with her barbed tongue), frivolous, futile, brutal, and vulgar; and yet, even *to* the end, this fallen race keeps a glamour for him. Was Proust a snob? It is a rather idle question, long and idly debated. Certainly, I think, he was at one period. It would be hard indeed *to* acquit of snobbery the Proust who describes with such unction, in his early series of articles on the *salons* of Paris society, how he saw some unfortunate person told at the door of the Countess Potocka that she was not at home, despite the carriage of the Duchesse de Luynes only too obviously waiting at the gate; and adds how he considerately waited till the despised and rejected one had turned the corner, before himself triumphantly claiming and obtaining entry. His aesthetic sensitiveness was charmed by the grace of good manners—he contrasts, almost passionately, 'cette peur de paraitre trop empresse . . . qui enlaidit de tant de laideur ct de gaucherie la plus sincere amabilite plebeienne' (which is surely but too true). Even his schoolfellows had mocked his own over-elaborateness, for which they maliciously coined the admirable word 'proustifier'. And again his imagination was thrilled by the pure poetry of ancestry. 'Je revoyais les armoiries qui sont peintes aux soubassements des vitraux de Combray, et dont les quartiers etaient remplis, siecle par siecle, de toutes les seigneuries que, par manages ou acquisitions, cette illustre

maison avait fait voler a elle de tous les coins de l'Allemagne, de l'ltalie, et de la France; terres immenses du Nord, cites puissantes du Midi, venues se rejoindre et se composer en Guermantes et, perdant leur materialite, inscrire allegoriquement leur donjon de sinope ou leur chateau d'argent dans son champ d'azur.' And again, of the Duchesse: 'Tous les chateaux des terres dont elle 6tait duchesse, princesse, vicomtesse, cette dame en fourrure bravant les mauvais temps me semblait les porter avec elle, comme des personnages sculptes au linteau d'un portail tiennent dans leur main la cathedrale qu'ils ont construite ou la cite qu'ils ont defendue. Mais ces chateaux, ces forets, les yeux de mon esprit seuls pouvaient les voir dans la main gauche de la dame en fourrures, cousinc du roi. Ceux de mon corps n'y distinguaient, les jours ou le temps menacait, qu'un parapluie dont la duchesse ne craignait pas de s'armer.'

He who had begun as the spoilt young Alcibiades of this society became, in the end, its Timon. But he never ceased *to* be obsessed by it, even when he had seen through it. Even at the close of his life he would rise from his sick-bed and venture out for the first time for weeks simply to see, for the sake of his book, how some Prince wore his monocle. That was rather pedantry than snobbery (just as he tends to deliver interminable lectures on the etymology of place-names, or on sexual abnormalities). But this preoccupation with the most trivial details about a rather trivial set of people grows at times exasperating. It remains perhaps fairest to say that this novel is a satire by an ex-snob. A writer who filled a large part of sixteen volumes with scathing satire of cricketers could hardly escape the charge of a somewhat excessive interest in cricket. Proust would have kept more sense of proportion about high society, had he not once been over-

fascinated by it. In this respect it is like his other obsession with perversion. The point is mainly important in so far as when he writes 'du cote de Guermantes', he gives us a certain feeling of falsity in his position—of hospitality exploited for literary copy; a blemish which is absent from those other sections of his work that deal with Swann's love or his own childhood by the Vivonne.

For the essential fascination of this book seems to me to he, not so much in its story, any more than in its philosophy, but in its spiritual autobiography, its intuitions flashed like X-rays on men and things, stripping them to the bare skeleton, and yet keeping in its blue flicker a sinister beauty that might belong to some necromancer of legend rather than to a modern scientific observer. *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is, above all, the recollections of a poet—another *Memoires d'Outre-Tombe,* even better deserving of the name, by one who is the literary descendant of that devoted pair, the La Rochefoucauld of the *Maximes* and the Madame de la Fayette who laid bare the heart of the Princesse de Cleves.

In Proust, indeed, France has added one more to her numerous *penseurs,* not to her few pliilosophers. He has the quick perception of a woman, not the organising logic of the builders of systems. It is the La Rochefoucauld in him that loves observations such as these:

'Dans une separation, c'est celui qui n'aime pas d'amour qui dit les choses tendres, Tamour ne s'exprimant pas directement.'

'Les mille bontes de l'amour peuvent fmir par eveiller, chez l'etre qui l'inspire en ne Teprouvant pas, une affection, une reconnaissance moins egoistes que le sentiment qui les a provoquees et qui peut-etre, apres des annees de la separation, quand il ne restera rien de lui chez l'ancien amant, subsisteront toujours chez raimee.'

(Of medical nostrums): 'Il y a une chose plus difficile encore que de s'astreindre a une regime, c'est de ne pas Timposer aux autres.'

'Les "quoique" sont toujours des "parceque" inconnus.'

'Toute mort est pour les autres une simplification d'existence.'

'Gouts inseparables chez les femmes du monde, de s'instruire et de s'encanailler.'

'Vous m'aimez, ma chere petite; comment avez-vous e*te* assez cruelle pour le dire?'

'La regie—qui comporte des exceptions naturelles—que les durs sont de faibles dont on n'a pas voulu, et que les forts, se souciant peu qu'on veuillc ou non d'eux, ont seuls cette douceur que le vulgaire prcnd pour de la faiblesse.'

Such generalisations were for him a passionate comfort. He was like a doctor consoled for a cancer which tortures him by fascinated interest in its symptoms (to which was added in Proust, I think, a certain morbid pleasure in pain). Thus Marcel takes a perverse delight in tracking down after Albertine's death her infidelities. They still agonise him with jealousy; but he is comforted by the discovery that his instinctive misgivings had been right, in the teeth of his 'miserable optimisme'. 'La realite la plus terrible donne en meme temps que la souffrance la joie d'une belle decouverte.' 'Belle decouverte?' one may sometimes ask, of such investigations as these. But this love of bitter and ironic truth tends in him, as in Webster, in Swift and at moments even in Hardy, to become a mania. It is delightful enough when it playfully invents the Due de Guermantes' formula for telegrams: 'Impossible venir, mensonge suit.' But not when it becomes a delight to him for its own sake, so that he has no longer eyes for human charm, 'comme le chirurgien qui sous le

poli d'un ventre de femme verrait le mal interne qui le ronge'. The doctor himself, one feels, is sick.

With this gift of generalisation, however, which involves an imagination as active as an immense automatic telephone-exchange, there goes a kindred gift for seeing analogies, which serves in Proust both the ironist and the poet. For the ironic Proust loves discovering likenesses in ants to elephants, partly to magnify the ant, as if he were throwing it on a magic-lantern screen for our clearer vision of it; but partly also, in a sort of mock-heroic way, as if to suggest that even the mightiest elephant is really only a larger ant. Thus to Marcel's aunt, who imagines Swann to be merely a highly respectable bourgeois, the idea that he was really intimate with the Prince of Wales, would have appeared as extraordinary 'qu'aurait pu l'etre pour une dame plus lettree la pensee d'etre personellement liee avec Aristee dont elle aurait compris qu'il allait, apres avoir cause avec elle, plonger au sein des royaumes de Thetis, dans un empire soustrait aux yeux des mortcls et ou Virgile nous le montre recu a bras ouverts'. (Even the slight inaccuracy—for Aristaeus visited the nymph Cyrene, not Thetis—is typical of the carelessness which alternates in Proust with his meticulous precision.) Or with the same elaborate 'pince-sans-rire' solemnity he will compare the capricious but cast-iron notions of Franchise with the injunctions of Jehovah, 'qui a cote de prescriptions feroces comme de massacrer les enfants a la mamefie, defendent avec une delicatesse exageree de faire bouillir le chevreau dans le lait de sa mere'. This recondite burlesque is most characteristic. It can be extremely amusing; it can also, at times, forget that 'brevity is the soul of wit'. Thus the sentence just quoted meanders on in the original into a second illustration both superfluous and bathetic. One of the most precious gifts of

a fairy-godmother to Proust would have been a blue-pencil.

But it is, above all, as a poet that he shows his power of imaginative comparison. For him it can light up life's most ordinary experiences, like a motor-drive: 'Les sapins de la Raspeliere, plus agites que quand s'elevait le vent du soir, coururent dans tous les sens pour nous eviter'; or again: 'ces cercles de plus en plus rapproches, que decrit l'automobile autour d'une ville fascinee qui fuyait dans tous les sens pour echapper et sur laquelle finalement il fonce tout droit, a pic, au fond de la vallee ou elle reste gisante a terre'. How often, driving, have I remembered these!—and surely such a power to make itself remembered, long after the book has returned to its shelf, remains one of the great tests of literature? This same imaginative gift in him can make a whole mythological ballet out of a telephone-call. Or again, when Albertine lies asleep, 'par instants, elle etait parcourue d'une agitation legere et inexplicable comme les feuillages qu'une brise inattendue convulse pendant quelques instants'. Not less delicate is the earlier comparison of Albertine and her playmates 'a un bosquet de roses de Pensylvanie, ornement d'un jardin sur la falaise, entre lesquellcs tient tout le trajet de l'ocean parcouru par quelque steamer, si lent a glisser sur le trait horizontal et bleu qui va d'une tige a l'autre, qu'un papillon paresseux, attarde au fond de la corolle que la coque du navire a depuis longtemps depassee, peut pour s'envoler, en etant sur d'arriver avant le vaisseau, attendre que rien qu'une seule parcelle azuree separe encore la proue de celui-ci de la premiere petale de la fleur vers laquelle il navigue'. Nor would it be easy to surpass that night-piece in *Le Temps Retrouve* of the darkened Paris of the air-raid years, lit by its winter moon. Of all the manifold impressions that Proust leaves, the most memorable

of all to me remains this gift of poetry—such that even in the midst of some passage when he seems like a bitter withering wind blowing on the flowers of a chateau-garden, the grey heavens will suddenly open and an unlooked-for shaft of sunlight turn his world to a dance of living green and gold again. Of all his principles none seems to me so true as this insistence on the power, and the need, of imagination to give life to life; as when, dining at Rivebelle, he suddenly sees the restaurant as a fantastic mediaeval universe where the tables are planets, and the waiters heavenly bodies, and the *caissieres* witches whose astrological calculations are busy keeping all these stars in their courses; and pities the diners who, instead of this beatific vision, are thinking of their bills. 'De quelle morne ennui est empreinte la vie des gens qui, par paresse ou timidite, se rendent directement en voiture chez des amis qu'ils ont connus, sans avoir d'abord reve d'eux, sans jamais oser sur le parcours s'arreter aupres de ce qu'ils desirentf There, surely, he lays his finger on the disease of our age, which will soon be too hurried *to* dream at all, except for the purpose of being analysed out of the neuroses its own frenzied haste engenders; and soon fly so fast as to leave behind, not only the waves of sound, but poetry itself. That seems to me the essential wisdom of Proust, among other things in him that are hardly sane. Had he only been able to keep his poetic imagination more living still, he would not, perhaps, have needed distance or misery to keep love alive in him; nor have seen only dull prose in whatever his hands could embrace.

Perhaps this failure was partly because he neglected so the other half of life—the physical half that obsessed D. H. Lawrence, just as Proust was obsessed by the analysing intellect. Had health not been denied him, had he kept more sanity about the physical side of existence, he might

have reached a less despairing view both of life and love. Had he been able to climb Alps with a different Albertine, instead of ruminating on reality in the lounges of Grand-Hotels, he might have discovered that mountains have beauties and beatitudes, not wholly Philistine, of their own; and that the cure for tormenting thoughts about existence may be found in other more pressing thoughts of how to reach food and shelter, which are easier to bring to a happy conclusion. Since happiness consists in healthy activity which satisfies one's wants, it is surely well to provide oneself, periodically, with wants that are possible and healthy to satisfy. 'I have sinned against my brother, the Ass,' said St. Francis on his death-bed; meaning that he had treated his body too ill. It is still on our brother, the Ass, that we most depend to ride into the Jerusalem of earthly content. And it is the part of the poet, in the words of Yeats, 'to stand like St. Michael with the trumpet that calls the body to resurrection'. For, again, 'though it is charming to have an affectionate feeling about flowers, that will not pull the cart out *of* the ditch'.

