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## **ESSAYS AND STUDIES**

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## WYRD AND PROVIDENCE IN ANGLO-SAXON THOUGHT

### I

HOWEVER much scholars may differ in the dates they assign to *Beowulf* and to *Widsith*, and however much—or little—Christianity they may ascribe to the authors of the poems, they would doubtless agree on one point, that those authors are still influenced to some extent by the pagan attitude to life. But what is this pagan attitude to life? Some kind of coherent philosophy forms the background of even the most primitive faith, and there must be something more in Anglo-Saxon paganism than the worship of Woden and Thunor, more than the sanctions of loyalty to a chief, more than the recognition of Wyrd as an impersonal and unapproachable force.

If we can descry the shadowy outline of this earlier, unformulated philosophy, it must be through the medium of the stories and memories of the Heroic Age. The Anglo-Saxons shared in that common stock as freely as any other of the Nordic<sup>1</sup> peoples, and it seems safe to assume that the ideas which lie behind it were also common property. At any rate it is worth seeing what these stories will yield, because there can be no doubt that a better understanding of the pagan philosophy would throw light on some dark places in early Anglo-Saxon literature.

Our first task, then, is to analyse the stories known to have been celebrated in verse by the Anglo-Saxons. And here we will leave the main themes of *Beowulf* on one side for the present, for amid the multiplicity of theories about that poem there is unanimity on one point, and that is that the subject-matter of the poem is an anomaly. We certainly know

<sup>1</sup> In the use of the term Nordic in this connexion I follow Professor Trevelyan in his *History of England*, cp. p. 29.

of no other heroic poem which turns wholly on the slaying of monsters.

But though *Beowulf's* main theme is anomalous, the poem contains several allusions to other heroic poems, and we can begin by considering these.

1. First there is the story of Finn, sung by Hrothgar's *scop* or minstrel, at the banquet celebrating the killing of Grendel. The details of the story are obscure, and not much light is thrown on them by the actual extant fragment of the *Finnsburh Lay*. It is, however, clear that the interest of the story centres in the conflict in the mind of Hengest, who having defended his own lord, Hnæf, with the greatest devotion, is forced by circumstances to make peace and to swear fealty to Hnæf's slayer and brother-in-law, Finn. The song in *Beowulf* describes the tragic conflict in his mind between the duty of vengeance for his late lord on the one hand, and the tremendous sanctions of loyalty to a chief on the other.

2. The other heroic poem referred to in *Beowulf*, and recited by a king's thegn, is that of Sigemund. The *Beowulf* poet seems to have attempted to bowdlerize this story, or at any rate to stress its more presentable features. The dragon-slaying, an exploit attributed in later versions to his son Sigurd or Siegfried, is here ascribed to Sigemund, and he is expressly said to be the maternal uncle of Fitela, as if the poet did not wish to dwell on the closer relationship in which Sigemund stood to Fitela in all Germanic stories—father as well as uncle. But the reference to '*fæhðe ond fyrene*'—feuds and fearful crimes—suggests that the poet and his audience were acquainted with some such story as is preserved to us in the North, and was evidently known in Germany. Signý, Sigemund's sister, is faced with a choice of evils. The only alternatives before her are to commit horrible crimes or to leave unavenged her father and brothers, treacherously slain by her husband. The story tells of the alternative she chose, and how she carried it through to the bitter end, not flinching at incest nor at the murder of her sons.

3. *Beowulf* contains another allusion to what must have been an heroic poem, for Alcuin alludes disapprovingly to its

recitation at Lindisfarne. It is the story of the choice placed before Ingeld, king of the Heathobards. To end a feud with the Danes, due to his father's death in battle at their hands, he has accepted in marriage the Danish king's daughter Freawaru. Is he to hold sacred his marriage and the oaths of peace, or is it not, in spite of all, his duty to wipe out the disgrace of letting Danish nobles wear in his court weapons and heirlooms stripped from his father in the field of battle?

These three epic lays mentioned in *Beowulf* all turn, then, on a forced choice between two evil courses, each of which presents itself as a duty.

4. In *Waldere* the conflicting duties are of a slightly different order. As we know the story from other sources Hagena has to choose between the oath of brotherhood sworn by him to Waldere, and his duty to his king Guthhere, who demands that he shall attack Waldere.

Now let us look at the references in *Widsith* to heroes whom we know to have been celebrated in heroic song.<sup>1</sup> We can of course only tell the plots of the stories from later sources, Scandinavian and German, but since they agree in essentials there is no reason to suppose that the Anglo-Saxon forms of the stories were fundamentally different.

5. The Hild story. As the Danish Saxo recounts this story a slanderer tells Högni (Hagena, l. 21) that Heðinn (Heoden), his sworn brother, who is plighted to his daughter Hild, has already betrayed her. Is Högni to avenge this dire insult on his sworn brother, or shall he let it pass unavenged?

In Snorri's account, apparently founded on a lost poem, Heðinn abducts Hild—a terrible insult, as we know from *Egilssaga*. Högni has to choose between killing his son-in-law and letting this insult remain unavenged.<sup>2</sup>

6. Hagbard is secretly betrothed to Signe, daughter of

<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Saxon forms of the names mentioned in *Widsith* are given in brackets, with the line of the poem in which they occur.

<sup>2</sup> I do not give the story of Wade (Wada l. 22) because we do not know it. In *Widsith* he is a king ruling over his people, in the German *Kudrun* a champion of Hetele: in late medieval story his adventures seem to have been of a mythical order, in a boat with a Norman name.

Sigarr (Sigehere, l. 28). Her brothers kill his brothers owing to a slander, in spite of oaths of sworn brotherhood. Is Hagbard to kill them or spare Signe? He kills them: Signe has to choose between him and the memory of her brothers.

7. The story of Alboin (Ælfwine, l. 70) is only told by Paul the Deacon, but it is generally recognized that his account is based on a poem. Alboin, who has slain Thurisind's son, comes to his court and claims hospitality. Thurisind has to choose between the duty of hospitality and the duty of vengeance.

8. The story of Hlith and Ingentheow (l. 116), as known to us in the verses in *Hervarar Saga*, concerns a battle between two half-brothers, there called Hlöðr and Angantýr. Hlöðr, grandson of the king of the Huns, having been taunted with being base-born, refuses Angantýr's offer of magnificent gifts from their father's property, as his honour demands that he shall share the inheritance equally with his half-brother. This leads to the great battle between the Goths and Huns, in which Hlöðr falls. The poem ends with Angantýr's lament over his half-brother: 'A curse has been laid upon us, my brother: I have brought about thy death. . . . Evil is the decree of the norns.'<sup>1</sup>

9. Witega, Viðga (Wudga, l. 130) having been a retainer of Theodoric, enters the service of Ermanaric with Theodoric's consent. When Ermanaric and Theodoric quarrel, what is he to do? He chooses loyalty to his present master, even though it involves killing Theodoric's brother in the battle.

This then is the type of story celebrated in heroic poems by the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century and earlier.

But if we are to understand the true force of those in which vengeance plays a part, we must utterly rid ourselves of the haunting idea, natural to members of a policed society, that the pursuit of vengeance was a yielding to a passion, to a temptation. On the contrary; it was very often a deliberate sacrifice of wealth, happiness, even of personal honour, in order

<sup>1</sup> Tr. Kershaw, *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*.

to fulfil an obligation which might be the holiest of all. The claim became thus paramount, as Professor Chambers so admirably explains,<sup>1</sup> when the original slaying had been accomplished by treachery or any kind of baseness. Such deeds struck at the very foundations of human society, and since society had no means of punishing the evil-doer, it is not to be wondered at that the individual most affected should be held to fail utterly in his duty if he did not manage somehow to compass retribution.

In each story there is thus a situation entailing a choice between conflicting alternatives, both of which are felt to be evil.

If we look at the stock of early German and Scandinavian poems not mentioned in Anglo-Saxon sources we find that they are of the same type. In Germany we have the early *Hildebrandslied*. Father and son have challenged each other to single combat in front of the hostile armies. Hildebrand discovers that his antagonist is his son, but the latter will not believe him and suspects treachery. What is Hildebrand to do?

In the North the Nibelungen story<sup>2</sup> turns on similar situations. Gunnarr's choice is put before him by Brynhild, who herself has to choose between her love for Sigurd and compassing his death. Gudrun has to choose between the duty of avenging her brothers and her duty to her husband. The other heroic poems in the Elder Edda are similar in plot. The lay of Helgi Hundingsbane presents the same problems as the story of Hagbard and Signe.<sup>3</sup> The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson tells how Heðinn has sworn an oath of awful sanctity that he will wed his brother's bride. What is he to do?

In the flotsam and jetsam of heroic poems preserved in

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Beowulf*, pp. 276 ff.

<sup>2</sup> I do not mention this story among those alluded to in *Widsith*, as, though Gunnarr is mentioned in that poem (Guthhere ll. 65-7), scholars do not consider that the Anglo-Saxons knew the combination of his story with the story of Sigurd.

<sup>3</sup> So also the Gram-Gro poem in Saxo.

various Norwegian sources and in Saxo there are the outlines of many more stories of this type,—e. g. the story of Hamlet—all turning on a choice between dire alternatives. And all the best of the Icelandic prose Sagas are inspired by the same theme.

It is not too much to say that it is the characteristic Nordic type of heroic story.

## II

Before we consider the relation of these stories to the pagan philosophy of these peoples, it will be well to consider what else we can learn of their attitude to life from the memories of heroic figures and events which they have preserved.

It is usual to marvel at what the Nordic peoples, including the Anglo-Saxons, remembered from the Heroic Age. But far more remarkable, and far more significant, is what they forgot. Few peoples can have had as spectacular successes as those who took part in the national migrations. They swept across Europe: they founded kingdoms from the Black Sea to Spain, from Africa to England. Yet what their poets remember is always connected with failure, defeat, disaster.<sup>1</sup> They have utterly forgotten Alaric and the sack of Rome, but Gundahari, who was defeated by the Huns not much later, is remembered for eight centuries or more, and sung of from Austria to Greenland. So too with Ermanaric, under whom the Gothic people were subdued by the Huns. The Anglo-Saxons have left no word in poetry of the victories they gained over the Britons, but they still remember the defeat and death of Hygelac in Friesland.

Strangest of all, perhaps, the Nordic peoples chose to forget how Theodoric the Ostrogoth ruled gloriously in Italy for thirty years, and in their poems one of the most successful

<sup>1</sup> Even the songs recited by Hrothgar at the festivity after Grendel's slaying are '*soð ond sárlic*'—true and sad, notwithstanding the joyful occasion. *Beow.* 2108 f.

figures in history, as Professor Chambers says, came to be the type of endurance under consistent and undeserved misfortune.<sup>1</sup>

There is something more in this interest in defeat than the mere poetic value of a lost battle against overwhelming odds, for very often no hint of odds has come down to us. Perhaps we shall get nearest to the secret of this interest if we see how the Scandinavians, at any rate, apply the ideas of failure and defeat to their gods. It may be that the myth of Ragnarök, the Doom of the Gods, is a late product of the Viking Age, but it seems to me to be the logical outcome of the Northern philosophy of life, and therefore to throw light on our problem. The gods are mortal and subject to defeat not, surely, because the Northerners could not imagine immortality or permanent success, but because disaster is the final acid test of character. The valour of Odin and his peers, like the valour of human heroes, can only be proved by their fighting a losing battle, with defeat foreordained and foreknown. They must fight against tremendous and terrifying adversaries, with the universe crashing about them, the sun darkened, the stars falling from their places, flames playing against the sky itself, the earth sinking into the sea. They must bear it out even to the crack of doom: they must strive against the shape of disaster and destruction to the end, however much they know, and all the world knows, that the fight will be in vain. It is the only way that they can be justified, and that the loyalty of their followers can be justified.