Perhaps there is something a little Teutonic, or Judaic, in the melancholy metaphysics of Proust—as there is a German heaviness about many of his sentences, especially when philosophy breaks in; so that they stagger to their close, groaning beneath their burden of provisoes and qualifications and alternatives, until one is reminded of a speech in Thucydidcs. It is not for a foreigner to dogmatise about French style; but I find it hard to believe that it would not be possible to better a sentence such as—' "C'est impossible ...", dit le docteur *qui,* comme les gens *qui* travaillent beaucoup et croient retenir beaucoup de choses *qu' ils* se figurent etre utiles, en oublient beaucoup d'autres, ce *qui* leur permet de s'extasier devant la memoire de gens *qui* n'ont rien a faire.'. How different from Anatole

France, for whom 'qui' and 'dont' were nettles to be rooted out wherever possible! Yet even Proust's most crowded and interminable periods preserve a kind of monstrous energy and variety, like those motley processions of faces that pass before one on a moving staircase on the Underground. Here is no Jacob's Ladder reaching to the stars and trodden by seraphic shapes; yet it vibrates with a vast complexity and power. And at other moments his style will suddenly drop its weight of thought and go gliding on its way with a melancholy grace like that Mariana of the South whom Marcel watched in childhood by the Vivonne—'revenant de quelque promenade sur un chemin ou elle savait qu'il ne passerait pas, oter de ses mains resignees de longs gants d'une grace inutile'.

Not as a gospel, then, nor yet as a novel *(Madame Bovary,* for example, seems to me a far more perfect work of art), but as a vast combination of confessions, *pensees,* and poetry, this book can be one of the most moulding experiences in life for those who read it. It remains typically French in its combination of vivid originality with loyalty to tradition and intelligence. A German would have made it too metaphysical and hysterical; an Italian, too rhetorical; a Russian too mystical and mad. Had it been written in England, the law would doubtless have suppressed what it has, with typical English illogicality, winked at in translation. There have been times since the War when our interests have clashed with those of our neighbour; when we have resented what seemed the short-sighted injustice of her policy; but when we come back from the miseries of statecraft to the world of letters and consider what in literature our age has produced to compare with this work, then the most civilised thing in Christendom seems still, as for now three centuries, the genius of France.

One thing catches my attention in looking back at these studies, which was not consciously present when they were written. They grew, indeed, at haphazard. I wrote of what I enjoyed. After a certain number had been written, it appeared that there was so much French influence in them that they had better take their present name. It was later still that I realised the especial dominance of Montaigne; and so, last but one, was written the essay on him. But what strikes me finally, in re-reading, about this series of writers from the author of the *Works and Days* to the author of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours,* is the tendency of serious literature to grow ever more delicate, more cloistered, more eccentric. The Muse has turned nun. Hesiod's work is just as alive with imaginative beauty as Proust's; and yet through its practical pages blows the wind of the open fields. It may be far less subtle; it is far more sane. The Middle Ages of Langland may be darkened with misery and mania; yet even they could produce the sanity of Chaucer, and of Chaucer's characters. Their superstition is not paralysed, like modern scepticism. They inhabited a haunted castle, not a sterile desert. With the coming of the Renaissance, Ronsard and Montaigne in spite of physical illness not only wrote books, but lived lives that still seem worth while. In Dorothy Osborne, in Herbert, or in Crabbe, their healthy sense of reality has not been undermined by their sensitiveness; though in both clerical poets there does appear a new sense of frustration, a sadness of minds at war within. But when we come to Beddoes, Flaubert, and Proust, genius seems now to impoverish writers' lives, as well as enriching them. Art becomes the pearl of a sick oyster. The brain corrodes body and heart. These instances are far too few to generalise from. Yet the general view of the Goncourts has already been quoted,

that the artistic temperament not only has, but must, be *maladif*. Today, when so much literature that is not popular seems simply insane, the question grows still more urgent. This book was not written to prove a thesis. I do not propose to begin now. It is a problem which everyone who cares for literature must face for himself. Though I suspect that the answer will be found not by the lucubrations of critics, but by the return of society at large to some simpler and saner way of life. Meanwhile (for we are likely to wait long for that) it would perhaps be something if at least authors and critics could recover some sense of proportion and cease to treat literature as a sort of sacrament; to talk mystically about the 'devoirs' of Art; to behave as if a well-constructed novel were a consolation for the worst-constructed life, and no human happiness could compare with a happy epithet. It is the critics rather than the artists themselves who started treating literature with this pompous solemnity, which has been bad alike for it and them; it was they who long ago began conducting controversies of literary taste as if they were holy wars on which hung the fate of Christendom. Only in the nineteenth century did creative writers become badly infected with idolatry of Art and manias for martyrdom. To the simplicity of Hesiod, as to the good sense of Johnson, it would have seemed absurd; but somehow it imposed itself on the passion of Flaubert and the subtlety of Proust. Great though they remained in spite of this, it is likely enough that with more sense of reality and healthier nerves they might have been greater still. It is time we shook off the mystical superstitions about literature that lead to the hermitage and the conventicle, to clique and coterie. 'N'esthetisons pas, ne byzantinons plus.'

MODERN CRITICISM

Meprise tous ces droles; a. quoi bon s'inquieter de ce que ces merles piaillent? C'est perdre son temps que de lire des critiques. Je me fais fort de soutenir dans une these qu'il n'y en a pas eu une de bonne depuis qu'on en fait, que ca ne sert a rien qu'a embeter les auteurs ct a abrutir le public, et enfin qu'on fait de la critique quand on ne peut pas faire de l'Art, de meme qu'on se met mouchard quand on ne peut pas etre soldat. Je voudrais bien savoir ce que les poetes de tout temps ont eu de commun dans leurs oeuvres avec ceux qui en ont fait l'analysc! Plaute aurait ri d'Aristote s'il l'avait connu! Corneille se debattait sous lui! Voltaire, malgre lui, a etc retreci par Boileau!' So much (and a good deal more) Flaubert found to say on the subject of criticism in general; while poor Louise Colet, reading his letter, doubtless drummed with her fingers on the table and wished, for the thousandth time, that her strange lover had a little more love in him and a little less hate. So, for generation after generation, the great writers have raged or laughed at the futility of critics: while the critics—why, they, for their part, remain as unabashed by such outbursts as a swarm of flies by an exasperated wave of the hand. They simply return to the attack and buzz about their victims as affectionately as before. It is surely a very odd situation. The creative writers despise the critics; and the critics, showing (in this respect, at least) a more than Christian meekness, repay this contempt with praises and loving studies of the writers; once the writers are dead, particularly. They take no trouble to defend themselves. That would be too superfluous. At most they may hint modestly in passing that

without them the great writers would infallibly be forgotten in a generation, and the whole world reel back into barbarism. But, as a rule, they do not even stop to consider the justification for their own existence. After all, that is natural; few of God's creatures ever do, however curious. They would be in danger of ceasing to exist, if they did. So that it would perhaps be asking too much to expect that criticism, which has not much in common with charity in other respects, should begin at home, by inquiring how far it is itself really worth while. Still, others may ask.

No doubt some criticism serves a real purpose; no doubt some of it is entertaining. But surely any one who is accustomed *to* question whether things are worth the amount of life they cost, must feel some dismay at the enormous quantity of time, energy, and sometimes intelligence that our age expends upon it. Besides, may there not be something worse than waste? In this babel of opinions and arguments about literature I feel there is much that is not only sterile, but also sterilising. Criticism becomes at times a superstition and a drug. The ivy begins to darken the house.

The present age has no great faith in anything; but it still tries hard to believe in experts. Not even the War, nor the Slump, can quite cure it of that. And certainly the world grows in complexity so fast that we he increasingly at their mercy. More and more the expert tends to dominate the intelligent individual; the old ideals of liberty to be replaced by the organisation, discipline, and inefficiency of the Termite State. The economists dispose of our worldly goods, the psycho-analysts of our souls. Over a large part of Europe, indeed, bodies and souls are nationalised and rationalised already. The process is said to be excellent for the train-services; but for

the human beings? And when it comes to the kingdom of literature, this tendency to set up codes and dogmas, dictators and high priests, to turn poetry into something between a church and a laboratory, a religion and a science, seems to me horrible. True, it is nothing in the least new for critics to talk as if they were the Eternal Father or, at very least, the Recording Angel. But there seems to be at the moment a recrudescence of this particular nuisance; and never was there less excuse for such dogmatisations. No doubt the spectacle of a number of very angry gentlemen of letters all laying down the law differently, and excommunicating one another like so many anti-popes, matters little in itself. One can look on, or away. But that a credulous faith in the literary judgements and systems they formulate should distort the taste and enjoyment of a certain number of other people, does matter rather more. There are, I feel, at present too many money-changers in the Temple of Literature, too many middlemen in Sion, too many guides and dragomans jabbering at the foot of Parnassus. It may be said that they only dupe those who are set on being duped by someone. It is likely enough that there is no real cure but the besom of Time. Still, this question of the uses and abuses of criticism is perhaps also not unamusing in itself.

Criticism is a wide term. To begin with, it can include the vast field of reviewing; and the usefulness of that no one can question. We may feel that we could do with less of it; but in the present spate of literature it is as necessary as the booksellers' catalogues it supplements. Reviewers are critics, among other things; though it is a very different task reviewing books that have not been read by the world, from re-viewing works it already knows. How different, indeed, too many reviewers inexcusably and incorrigibly forget. The reader wants first

and above all to gather what he will himself think of the book—what is it like? shall I like it?—not what some reviewer thinks. It follows that to him an inch of quotation is usually worth an ell of opinion. But the race of reviewers seems afflicted with a morbid conscientiousness (at least, that is the most charitable explanation) which makes them feel they are defrauding their editors and their public if they quote freely, instead of producing a complete line, all their own, for every penny paid them. The public might put up with that a good deal more philosophically than they suppose. There are periodicals one could name, where the reviewers are so anxious to have views, yet so uncertain what they are, and so nervous lest anybody else should find out, that one comes in the end to read nothing in their articles except the quotations—which, unfortunately, are the one thing they grudge. For, alas, reviewers too are human and long to mount the tripod; forgetting that we want an idea of the book in question rather than their idea of it, and to be told what it is rather than what they think it ought to be. Still, reviewing is a side-issue in criticism. We could not do without it. And the modern standard of courtesy, tolerance, and good temper among reviewers, unlike some grander critics, remains creditably high. Things are very different in this quarter from a century ago.

No less essential, again, are the literary historians and biographers, who give us facts, not feelings; truths, not opinions. True, they sometimes behave as if they had graduated at the University of Laputa. 'Pepys's illnesses', writes Mr. Ponsonby in an amusing passage, 'have been analysed by prominent physicians, a book written about his music, the sites of his houses searched for, his friends and acquaintances described, his own relations and his relations by marriage unearthed, his servants' genealogies

extracted from registers, estimates made even of his stature calculated in relation to a giantess he once went to see.' This is certainly one of the worst abuses of modern criticism. The earth, indeed, seems filled with people who only read books in order *to* write books, as it is with others who only enter into conversation in order *to* talk themselves. Vain curiosity, the primal curse in Eden, becomes a cardinal virtue in the world of learning. However, that is at least nothing new; little has changed since Montaigne wrote, three and a half centuries ago: 'This man, whom about midnight, when others take their rest, thou seest come out of his study, meagre-looking, with eyes trilling, flegmatick, squalide, and spauling, doest thou thinke that plodding on his books he doth seek how he shall become an honester man, or more wise, or more content? There is no such matter. He will either die in his pursuit, or teach posterity the measure of Plautus's verses and the true orthography of a Latine word.' Fifteen centuries earlier still Seneca had already ridiculed the follies of the Homeric Question 'and other matters of the same stamp, which if you keep them to yourself, will not profit your inner life, and if you talk about them, will make you seem not a sage, but a bore'. But human futility knows no limits. It learns everything and forgets nothing, except common sense. There was once a worthy Jesuit who bestowed infinite labour on making an alphabetical index of all the names of animals applied by the fathers to heretics. After all, it may have kept him out of worse mischief. Pere Hardouin, again, persuaded himself with more than German thoroughness that the Classics were all forged except Homer, Herodotus, Plautus, Pliny, and fragments of Cicero (the *Aeneid* and the *Odes* he also admitted; but they were not by Virgil or Horace). However, as he persuaded no one else, here,

too, no great harm was done. And what could surpass the young American scholar who recently presented a novelist of my acquaintance, on her arrival in the United States, with a list of all the words in her last work which would have been spelt differently on his side of the Atlantic?