And so with human heroes. The quality of a man is not known until he is sore beset, either by defeat in battle or by being placed in a situation in which he must do violence to his sense of right. Fate can put men and women into positions whence it seems impossible for them to emerge with honour. They are judged by their choice, still more, perhaps, by the steadfastness with which they carry out their chosen aim, never looking back. Signý, in the Volsung story, is everything that the Northern peoples most condemn: a treacherous

<sup>1</sup> It is instructive to contrast the epic memories of another people—the Greeks. There is tragedy in the *Iliad*, but the Greeks did capture Troy, and the *Odyssey* ends with the hero's successful defeat of the suitors.

wife, a murderous mother. Yet she is a heroine, worthy of men's admiration, because having chosen her path she never looks back until her purpose is accomplished. When that is done, the *Völsunga Saga*, which is founded on ancient poems, makes her refuse to come out of the burning house, her husband's hall, which she has helped to set on fire for his destruction. To compass his undoing she has done things which make her, as she says, not fit to live, and now that right is done, treachery avenged, she can behave like a true wife and die with him.

Signy perhaps vindicates herself by her end: but many of the heroes and heroines have no chance of doing this: for them there is simply the awful choice between two evils.<sup>1</sup> But the point is that there is a choice.<sup>2</sup> It may be no more than a choice between yielding and resisting to the uttermost what is bound to happen: it may be only a choice between two courses each of which is hateful. But the intense interest of poets in this type of story does seem to show that the aristocracies of the Nordic peoples felt that man's will was free and, therefore, in some way superior to the Fate that crushes him. If this is not the ultimate significance of the stories, we should be forced to think that the Northern poets put their heroes and heroines into unendurable positions merely in order to see what they would do—as a child pulls the wings off a fly. But they justify themselves and redress the balance by their conception of Fame. Fame is for the man who has the courage to choose: whether he chooses resistance to the uttermost against hopeless physical odds, knowing that his death is ordained, or whether he chooses one course rather than another of two that are hateful to him, and makes something magnifi-

<sup>1</sup> One of the alternatives may be suicide: Helga, in *Hervarar Saga*, ch. vii, chooses this way out instead of avenging her father and mother on her husband. See also the interesting story of the old comrades of Ingimund the Old, whose slayer is too low-born for satisfactory vengeance, *Vatnsdala Saga*, ch. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Quite distinct from these are the misfortunes befalling men as a result of their own folly or credulity or cruelty: e.g. to Nithhad in the *Weland* story: to Ermanaric, to Thiadric (the Frank), and to Atli in the Northern versions.

cent of it by a single-minded pursuit of it. About the references to Fame in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian poetry there is a warmth and a passion which ought to warn us against regarding it as the meed of mere physical prowess. It is an assertion that there is something greater than Fate: the strength of will and the courage of human beings, and the memory which could preserve their deeds. Fame and human character: these were the two things against which Fate could not prevail. 'Wealth perishes, kinsfolk perish, one's very self perishes', says the Northern *Hávamál*, 'but fame dies never for him who gets it worthily.'<sup>1</sup>

For the Northern peoples there was no reward in a future life, since the doctrine of Valhöll never seems to have made much headway against the far older beliefs that the dead man lived on in his grave-mound or led a shadowy existence in Hell. So, as the Anglo-Saxon gnomic verse says: Dom bið selast—'Fame is the best of all.'<sup>2</sup>

This attitude to life deserves, I think, the name of a philosophy,<sup>3</sup> and it is none the less a coherent philosophy for being unformulated. It depends equally on the conception of Fate and on the conception of Fame. Neither can be taken away without shattering the web of thought.

To understand the influence of medieval Christianity on Anglo-Saxon thought we must imagine some such ideas as these in the minds of those who listened to Augustine or to Paulinus. But we must first consider two questions. The first question is, what parts of medieval Christian doctrine would be most readily apprehended by men with this background of thought? The second is, how far could the new ideas be assimilated to the old philosophy?

<sup>1</sup> Beowulf utters much the same thought, ll. 1386 ff.

<sup>2</sup> There is a tacit appeal to this sentiment in the song sung by an Icelandic court poet to the Norwegian army before the battle of Stiklastaðir, in 1030, in which St. Olaf fell. The poet chants of no victory, but of the attack on Hrólfr Kraki (*Widsith's* Hrothulf) and his retainers in their hall, and of how they perished every one.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. W. P. Ker, *Dark Ages*, p. 57.

## III

It is abundantly clear, and has been well pointed out by Ehrismann<sup>1</sup> and Haase,<sup>2</sup> that the ideas of heaven and hell dominated the early converts. This comes out very clearly in Bede's account of the conversion. Augustine's first message to Æthelbert of Kent is that he brings him 'a joyful message which most undoubtedly assured to him that hearkened to it everlasting joys in heaven'.<sup>3</sup> In Northumbria it is the first thing the heathen priest Coifi seizes upon: 'The truth of this doctrine can confer on us the gifts of life, of salvation, of eternal happiness.'<sup>4</sup> The famous simile of the sparrow<sup>5</sup> shows that the conception of a future life among the heathen Anglo-Saxons was vague and unsatisfying. It is, therefore, natural that this should be the point they would seize on first, and which would influence them most. But we need not suppose that the interest of the better converts in Heaven and Hell was merely selfish. Though the Northern peoples had a high appreciation of the ethical value of law and justice in society, they had never, so far as we can tell, conceived of a reign of law and justice in the world order. Yet it is easy to see that it is a conception which would have an immediate appeal to them even in the crude form in which medieval Christianity presented it to them.

These ideas of Heaven, Hell, and the justice of God, are the three ideas connected with the new faith which we find clearly indicated in *Beowulf*, and they were no doubt specially characteristic of the first few generations after the conversion. How did they blend with the old heathen philosophy of life?

Clearly mere misfortune, mere defeat, was easier to understand in the light of the new knowledge. The victim could be compensated in the next life for his sufferings in this one, though that resistance to the uttermost, that defiance of Fate,

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Braune's *Beiträge*, xxxv (1909), pp. 209 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Haase, *Kirchengeschichte*, ii. 47, quoted by Ehrismann.

<sup>3</sup> *H. E.* i. 25 (Sellar's tr.).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *loc. cit.*

so much admired in the heathen times, was now very liable to become mere impiety. As for all the rest of the heathen philosophy, it could have needed no special acumen to see that it was wholly incompatible with the new Christian doctrines.

In a universe governed by justice and not by a capricious Fate, in a universe where men go to Heaven or Hell according to their deeds, the old Nordic type of story leads to grave difficulties. If the world is governed by justice, how can men and women be forced into following one or two evil courses? What place in a future world could be assigned to Signý, of the Volsung story, to Hagena, who breaks the oaths of sworn brotherhood, to Ingeld who breaks the oaths of peace, and kills his wife's nearest kinsfolk? They cannot be thought of in Heaven, yet all the ancient traditions must have risen up in protest against consigning them to Hell, as Alcuin does Ingeld. It is surely not merely because Ingeld was a heathen that he is a *rex perditus*.<sup>1</sup> It is because he must be judged by the sins he committed, which were very great, and not, as the heathens would have considered, by the heroism which broke a way out of a network of evils.

At this stage it is useful to see what happened to these old stories in Germany. Just this feature which must have been repugnant to medieval Christianity, is smoothed away in a very interesting fashion. Even poets in a monastery may treat of Waltharius, Waldere, if they like. The conflict of motives is still there: Hagen is still faced with the alternatives of breaking his oath of brotherhood to Waltharius, or failing in loyalty to his king, and it is only when his nephew is slain by Waltharius that he enters the fight. Here are all the ingredients for one of the old heathen tragedies. But they are not allowed to clash beyond a certain point. The heroes each lose a limb in the battle, but they are mended, and go home happily after a reconciliation. It is an ending that is generally recognized to be grotesque, but it is evidently the price the story-tellers had to pay for the survival of the story in a Christian atmosphere. So with the story of Hildebrand

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, p. 465 f.

and Hadubrand. The ancient poem undoubtedly ended in the tragic slaying of the son by the father.<sup>1</sup> But in the *Jüngere Hildebrandslied*, though the stage is set in the same way, the ending is cheerful. So, too, with the originally tragic poem of Heðinn and Högni. The Middle High German *Kudrun* lets Hetel and Hagen wound each other sorely, but then it reconciles them, heals their wounds, and gives a happy ending to the story.

Such violence as this cannot be done to the greatest of all the tales, the Nibelungen story. But all the balance of the story has been altered in the *Nibelungenlied*. Tragedy remains, and much of the heathen spirit, but here it is the conflict of motives in the minds of the heroines which has been smoothed away. The Scandinavian Brynhild cuts the knot of her love for Sigurd by inducing her brothers to kill him. The conflict in the mind of a woman in such a situation continued to interest the Icelanders at the very time the *Nibelungenlied* was committed to writing, for it is studied afresh in the Laxdale Saga. But in the *Nibelungenlied* it is Hagen who decides to take vengeance on Siegfried for Brunhild's humiliation, though later she is said to have been in the plot.<sup>2</sup> She disappears from the story before Siegfried's death, and it is not suggested that she loved him. Kriemhild, Siegfried's widow, in revenge for his slaying, compasses the death of her brothers, but the sympathy of the poet is not with her, and the end of the poem shows her simply as a very wicked woman, who meets a righteous death at the hands of Hildebrand. Indeed, she is represented as more concerned with getting hold of the Nibelungen treasure possessed by her brothers than with her vengeance on them. The old conflict of duties in the minds of Brunhild and Kriemhild has disappeared.<sup>3</sup> 'The *Nibelungenlied* is glorious, but its glory, like its metre, is not that of the ancient lays.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ehrismann, *Gesch. der d. Lit.* (Munich, 1918), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Nibelungenlied*, ed. Bartsch, Leipzig, 1875, xiv. Av. str. 864; *ibid.*, xvi. Av. str. 917.

<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the *Nibelungenlied* has preserved, or developed, an interesting conflict of motives in the mind of the Markgraf Rüdiger.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, *Widsith*, p. 8.

## IV

In early Anglo-Saxon poetry the interaction between the heathen attitude to life and the new doctrines seems to have been more creative and more interesting than in Germany. Let us first consider *Beowulf*.

Two things are certain about this poem. The first is that its author had thoroughly assimilated, not Christianity,<sup>1</sup> but the three ideas of medieval Christianity which dominated the minds of the early converts: Heaven, Hell, and the reign of justice in the universe.<sup>2</sup> The second is that its plot is an anomaly. W. P. Ker observed that the construction of the poem is in a sense preposterous: theirrelevances, the monster-slayings, are in the centre, and the serious things—the references to heroic story—are on the outer edges.<sup>3</sup> In *Widsith*, which shows us, as Professor Chambers says, the stock in trade of the old Anglian bard, the hall Heorot is not thought of as the place where Beowulf overcomes monsters, but as the scene of strife within the kindred, and of the Ingeld story. 'In that conflict between plighted troth and the duty of revenge', Professor Chambers adds, 'we have a situation which the old heroic poets loved, and would not have sold for a wilderness of dragons.'<sup>4</sup>

The choice of the story seems to become more mysterious still as the suspicion of scholars about its hero deepens. Beowulf's long reign of fifty years over the Geatas does not fit the chronology, and his name does not fit with the names of the Geatic dynasty, nor with those of his father's house.

These two anomalies—that the great epic deals with monster-

<sup>1</sup> Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, p. 47 f.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 588 f., 977 ff., 2741 ff., 2819 f.

<sup>3</sup> Ker, *Dark Ages*, p. 253. Cp. also Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, p. 116; Ehrismann, *Anglia*, xxxvi (1912), p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> No one would suggest that heroes did not kill dragons: Sigurd did, and Sigemund too, and Theodoric the Ostrogoth seems to have been particularly active in this sphere. But dragon-slaying is only an incidental glory to these heroes: their interest for heroic poets lies elsewhere.

slayings instead of with heroic story, and that the hero does not quite belong to his environment, have led Professor Klaeber<sup>1</sup> to suggest that the author imported the figure of Beowulf into heroic story with a definitely Christian aim. He took him as his hero because a prince who delivered his people from a dragon would remind his audience of the Redeemer of their new faith. The story, in fact, lent itself to being made into a symbol or allegory of the central fact of the Christian faith.

While fully admitting that there must have been some special reason for the choice of the theme of *Beowulf*, there seems to me to be unsurmountable difficulties in Professor Klaeber's theory. If the poet had the Christian Redeemer in his mind, the absence of any allusion to Him, or to anything in the New Testament except the Day of Judgment, becomes stranger than it already is. And would it not be too strange an irony, if the author had such a prototype in his mind, to make the dying hero exult in the dragon's gold, and insist on seeing it as he lies dying—gold which is buried with him, 'as unprofitable to men as it had been before'? And why, with such a hero, describe with such gusto a markedly heathen funeral? But there is a more serious objection than these—namely, that the poet has not troubled to omit from the story a feature which makes Beowulf actually more primitive than the ordinary epic hero. Beowulf may be forgiven for fighting Grendel without a sword, whether from chivalrous motives (ll. 679 ff.), or because weapons will not bite the monster (ll. 433 ff.). But when he goes out of his way to boast of having hugged to death a human antagonist, the warrior Dæghrefn (ll. 2506 ff.), he seems to show bear or troll-like attributes,<sup>2</sup> which would surely have been omitted by an author who had selected him for the reasons suggested by Klaeber.

Let us now suppose that the poet of *Beowulf* was a *scop* devoid of the slightest missionary aim—on the contrary, delighting (as he evidently does) in pagan antiquity. Yet he is anxious to compose a poem which could fitly be sung in the

<sup>1</sup> *Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf*, iv, *Anglia*, xxxvi (1912), pp. 169 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, p. 121.

hall of such a king as Oswald, Oswin, or Oswy.<sup>1</sup> He and his audience are still so near to pagan times that no one will expect him to celebrate the past with no references to paganism, but on the other hand, he must have a respectable hero and plot. He must not take one of the old traditional plots which turn on an evil choice being offered to man or woman ; because in a world governed by justice, and leading to Heaven or Hell, it is obviously impossible that a human being should be forced to do one wrong in order to avoid another. Yet our poet wants to keep the heroic atmosphere, and to use all the knowledge of the kings and peoples of the pagan past, which is his stock in trade. In this dilemma he chooses a dragon-slayer as his hero : but a dragon-slayer who can be placed in the environment of which he has always sung—the dynasties of Southern Sweden and Denmark. He loses the close-knit structure of a story of the old type, and the Wyrd of the old religion becomes a mere body-snatcher.<sup>2</sup> But at least he can have fighting, and ceremonial,<sup>3</sup> and loyal and disloyal retainers, and he can put fine speeches into the mouths of his characters, and he can allude constantly to the web of ancient stories which is still present in the minds of his audience.

He sacrifices, in fact, as little as he possibly can, and the result is that his poem is liked both by the Christian and the more conservative elements of the aristocracy, and comes ultimately to be written down in a fine MS., together with the Christian poem *Judith*. *Beowulf* may thus be considered the first English compromise.

Perhaps, however, he was not the first *scop* to discover that allusions to the old pagan stories were inoffensive to Christians, and nearly as satisfactory as the stories themselves to the less

<sup>1</sup> I follow Chadwick in regarding the poem as very early : cp. *Heroic Age*, p. 46 f.

<sup>2</sup> Except in l. 572 f.

<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to follow Klaeber in regarding courtly behaviour as necessarily Christian. The courtesies of *Beowulf* are after all outdone by the supreme courtesy of king Hringr in wholly heathen times, when he gives his fallen enemy a chariot and saddle in the grave-mound, so that he may ride or drive to Valhöll as he wishes (*Sögubrot af Fornkonungum*, ch. ix).

ardent converts. It may be significant that out of the five poems referring to the pagan period surviving in England, three, *Beowulf*, *Widsith*, and *Deor*, use this allusive method of recalling ancient stories. They are the only three of the poems to be preserved entire.<sup>1</sup>

## V

I have said above that the poet of *Beowulf* sacrifices as little of the old poetic traditions as he possibly can. But one thing he has lost without being aware of it, and the loss is typical of early Anglo-Saxon poetry as a whole. It is the loss of a certain spirit, a sort of grim satisfaction in recounting the actions of men driven into a corner by adverse circumstances. The modern reader feels this spirit even in Saxo's prolix Latin version of the old Lay of Hrólfr Kraki, and still more, of course, in the references to Ragnarök, the Doom of the Gods, in the Eddic poems. So far as the shortness of the fragment allows, I think it can be felt in the *Finnsburh Lay*. But in *Beowulf* it is replaced by a wholly alien spirit, one of melancholy resignation. As Professor Legouis says: 'This poem, which is a glorification of bold enterprise, leaves a bitter taste, or at least an impression of universal melancholy.'

Owing to the markedly elegiac note of such poems as the *Wanderer*, and the *Ruin*, scholars usually assume that melancholy was an inborn trait of the Anglo-Saxons. Yet it seems strange that these peoples, delighting in the same stories as the rest of the Northern world, should have differed so greatly in temperament from their close kinsfolk. The one difference we can trace is a difference in the nature of their conversion to Christianity. The Anglo-Saxons were converted by persuasion and not by compulsion, at a time of great religious fervour, and under the direct influence of Roman, Greek, and

<sup>1</sup> I subscribe to everything said by Professor Chambers in his *Lost Literature of Mediaeval England* as to the element of chance in what has been kept and what lost of Anglo-Saxon poems. But still it is clear that poems which could be included in mainly religious MSS. were far more likely to survive than others.

Celtic culture. It is, therefore, not strange that Christian ideas should have a much more rapid influence on the thought of aristocratic circles in England,<sup>1</sup> than in countries converted later, mainly by compulsion, like North Germany and Norway, by missionaries who could not compare in ability and enlightenment with those who converted England.

It therefore seems more natural to explain the melancholy in Anglo-Saxon poems as a result of the clash between the pagan philosophy of life and the new doctrine, so readily accepted. On the one hand we have what W. P. Ker saw in the myth of Ragnarök, 'the assertion of the individual freedom against all the terrors and temptations of the world, . . . absolute resistance, perfect because without hope,'<sup>2</sup> sometimes reaching an intensity of defiance which does not fear to arraign the gods.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, there is the new knowledge that the world is ordered by a just Providence, so that resistance to what must be becomes no longer glorious but simply impious and foolish. It is surely natural that the revulsion from the old attitude should lead to an undue stressing of resignation.

Other causes, similar in origin, contribute to the tendency to melancholy. The old idea of resistance was stimulated by the thought of Fame, the one certain and enduring reward of the morally and physically valiant. But what is Fame, when all that matters is the whereabouts of the soul in the next world? And what of physical prowess, of the glory of weapons and of gold, since Fame is a shadow, and life not what it seems?

The old idea of resistance is still of course respectable in battles against mortal enemies, and in this connexion, in the words uttered by Byrhtwold in the *Battle of Maldon*, we find

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Brandl, *Paul's Grundriss*, ii. 1, p. 963: all Anglo-Saxon secular poetry is 'im innersten Kern Adelspoesie'.

<sup>2</sup> *Dark Ages*, p. 57. See whole passage.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Biarki in the *Lay of Hrólfr Kraki*, boasting that if he could meet with Odin he would kill him in vengeance for the disaster that is overtaking his king (Saxo, *Holder*, p. 66); Egill, in the *Sonatorrek*, wishing that he could fight the sea-god Ægir, who has bereft him of his sons; Hervör, in the poem in *Hervarar Saga*, defying the decrees of Fate.

it more finely expressed in Anglo-Saxon than in any other Northern literature :

Soul shall be the more stalwart, heart the higher,  
Courage the greater, the more our might 'minisheth.

There is still one connexion in which resistance to the decree of God can be freely described without offence to Christian doctrine—in telling the story of Satan. Here many strings of the old heathen harp can be touched—disaster and defeat, as well as resistance and defiance, all in surroundings that surely owe something to Niflheim. The finest flower of religious narrative deals with the Fall of the Angels : and this is surely no accident. Though the poem is translated from Old Saxon, the very fact of the translation suggests that the subject made a powerful appeal to the Anglo-Saxons.

It is interesting that the nearest approach, in the religious narratives, to the old heathen stories of choice between two evils occurs in the poem written in the same manuscript as *Beowulf*, and by the same hand as the latter part of that poem. Of course it is a duty for Judith to kill Holofernes, and it is the proper alternative for her to choose. Nevertheless, the poem has something of the old interest and the old gusto in depicting the choice of a man or woman, driven to desperate straits by Fate, and it is significant that just these two poems—the *Fall of the Angels* (*Genesis B.*), and *Judith*, should appear to W. P. Ker to be the best of the religious narrative poems.<sup>1</sup> Both poems, of course, owe much to the circumstance that their plots enable their poets to use the ancient heroic vocabulary. The self-will of women was a subject quite as dear to the pagan poets as that of men,<sup>2</sup> so that in describing Judith

<sup>1</sup> *Dark Ages*, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> The very strong-willed, ruthless women of heroic tradition seem to have been even more repugnant to Christian sentiment than the men. The St. Gall poet turns Hildegund into a weak and gentle character, most unlike the impression given by the Anglo-Saxon fragment, if the speech to Waldere is rightly attributed to her. It is noticeable that the women in *Beowulf* play very minor parts and are models of propriety, though *Beowulf* refers to another, Thryth, who seems to have been in the old Valkyrie tradition.

the poet had an immense traditional vocabulary to draw upon.<sup>1</sup>

But the pagan ideas are responsible for much more than the excellence of these two poems. It seems too paradoxical to see their influence in the Anglo-Saxon version of the *De Consolatione* of Boethius, yet it might never have been translated by Alfred but for paganism. A glance at the book will show how profoundly it must have interested a people torn like the Anglo-Saxons between rather crudely apprehended Christian doctrine on the one hand, and, on the other, the philosophy incorporated in their old stories, with its Fate, its Fame, and its defiant consciousness of free will. W. P. Ker said that Boethius saved the thought of the medieval world. But he could only save it because the ideas of which he treated were fermenting in the minds of the converted barbarians. 'What the onefold Providence of God is, and what Fate is, what happens by chance, and what are divine intelligence, divine predestination, and human free will'<sup>2</sup>—were not these questions which every thoughtful Anglo-Saxon must have pondered, so long as he was acquainted with the old tales of his people, as Alfred himself was? And Book II, on the nothingness of Fame, must also have had a deep, if melancholy, interest for the Anglo-Saxon. We may well owe the preservation of this work, and with it the best thought of the Middle Ages, to the fact that it made a bridge between the ancient philosophy of the Nordic peoples and their new religion.