Clearly, this sort of laborious imbecility, so persistent from age *to* age, must answer some deep human need; above all, perhaps, the need to avoid thinking. In any case, there is little to be done about it. Where there is learning, there will always be pedants also. Far better that Mr. Pismire and Dr. Emmet should waste their lives—it is, after all, mainly their own affair—than that the leisure of others who know how to use it, should be inspected and curtailed. No great harm results. The two worst features of this side of criticism are, I think, the dragooning of the young in the name of 'Research', whether they are fitted for it by nature or not, to rake together some rubbish to exchange for a rubbishy degree; and, secondly, the tendency of the general public to read books about literature instead of literature itself. For it is always easier to sit down and read the latest biography of Shelley than *Prometheus Unbound;* partly because modern books demand less effort than older ones; partly because great literature is seldom light reading. So that a Jeremiah might foresee an age which will know everything about our great writers—except their works.

But I am concerned really with criticism in its strictest sense—the expression of judgements or feelings about literature. And here at the very outset there is, indeed, one vital distinction to be made. On the one hand, there are the critics who set out to say what is, they think, absolutely true, and whose work makes no claim to any literary value; on the other, those who say what is, at all events, true for themselves, and may delight us by their

self-expression, as Montaigne delights us, even when we totally disagree. Those who like such words may call them respectively 'objective' and 'subjective'. This distinction is not, of course, a rigid one. There are infinite gradations between those who, like Anatole France, feel that they are simply writing a spiritual autobiography, as self-conscious as the *Confessions* of Rousseau, about their adventures among masterpieces, and those who, like Boileau, believe that literature can and must be judged by a code of iron laws; between the critics who approach the kingdom of the dead as poets like Orpheus might, and the critics who sit in judgement there, like Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus. Yet there remains a real opposition between the criticism, on the one hand, that is itself a by-form of literature, dealing with literature instead of with life directly; that sets out to please, and remembers the Graces; that is a creative utterance of the writer's own feeling and imagination—between this and, on the other hand, the criticism that tries to be scientifically cold, impersonal, and detached; that believes in absolute standards, and hopes to determine their laws; that attempts, *not* to express its writer's own feelings, but to impress the reader with the truth of his views. Though a critic may not be really in the camp he thinks he is, or seems at first sight to be. Thus Dr. Johnson imagined he was uttering general and absolute truths; in consequence his critical work is fuller now of falsehoods than it need have been. But we read it today, not so much because it is still such good criticism, but because it is such good literature; because, though often obsolete in its judgements, it expresses him so well and wittily; because, in a word, it throws even more light on Johnson than on Gray or Donne. In the same way we read Johnson's account of the Hebrides, not as a guide-book, but as a

book. The *Lives of the Poets* supplement Boswell. They are immortal for their combination of biography and autobiography; for their wit; and for their style. Johnson lives in confined quarters; but within their limits he is the most charming of hosts. Therefore, of all the critics of his age, with all his errors he alone is frequented still.

Of course, this idea of criticism as a by-way of literature—an art, though an applied art, rather than a science—is nothing new. Johnson conformed to it in practice, despite his principles; Sainte-Beuve with open eyes, though with discretion: 'Pour nous, en effet, faut-il le trahir?—ce cadre ou la critique, au sens exact du mot, n'intervient souvent que comme fort secondaire, n'est dans ce cas-la qu'une forme particuliere et accommodee aux alentours, pour produire nos propres sentiments sur le monde et sur la vie, pour exhaler avec detour une certaine poesie cachee.' Thus the disappointed author of *Volupte* and *Joseph Delorme* consoled himself by becoming the disguised novelist and poet of the *Lundis.* Are they the less great criticism for that? And after Sainte-Beuve, Anatole France in his turn yet more boldly avowed and defended the idea of the critic as autobiographer. But old as this view now is, it remains less familiar than the still older vision of the critic as a judge sitting, majestically periwigged, on the bench, not as a witness in the box. 'Judge', after all, is the original meaning of the word 'critic', and it may be argued that it is the business of a judge, not *to* give pleasure, but to administer justice. The Aristotlcs, the Scaligers, the Dennises, the Lockharts of criticism have all made general truth their object, and some of them utility also; it was their self-appointed task to discover the laws of literature and, usually, to see that these were kept. They do not lack would-be successors today.

But, then, are there any laws to keep? What Justinian or Napoleon has ever codified literature? Who set up judges over the poets? Are their judgements needful? Are they even helpful? How often can they be trusted even to be true? Perhaps I am by temperament too sceptical, too full of rebellion against all authorities and supposed experts, too unsociable and individualistic in a rooted hatred of all 'movements' and 'schools', coteries and conventicles, to be fair to criticism of this sort. For there can be no doubt that it is highly helpful to the coteries, at least. Critical formulas they love and live on. These are their banners and their battle-cries. By these they create; by these they judge what they have created to be perfect, and most other writers worthless. But how far the judgements of critics have helped that literature which has stood the only real test, the judgement of Time, remains much more doubtful; indeed, it would not be difficult to argue, I think, without going so far as Flaubert and dismissing all criticism as worthless, that their verdicts have, on the whole, been less help than hindrance to the writers of the past.

Certainly the greatest works of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages, which, after all, can face comparison with anything modern, were produced in societies where professional criticism did not exist and would have been considered a very curious occupation for an able-minded human being: so that this midwifery of critics is clearly not essential to the safe delivery of genius, nor their nursing to its preservation. It was only in the autumn of the Ancient World that these buzzing creatures were first engendered: in declining Athens, in half-barbarous Alexandria, in Rome under the heel of the Caesars. Then it was that the first bright spirits appeared to demonstrate to an admiring world that Homer snored and Virgil

stole. True, the first great philosophic critic, Aristotle, still bestrides us. In that prosaic work, his *Poetics,* there are brilliant things; its gift for asking the right questions, whatever one may think of some of the answers, remains very remarkable indeed. But on the whole, after years spent on it, it seems to me—will this sound very shocking? —an overrated book. How many of its conclusions are both true and important? Generalisations about art—if one may hazard yet one more—are certainly entertaining. They make excellent subjects for after-dinner conversation, especially as no two people in a room ever agree about them. They will not hold water, but they make amusing paper-boats to launch on a stream of talk. They lead nowhere, but they provide very pretty excursions. The trouble comes when people insist on taking them seriously; of that the history of the *Poetics* provides only too many examples. Who can resist a smile at the religious fervour with which scholars since the Renaissance have found Aristotle always right, even when they have translated him wrong, and have extolled the deep wisdom of opinions he never held? Subtle, but ponderous, like an elephant picking up pins, he remains, at all events, far more sensible and far less dogmatic (with much more right to be) than most of his successors on the philosophic side of criticism.

He has had a progeny like Abraham's—great names, often; and what have they produced? What single canon have all of their efforts established—of any practical value either for creating or for criticising literature—that can command general acceptance today? What laws have these philosophers and scientists of literature discovered comparable with the laws of physics, however shifting and fluid even these may be? The best that can be said for most academic criticism is that, as a rule, it has failed

most fortunately. It has won few triumphs for posterity to lament. Sidney failed to strangle the Elizabethan drama in its cradle; though the pedants got the better of Corneille. Similarly, the Romantics outlive the half-forgotten judges who condemned them to death. And among the Romantics in their turn, what better, or worse, example could be found of the futility of trying to subject practice in literature to theory, than Wordsworth's famous preface about Poetic Diction, with its singularly muddled arguments which were proved bad by Coleridge with arguments not much less muddled, in a case where no arguments could ever have been good? Who can argue a man into liking milk-pudding? And who, once more, can read now without a sense of hopeless weariness Arnold's exhortations to poets to employ ancient subjects and the grand style, to be highly serious and to criticise life?

So with all the threadbare controversies about Artistic imitation' and the Unities, about Classicism and Romanticism, about Art and Morality—they have dragged *on*, like the old wars of religion, to no end except exhaustion, tolerance, and *laissez-faire*. All critical laws and verdicts, watchwords and catchwords, formulas and precepts reduce themselves at last, in Moliere's wise phrase, to 'quelques observations aisles que le bon sens a faites sur ce qui *peut* oter le plaisir que Ton prend a ces sortes de choses'. Why not be content with that?

Nor can it be urged that critics are much more reliable (if we seek any absolute truth) in their particular than in their general judgements. It might have been thought that, however weak their theories of what makes literature good, they would at least have an intuition for good literature when they saw it; as a man may be a master of billiards without understanding dynamics, or a judge of

wines without knowing how grapes grow or the tongue tastes them. To some extent this is true; but reliable they cannot be called. Even the best critics are mainly wise after the event. It is not they who choose the great writers (that is done by time and the common reader): they only praise, expound, and comment on them when chosen. Even the deft fingers of a Coleridge, a Sainte-Beuve, or an Arnold, however skilful at embalming or dissecting the dead, have made some nasty slips in handling the living. And not the living only. It would make a most illuminating anthology, if someone—may it soon be done!—would collect all the verdicts of famous critics that time has turned to derision. It might even—but no, nothing could do that—inspire a few momentary doubts in the minds of some of their living successors. What name, for instance, more eminent in criticism than Coleridge?—who yet found Gibbon's prose detestable and Tennyson ignorant of what metre was; who could discover nothing 'sublime' in Greek literature and was so grotesquely inappreciative *of* French, as *to* give public thanks to God in a London lecture that he could not pronounce a line of the language—much as if a man should claim to be publicly admired for going about with one eye shut. Think, again, of Hazlitt, unable 'to make head or tail' of Shakespeare's *Sonnets;* dismissing Racine as one who cannot 'lay bare the heart', and simply 'reads lectures out of a commonplace book'; of De Quincey denouncing Keats for having 'trampled upon his mother-tongue as with the hoofs of a buffalo', or talking glibly of 'the prodigious defects of the French in all the higher qualities of prose composition' and of the inferiority of Voltaire to Horace Walpole; of Swinburne, shocked by *Venus and Adonis* and by Walt Whitman,

abusing Euripides as 'a mutilated monkey', and Ibsen as 'a Fracastoro[1] of the drama'.