<sup>1</sup> Is it not possible that the choice of subject in the religious narrative poems may have been considerably influenced by the existence of an old poetic vocabulary and convention? *Elene* and *Juliana* offer some of the same advantages to poets as *Judith*: the story of *Andreas* may have been chosen for the adventures at sea, for which an immense traditional vocabulary was at hand. Probably poems about the beginning of the world also had pagan prototypes which could be followed to a certain extent.

<sup>2</sup> *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book VI, Alfred's version, tr. Sedgefield. The discussion of Free will is much expanded by Alfred or by some previous commentator.

## VI

If the old pagan attitude to life has been rightly interpreted, one or two problems confronting Anglo-Saxon scholars become less difficult of solution. Stories born of the heathen philosophy could not but be unacceptable in the courts of newly converted kings, and it is, at least, a possible explanation of *Beowulf's* main theme that it is a gallant attempt to keep the traditions of heroic poetry while sacrificing the hero torn between two conflicting duties. So also the transition in Anglo-Saxon thought from pagan defiance to Christian resignation, from the glory of undying Fame to the nothingness of this world, might well produce the melancholy in Anglo-Saxon poetry, which strikes such an alien note in the chorus of heroic song.

But there is a greater mystery in Anglo-Saxon literature than these. Why did it die of no notifiable disease, as W. P. Ker said somewhere, and in a manner puzzling to literary historians, long before the Norman Conquest? If the theory advanced above has any truth in it, this decay of poetic literature is perfectly explicable. Whereas in Norway and Iceland, so long as the old ideas still have creative force, the native literature is like a plant perpetually putting forth new shoots, in England the principle of life in the old stories was dead, though the old poems, no doubt, continued to be sung. (It was not, I suppose, till the Tudor period that the English people again occupied themselves with the problem of men and women faced by evil alternatives.) And, except for historical events, there were no new stories to be got save by borrowing. The impulse to treat in verse stories from the Bible and from lives of Saints died out, perhaps, because they necessarily lacked the close-knit dramatic structure of the heroic poems, perhaps owing to the decay of religious fervour. Then comes a long silence, and when next we meet stories treated in verse they no longer treat of the clash of character with Destiny. They are stories of adventure, and they are borrowed. Some the new Norman aristocracy brings, most come from the conquered Britons, a few from the conquering Danelaw. None appear

to be the original property of the Anglo-Saxon element in the population.

The other Northern peoples whose literature has survived seem to have had the same intellectual history, except that no silence supervenes on the abandonment of the old themes. By the time that they were conscious of the incongruity of their stories and their beliefs, there was plenty of new material to borrow. In some ways the transition in Iceland from the stories of character to the stories of adventure and chivalry is even more striking than the course of literary history in England. But that is another story. What we can say here is that the Anglo-Saxons were the quickest of all the Nordic peoples to observe the discrepancy between their heroic stories and the new doctrines, and the most original in their efforts to create a new poetry on the lines of the old, yet in accord with the teaching of medieval Christianity.

BERTHA S. PHILLPOTTS.

## JOHN OF SALISBURY

**M**EDIEVAL Latin died of Erasmus and Rabelais and the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*. No language could have survived the night in the tavern when the Magisters and Doctors 'in high feather' disputed whether one should say *noster magistrandus* or *magister nostrandus*, and inclined to the second, presumably as more majestic. And behind the gibes of the scholars was the solid bludgeoning of the Reformers, the acid contempt of the philosophers. 'Thus what in writing of rymes and registering of lyes was the Clergy of that fabulous age wholly occupied.' The writing of rhymes indeed, came better off.

Mihi est propositum  
In taberna mori

for the secular verse,

Rex tremendae maiestatis

for the sacred, have their inviolate supremacy: critics so diverse as Samuel Daniel and Baudelaire have agreed that something in rhyming Latin satisfies the ear of the world. The prose has had fewer to speak for it. And yet in every century there have been a few who had some tenderness for 'these generations of mainly disinterested scholars, who whatever they were, were thorough, and whatever they could not do, could think'. Goldsmith, always softhearted to the discredited, discovered in them a 'most extensive erudition', although he admits that they were mainly busy about 'some petty traffic in a little creek', and that mankind was right in refusing to 'swallow a chimera for breakfast, though even cooked by Aristotle'. Milton evened Duns Scotus with Aquinas, and the whole corpus of the scholastics to a feast of sowthistles. But Bacon, with his vast indifferent comprehension, goes deeper. 'If those scholars to their great thirst of truth [only Bacon in his age would have admitted that] and

unwearied travel of wit had added universality of reading and contemplation, they had proved excellent lights, to the great advancement of all learning and knowledge: but as they are, they are great undertakers indeed, and fierce with dark keeping.'

The Gothic renaissance of the last century did little for medieval Latin: if anything, discredited it further. Beside what Nash calls the 'yong grasse' of the vernacular, the older language showed no better than the discoloured stubble of a harvest long since rotten. The result has been to leave the twelfth century in England romantic enough, but as flat as a tapestry. The vernaculars are capable of lyric and narrative, feeling and gesture, not of thought. *Sumer is icumen in*, the love in the forest of Tristrem and Iseult,

In winter it was hate,  
In somer it was cold,  
Þai hadden adorn [secret] gat  
þat þai no man told.

are far beyond the reach of Latin. But for all the intellectual purposes of language, the early vernaculars are inarticulate and dumb. They have no vocabulary of the mind. Without medieval Latin we are ignorant of the whole intellectual background of the century, that 'première hellénisation de la conscience occidentale [qui] s'est faite en plein moyen âge . . . cet humanisme plus profond qui refuse de sacrifier aucune valeur spirituelle et humaine'.<sup>1</sup> It is extravagant language, but not so extravagant to the readers of Abelard and Bernard Sylvestris and John of Salisbury. When John turns from Petronius Arbiter to the Book of Job—'*Militia est, inquit, vita hominis super terram*': yet if the prophetic spirit could have conceived our generation, he had rather have said that man's life upon the earth is a comedy, in which every man, forgetful of his own, plays another's part'<sup>2</sup>—it does not matter that the language is the Latin of the *Polycraticus*: the accent

<sup>1</sup> Gilson, *La Philosophie au moyen âge*, i, p. 93. Cf. St. Bernard, 'Abelard, sweating to make Plato a Christian, doth but prove himself a pagan' (*Tract. de error. Abel.*, iv).

<sup>2</sup> *Polycraticus*, iii. 8.

is unmistakable, the accent one will hear again in Bacon and Burton and Sir Thomas Browne, in Addison and Swift: the detached and melancholy irony that is as English as *Havelok*.

John of Salisbury has never lacked readers. Benvenuto da Imola quotes him in his commentary on Dante:<sup>1</sup> even in the seventeenth century he was three times reprinted, and Eudes de Mézéray, attracted by the political theory, translated the *Polycraticus* as *Les Vanitez de la Cour*: he has had the supreme good fortune of a chapter in Dr. Poole's *Illustrations of Medieval Thought and Learning*; the *Polycraticus* has been edited by Dr. Webb: the *Historia Pontificalis* by Dr. Poole. But the oddest recognition is in a note to Newman's *Apologia*, where John of Salisbury appears among the English Saints, though in italics, 'as not included in the Sacred Catalogue'; the Curia, which passed over so many things that wistful and broken scholar found important, had passed over this man also. John himself would have agreed with the Curia, for his religion was of an admirable taciturnity; yet if his own definition of sainthood held, his place would be as eminent as Bernard's. In one of the most characteristic passages of his prose he 'borrows the fashion of the Stoics who are for ever busy with analogy', and after identifying the Greek *heron* with the Latin *verum*, that which is sure ('nor let it move you that for the Greek aspirate the Latin hath the consonant *v*, since the Aeolic digamma hath with that consonant many affinities'), he parallels it with the Catholic *sanctus*, that which is made fast, the souls who have escaped the perpetual flux of vanity and now inhabit truth.<sup>2</sup> So, too, his valedictory request to the reader is not the familiar prayer for his soul's salvation, but that he may be 'truth's eager questioner, alike her lover and her worshipper'.<sup>3</sup> It is this unemotional sincerity, this conviction that 'there is one sin, ignorance',<sup>4</sup> that is John's strength; and if ever his style heightens to passion, it is in defence of

<sup>1</sup> Benvenuto da Imola (Florence, 1887, vol. iii, p. 235). I am indebted for the reference to Sir Frederick Pollock.

<sup>2</sup> *Metalogicus*, iii, c. 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 42.

<sup>4</sup> 'Ignorantia mater vitii est' (*Polycrat.*, iii. 1).

intellectual vision. '*Ariditas linguae, torpor sensuum*, a dryness of speech, a sluggishness of the senses,'<sup>1</sup> were his own rueful judgements on himself, and the *Metalogicus*, the greatest defence of the scholar's religion that the Middle Ages produced, was goaded from him, rather in the spirit of those veterans and *emeriti* who came some years ago to Oxford to 'man the last ditch for Greek'.

Is it not idle, this solicitude, this life of sleepless nights, laborious days, to win the secret places of philosophy? . . . Better lie still and listen to the lyre, and open all the senses' gates to pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

To scorn delights and live laborious days . . .  
Were it not better don as others use . . .

It is not only in a sudden identity of phrase that John reminds one of Milton. Both were passionate scholars, thwarted of their leisure and their hopes: both had taken 'labour and intense study to be my portion in this life', and literally found it instead among 'the brabbles and counterplotting of the bishops'. 'Let any gentle apprehension imagine what pleasure can be in this,' said Milton, looking back across that sea of hoarse noises and disputes in which his own voice had rung as harsh as any, to that 'quiet and still air of delightful studies' in which he had thought to dream away his years. 'Marvel not', writes John to his friend Thomas à Becket, 'that I climb no single step of that stair whereby alone men rise . . . for I despise those things which the courtiers go about, and the things I go about they despise. Marvel rather that I do not cut or break the knot, if there's no other way of loosing it, that so long has bound me to the trifles of the Court, and holds me, struggling still, in such a servitude. Wellnigh twelve years frittered away . . . I that had set my heart on things far other.'<sup>3</sup> To both, disgrace brought deliverance. In 1159, John, secretary to the dying Archbishop of Canterbury, cumbered with the whole administration of the

<sup>1</sup> *Metal.*, iii. prol.

<sup>2</sup> *Polycrat.*, vii, c. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Polycrat.*, i. prol.

metropolitan see,<sup>1</sup> already fighting Henry II for the immunities of the Church, fell under the king's displeasure, was suspended, and left to struggle with his debts and the newly discovered *Organon* of Aristotle in a sudden delicious leisure. He used it to complete a defence of scholarship that swept it from the plane of intellectual delight to the eternity of the things of the spirit. But his hand, it seemed to him, had lost its cunning: gone 'the liveness of youth, the swiftness of ardent wits, the fidelity of memory'; and then, as always with him, the memory of Virgil comes to set upon his melancholy the consecration of an eternized phrase:

The years take all away, aye, even the soul:  
A boy I can remember used to sing  
All the long summer days; now all the songs,  
The many songs he used to sing, forgotten.  
The voice has fled the singer: all is fled.<sup>2</sup>

'It is well-nigh twenty years',<sup>3</sup> he goes on, 'since my own poverty, and the counsel of friends one could not but obey, tore me from the workshop and wrestling ground of the philosophers. . . . And since then, distracted by other not so much diverse as adverse occupations, there has scarcely been an hour, and even that hour stolen, that it was suffered me to be the philosopher again. Ten times have I crossed the Alps, since I first left England; twice have I travelled southern Italy; many times have I served the interests of my lords and friends in the Roman Church; again and again, in various emergencies, have I gone throughout not England only, but also France . . . wherefore I do hold myself something excused, if the reader finds what I have written unpolished and

<sup>1</sup> 'Sollicitudo totius Britanniae, quod ad causas ecclesiasticas, mihi incumbat' (*Metal.*, i, prol.).

<sup>2</sup> Omnia fert aetas, animum quoque: saepe ego longos  
Cantando puerum memini me condere soles:  
Nunc oblita mihi tot carmina, vox quoque Moerim  
Jam fugit ipsa. (*Metal.*, iii, prol.)

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the very difficult chronology of John's life, see Poole, *Early Correspondence of John of Salisbury*, and the *Historia Pontificalis*, pp. lxxi-lxxxii.

insensitive [obtusius et incultius].’ ‘The brevity of our life’, he says elsewhere, ‘the dullness of our senses, the torpor of our indifference, the futility of our occupation, suffer us to know but little; and that little is soon shaken and then torn from the mind by that traitor to learning, that hostile and faithless stepmother to memory, oblivion.’<sup>1</sup> Five years later, in 1164, the storm broke. John, driven out of England in the first gust of the king’s anger, writes to his friend and master, Thomas à Becket, still beating against the wind. He is almost penniless; he had hardly twelve pence of his own when he left Canterbury, and the few marks given him were almost all spent in baggage and tips; lodgings in Paris are ruinous; he has had to spend three days looking for what he has got, and then to pay a year’s rent before he could set foot in them; he has had to sell his horses; he had thought to travel, but it looks more like sitting still. But the grumbling is transparent; the whole letter is radiant with escape. The curious amenity, the serenity that seems to abide about the coasts of France is the first word in his letter: ‘it seemed to me as soon as I touched these shores, that the very temper of the air was tenderer’. Paris, the second *patria* of scholars, is about him once again. Thirty years before he had stood in the schools, *admodum adolescens*, hardly more than a boy, greedy for every word that fell from the lips of Abelard, one of the last to hear the great voice, before it fell abruptly silent: behold him again on the Petit Pont, the crowds again about him, the old familiar arguments, the dear disputes. ‘Happy the exile, to which such place is given!’<sup>2</sup> So full in his heart, so apt the quotation, that he seems to have shared it not only with Becket, but with his old friend, Peter of Celle, now abbot of Rheims. ‘Happy exile indeed’, snorts the godlier Peter, ‘with rather more to drink than there is at home, and friends meeting one every day, and pleasant, fairly frequent, little dinners. Ah Paris! how apt art thou to capture souls! Exile! Would that my John did in very truth so think it, and would come back to his *patria*. Here is no buying of books, and paying

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, i, Prol.

<sup>2</sup> *Chart. Univ. Paris*, i. 19.

of copyists, and wrangling of philosophers. . . . Here is the school of the simplicity of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

Peter was not always so censorious, though always a little jealous for John's company. The two had been poor together for a while in Provins,<sup>2</sup> sometime in the course of the twelve years in which John followed at the heels of learning 'through the divers cities of sweet France'. Those twelve years laid the foundations of that classical scholarship in which, says Dr. Poole, he was unapproached by any man of his age, but left him at the end as poor as at the beginning. The less learned Peter was more fortunate: 1146 found him Abbot of Montier-la-Celle, one of the richest monastic houses in Champagne. Preferment might have come that way to John, but, profound and taciturn mystic as he is, he seems to have fought shy of the cloister. The Abbot of Celle kept open house for him; gave him some nominal employment as his clerk, and pleased himself now and then to write to his brilliant friend 'suo clerico suus abbas' for the rest of his life. John was not unhappy. 'Time was', the Abbot wrote wistfully when his friend had gone into the world and was much sought after by the great ones, 'you said you loved this place above all other places. You have greater friends now, but I loved you first. It was not my substance I shared with you, it was my heart.'<sup>3</sup> John sends him his *Statesman's Book* for criticism; Peter retaliates with his own *De Panibus*, an allegorizing commentary of prostrating dullness on the various scriptural metaphors of bread. It was acknowledged with hearty affection, but with some levity. 'I swear it, I have swallowed every crust of it, every crumb: but I need not remind a man of your experience that man doth not live by bread alone, and that an assiduity of potation hath made the English remarkable among foreign nations. Fitting is it that the hand which gave the bread should also pass the cup . . . and wine I know is readier to your hand than *coelia* which the vulgar among

<sup>1</sup> Peter of Celle, *Epist.* 72; Migne, 202, c. 519.

<sup>2</sup> John of Salisbury, *Epist.* 82: 'Nam quod ad me, idem sum qui fueram, possideo plus quam nos duo Pruvini habuerimus.'

<sup>3</sup> Peter of Celle, *Epist.* 72.

us here call beer. Nevertheless I am myself a drinker of both, nor do I abhor anything that can make one drunk.' He goes on to reminiscences of their old friend 'who never unless drunk sprang to the arts', but who, once he had drink taken, made verses far surpassing the Virgilian in number of their syllables and feet. Yet in distinction to your true drunkard, says John, 'I do but ask that wine shall cheer that which bread hath strengthened. Now the vineyard of the Sieur de Soreth is known to you . . . That wine hath subtlety for a delicate palate, yet solidity enough even for the crude and amateur. Certain qualities it hath, which set it far above Falernian or Sicilian, or that Greek wine which the Chancellor of Sicily used to make me drink, to the grave detriment of my constitution. So, pray you, send me a supply thereof, or at least a pittance; and yet enough, withal, to satisfy an Englishman and a drinker. Fail me, and I brand you for a traitor, in that you have wedged me full of bread, and deny me the wine that might digest it, far unlike the custom of the French which is to send away the invited guest often, it is true, sober, but at least not dry.'<sup>1</sup> He was to come back to Peter, fugitive and proscribed, but still equable. 'That cholerick and heavenly temperament of thine', said Peter once, 'is gayest in thine afflictions, puts forth leaves in the frost.'<sup>2</sup> John was already busy with his *Historia Pontificalis*, commissioning a copy of Aristotle with Richard l'Evêque's notes on doubtful passages ('I admit the eloquence of the translation', said John, 'but suspect the grammar'),<sup>3</sup> entreating a translation of the pseudo-Dionysius from John Sarrazin, to be collated with the older translation by the other John, Scotus Erigena.<sup>4</sup> Henry had confiscated his property and beggared his kin, but after that there was no more that he could do. *Instans Tyrannus* is helpless before a scholar.

The material for the *History of the Popes* was the result of John's first secretaryship, to Eugenius III: it was in the Papal Curia that he began that experience of the vanity of courts which gave him his profound and dispassionate knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> John of Salisbury, *Epist.* 85.

<sup>2</sup> Peter of Celle. *Epist.* 25.

<sup>3</sup> John of Salisbury, *Epist.* 211.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 149, 169.

men. He saw the coming of Louis from the Second Crusade, 'his strength shattered in the East', and Eleanor, that undaunted daughter of desires and of William, the troubadour Duke of Aquitaine, still sulking at being rent from Prince Raymond's livelier court at Antioch. Raymond's hospitality had been magnificent: he was no brother to the Duke of Aquitaine if he were not witty, and the two talked endlessly, 'almost without a break', says John, while the poor king prowled like a wistful schoolboy, and finally played the strong man and carried her off to Jerusalem, 'and in the heart of either the injury climbed higher, and dissemble as they might, persisted still'. John, quoting long after

Kingship and love bear ill with company.

adds his own comment: 'Of a truth, it is easier to surrender the wealth of a kingdom than the love of a woman.'<sup>1</sup> The good old Pope listens patiently to both, soothes the quarrel, coaxes them together, forbids any further speech of the 'consanguinity' which Eleanor had begun to use as a weapon of defence—a ruling, says John drily, which seemed particularly to please the king, for he loved the Queen *vehementer et fere puerili modo*—and finally gave them his parting benediction, although he was an austere man, with tears.<sup>2</sup> Eleanor's conscience, however, seems to have been too tender to be allayed even by the papal reassurance: she finally satisfied it by a divorce from Louis and a marriage with her still closer, but more masterful kinsman, Henry of Normandy, later of England: and a viper's brood she bore him. John tells the story with his usual economy of phrase: but the heresy hunt in the Council at Rheims, where Guibert de la Porrée presented a bland and impenetrable front to the saintly Bernard is a subject more in his *genre*. St. Bernard's mother dreamt before his birth that she was delivered of a whelp that barked and ceased not; and indeed, said the holy man to whom she brought her perplexity, that which shall be born of thee shall be a right noble whelp, who shall be a right watch-dog of the House of God, and shall bark mightily against the enemies of

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, iii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Pont.*, 23-9.

the faith.<sup>1</sup> Abelard had been hounded into heart-broken retreat at Cluny; but Guibert de la Porrée had made his earth too deep in patristic theology for dislodging. It was a duel between the two ablest brains in the Church, and neither scored. The good Pope came to the conclusion that 'the essence of God is to be predicated not in the sense of the ablative case only, but also of the nominative';<sup>2</sup> the bishop 'reverently received the sentence and returned with his rank untouched and honour unabated to his diocese': but certain of the bishops a little suspected the humility of that retreating back.<sup>3</sup> On one thing, however, there could be no two opinions; sixty years spent in what John calls the *tritura*, the delicate friction of letters, had given Guibert's style a kind of *patina*, a bloom; the heat of the debate did but make it incandescent. Never, said the cardinals, had man spoken thus before. *Quietus tardior*, he was something too deliberate when unprovoked, 'but goaded by questioning and shrewdly pressed, he showed ever larger and fuller. You would have had him always roused, that the vigour of that fiery brain might at once lighten and kindle you.'<sup>4</sup>

It is good criticism, and not inapplicable to John himself. *Quietus tardior*, he has not the unearthly quality of John Scotus Erigena, who speaks another language than ours, yet makes it intelligible by some translucency of the spirit: he has not even the living prose of Bernard Sylvestris, always vibrant on the edge of poetry, sometimes great poetry. The movement of the Englishman's prose is slower; the creative process with him is rather the crystallization of overcharged thought than sublimation from intensity of heat. He loved

<sup>1</sup> Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, *Vita S. Bernardi*, Migne, 185, c. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Was A. D. Godley remembering it when he wrote *To any Bus*:

Dative be or Ablative,  
So thou only let us live!