There is no need to multiply examples. One would think there were warnings enough for any modern critic with the slightest knowledge of his predecessors, against undue dogmatism. Do they suppose themselves gifted with more wisdom than Johnson, or more genius than Coleridge? The only conclusion, I should have thought, must be a resolute scepticism about all judgements not confirmed by long experience. That would not prevent one *feeling* vigorous likes and dislikes of one's own as strongly as ever; but to *think* that one can impose them as valid matters of fact on other people! And yet living critics continue to utter their general statements about literature and their judgements on individuals with the same complete self-assurance as of old. 'Poetry is rhythm in touch with the Absolute'; 'Poetry is love speaking musically'; 'Art demands a bleak and uncompromising daylight for its operations' ('Kubla Khan', for example?); 'That it may survive, poetry must be anonymous; it must be strictly, religiously impersonal' (like Catullus, or Villon, or Byron?); 'Nothing rational is beautiful' (a view certainly prevalent among modern poets)—there is no need to multiply quotations. Our weekly and monthly periodicals hum with such oracles. Any one, with a little practice, could turn them out by the hundred. The complacent attitude to Art of such literary censors always reminds me of Flaubert's description of bourgeois at the sea-side: 'des "mosieurs" a lunettes d'or, lisant le journal, et de temps a autre, entre deux lignes, savourant l'immensite avec un air d'approbation'. It is, indeed, just the sort of criticism to be written for, or by, Bouvard and

[1]**Fracastoro, the sixteenth-century author of a poem called *Syphilis*.**

Pecuchet. The Bouvards and Pecuchets, with their credulous and pathetic longing to know the last word about everything, whether it can really be known or not, find balm for their tired souls in stark, dogmatic statements. A new generalisation, whether true or not, gives them a sense of mastery over the Universe. Jargon, in particular, is for them a sort of magic; the demon is in your power, once you have uttered his mystic name. So that these sublime pronouncements of literary dictators are twice-blessed: they gratify the author, sunning himself on the eminence of a private Sinai; they delight the hearer with all the joys of illumination, discipleship, and feeling superior to the uninitiate vulgar—the usual motives on which crank religions thrive. And so this sort of criticism continues highly successful. For the Bouvards and Pecuchets must have their certainties, in hard black and white. Not for them to rest with Montaigne 'on the pillow of ignorance': they hope for the Philosopher's Stone at the bottom of a saucepan. Thus criticism ends by becoming the theology or the alchemy of Art. That does not imply that it becomes at the same time consciously insincere. What people in fact mean when they talk of poetry being 'in touch with the Absolute', or 'Love speaking musically', is that they quite genuinely wish to pay compliments (surely superfluous) to Poetry; and, in their frenzy to avoid the banal, use vague and abstract words, preferably of as many syllables as possible, to the end that their readers may be as much in a mist as themselves, and the honour and glory of poetry be enhanced by such metaphysical noises. And, again, what people in fact mean when they say that 'Art demands a bleak and uncompromising daylight', or 'impersonality', is that they themselves demand these things; being, or wishing to be, or wishing to appear to be, severe intellectuals with

none of your sentimental nonsense about them. But then, why not say 'I demand', instead of 'Art demands'? It would sound less impressive, no doubt. But then these statements would become true, which is surely some advantage. They might even become interesting. But these gentlemen are so modest—in some ways—about speaking for themselves.

Of course, now too, as in the past, it might be urged by one who admitted most of their generalisations to be nonsense, that the practice of modern critics was better than their theories. It might even be better because of them; as scientists may be helped by working hypotheses, though actually incorrect; or as poets may gain a certain depth and unity from philosophies which must often, if not always, be false. But that does not seem to me in fact the case. Critics with creeds can seldom resist the temptation to become dogmatic and fanatic, damning anything outside their own conventicle. Such doctrinaire criticism is, I think, even less justified by its actual works than by its faith. For example—since it is necessary to take one—among the most esteemed of modern critics is Mr. T. S. Eliot, whose two chief critical works, *The Sacred Wood* and *For Lancelot Andrewes*, embody such statements as these:

> We can only say that Keats and Shelley would *probably* have become great poets, poets on a much greater scale than Crashaw: judging them on their accomplishment only, Crashaw was a finished master, and Keats and Shelley were apprentices with immense possibilities before them.

> There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters.

> 'Emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity.

(Of the 'savage comic humour' of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*—which Mr. Eliot for some extraordinary reason takes for a farce instead of a tragedy—as expressed in the last words of Barabas:

> But now begins th' extremity of heat
> To pinch me with intolerable pangs:
> Die, life! fly, soul! tongue, curse thy fill, and die!)

It is something which Shakespeare could not do, and which he could not have understood.

(Of Hamlet.)
So far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure.

(Again of Hamlet.)
The character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead. . . . Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge.

There are people who would put up, at a pinch, with 'a weakness in creative power' as great as Goethe's; and who are too dull to see why it is so much better to regard Hamlet as 'a failure' than to regard him as a Werther. And it is hard, too, to resist an indiscreet curiosity whether Mr. Eliot thinks himself a better judge in this matter than Coleridge or Goethe on the theory that he has himself no creative power; or on the theory that he has no weaknesses in it. Be that as it may, when a critic finds in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' or the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' prentice-work inferior to Crashaw; and expunges Romanticism from literature with a stroke of his pen; and knows better than Wordsworth himself how Wordsworth felt when writing poetry; and prefers *Coriolanus* to *Hamlet;* and can tell us for certain that Shakespeare could not have written parts of *The Jew of Malta,* or even understood them; it becomes pretty clear that he has not,

as they say, got up at three every morning merely in order to think like everybody else. I suppose if one hazarded the suggestion that it is rather belated now to dismiss as a failure a play like *Hamlet* that has fascinated its public for generations, Mr. Eliot might reply, like the character in Dorat's *Les Proneurs:*

> Quant au public, son joug vous tient-il done courbe?
> Le public est, monsieur, terriblement tombe.

If the public likes *Hamlet,* so much the worse for the public. For Hamlet's mother, we are told, is not an 'objective correlative' for Hamlet's violence of feeling. (One ruefully recalls Aldous Huxley's ironic summary of most 'advanced' reviews, as ' "Mary had a little lamb" translated into Hebrew and written in cipher'.) What is an 'objective correlative'? Mr. Eliot generously offers two examples. These, alas, contradict one another. But it finally emerges that he feels Gertrude too poor a creature so to upset her son—in other words *Hamlet* should really be called *Much Ado about Nothing.* Mr. Eliot has poured public scorn on'the psychologists', as it pleases him to call psycho-analysts. It might be no ill tiling if he read a little more 'psychology' before condemning Shakespeare's.

And what, again, of this flower of criticism tossed us in a coy footnote—'I have never, by the way, seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to *Othello's* Rymer's objections are, briefly, that to mix comic relief with tragedy is 'unhallowing the Theatre'; that the catastrophe outrages poetic justice—'if this be our end what boots it to be virtuous?'—the missing handkerchief ought to have been found in time; that Iago is a 'false, insinuating rascal', whereas a character of plain-dealing honesty has always been attributed *to* soldiers 'for some thousands of years in the world'; that he is ungrateful,

whereas 'Philosophy tells us it is a principle in the Nature of man to be grateful'; that Desdemona talks more meanly than 'a woman bred out of a Pig-stye'; and that, compared with Shakespeare, 'there is not a Monkey but understands Nature better; not a Pug in Barbary that has not a truer taste of things'. It would be interesting to know which of these propositions Mr. Eliot finds in such need of 'cogent refutation'. The most charitable explanation is that it is some time since he read them. Or was it the charm of the style?

But, of course, Mr. Eliot's ideas of beauty are true for him. If he and Thomas Rymer feel like that, they feel like that. One may suspect these eccentric *gouts d'alcove* of being sometimes a little factitious; still, one cannot prove that. But to be expected to accept such views as absolute general truths is at first a little staggering. True, one quickly grows hardened; after being told what Shakespeare could not have even 'understood', one learns with comparative calm that he is less 'sane' than Dante; that Machiavelli was 'innocent' and 'pure in heart' ('only the pure in heart can blow the gaff on human nature as Machiavelli has done'); that human goodness is 'a myth' (for Mr. Eliot would have us know that he can 'blow the gaff' just as hard as Machiavelli), but the divine right of kings 'a noble faith'; that Hobbes was 'an extraordinary little upstart'; and that it is 'an unanswerable argument' against determinism that it 'makes praise and blame meaningless'. Why should they not be meaningless? Certainly as a critic Mr. Eliot does his best to make them so.

It might, of course, be urged that a critic can easily seem more dogmatic than he means to be. He may be intending to speak only for himself. He cannot be expected to add at the tail of every sentence: 'or, at least,

so it seems to me'. But that plea cannot cover the tone of passages such as occur in the introduction of Mr. Eliot's selection from Ezra Pound: 'I have met very few people in my life who really care for poetry. . . . Most people will find in this book things that they like and tilings that they dislike; only persons who like poetry and have trained themselves to like poetry will like it all. And of such persons there are not many.' Here, to be sure, is the living echo of Bramston's 'Man of Taste':

> This is true taste, and whoso likes it not,
> Is blockhead, coxcomb, puppy, fool, and sot.

Only in its wearier tone this curious cold insolence seems not so much deliberate as the utterance of some Pharisaic ghost, hardly conscious whom it is addressing in the living world, so remote has it grown.

The selection in question would, indeed, have been none the worse, had its editor devoted a little less space to celebrating his own excellences, and a little more time to correcting the howlers that disfigure its classical quotations. Such things are trifling enough in themselves; but Mr. Eliot can hardly expect special indulgence, after ordering the late Charles Whibley to execution for a simple phrase of two words: 'a critic would not use so careless a phrase as "Tasso's masterpiece" '. But indeed we all stand in mortal peril: 'It might be said in our time that a man who cannot enjoy Pope as poetry, probably understands no poetry.' Here is a wholesale banishment among the Goths hanging over our heads. Pope would doubtless have smiled with gratification to hear such a judgement; but I trust he would also have had the sense to laugh at it. For how can any rational being make such enormous statements? As certitude follows certitude on these pages, and hyperbole hyperbole, I find myself murmuring again and again, like the Marquise whose husband

was pontificating at dinner about the intimate relations of Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon: 'Eh bien, Monsieur, que faites-vous pour etre si sur de ces choses-la?' Mr. Eliot has himself observed that 'English criticism is inclined to argue or persuade, rather than to state'. It is possible that this may be a smaller fault than he supposes. Certainly he will be acquitted of it.

This unfortunate side of the criticism of Mr. Eliot and his school is due, I think, partly to their very zeal for the good cause, and to their conception, of which something has been said above, of critics as commissioned to improve and reform mankind. They see themselves as defending the Capitol from the Gauls, the faith from the infidel. 'The Charles Louis Philippes of English literature are never done with', writes Mr. Eliot, in the tone of a weary Hercules, 'because there is no one to kill their reputations; we still hear that George Meredith is a master of prose, or even a profound philosopher. The creative artist in England finds himself compelled, or at least tempted, to spend much of his time and energy in criticism that he might reserve for the perfecting of his proper work: simply because there is no one else to do it.'

It would be interesting to hear the names of a few of these creative artists who so nobly allowed their lives to be blighted in the sacred cause of 'killing reputations' lest English literature should go to the dogs. I suppose Mr. Eliot is thinking, among others, of himself. But who *are* the others? Matthew Arnold? Was it criticism that dried up the stream of his poetry? If so, it was a pity. But I know no reason to think so. And why this duty of 'killing artists' reputations'? If they can be killed, would they not die naturally, even if let alone? And *can* they be killed in any case? Was Bentley so wrong in his brave saying that no man was ever written down except by

himself? And why should any sane being, fortunate enough to be able to produce living work of his own, feel 'compelled' or even 'tempted' to take a tearful farewell of his Muse in order to go 'killing reputations'? It is a delightful picture, surely—the republic of letters in danger, and English literature screaming to be rescued from the reputation of Mr. Meredith. So the Aztec kings at the new year swore to keep the sun in its proper course, and the monks in Rabelais watched to protect the moon from the wolves.

The truth is, I think, that critics are extremely impotent in either giving or destroying reputations of any permanence; and we should surely be thankful that it is so. My blood runs cold at the idea of a dictator of English letters, even Mr. Eliot—what visions of hungry thousands being fed on Crashaw and Lancelot Andrewes, and even smaller Anglican and Catholic fishes! And if it is improbable that critics do much good to the world by assuming the style of self-appointed censors and inquisitors, it seems to me that they certainly do themselves a good deal of harm. It is easy to enjoy being a Jeremiah. The taste is soon acquired, and that mantle had already worn pretty threadbare by the end of the last century after passing through so many hands. Such prophets come in the end to look about for reasons for weeping over Jerusalem. For one thing, there are so many cinemas. Or again, mourns Mr. Eliot, Marvell 'etait une belle ame, comme on ne fait plus a Londrcs'. How on earth do we know (even if Marvell, for that matter, had been 'fait a Londres')? Or again: 'Matthew Arnold was intelligent, and by so much difference as the presence of one intelligent man makes, our age is inferior to that of Arnold.' Which must mean, if anything whatever, either that there was one intelligent man alive in 1850, and

not one now, or that by some very odd coincidence all intelligent men who have died since 1850 have been replaced by others, except one. It seems strange, in the world of today, to be so hard put to it to find themes for lamentation. 'My great ambition', writes Horace Walpole, in anticipation of old age, 'is not to grow cross.' It is not a very ambitious ambition; but I know few as sensible, especially for critics.