<sup>3</sup> Otto von Freisingen, *Gest. Fred.*, i, c. 57; Poole, *Illustrations of Medieval Thought*, pp. 159-70.

<sup>4</sup> 'Quietus tardior, sed quaestionum stimulis provocatus et iniuriatus argucius plenior et planior apparebat. Velles semper esse commotum, ut igne mentis te pariter illustraret et accenderet vigor' (*Hist. Pont.*, c. 12).

a great phrase in another: Pope Adrian's bitter cry, 'Well may the tiara glitter, for it is of fire!',<sup>1</sup> Bernard Sylvestris—or is it Hildebert of Le Mans?—

Blind chance upturns the silly toil of men.

Our life's a mock, the standing jest of gods.<sup>2</sup>

and sometimes himself achieves it, in a sudden generous heat at the end of a letter to Becket, assuring him that there are still some faithful among the English bishops, 'How should there be eclipse of all the stars?',<sup>3</sup> or in a white indignation against the ferocity of the game laws, 'that will torture for loss of a beast the image of God'.<sup>4</sup> Again, in a single phrase on Julian, *sordidus imperator*,<sup>5</sup> he has stripped the neo-pagan splendour from the Apostate, and left him rather as his contemporaries saw him, a dingy philosopher, with ink-stains on his fingers and an unkempt beard. 'Words', says John, 'should be gently handled; not tortured like captive slaves, to make them give up what they never had.'<sup>6</sup> He reads best in paragraphs, the chapter on exile, the *aliena terra* of scholarship; on music and the human voice, itself so nearly spirit; on the world's comedy or tragedy (*de mundana comoedia vel tragoedia*); on the study of literature, and especially the classics, as the foundation of all others; above all, for sheer processional state, the prologue to the *Statesman's Book* in defence of the written word.<sup>7</sup> 'For who would know the Alexanders or the Caesars, who marvel at the Stoics and the Peripatetics, had not the monuments of literature distinguished them? Who would follow in the adored footsteps of the apostles and prophets, had not the sacred writings given them their consecration for posterity? Triumphal arches avail to the glory of famous men, in so much as the inscription graven upon them sets forth for what causes and to whom they were erected. The liberator of his country, the builder of its peace,

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, viii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Epist.* 175.

<sup>4</sup> *Polycrat.*, i. 4. Almost alone among the medieval moralists he saw the suffering of the hare, 'that little unhappy, timid beast'.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, viii. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Metal.*, iii. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Polycrat.*, vii. 13; i. 6; iii. 8, 9; *Metal.*, i. 23, 24; *Polycrat.*, i. prol.

then only is recognized by the beholder, when the inscription bids him know that it is Constantine, whom our own Britain bore, who triumphs here. None ever shone with an abiding lustre, unless it were in his own, or a stranger's, record. A little while, and the fame of an ass and the fame of an emperor are one, unless the memory of one or other is preserved by the good offices of a scribe. How many and how great kings, think you, have there been, of whom there is neither speech nor any man thinking upon them any more? To no purpose are the great deeds done, doomed are they to be enveloped by the everlasting dark, unless they take fire in the light of letters. Whatever favour or crying of the heralds is otherwise won, it is no more than if Echo of the legends should prolong the applauses of the theatre: it ceases, even as it began.'

'Never in thy letters', writes Peter of Celle, 'have I known thy pulse uneven.'<sup>1</sup> 'Friendship with thee', he says elsewhere, 'is fuller in the heart, seldomer on the tongue; it burns without smoke, flows, but without foam; it moveth its wings, but silently; seeketh the lowest place, but as sublime in its generosity as strong in its integrity: it giveth heat, but not ashes: it knoweth its end, but that end is not a consumption, but a consummation.'<sup>2</sup> It is Peter's one moment of creation; John's quality is prisoner in those phrases, as himself could never be in Celle; he has imposed upon the wordy Peter something of his own ardour, his own restraint. It is this which gives distinction to John's critical intelligence, its rare combination of enthusiasm and balance. For every quality of greatness, whatever, in Milton's phrase, 'hath passion or admiration' in the men who were his masters or his contemporaries, his recognition was instant and generous: but his judgement never surrenders, not even to Abelard, whom he loves to call the Palatine, not even to Bernard, *senex Carnotensis*, 'the most perfect Platonist of our time'. Abelard's spell over a nature so different from his own is strong to the last; most richly gifted, *opulentissimus*, he calls him; criticizes his philosophy, but never speaks of him without an elevation. For the quality in Abelard

<sup>1</sup> Peter of Celle, *Epist.* 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Epist.* 70.

which distinguished him to John is the quality which has survived the summer lightnings of his fame: the solid honesty, humility even, of his intellectual purpose. 'He did with passion, what Augustine would have done in all things, that is, *rerum intellectui serviebat*—he served the understanding of things.'<sup>1</sup> Beside him, to John's mind, Adam du Petit Pont cut a sorry figure; a brain of the keenest, and considerable literature, but wilfully, contemptuously, obscure, for the sake of reputation among the undergraduates. To John's riper scholarship he gave himself, freely and benignly, lent him books; but that kind of intellectual dishonesty John cannot away with—'his disciple I was not, for one day'.<sup>2</sup> Even in the heat of the heresy hunt and the exquisite malice of the encounter that followed it, when Bernard suggested through John himself a friendly informal conference with the learned bishop on certain points in the writings of St. Hilary, and the learned bishop courteously replied that to ensure full profit from the discussion the abbot should first submit for a year or two to the ordinary processes of a liberal education, John holds the balance even. 'Yet were these both excellently lettered, and mightily eloquent: their studies lay apart.' And even as he defends the abbot's scholarship, so he defends the scholar's divinity, till the style, 'moving its wings but silently', hangs poised at last in the diviner air of which he has the secret. 'And now as I believe [the passage was written long after both were dead] his judgement hath no discord with the Abbot nor all Saints, since now they look together on the truth they both desired.'<sup>3</sup>

John was critical, certainly ironic, sometimes a little malicious, as on those amateur logicians who insist on defining things, so that a carpenter cannot be held to have made anything to sit on until he says in so many words 'I have made a stool';<sup>4</sup> but he is never captious. There is nothing in him of the curious tendency which he notes as almost universal in humanity, to think ill of one's superiors in

<sup>1</sup> *Metal.*, i. 5; ii. 10; iii. 4, 6; iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 10; iii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. Pont.*, viii, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Metal.*, v. 8.

office. Read the comic poets, says John, or the tragic either, and will you ever find a *pater familias* popular with his household? It holds good of every profession, academic, religious, diplomatic. John's respect for Gilbert Foliot was profound; it always indeed went hard with him to quarrel with so elegant scholarship; but on Gilbert's one foible the hawk-like irony checks and stoops. In earlier days, Gilbert had had much to say to John about the morals of the religious orders; himself then entered the cloister, looked round upon his brethren, and kindled with new fires, inveighed upon the turpitude of his superiors. Gilbert is promoted: touched with sympathy for his fellow-officials, he yet feels that all is not well with Priors. They made Gilbert a prior: Gilbert now carps at Abbots. They made Gilbert an abbot: Gilbert's eye softens as it contemplates Abbots, but bends itself sternly upon Bishops. They made Gilbert a bishop; and the Church hath rest.<sup>1</sup> Oddly enough, the sequence does not end there, though John, writing in 1159, could not know it. There still remained Archbishops; but even Gilbert could find little amiss with good old Theobald of Canterbury, now near his end. Theobald dies: his successor, Thomas à Becket, gave his critics full scope, and Gilbert is hot upon it, from the first moment in the great council at Westminster: was this to be Archbishop, the persecutor of the Church of God? 'My son', says the magnificent old warrior-bishop, Henry of Winchester, turning to the Archbishop-elect, 'hast thou been Saul the persecutor? Then be thou henceforth Paul the apostle.'<sup>2</sup>

It is this critical dispassionate aloofness that sets John solitary in the Middle Ages: solitary, one suspects in his own life. 'I despise the things they go about: the things I go about, they despise.' The question of the universals, which sometimes turned the schools into a cock-pit, does but give him occasion for a fragment of gracious prose—'that ancient problem wherein travailing the world hath grown old, wherein more time hath been consumed than the Caesars spent in winning and in ruling

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, vii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Garnier de Pont-Saint-Maxence, *La Vie de S. Thomas (Hippeau)*, p. 18.

a world empire, and vaster fortunes squandered than Croesus with all his great possessions knew'.<sup>1</sup> He is absolute neither for Plato nor for Aristotle, nor yet for the gallant endeavour of Bernard of Chartres and his disciples to reconcile the two—'they have come late, to my thinking, and labour in vain who would reconcile those dead, who never in their lifetime could agree'.<sup>2</sup> On most of the vexed questions of theology, over which later centuries saved and damned souls alternately, 'fixed fate, free will, fore knowledge absolute', the origin of good and evil, a score of insoluble riddles, he professes himself an academic content to doubt:<sup>3</sup> yet not an academic in such straits as that unfortunate philosopher in the *Attic Nights* who confessed that he knew not whether he might not be a grasshopper.<sup>4</sup> It is this quality, in spite of his pedantry, the frequent rigidity of the style, the endless didactic digressions, that make him strangely our contemporary. The men he had to do with are medieval, each of them a figure from a tapestry: Henry, with the thrusting shoulders and the horseman's thighs and the astute tawny lion head, over against the haggard beauty of the Archbishop, 'Phoebus Apollo turned fasting friar', and between them this grey academic ghost, never blinded by his love of the one to ignore the great qualities of the other, a disembodied intelligence, but with full capacity for suffering.<sup>5</sup> In Becket's terrific fight for the privilege of his order, John was his faithful henchman, never his partisan. He had courage enough, even when his heart was breaking for him, to withstand Becket's rashness to the last: when the four butchers, as the Saint's biographers call them, came truculent and ranting to beard the Archbishop in his chamber, and the Archbishop spurned them to the very door, with truculence at least equal to their own, John met him on his return with an irony that would be cruel if one did not catch the strain behind it. 'Admirable! was it for you to exasperate these

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, vii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Metal.*, ii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Polycrat.*, i, prol.; vii. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Polycrat.*, ii. 23.

<sup>5</sup> He heard that his friend, John, Bishop of Poitiers, was dying, poisoned. 'It was as though my arm were being torn from the shoulder' (*Epist.* 146).

malignants further? Could you not have taken counsel, and given a gentler answer, when their whole purpose is to trap you in your speech?' *But the Saint, who already sighed after the straits of death as for the sweets of quiet made answer. 'My counsel hath been taken: I know what I must do.' To which Master John 'God grant that it be for good'.<sup>1</sup>* But once that generous madness had reached its climax in the ecstasy of martyrdom, John moved heaven and earth for his canonizing. The living man he counselled, entreated, upbraided, criticized to his face, and with no soft words, saved him sometimes from the consequences of his own folly, sometimes had to confess that he had spent himself in vain: once dead, he will have the world remember one thing and one thing only, the quality which John most loved in him and himself had not, 'that magnificence of soul'.<sup>2</sup>

'I see you always', wrote Peter of Blois with that unction reserved by the Archdeacon of Bath for the misfortunes of his friends, 'between the hammer and the anvil.'<sup>3</sup> 'The upper and nether millstones' was John's own phrase. His was a peculiarly cruel position, to see the cause which his heart and his conscience approved, imperilled by the insane obstinacy of the man he most loved. Henry was wise enough to recognize John's quality: he did his best to detach him from Becket's side, and secure him for his own: without that wary brain the Archbishop would soon have wrought his own ruin, alienated even the heads of the Church whose battle he fought, Pope and legate and cardinal, with his vindictiveness, his annihilating sincerity, his vitriolic contempts.<sup>4</sup> But John's influence with Becket was even deeper rooted and of longer standing than most men saw. He has no great name in history; but he was one of those few 'the effect of whose

<sup>1</sup> Benedict of Peterborough (Robertson, *Materials for the Life of Thomas Becket*, iii. 9).

<sup>2</sup> John of Salisbury, *Vita S. Thomae*, Migne, 190, c. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Peter of Blois, *Epist.* 22, Migne, 207.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Becket's astounding letter to the Papal legate (Becket, *Epist.* 64), fortunately submitted to John before it was sent, with John's (*Epist.* 221), in which precisely the same things are said, but with complete courtesy. See also *Epist.* 222.

being on those around them is incalculably diffusive'. When Thomas the Chancellor became Thomas of Canterbury, Gilbert Foliot said with his fine sneer, 'The king hath wrought a miracle: from a man of the world and a soldier he hath made an archbishop'.<sup>1</sup> Thomas himself, when the king told him that he would have him consecrated, held out a fold of his magnificent cloak, 'A right saint you have chosen for the Holy See!'<sup>2</sup> Yet the consecration of the holy oil was a consummation, rather than a beginning. Becket's intimate for years had been this silent scholar, whose spirit dwelt in a place beyond the exacerbations and the noises, the quick mounting and hard riding of the Court, where the horses might sometimes keep Sabbath, never their masters.<sup>3</sup> It is not only the secret place of the Most High: it is the sense that one gets in Boethius, in stray passages even in Abelard, and in that other great egoist, Milton, of some *communis patria*, the spirits of just men made perfect. 'The world hath its Elysium, here and now: it knows its sun, its stars . . . for what are the Elysian fields, but the largeness of noble souls?'<sup>4</sup> The *Polycraticus*, dedicated to the Chancellor warring at Toulouse, ends with a vision of the tree that haunted the imagination alike of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the tree of knowledge by which man fell, and by which only he may inherit life again, the sacred tree of Virgil, Proserpine's golden bough.<sup>5</sup> On all those things which were the breath of the Chancellor's nostrils, John set the scorns of his light mockery, as well as of a graver indignation: but in his speech of the vast world theatre, where every man plays out his farce to its tragic end, about whose mighty stage coils the ninefold Styx and Charon plying with his ancient boat, and looking down upon it the august cloud of witnesses whom men thought mad because they scorned the motley, there runs a passionate undertone, the longing that one spirit so finely touched might play his part aright.<sup>6</sup>

If it were so, the shaft was well sped: the heart it struck

<sup>1</sup> Fitzstephen, *Materials*, iii. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert de Boscama, iii, c. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Peter of Blois, *Epist.* 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Polycrat.*, iii. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, viii. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 8, 9.

was sufficiently noble. 'That magnificence of soul' had led Becket into dangerous ways, but delivered him from their evil. The crimson *pallium* that his mother saw in a dream flung across his cradle, and billowing fold on lustrous fold to the horizon,<sup>1</sup> was the right colour, the right magnitude, for that boundless extravagance, that boundless charity. John, bidding his *libellum* take the road to the Chancellor's palace, bade it have no fear of losing its way: there was a beaten path, trodden by countless poor men's feet. Fantastic and magnificent, the lust of the eye and the pride of life were always with him, but not even his enemies could tax him with the lust of the flesh. Henry loved him, teased him, would come dishevelled from hard riding and stand amused, watching his favourite dining with fastidious pomp (*fastu* is the admirable word of the biographer), and leap the table to sit beside him: revelled with him, 'reigned with him', but could not debauch him.<sup>2</sup> Once, in Stafford, it was the king's own mistress who tempted him, and his host aware of it and curious to know the truth of this vaunted chastity, but a little timorous, came late that night with his lantern to the room that should have housed his formidable guest. It was empty, the bed not slept in: the hawk had stooped to the lure. The man turned, raising his lantern to go out, and the light fell on a figure kneeling at the foot of the bed: the Chancellor, fallen asleep at his prayers.<sup>3</sup> One passion persisted through all the rigours and austerities of his later life: the Thomas who leapt into a mill-race to rescue his gentle, and was all but crushed himself beneath the grinding wheel,<sup>4</sup> is the same Thomas who stopped on his dreary road from Gravelines, sea-stained and spent after the long crossing in an open boat, to look at the hawk upon a young man's wrist. Exhausted as he was, drenched in his poor disguise, and all but barefoot, he stood there looking at it, 'remembering his former state, forgetful of his exile'. Some

<sup>1</sup> Grim, *Vita S. Thomae, Materials*, ii. 357.

<sup>2</sup> William Fitzstephen, *Materials*, iii. 21-25; William of Newburgh, ii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> William of Canterbury, *Materials*, i. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Grim, *Materials*, ii. 360.

keenness of the connoisseur flashed under the shabby cowl, and all but betrayed him. 'Upon my life,' said a bystander, is not that the Archbishop?' 'Idiot!' said another, 'since when did the Archbishop travel thus?' and the danger passed. Thomas had blenched; and perhaps, says his pious biographer—may God assoil him—'that pang of fear might something atone for his thought of vanity at such a time'.<sup>1</sup>

The Count Rollanz, beneath a pine he sits,  
Turning his eyes towards Spain, he begins  
Remembering so many diverse things,  
So many lands where he went conquering,  
And France the Douce, the heroes of his kin,  
And Charlemagne his lord who nourished him.

'His lord who nourished him'; it was the peculiar cruelty of the struggle between Henry and Becket—far more cruel than that which broke Frederick II—that it meant the estrangement of a passionate friendship.<sup>2</sup> Henry, great egoist as he was, watched Becket turn away from him with a puzzled child's dismay; he suffered in his heart, as well as in his thwarted dreams of sovereignty. It was a conflict of ideas, too, neither of them ignoble.<sup>3</sup> The Church had been the one stronghold of justice in the nightmare of Stephen's reign; but her own discipline had suffered. In the nine years since Henry's accession, a hundred clerks had been found guilty of murder, sometimes aggravated by fouler things: the ecclesiastical courts had degraded them, and there it ended: ordinary human justice could not reach them.<sup>4</sup> Henry did well to be angry, even if the Angevin lust for absolute sovereignty moved him as much as the Englishman's passion for justice. The Canon of Bedford over whom the battle finally joined was a poor creature; Becket himself would have had him flogged and

<sup>1</sup> Alan of Tewkesbury, *Materials*, ii. 335; Roger de Pontigny, Migne, 190, c. 89.

<sup>2</sup> William of Newburgh, ii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 25. Cf. Herbert de Boseham, 'O rex et O Pontifex!' *Materials*, iii. 272-3.

<sup>4</sup> William of Newburgh, ii. 16, 'and the judgment of God seemed to tarry'.

suspended: but the king wanted justice, and his own justice. Becket would abate no jot of the rights of the Church to judge her own. He stood for the supremacy of God, by whom kings reign and princes execute justice; the least of His sworn servants stood or fell to one Master; on this living rock the Church was built, and the gates of hell should not prevail against it. True, the king had the power of the sword, but that sword was given him by the Church that consecrated him, her hands too sacred to be stained with blood.<sup>1</sup> This was the ideal State, as John saw it, a vision apocalyptic enough; it faded a little when some craven shifty-eyed wretch paraded a neglected tonsure to save him from the dangling rope. The king weakened his cause by demanding too much: he would have had the last resource of the Church, its black omnipotent ace, excommunication, subject to his consent; he denied her right to ordain the sons of serfs, and so closed the one door into liberty that the poor prisoners of the feudal system knew, the feet of the body politic that endured all things and whom no man pitied, unless John. Arrogance met with arrogance, pride with Satanic pride. Through endless strife and shifts and meannesses, the struggle went on, with now and then a torchlight flare of drama, sometimes defiant as in the scene at Northampton when the Archbishop, summoned like a criminal before his judge, came down the great hall, carrying in his own hands the archiepiscopal cross, and the king at the rumour of his coming drew back to an inner room, whence messengers came in and out, and gusts of so great anger that the watchers in the hall blanched, and still the Archbishop waited, holding his cross;<sup>2</sup> sometimes sheer comedy, as when the letters excommunicating the royalist bishops were smuggled through rather like bombs from France, past the king's wards, and unostentatiously served upon the dignified Gilbert himself;<sup>3</sup> sometimes pitiful, as when Becket stood day after day watching the dismal procession of the

<sup>1</sup> *Polycrat.*, iv. 3: 'Quod princeps minister est sacerdotum, et minus eis.'

<sup>2</sup> Fitzstephen, *Materials*, iii, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90.

proscribed, old men and women and crying children, stripped of all they had, exiled from England, and bidden upon oath to go and show themselves to their master, that he might see to what straits he had brought them.<sup>1</sup> Becket's heart broke, but not his courage. 'Tempest hath struck the ship. My hand is on the tiller, and you bid me sleep,' he flashed back at Gilbert, counselling compromise.<sup>2</sup> It was as well for the Church that John's hand was sometimes laid above the Archbishop's; it saved Henry himself from excommunication, and Christendom from yet another schism. John spent his strength and his lean purse and his hopes in fruitless negotiation.<sup>3</sup> Reconciliation after reconciliation broke on Becket's great and terrible phrase, 'saving the honour of my order'. 'Marry come up', said one of his clerks, apostrophizing his horse that had stumbled on the weary road—'saving the honour of God and Holy Church and my order.'<sup>4</sup> 'Saving the honour of God' it had become; Becket had gone deeper into the cloud.

It was a strange life for an academic and a Ciceronian; yet at the moment when the severance of the two lives—the scholar's and the politician's—is most complete, the secret bond between them is revealed. That moderating power, the clear-sighted detachment that would be inhuman but for its sensitiveness and its suffering, John had learned elsewhere. The scholar who had seen that in every darkness God hath his stars, that in every religion, Greek, Roman, Judaic, He is the shepherd of faithful souls, whose saints were pagan as well as Christian, Socrates, and Numa, and Scipio, and Titus, and above all his beloved Trajan, who cannot too much praise their fortitude, their chastity, their gentleness,<sup>5</sup> could not be blind to Henry's angry virtues, his thwarted blundering zeal. Like Bacon, John's soul was all its life a stranger, but his meditation upon the 'universal frame of nature' did not bring him to see

<sup>1</sup> Herbert de Boseham, l. iv, cap. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Becket, *Epist.* 630 (Migne, 190, c. 605).