But even worse than the peevish gloom of this kind of criticism, is its religious grimness. Literature, which one fondly imagined *to* be a kind of pleasure, turns out to be a sort of mortification of the spirit. The great words of praise are 'serious' and 'impersonal'; 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'. The artists and writers I have known have been persons whose personality was anything but extinct. However, perhaps they were false brethren, wolves in sheep's clothing. But surely, in fact, there are artists of all sorts and conditions, from Byron to Jane Austen; why should they all be as alike as so many peas? And as for the appreciation of their work, I would rather a man approached it as a plum-pudding than as a sacrament. Far better follow that excellent motto of one of Herrick's poems: 'To live merrily, and to trust to Good Verses.' But your critical Savonarolas will have no Abbeys of Thelema; they write of the joys of literature like poor Maupcrtuis who 'ecrivait sur le bonheur d'une maniere a faire pleurer'. Indeed Mr. Eliot speaks in a curious sentence of 'the dreary cemetery' of literature. That he should find it so is not surprising; but that he should admit it even to himself, seems remarkable. Or was it just badinage? I can hardly think so. Sometimes I have wondered whether such critics really hate all literature unconsciously, with a Platonic and Puritanic

hatred; and find some outlet for their feelings in putting the Muses on bread and water. Equally severe and austere, to take another instance, is Professor Herbert Read, who finds in Jane Austen 'the atmosphere of a marionettes' opera —an atmosphere that explains the charm which Jane Austen undeniably exercises on people whose particular need is to be amused in a recondite way. Such people have a sophisticated love of "mere quaintness", and seek this quality in all the arts.' It is a pity Miss Austen should so fail to amuse Professor Read; for Professor Read might have amused Miss Austen a good deal. Most people, not professional critics, in his position would say: 'I have a blind spot for Jane Austen.' Everybody has blind spots for somebody. But our Torquemadas will hear of no such moderation; and Professor Read, in his *English Prose Style,* from which the above condemnation of Jane Austen comes, orders writers to the block right and left for lapses in their style, with a rigour perhaps slightly excessive in one who can himself write: 'Once started on a trend of close reasoning, even the break of a paragraph may be disconcerting.' Was it Congrevc who said?—

> Rules for good writing they with pain indite,
> Then show us what is bad by what they write.

At all events the strange conclusion of the book: 'In fact, all that is necessary for clear reasoning and good style is personal sincerity', may be thought, as far as reasoning is concerned, to refute itself.

But that is not the view of Professor Read. 'In case I may be accused', he has written in a more recent work, 'of excessive dogmatism, I would ask: what is a dogma but a plain statement of an axiom, and what is a dogmatist if not a man who takes the fewest words to express his axioms clearly and then to apply them generally?' To which the answer is surely that an axiom means, ordinarily,

a self-evident truth admitted by all men; whereas a dogma is a doctrine promulgated by authority. Self-evident truths need no authority to promulgate them; and the objection to dogmatists is surely that it is neither good manners nor good sense to claim authority which is merely self-assumed, and certainty where certainty is not to be had. Professor Read, however, hardens his heart: 'I would even suggest that what is wrong with criticism today is not too much dogma but too little. . . . Criticism is a tonic.' It would be interesting to know more exactly who are all these modern critics who deliver judgement with too blushing diffidence; certainly they blush unseen. And it would be interesting also to discover why an opinion should provide a more stimulating 'tonic' when asserted as a fact, which it is not, than expressed as what it is—an opinion. Certainly when Professor Read lays it down in his appropriately named *Sense of Glory*, for example, that national hatred is a consequence of 'humanism' (in the teeth of the tolerance of the eighteenth century); or that 'no mockery of the human spirit ever survives the hour of its birth' (as if *Candide* were dead); or that irony is 'the hall-mark of an insincere age' (as if Thomas Hardy had been insincere); or that Sterne is a classicist, because he is a humorist and 'all real humorists are classicists', though, on the other hand, 'we find no real humour among the ancients' (so that nothing in the Classics, apparently, is really 'classical'); or that Sterne is 'the precursor of all psychological fiction' (as if Madame de la Fayette or Marivaux or Richardson had never existed); or that Rousseau (whose style is, on the contrary, singled out by Lanson as the first in the French eighteenth century to be 'oratoire, ample, resonnante') broke down 'the dignity, the orotundity, and the volubility of his predecessors' (the pomp of Fontenelle, no doubt, and the

'orotundity' of Voltaire!)—to such a parade of paradoxes one may ask whether much value, 'tonic' or other, is really added by their 'dogmatism'. For if one may hazard a generalisation about these revolutionary generalisations, it is that they are without exception false. When the leaders of a movement allow themselves such orgies of certainty, it may be imagined what happens with the camp-followers.

But, after all, that some modern critics should stultify themselves by being so doctrinaire, need not matter much to any one but themselves. The real harm lies, I think, in the effect of too much criticism on the creative writers and, much more, on the public of today.

No doubt every creative writer must be in some degree a critic, too; every revision of a man's own work entails self-criticism. But there may come a point where the critic in him rises up and strangles the creator—cramps his style, paralyses his daring, gives him a mental stammer. The more sophisticated the age he lives in, the greater the danger. To quote Flaubert once more: 'Ce qui nous manque, c'est l'audace. A force de scrupules, nous ressemblons a ces pauvres devots qui ne vivent pas de peur de l'enfer, et qui reveillent leur confesseur de grand matin pour s'accuser d'avoir eu la nuit des reves amoureux.' There are hundreds of authors at work today who would never fall into the lapses of taste that mar page after page of Shakespeare; the technical slovenlinesses of Wordsworth would shock a modern writer of magazine verse. **But** we remain even more incapable of their greatness than of their faults. One does not travel far, if one takes one's own temperature at every step. 'Par l'analyse,' writes Amiel, je me suis annule.' One of the fundamental conditions of good writing is, I believe, the right balance of conscious and unconscious in the writer's mind. In

critical ages the conscious encroaches; till men by perpetual thinking of their thoughts lose their imaginative originality and try to replace it by cold-blooded eccentricity.

Still, this is not an objection on which great stress can be laid. Critics will not cease criticising, and the public will not cease paying them for it, just because they cramp creative writers. And after all an author of any real force will triumph over this difficulty, as Flaubert himself did. Demosthenes will learn to speak, even with a pebble in his mouth. It is the hampering effect of too much criticism on the very public which it pretends to help, that seems to me a more serious indictment.

To begin with, too critical an attitude is liable to destroy the spontaneity of a reader's response. Moliere read his plays to an old woman; so, centuries before, on the other side of the world, did Po-chu-i with his poems. They were not merely being capricious. They knew what they were about. Watch a cultivated audience at a play, in London or Cambridge, and listen to their conversation in the intervals—the febrile, intellectual snobbery, the desire to attract attention by some peculiar view, the assertion of superiority by some contemptuous epigram, the slavish fear of backing the wrong horse and praising where it may prove smarter to have sneered. It is all very entertaining, but also a little nauseous. The naked human rage for superiority is not pretty, when its wrappings of politeness slip down and leave it bare. No doubt, in a far less critical society this tendency would still in some degree be there. 'Plus il y a d'hommes ensemble, plus ils sont vains, et sentent naitre en eux l'envie de se signaler par de petites choses.' But the present age seems to suffer particularly from this malady. Madame du Deffand divided mankind into 'trompeurs, trompes, et trompettes': we are deafened with the last.

Spontaneity, again, even if it escapes this critical snobbery, may still suffer from overmuch analysis. One may come to acquire a sort of mental X-ray apparatus which reveals in everything one meets the underlying skeleton. Every guest at the feast becomes a death's head. I know by experience how the spectre of Aristotle may follow one into every theatre, bothering one with reflections that never trouble the rapt absorption of one's neighbours. True, the habit may be overcome; for good criticism, it must be. For the critic, like the poet, must work with 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'; giving sympathy and surrender, if possible, at the moment, and judgement only afterwards. But this suspension of disapproval is easier to talk of than to practise; and nibbling at criticism clearly results for many in less pleasure, not in more taste. X-rays are dangerous.

Further, there is, I believe, a real danger of distortion in that dragging of certain reactions from the unconscious up into consciousness, which a great deal of criticism deliberately sets out to accomplish. In a poem, for instance, certain nuances of association, or of rhythm, may be only dimly felt by the ordinary reader; and rightly so: focus the attention on them, and the total effect becomes quite different. Those who practise such analyses, sometimes claim that their enjoyment is thereby increased. But one may wonder whether they do not enjoy the fruit, really, because they like climbing the tree; partly for the exercise, partly for the eminence. Here, again, personal taste clearly comes into play; certainly unsuspected beauties of form are sometimes revealed by such dissections. But this sort of anatomy can easily be overdone, and one is too often reminded by its results of Swift's hideous jest about the woman whose appearance was so strangely altered for the worse by

being flayed. 'Quel fleau pour la poesie qu'un geometre!' as Madame Dacier feelingly observed. I retain a prejudice for looking at pictures not too much through microscopes, and a suspicion that, except where the lapse of years has brought obscurity, a message that needs much explaining seldom merits it. This is no very eccentric view. Surely Keats felt the same when he made his exclamation that 'Philosophy would pluck an angel's wing'; and Goethe, when he observed: 'One must ask children and birds how cherries and strawberries taste.' True, they cannot tell one, ask as one will, since their tongues are more for taste than speech; and certainly there arc sophisticated tastes also, which can only be painfully acquired, and are worth acquiring even painfully; but we are too prone to assume that we necessarily add cubits to the stature of our artistic appreciation by taking great thought about it. In literature (and throughout I am speaking only of that and of no other arts—I know too little of the rest) there are heavens, I believe, only to be entered by those who can retain or recapture the fresh simplicity of youth.

Nor is the objection simply to overmuch anatomy and introspection in reading literature or seeing drama; too much criticism seems to me to lead also to a certain dulling of real sensitiveness in another way as well. For it is not the most sensitive who chatter most about their artistic sensations. There is such a thing as reticence. 'What is set out for show, is half sold.' Here, too, it is apt to be the Regans and Gonerils who talk most glibly. That, at least, is my own conclusion, after years of lecturing: there are feelings one docs not want to publish, feelings that one has blunted by doing so. And, above all, these stupid controversies about the merits of authors (as if such things could possibly be proved) lead only to

dust and desolation. It is as if rhinoceroses had done battle on one's favourite rose-bed; only a rhinoceros would.

These doubts of the benefits of criticism lead naturally to another: the question of criticism in education, and the teaching of taste. One may ask whether the critical mania of the age has not sown here too its tares; leading us *to* try to make the young critical instead of cultivated. I doubt if taste can to any extent be taught directly; and I doubt still more if the way to teach it is to lecture people on such matters as why bad poetry is bad, and silly judgements silly. It is too negative—like thinking it necessary to lecture children on the childishness of dolls and lollipops; surely they may be left to grow out of them. Adult interests will catch their attention, and they will quietly put away childish things. So with literature; we can only put its best things in the path of the young, and trust to its beauty working on them as Nature's beauty on Wordsworth's Lucy. I would far rather a young man spent his time reading *The Earthly Paradise* on his back in a punt (I do not say he could not do better) than stewing over critical periodicals. How far, indeed, English Literature should be *taught* in Universities is still an open question. In schools it must be, for the sake of the children of the Philistines. But when it comes to lectures to young men on something as difficult and delicate as taste, I remember with apprehension the man in Tchekov who must needs teach his kitten how to catch mice; with the only result that it fled ever after at the sight of one. In the same way Lord Chesterfield, after long years of letters and lectures on 'the Graces', produced a young man who ate gooseberries at a dinner-party out *of* the dish. Lectures on literature are terribly apt *to* become like char-a-banc trips to Grasmere. 'The dons', said Samuel Butler,

'are too busy educating the young men to teach them anything.' That is particularly the danger with a subject like literature. Sometimes I have a sort of nightmare of the future, in which there are lectures on how to look at scenery, and how to see jokes, and how to make love; lectures for teaching roses how to grow and noses how to smell them; with panegyrics of the opinion of some unborn Mr. Eliot that roses are sentimental and malodorous, compared with the perfume of the prickly pear.

However, the place of criticism in education is here a minor point; it is its position in the modern world at large that seems to me so exaggerated. We squander on it an amount of time and energy we can ill afford; and for lack of a little ordinary scepticism we encourage in its supposed experts an arrogance as ugly as it is imbecile. For, unfortunately, there are in the modern world a number of people, mainly young, with starved religious instincts who rush, like bubbles to the side of a tea-cup, to the feet of anyone who will hold forth to them with sufficient dogmatism in a sufficiently churchyard tone of voice; just as Proust's Dr. Cottard made his fortune from the day when some friend 'lui conseilla l'air glacial . . . peremptoire quand il fallait parler'.

Yet there remains the other side of criticism already mentioned—its artists, those who, instead of vying with astrologer and alchemist, see that literature makes an excellent subject for literature, however little it lends itself to science. Look back on the literary criticism of the past: how much of it survives because of its literary, not its critical, worth—for its happy style or vigorous expression of its author's personality! Longinus and Horace, Boileau and Pope; Sidney's *Apology* and Shelley's *Defence;* the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and the *Lives of the Poets*—is it too much to say that their ideas are no longer new, and

often untrue, and yet we read them for the pure pleasure they still give? Even as criticism, the wildest judgements of Pepys on Shakespeare are worth volumes of modern verbiage, because they are so genuine and true for Pepys, if now for no one else. So with Fontenelle, when he dismisses Aeschylus as 'une espece de fou'; so with Johnson on *Lycidas.* We shake our heads, but we read on. For Fontenelle and Johnson have more force and charm, more style than fifty 'corrected critics put together; and it is style that matters ultimately in criticism, as in any other form of literature. The wiseacres who write so hideously of the Beautiful, have their vogue and pass; while a Sainte-Beuve, too subtle to get enmeshed in any system, too sceptical to call his work by any more pretentious name than *Causeries du Lundi,* lives on above their dust. Those weekly 'talks' of his will soon have lasted out their century. Yet he had, in the end, no principles, no formulas left at all: 'II craindrait' (said Taine of him) 'de froisser la verite en l'enfermant dans des formules'; he used none of that jargon dear to mediocrities, who will not recognise that subtle thinking does *not* entail complicated language. Not imagining himself a scientist, he did not conceive liimself licensed to be a barbarian or a bore; not thinking of literature as a sort of religion, he did not talk of it in tones borrowed from the sacristy. There are critics who could be taken more seriously, if they took themselves and their subject less so. No one will accuse Boileau of undervaluing his art; yet it was he who once humorously remarked: 'II faut avouer que j'ai deux grands talents, Tun de jouer aux quilles, l'autre de bien faire des vers.'

Is it then claiming too little for criticism, or asking too much of it, to suggest that those who practise it should cultivate enough good sense and good taste to regard

their calling as a minor art, but still an art—something which will add pleasure, not peevishness, to life; which will look for new beauties rather than new truths? It is the poet's business, said Sidney, to make 'the much-loved earth more lovely'; it is the critic's business—the most truly useful part of it—to do the same for the much-loved world of letters. To point out the elusive greatness, for instance, of a writer like Racine is much more valuable than finding faults, or cramping the godhead of Apollo within the limits of some petty aesthetic creed. That simple utility, and the pleasure good criticism can give in itself, seem to me the real reasons for writing it; it becomes a mixture of portrait-painting and autobiography, of table-talk and poetry. Different ages suffer from different sorts of charlatanism; sometimes they are religious, sometimes they are political. It may be an illusion to suppose that our time is afflicted with more than its share of the literary kind; there may have been just as much critical cant fifty years ago, now simply forgotten. But I doubt it. In any case the educated world today is, I feel, too full of persons who have been or are being, in Blake's excellent phrase, 'connoisseured out of their senses'; too full of criticism which provokes any mind in the least critical to exclaim, as Hazlitt *to* William Gifford: 'But you, sir, are a nuisance and should be abated.' To put about dyspeptic paradoxes with the air of a public authority is not merely useless; it serves, in so far as it succeeds, *to* lower the general level of intelligence and taste. We live, as it is, in a Europe brutalised with dictatorships of the Right and the Left; we need no Hitlers to adorn the republic of letters.

OF SILENCE

Conticuere om—so runs a half-finished sentence which the spade has brought to light among the scribblings on the street-walls of Pompeii. *'Conticuere omnes*—'all fell silent'—it is a strangely fitting phrase for that city of the dead; as if it had been in some moment of second-sight that this Virgilian description of the hush of the court of Carthage before Aeneas' story of the last night of Troy, was thus scrawled by an idler's hand on the walls of the Campanian city—itself so soon to pass likewise through a fiery darkness into an eternal silence; as if, too, in the fearful suddenness with which fulfilment followed, time had even been lacking *to* complete the last three letters of this writing on the wall. I know no ruins where silence broods with a more sombre majesty. It is enough to turn aside from the main streets, with their crowds of sight-seers, down some quiet side-alley leading to the open countryside, and there to sit watching that silvery smoke, pallid as death, curl on and on eternally from the grey *cone* of Vesuvius above the cypresses. The silence of the past is there; the silence of the present; the silence also of that future when all our world will lie at last like one wide Pompeii. For there is nothing more ancient than silence, nothing more destined to endure. We forget that, since sound requires an atmosphere, our noisy little earth is only a clamorous islet, a transitory Pithecusa of the Apes, lost in an infinity of stillness. Among the short-lived deities of men Silence has never had an altar: but she will remain when other gods are not even the ghosts of a twilight memory, and the last vain cry of their last worshipper has died away.

It is strange, indeed, that the Greeks, whose vivid fancy could bestow a maiden's beauty and a broken heart even on the empty voice of Echo, imagined no such gracious embodiment for Silence; which played a part indeed in their religion, but never gained there a personality. It was enjoined at their sacrifices, lest a word of ill-omen should fall from some heedless tongue; it was the attribute of deities; but it was never a deity itself. To Pan belonged that 'panic' stillness which lurks among the mountains of Greece and Sicily through the hushed hours that follow noon; when every leaf hangs motionless and beasts lie low for fear of waking the drowsy Goat-god in his anger, while the uneasy traveller hears his own heart beating in the quiet of the hills. And again, one of those sudden pauses in the talk of a whole gathering, which our grandmothers used to attribute to 'angels' wings', would move a Greek to say: 'Hermes is come into the room.'

Similarly, even amid the innumerable divinities of ancient Rome, Silence still remained an Unknown Goddess. Vaticanus they knew, the god of the child's first cry; and Fabulinus, who watched over its first articulate word; and shapes more shadowy still, like Aius Locutius, the Voice that spoke once in the darkness, with one vain warning of the coming of the Gauls: but for that auguster power whose finger is laid for ever on her lips, no place was left in their crowded pantheon, and no prayer called on her who had never uttered word.

Yet if silence had no divinity for the Ancients, they set it high indeed as a virtue. The cult which no priest offered, was paid with endless reiteration by sage, philosopher, and poet. Indeed, from the fervour with which the Greeks praised silence, it is clear how little they practised it. The commodity must have been so precious because so rare. Hence that rather naive admiration of

the rest of Hellas for the gruff laconism of the Spartans, expressed in endless anecdotes like the tale of their answer to Philip of Macedon. For when that King wrote threatening that if once he came within the marches of Laconia, he would leave them not one stone standing upon another, they wrote in reply the one word: 'If.' But throughout the rest of Greece only philosophers could aspire to this laconic standard; Plutarch, for instance, records with what we feel to be excessive edification, the retort of Zeno at a dinner given in Athens to the ambassadors of Persia. There the Founder of Stoicism, amid the chatter of his more frivolous fellow-philosophers, preserved a rigid taciturnity: 'whereupon the said Embassadors and strangers of *Persia* began to bee merrie with him and to drinke unto him round, saying in the end: "And what shall we report of you, Sir *Zeno,* unto the king our Master?" "Marie (quoth he), no more but this, that there is an ancient man at *Athens* who can sit at the boord and say nothing." '

There are colder climates we could name where the accomplishment in question is less remarkable. But Plutarch is lost in admiration ('Thus you sec that silence argueth deepe and profound wisedome'), and reinforces so excellent a lesson with the no less excellent example of the geese of Cilicia, 'who when they be to take a flight into *Cilicia* over the mountaine *Taurus,* which is full of eagels, take up everie one in their bill a good big stone, which serveth them instead of a locke or bridle to restraine their gagling; by which devise they may passe all night long without any noise, and not be heard at all or descried by the said eagles'.

There is, indeed, a good deal of curious information in Plutarch's whole essay 'Of Garrulity'—a passably garrulous piece of work itself; containing various other apt

illustrations of its theme, such as the silly barber who got himself tortured for babbling in Peiraeus the first dim rumour of the Sicilian disaster, and was no sooner untied from the rack than he turned to the executioner and begged him for any later news that might have arrived meanwhile; or the retort of Aristotle to one 'who after much prittle-prattle and a long discourse, said thus unto him: "I doubt I have bin tedious unto you, Philosopher, with my many words"; "No, in good sooth (quoth Aristotle unto him), for I gave no eare at all unto you." ' Certainly, when Plutarch sums up with the assertion that 'taciturnity hath not only this one fair property and good virtue, that (as Hippocrates saith) it never breedeth thirst; but also that it engendreth no pain, no griefe nor displeasure'—in the face of that revealing utterance we who know, alas, much better, may dismiss our last doubts of the loquacity of ancient Greece, the true fatherland of that Garrulous Man of Theophrastus whose very children tease him, saying at bedtime: 'Talk to us, papa, that we may go to sleep.' For an instant the modern reader seems to hear, as through the door of a banquet-hall momentarily opened, the gay babel of all those lively voices, stilled now for so many centuries, which Aristophanes mocked for their 'Everlasting Eh?'[1] All the deeper was the admiration of the Athenians for exceptions to their rule like the heroic prostitute Leaina, who died in silence under the torturers' hands, without a word to betray the plot of Harmodius and Aristogiton, the tyrannicides; and was honoured by the liberated republic with a brazen statue, suggested by her name, of a lioness without a tongue.

The temper of Rome resembled laconic Sparta, in this as in other ways, rather than the rest of Greece; as we in

[1] τοῦτο τοὑπιχώριον ἀτεχνῶς ἐπανθεῖ τὸ 'τί λέγεις σύ;'

our turn are closer to Rome than Athens. So that the Latin writers, like our own, have talked less of the importance of talking little. And yet from our earlier literature, of that period when England is alleged to have been 'merry', and its levity unfavourably contrasted with the gravity of France, there survive still a good many counterparts of those endless Greek adages on the excellence of reticence.

> Whatsoever be in thy brest,
> Stop thy mouth with thy fist,
> And lok thou think well of had-I-wist,
> And bere a home and blow it naught.

If thou dost harbour sorrow, let not thine arrow know it; whisper it but to thy saddle-bow and ride abroad with song.

Or, more vividly:

> Wikked tunge breketh bone,
> Thow the tonges self hath none:

which is much more pointed than its Hebrew original in *Proverbs:* 'By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.' Such, too, was the moral impressed by his mother, with a none too edifying story of a heathen god, on Chaucer's Maunciple—

> Heed wel thy tong and think upon the crow.

But, after all, such precepts are world-wide: even in far Arabia 'the tree of silence bears the fruit of peace'. Aphorisms are of interest less for their truth than for their style; less for their collective wisdom than for the humour of their incessant contradictions of one another; less for the light they throw on conduct than for that other light they throw on the characters which coined them. For the modern mind is incredulous of homespun wisdom, and inclined to dismiss all saws and adages to the cheese-trenchers and porridge-bowls of shops dedicated to the arts and crafts. The proverbs of the populace,

like the laws of the critics and the commandments of the churches, have been found out too often. They are too simple for life's complexities; they are self-contradictory; they are threadbare. Euripides himself, in his aphoristic moods reminds us uncomfortably of Sancho Panza. We, too, suffer from the inability of human beings to hold their tongues; we, too, face in our private lives the same 'ordeals by tattle'; we, too, have to listen to the admiratory noises of our friends before landscapes and works of art and, still worse, are expected to reply in kind; we have even in our own time seen armies perish for the failure of some one behind them in this simple art of silence; but it is in silence, on the whole, that we endure our lack of it. For, indeed, one of the most striking peculiarities of our age is that the intelligent have come in general to think less about improving the rest of mankind than ever before; whether from fatalism, because it is seldom possible to improve them, or from sceptical indifference amid the general breakdown of the imperative mood, or from a greater politeness in tolerating creeds of conduct that differ from our own. In consequence, moralists are almost extinct; they have given place to psychologists, and psychologists are scientists, and scientists think of truth and error, not of good and evil. The tree of silence still bears the fruit of peace, but we have no ears for truths put so. Yet it amuses me for a moment to recall side by side with the directness of such ancient wisdom Proust's picture (so vivid, despite all its exaggerations and improbabilities) of the tortured unhappiness of a modern passion; where the lover finds the only respite from his misery with Albertine in the silent moments of her sleep beside him, when peace flowers an instant, even for him, between the breasts of despair. All who have learnt how speech can come to seem a means

only of misunderstanding, letters but bottomless pitfalls, words mere veils across a sympathy which might, perhaps, have shone clearly without them, must feel here as if they had come suddenly upon a landscape but too well known. Even in that desert of the soul the tree of silence still bears its fruit of peace: or so it seems for a moment. Then the mirage fades and the ache of thirst comes back again.

But here, indeed, we have passed from proverbs to poetry, from Polonius to Hamlet. It is, indeed, only when silence becomes beautiful that it becomes really interesting to us now. Yet how often that is! But it is the poets who have found it out: even the rhythm of their verses, in a way of its own, puts into practice their discovery. The music, the sonority, the trumpet-calls and organ-notes of poetry we all know: we think less often of its gracious silences. The poet rises—*'conticuere omnes'*, a hush falls round him. But Silence is more than merely the herald who gains him hearing: she is also the quiet partner of his harmonies. Such, for example, is the grace of those moments when in the marble colonnade of Virgil's polished and fluted hexameters appears suddenly, like a broken pillar, a line that lacks its end. The learned have disputed whether these short lines, peculiar to him among Roman poets, were left so of set purpose; or are in all cases, to use his own phrase of at least some of them, mere 'props' to uphold temporarily his great fabric, which still lacked the final touches when the dying poet ordered his executors to give it to the flames. This view seems on the whole the likelier: there are no parallels for such a deliberate use of short lines anywhere in ancient hexameters, as there are in English blank verse.[1] But few can regret the splendid incompleteness of such a cadence as

[1]It has been urged as a proof that Virgil's half-lines were not meant to be completed, that Ovid said of a couplet of Varro Atacinus:

ends, for instance, the dirge for Umbro the Marsian, the leech whose skill in healing others could not save him when he went down before the Dardan spear:

> neque eum juvere in vulnera cantus
> Somniferi et Marsis quaesitae in montibus herbae.
> Te nemus Anguitiae, vitrea te Fucinus umbra,
> *Te liquidi fievere lacus.*

> Thy hurts not all thy drowsy chants could heal,
> Nor all the magic herbs on Marsian hills.
> The glassy shadows of the Fucine lake
> Did weep for thee, for thee Anguitia's grove,
> For thee the watery meres.

Even Virgil could hardly have added to that without taking something away. The grasshopper that, when a string broke in the middle of a musical contest at Delphi, perched on the Greek minstrel's lyre to supply the missing notes, was not a happier collaborator than silence here becomes. So, too, with the silent music of the ever-varying pauses in Virgil's verse, or Shakespeare's, or Milton's; and again how many of our lyric measures owe half their beauty simply to the pleasure of the ear in finding a line shortened and its expected symmetry of sound replaced by a sudden peace! That is a charm as old as Sappho and as modern as Tennyson and Swinburne; who gave new youth to worn-out stanzas, as Medea with her knife to Aeson, simply by lopping their closing cadences—for instance, in the metres of 'The Palace of Art', 'A Dream of Fair Women', or 'Dolores':

'It would be better without the last half-line/.'But that is forcing the evidence. The couplet is, appropriately enough, about silence:

> Desierant latrare canes urbesque silebant;
> Omnia noctis erant placida composta quiete.

The Greek original in Apollonius Rhodius is far finer:

> οὐδὲ κυνῶν ὑλακὴ ἔτ' ἀνὰ πτόλιν, οὐ θρόος ἦεν
> ἡχήεις· σιγὴ δὲ μελαινομένην ἔχεν ὄρφνην.

One show'd an iron coast and angry waves,
You seem'd to hear them climb and fall
And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves,
Beneath the windy wall.

Whereto the other with a downward brow:
'I would the white cold heavy-plunging foam,
Whirled by the wind, had roll'd me deep below,
Then when I left my home.'

Like ashes the low cliffs crumble,
The banks drop down in the dust,
The heights of the hills are made humble,
As a reed's is the strength of their trust;
As a city's that armies environ,
The strength of their stay is of sand;
But the grasp of the sea is as iron,
Laid hard on the land.

Or the hush may come before the last line, as in Housman's:

When lads were home from labour
At Abdon under Clee,
A man would call his neighbour
And both would send for me.
And where the light in lances
Across the mead was laid,
There to the dances
I fetched my flute and played.

Which in its turn, it may well be by coincidence, recalls that lovely halt and check of Campion's:

Kind are her answers,
But her performance keeps no day,
Breaks time as dancers,
From their own music when they stray.

The dramatists, again, just as the poets have made Silence finish their lines for them, have brought her *to* fill a part upon their stage; above all (by a paradox which is yet a natural combination of opposites) the loudest-tongued among them, Aeschylus. Perhaps, gleaner from

Homer's banquet as he was, he remembered that angry silence with which the wraith of Ajax turns from Odysseus in Hades across the meadows of asphodel; which Virgil certainly remembered when he made Dido's spirit turn likewise, without a word, from the lover who had left her to die; and which Longinus has praised as an instance of those great things in literature whose greatness is independent of the form and language of their expression. But no less fine is the effect in Aeschylus, when behind the dry crash of the hammers that crucify him high up on Caucasus, endures the silence of Prometheus; behind the shoutings that welcome the King of Kings up the Argive street, the silence of Cassandra. So too, in other plays of his now lost to us, Achilles sat and brooded speechless; speechless, for two whole scenes, sat the childless Niobe by her slain children's tomb; like a Job drawn by Blake, a Rachel refusing to be comforted. The silences of Sophocles and Euripides are less titanic; but there, too, Eurydice and Dejanira steal away to slip the fatal noose about their necks, without a word; and Jocasta likewise, with only one final cry. Phaedra, too, speaks not a syllable to the man for whose love she is dying, when they at last meet face to face; nor Alcestis to the husband who had let her die for him, when she comes back from the dead. In the words of that line of Seneca which the Elizabethans were never tired of quoting:

> Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent.
> Slight griefs find utterance: agony is dumb.

Aristophanes might mock at the adamantine silences of Aeschylus; but even in loquacious Athens this other art of reticence was also understood.

It may be that necessity helped slightly to mother their invention; on a stage whose tradition allowed only three speaking actors, and so only three speaking parts in

any scene, while the rest remained 'dumb faces', κωφὰ πρόσωπα it was a great artistic economy temporarily to hand over one of the main characters in this way to a super. Certainly our modern drama, free from this accidental restriction, has seldom drawn such eloquence from dumbness. The silence of the ghost in *Hamlet,* or of the midnight in *Macbeth;* of Iago, when his guilt is laid open, or of Hermione, when she comes back like Alcestis to a husband unworthy of her innocence; of Cordelia in *Lear* or of Virgilia, 'my gracious silence', in *Coriolanus*—all these are faint compared with Aeschylus. Indeed, beside the Greeks, we with our shouting stage-crowds, our alarums and excursions, are like Homer's Trojans, marching with their barbarous uproar against the disciplined hush of the Achaean host.

And yet on the stage of life, at all events, the dramatic value of silence has been fully re-discovered by some of our Romantics. The great of the eighteenth century had already come to despise laughter, so that Fontenelle could say disdainfully je ne fais jamais ah-ah-ah', and Lord Chesterfield could not recollect having given way to it 'since I had the use of my reason'. Early in the nineteenth century Lord Byron went on to despise even speech. He was, indeed, perpetually torn between the rival splendours of proud rhetoric and of prouder silence, until he found the last for ever in the earth of Missolonghi:

> Mute,
> The camel labours with the heaviest load
> And the wolf dies in silence—not bestowed
> In vain should such example be; if they,
> Things of ignoble or of savage mood,
> Endure and shrink not, we of nobler clay,
> May temper it to bear—it is but for a day.

Nor, again, was it in Shelley's mind only that the suffering Titan with his lips proudly locked rose again

from the abyss of Time. Caucasus grew crowded. Alone on his desolate height brooded the ineffable scorn and *ennui* of Chateaubriand: 'Je voudrais n'etre pas *ne* ou etre a jamais oublie. . . . Je regarde passer a mes pieds ma derniere heure.' And after him, in Byron's footsteps, Alfred de Vigny in his turn cried his silence to the silent heavens and the silent earth:

> Les grands pays mucis longuement s'dtendront.
> Le juste opposera le dedain a l'absence,
> Et ne repondra plus que par un froid silence
> Au silence eternel de la Divinite.
>
> Seul le silence est grand, tout le reste est faiblesse.

There is, indeed, always a slightly false ring about a taciturnity that cries out to be heard; and yet those who are not too English may grant a magnificence of its own to such rhetoric. The English, unfortunately, can seldom appreciate rhetoric of any kind, and so remain permanently astonished at the continental reputation of a Byron. They think it is because they are too honest. Foreigners might say it was because they were too hypocritical. Both may be right. In any case, we, too, have had our romantic cult (now grown rather a jest) of'strong, silent men', though we prefer that they should leave their silence for others to remark upon. And even today the silence which commemorates the Armistice in England conforms to that ideal—a fine conception in so far as it springs from a hatred of windy eloquence above graves too deep for words; though slightly detestable also to some who sense in it a touch of that hypocritical complacency of ours, which is glad to substitute a ceremony for any real thought of the horror of the thing and of the menace of its return. And some, too, not the least truly English for that, resent even the momentary interference that this silence imposes on the freedom of the individual. Still, of all the war

memorials in Europe few are as dignified; and had we read of it as a custom of ancient Rome, we should surely admire its sublime simplicity.

The trouble with the sublime from Homer's day to ours is that in man, unlike Nature, it has that proverbial first-cousinship to the ridiculous. 'Le sublime est si peu naturel': the sophisticated mind is slow to bow the knee, or breathe an 'O altitudo!.' To beauty it may still surrender open-armed: in sublimity it may sense a challenge, and be provoked. 'You dare not laugh at the Sphinx', cries Kinglake. And certainly of the sublimity of silence this oldest instance still remains the greatest. 'Abou el Houl', the Arab calls her—'the father of terror'. 'You dare not laugh at the Sphinx'? And yet I dare say that Horace or Montaigne or Voltaire would have dared to smile, even at her. For even she is, after all, only a monument of the vanity, and the mad callousness, of man. But if even Solomon in all his glory is not safe amid his bodyguard from absurdity, at least the lilies of the field are. And that is not simply because humanity is more easily grotesque than Nature. The Alps have seemed hideous to generations: but I never heard of a race that mocked the rose. Certainly human things can far more easily and more often be beautiful or gracious or pathetic, than sublime: to tower beyond the reach of laughter is a privilege shared with Nature only by some rare Michelangelo. Beauty is surer than sublimity. And so, magnificent as Silence has sometimes been in human art and life, it is more often as something gracious and lovely that she has won men's hearts. Above all, the poets have felt her spell; as if in their agelong struggle to break with brief music the stillness of eternity they had grown in love with their 'sweet enemy'. Sometimes it is for the pure beauty of her peace—'the silence that is in the starry sky, The

sleep that is among the lonely hills'; as in Virgil's 'arnica silentia lunae', or Alcman's verses on evening stillness, less known than Goethe's famous adaptation of them:

> Εὕδουσιν δ'ὀρέων κορυφαί τε καὶ φάραγγες,
> πρώονές τε καὶ χαράδραι,
> φῦλά θ'ἑρπετὰ τόσσα τρέφει μέλαινα γαῖα,
> θῆρές τ' ὀρεσκῷοι καὶ γένος μελισσᾶν
> καὶ κνώδαλ' ἐν βένθεσι πορφυρίας ἁλός,
> εὕδουσιν δ'οἰωνῶν
> φῦλα τανυπτερύγων.
>
> Now sleep the mountain-summits, sleep the glens,
> The peaks, the torrent-beds; all things that creep
> On the dark earth lie slumbering in their dens;
> Hushed are the mountain-beasts, the race of bees,
> The monsters lurking in the purple seas;
> Deep
> The birds of heaven sleep.

No less perfect are the lines of our own Arnold with his classic love of tranquil things:

> Round our hearts with long caresses,
> With low sighs hath silence stole.
>
> Is not on cheeks like those
> Lovely the flush?
> Ah, so the quiet was,
> So was the hush.

But of the simpler charm of silence I know no praises to equal Herrick's. Poet of perfect ear, he has almost a passion for quiet, or those gentle sounds that break its hush so little as to make it but the deeper:

> The mellow touch of musick most doth wound
> The Soule, when it doth rather sigh, than sound.
>
> Upon thy Forme more wrinkles yet will fall,
> And comming downe, shall make no noise at all.
>
> Fall on me like a silent dew
> Or like those Maiden showers,
> Which by the peepe of day, doe strew
> A baptime o're the flowers.

So Good-luck came, and on my roof did light,
Like noyse-lesse Snow; or as the dew of night.

But loveliest of all are his lovers:

They tread on clouds, and though they sometimes fall,
They fall like dew, but make no noise at all.
So silently they one to th' other come,
As colours steal into the Peare or Plum,
And Aire-like, leave no pression to be seen
Where e're they met, or parting place has been.

Beside such silence, purely beautiful, stands a silence of another kind, still pleasant, but with a slight touch of terror; like the landscape of that Castle of Indolence built in the clouds by James Thomson (who spent his own days indolently abed, because 'I see no motive to rise, man'):

Full in the passage of the vale, above,
A sable, silent, solemn forest stood,
Where naught but shadowy forms was seen to move
As Idlesse fancied in her dreaming mood;
And up the hills, on either side, a wood
Of blackening pines aye waving to and fro
Sent forth a sleepy horror through the blood;
And where this valley winded out below,
The murmuring main was heard and scarcely heard to flow.

Increase that sinister suspense and let the pleasure further dwindle till it vanishes—you have then the darker silence of the Woods of Westermain with the phantom eyes beneath their leaves; or of the forests of La Fontaine's warning:

O belles, eVitez
Le fond des bois et leur vaste silence;

or the midnight hush of the Ballad of True Thomas:

About the dead hour of night
He heard the bridles ring:

or those 'severa silentia noctis' of Lucretius, which contrast so characteristically with Virgil's 'friendly* moon.

Few open Valerius Flaccus now; but I can never read

without a thrill the meeting of his Jason and Medea in the blackness of the Colchian Wood:

> Obvius ut sera cum se sub nocte magistris
> Impingit pecorique pavor, qualesve profundum
> Per Chaos occurrunt caecae sine vocibus umbrae;
> Haud secus in mediis noctis nemorisque tenebris
> Inciderant ambo attoniti juxtaque subibant;
> Abietibus tacitis aut immotis cyparissis
> Adsimiles, rapidus nondum quas miscuit Auster.
>
> Just as, when nights grow late, falls suddenly
> Panic on herd and herdsman; or as when,
> In depths of Chaos, dumb, blind phantoms meet;
> So in the midnight darkness of the wood
> Those two drew near, and met, and stood amazed;
> Like noiseless firs or moveless cypresses
> Ere wild South-westers whirl them both in one.

Of this kind was that silence of infinitude before which cowered the lost soul of Pascal. But here we approach the borders of yet another province of silence—that where some menacing presence is replaced by a Saharan emptiness, which even the sense of something hostile would at least make less intolerably desolate.

Or again this silence of suspense, instead of pressing threateningly forward, or thinning into void desolation, may recede into the background, where it remains as an aloofly watching presence; so that the same starry silence which terrified Pascal, whispered with ironic remoteness to Emerson in moments of lost self-control: 'So hot, my little sir?' Menace has given place to impassivity. More impassively still for Catullus the silence of the constellations looks down unmoved on the stolen loves of men; or for Theocritus, on his witch-maiden's love for ever lost:

> ἠνίδε σιγᾷ μὲν πόντος, σιγῶντι δ'ἀῆται·
> ἃ δ'ἐμὰ οὐ σιγᾷ στέρνων ἔντοσθεν ἀνία.
>
> Quiet lies the sea, and quiet all the winds;
> But never quiet the anguish at my heart.

The same unresponsive calm haunts that deserted house where Walter de la Mare's Traveller knocks in vain, sinister and silent as the Dark Tower of Childe Rowland:

> But only a host of phantom listeners
> That dwelt in the lone house then
> Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
> To that voice from the world of men:
> Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair
> That goes down to the empty hall,
> Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
> By the lonely traveller's call.

And then there is a Silence still deadlier: not threatening the future, nor watching the present, but brooding over what is for ever past:

> That after-silence when the feast is o'er,
> And void the places where the minstrels stood.

She, too, is beautiful, with that sinister beauty of Proserpine which the Psyche of Apuleius breathed and died. Hers is the fascination of the whirlpool for the floating leaf: that fascination which Freud in our own day, abandoning himself for a moment to the dream-poetry of a sort of Platonic myth, has pictured as a longing of the elements of the living body, not for resurrection, but for death—a 'nostalgie de la poussiere':

> Still my bones within me say
> 'Another night, another day.'

To this instinct was due in part, it may be, the physical loveliness of Death in Greek sculpture, so different from the skulls and skeletons of our Gothic barbarism; hence, too, the passion of the poets for 'easeful Death', their impulse to kill tragically the creations they have themselves made and loved, their sense of the supreme eloquence of mouths that will speak no more—'0 *eloquent*, just, and mighty Death.' This silence may be the silence of human death:

She turned her face unto the wa',
And there her very heart it brak.

Clerk Saunders he started, and Margaret she turned
Into his arms as asleep she lay,
And deep and silent was the night
That fell atween thir twae.

Or it may be the silence of a dying god whose oracle has fallen dumb, as in that last cry of pagan Delphi:

εἴπατε τῷ βασιλῆϊ, χαμαὶ πέσε δαίδαλος αὐλά·
οὐκέτι Φοῖβος ἔχει καλύβαν, οὐ μάντιδα δάφνην,
οὐ παγάν λαλέουσαν· ἀπέσβετο καὶ λάλον ὕδωρ.

Say ye to Caesar, 'Lo, the hall divine
Is fallen, Phoebus holds no more his shrine,
His prescient laurel, his fount of prophecy—
Even the speaking spring is dead and dry.'

Or it may be the silence where the home of a whole dead race has been swallowed, like ancient Dunwich in Swinburne's *By the North Sea.*

Miles on miles on miles of desolation!
Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change!
Sign or token of some eldest nation
Here would make the strange land not so strange.
Time-forgotten, yea since time's creation,
Seem these borders where the sea-birds range.

Slowly, gladly, full of fear and wonder
Grows his heart who journeys here alone,
Earth and all its thoughts of earth sink under,
Deep, as deep in water sinks a stone;
Hardly knows it if the rollers thunder,
Hardly whence the lonely wind is blown.

Or, last of all, it may be the final silence of a whole ruined world:

When the great markets by the sea shut fast,
All that calm Sunday that goes on and on;
When even lovers find their peace at last,
And Earth is but a star that once had shone.

Indeed, in the momentary hubbub of this planet, it is hard *to* conceive the soundlessness of the universe that engulfs it, or the strangeness of a lunar landscape, such as ours too will become, where (could we live a moment in its airlessness) we might watch some stony avalanche sweep down a mountain side without a whisper. For even Echo, divine though she be, dies where air is not.

It would be pleasant to compile an Anthology of Silence—from Homer's pictures of lightly-falling snow or windless starlight down to the- Cupid of Ausonius, in the twilight of the pagan gods, crucified in that garden of Proserpine:

> Inter arundincasque comas gravidumque papaver,
> Et tacitos sine labc lacus, sine murmure rivos;
>
> Amid the tresses of the rushes, and the poppy's heavy head,
> And fleckless meres whose voice is still, and streams whose murmur's dead:

and again from the beginnings of our own literature, 'the Fight at Finnsburg', with its raven hovering sombre and mute above the battlefield, on to Malory and the silence of the mere where Excalibur was cast away. There, too, would follow Sidney's quietly climbing moon; Webster's dying Flaminco, 'in the way to study a long silence'; Chapman invoking the dumb midnight sky:

> All ye peaceful regents of the night,
> Silently gliding exhalations,
> Languishing winds, and murmuring falls of water;

the young Donne creeping to his mistress, with even the rustling of his silks subdued; Traherne's childish terror in the lonely field at evening, and Vaughan's soft-stepping night, and Cowper's days stealing as noiselessly upon him as Lear's horsemen shod with felt; Pope's creeping Maeotis in the stillness of its freezing steppe, and Crabbe's

'ships softly sinking in the sleepy sea'; Parnell's phantom beauties, who

> range the reeds and o'er the poppies sweep
> That nodding bend beneath their load of sleep,

and that 'rifted spire' of Langhorne's, nodding to its fall above the village dead:

> Where longs to fall that rifted spire
> As weary of th' insulting air,
> The poet's thought, the warrior's fire,
> The lover's sighs are sleeping there.
> When that too shakes the trembling ground,
> Borne down by some tempestuous sky,
> And many a slumbering cottage round
> Startles—how still their hearts will lie!

Then the Romantic Revival would almost embarrass the anthologist with its riches—the silence that haunted Wordsworth on the hills, and Coleridge's mariner on his stagnant sea; Endymion's 'little noiseless noise among the leaves', and the dumb, fallen Saturn of *Hyperion;* the cursed midnight of Manfred, and the charnel-hush of Beddocs, broken only by the low rustle of the dead turning unquietly in their shrouds; Landor's eagle in its still eyrie up the mountain-side, and the silent forests that sealed in one mystic moment Browning's love, and the haunted taciturnities of Hardy's world.

That might make not the poorest of anthologies: compile it who will. Few subjects can be exhausted without exhausting the reader also; and it may well be we have too many anthologies in England, without this poppy garland. So let it be printed at a castle in Spain.

Here, however, is one last fragment from that opiate work: 'Silence, it has been said, though so honoured of the poets, had never a priest. But those who are versed in the myths of Atlantis relate that once she was worshipped there. Her temple stood, they say, deep in a

windless valley with a still cypress-wood behind it, and a waveless lake before, in whose depths flitted only the mute shadows of her sacred fish. They were the only Hfe there—they, and the bright eyes of mice that peeped from the corners of her marble precinct in the drowsy afternoons, and the bats that circled round it as evening fell. Her priesthood, in white, unrustling robes and felt-soled sandals, bowed before the goddess in the grey of each dusk and dawn. No sacrifice burned on her altar, only a perpetual and uncrackling flame. But behind sat enthroned the statue of the goddess herself, carved in white marble; her face resting on one hand which hid her lips, and full of that strange calm which lives in the looks of those who hear no longer the noises of the world. Beneath her feet passed sculptured in a winding frieze the multitudinous deities, whose reign she has preceded and will hereafter close: on either side of her, like watch-dogs, lay a couchant sphinx; in the empty courts about her nodded hemlock and poppies left unmown. But her worship, though not her kingdom, perished with Atlantis: above her temple-roof lies now, as the fiery dust above Pompeii, the soundless and sunless darkness of the Atlantic sea.'