<sup>3</sup> John of Salisbury, *Epist.* 145, 142, 183, 207, 232, 237, 168.

<sup>4</sup> Fitzstephen, iii. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Polycrat.*, iii. 9.

'the earth with men upon it . . . not much other than an ant hill, where some ants carry corn, and some carry their young, and some go empty, and all to and fro a little heap of dust'. He saw it the stage of a comedy, but a pitiful one; for to most things, he says, there is a tragic end, and whether comedy or tragedy, it is to him 'immense, mysterious, unutterable'.<sup>1</sup> He had known Becket arrogant, revengeful, unchristian; but he had also known Becket at the altar, celebrating in such wise that he saw the Lord's Passion.<sup>2</sup> 'By doubting', Abelard had said, 'we are brought to question; and by questioning, we come at the truth.'<sup>3</sup> That was John's way: but the other way of coming at the truth, Becket's way, the divine *furor*, he also recognized, and took the shoes from off his feet. His own episcopate followed on the canonizing of the murdered Archbishop; but the familiar formula 'Dei gratia episcopus', altered in John's letters to 'John, by the Divine favour and the merits of St. Thomas, servant of the Church at Chartres'.

For it was at Chartres that John of Salisbury came, in the phrase of his beloved Petronius, to the harbour of a stilled desire. Thirty years before he had come there to read 'the heathen writers, with whom is bound up the life of human learning', and though Bernard's humanism was already gone from the schools, the 'divine idea' had taken a shrine, not

Of crystal flesh wherein to shine'

but of living stone. The West Portal of the Cathedral had even then been in building; in these last decades of the century it stood, a new and gracious miracle. Dead kings and queens, the familiar faces of Donatus and Plato and Aristotle looked down upon him, and through the blue of the western lancets he saw the light, as he had once seen it through a sapphire, 'become a purer heaven'.<sup>4</sup> For four years he served the altar, the last

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 8: 'Tam immensae, tam mirabilis et inenarrabilis tragoediae vel comoediae theatrum.'

<sup>2</sup> John of Salisbury, *Vita S. Thomae*, Migne, 190.

<sup>3</sup> Abelard, *Sic et Non*, prol., Migne, 178, c. 1349.

<sup>4</sup> *Polycrat.*, v. 3: 'firmamento puriori in sapphiro confirmatur'.

of a long succession of saints and humanists, some of them saintlier, but none more humane than he. There are not many records of his episcopate, but two things are noted in the Necrology, that he secured the freedom of all serfs of the Cathedral who might be worthy of it, and forbade judgement by ordeal of water or fire, substituting purgation by the word of three witnesses.<sup>1</sup> Peter of Celle, always a little officious, bustles in for denial of certain accusations, fragments of gossip, complaints of his beloved John's administration, his quick temper, his slackness, his high handedness, his indifference.<sup>2</sup> John took little trouble to answer; he was safe in his old refuge. 'Dear in many things, the dearest fruit of literature is this, that every grievous gulf of space and time annulled, it brings a man face to face with his friends . . . It hath a mysterious sweetness, this setting of the mind's edge to the reading or writing of something that hath worth. None of the things men do will they find so gracious as this, unless, moved by some divine compunction, devotion urges to prayer, or, the heart great with love, conceives the vision of God in the mind, and draws His greatness down as though with human hands.'<sup>3</sup> It might well be that the Chapter had cause to grumble, and that the archdeacon found his bishop unbusinesslike. 'For we also wrestle with the Angel . . . and the man in whom the love of eternity hath kindled, will go lame in the things of time. . . . For not without the anguish of the struggle shall the face of truth be seen . . . nor shall the day break without a benediction.'<sup>4</sup> It broke for John on the 25th of October, 1180. '*On this day died our father John of good memory, venerable bishop of this church; a man of great faith, illumined with all learning, a shepherd kind to all men, cruel to no man but himself. . . . And he loved this church with the whole affection of his heart and intention of his mind, and adorned it with precious ornaments. . . . Two precious vases he left to the Church, in one of which is the blood of the*

<sup>1</sup> *Necrologium Carnotense*, quoted by Migne, 199, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Peter of Celle, *Epist.* 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Polycrat.*, i, prol.

<sup>4</sup> *Polycrat.*, vii. 13.

*glorious martyr Thomas of Canterbury. . . . He also left to the Church these volumes [follows a long list of the Fathers, Jerome, Augustine, Origen, Lactantius, the old familiar De Cœlesti Hierarchia, perhaps in John Sarrazin's translation, a well-worn Cicero] . . . and besides these his own Polycraticus and all his books.'*<sup>1</sup>

HELEN WADDELL.

<sup>1</sup> *Necrologium Carnotense.*

## SIR THOPAS: A SATIRE

**F**EW of the *Canterbury Tales* make a wider appeal to modern readers than the Prioress's beautiful and affecting story of the little choir-boy who suffered martyrdom for his sweet devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and few of them can have been more popular at the time when they were written. No doubt it is difficult, if not impossible, for Jews to read the story without resentment, but most other modern readers probably accept the situation and incidents of this story, as they accept those of a fairy tale, without either inquiring into their truth or feeling that the name 'Jews' is anything more than a meaningless but necessary label—a part of the fictional machinery required to produce the situation and events of the story. Similar incidents have been reported in modern times from distant countries, but have been received by the intelligent public only as evidences of the hysterical credulity of the ignorant and uneducated. In Chaucer's own time, less than a hundred years after the expulsion of the Jews from England, and while memories of similar tales still lingered in popular tradition, the story must have had a reality and poignancy which to-day it has lost.

The suitability of the tale to the Prioress and the excellence of its workmanship have combined to support the view that it was composed after Chaucer had conceived his plan for the *Canterbury Tales* and was written expressly for assignment to the Prioress. Not only the excellence of the workmanship, but the agreement in technique with Chaucer's later work, support this view, and the text itself contains no clear indications to the contrary. But there is one feature of technique in which the tale differs from the later work, and as the subject matter suggests no sufficient reason for this difference, it is perhaps worth while to inquire whether the story may not originally have been composed for another purpose, and yet sufficiently late in Chaucer's career to enable it to participate in his most advanced developments in technique.

The story is, I believe, the only one supposed to belong to the later period that is written in stanzas. In subject it is definitely connected with one of the most famous traditions of the city and cathedral of Lincoln, and the teller of the tale emphasizes this connexion in the very last stanza :

O yonge Hugh of Lincoln, slayn also  
With cursed Jewes, as it is notable  
For it nis but a litel whyle ago,  
Preye eek for us, we sinful folk unstable,  
That, of his mercy, god so merciable  
On us his grete mercy multiplye,  
For reverence of his mooder, Marye. Amen.

In the year 1255, according to Matthew Paris, a contemporary chronicler, the Jews of Lincoln stole a Christian boy, eight years old, named Hugh, and, after assembling Jews from all parts of England, re-enacted upon him all the tortures of the Crucifixion. They then disembowelled him, for certain uses in magic, and tried to dispose of the body, but the earth refused to receive and retain it. They finally threw it into a pit where his mother found it. Upon the confession of a Jew named Copin, procured by the zeal of 'dominus Johannes de Lexinton, vir quidem discretus et circumspectus, insuper eleganter literatus', the whole affair was discovered. Copin himself was drawn to the gallows at the tail of a mare and then hanged, and later eighteen of the richest Jews were similarly drawn and hanged, and twenty-three others imprisoned to await the same punishment. Copin declared that the Jews tried every year to procure a Christian child as a substitute for the Paschal Lamb, but often were unable to do so. That lively traditions of this event still persisted in the city of Lincoln is strongly suggested by the existence there during the fourteenth century of a Miracle Play on the subject. This play has escaped the attention of historians of the drama, but it is definitely recorded as having been performed at Christmas, 1316. Students familiar with the history of the drama in England will hardly doubt that the play was repeated year after year for many years.

If this play, or a successor on the same subject, was an established institution at Lincoln in the fourteenth century, it is barely possible that Chaucer may have seen it and highly probable that he had heard of it. His sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford, had her principal residence in Lincolnshire, and her associations with the city were so close that, notwithstanding the burial of her distinguished husband, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in London at St. Paul's, her own tomb, in accordance apparently with her own desires, was placed in the cathedral at Lincoln. Contemporary evidence is too scanty to justify the assumption of any close connexion of Geoffrey Chaucer himself with Lincolnshire, but in a recent search for the possible originals of the Sergeant of the Law and the Frankeleyn and in an examination of the backgrounds of the tales of the Sumner and the Friar, I found some reason to believe that his attention was specially attracted to this district. Additional evidence in the same direction is afforded by contemporary record. In the year 1386, as we learn from John of Gaunt's register, Philippa Chaucer, together with Henry, earl of Derby, afterwards King Henry IV, Sir Thomas Swynford, and six others were given letters of fraternity in Lincoln Cathedral and admitted to participation in the merits and prayers of the clergy. Such an event as this must certainly have specially attracted Chaucer's attention to the cathedral and its traditions, and it is at least not impossible that some circumstances connected with the event may have suggested the composition of this affecting tale. If this supposition is true, we could easily account both for the developed workmanship of the tale and for the fact that the verse form in which it appears is not the heroic couplet, which, with this exception, seems to have been used in all of Chaucer's later work.

I am aware that this supposition is purely speculative and that none of the arguments in its favour has any compulsive force. I merely suggest that on the whole this seems a possible, if not a probable, genesis of the story.

However this may be, and even though the emphasis in the description of the Prioress in the Prologue might have prepared us to expect a story of another character, it cannot be denied

that the tale is eminently suitable to the tender-hearted Prioress who, as Chaucer tells us,

was so charitable and so pitous,  
 She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous  
 Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.  
 Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde  
 With rosted flesh, or milk and wastel breed.  
 But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed,  
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;  
 And al was conscience and tendre herte.

The effect of the tale upon all the Canterbury pilgrims is profound and entirely unexampled in the rest of the tales:

Whan seyde was al this miracle, every man  
 As sobre was, that wonder was to se.

The Host is obviously as much touched as any member of the party, but like a sophisticated and experienced man of the world, he attempts to hide his feelings and takes refuge in a jest:

Til that our hoste jopen tho bigan,  
 And than at erst he loked upon me,  
 And seyde thus, 'What man artow?' quod he;  
 'Thou lokest as thou woldest finde an hare,  
 For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.

'Approche neer, and loke up murily.  
 Now war yow, sirs, and lat this man have place;  
 He in the waast is shape as wel as I;  
 This were a popet in an arm tenbrace  
 For any womman, smal and fair of face.  
 He semeth elvyssh by his countenaunce,  
 For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.

'Sey now somewhat, sin other folk han sayd;  
 Tel us a tale of mirthe, and that anon'.

The earlier editors and commentators on this passage interpreted the Host's remarks about Chaucer as describing his permanent characteristics and habitual manners. He was accustomed to go about, they said, with his eyes fixed on the ground and with such a look on his face as indicated his entire obliviousness to what was going on, immediately about him.

This, to be sure, was in direct and entire contradiction to the picture of himself given us by Chaucer in the Prologue, where he is represented as quickly and easily forming the acquaintance of all the pilgrims and, by his sympathetic remarks, establishing familiar relations with them :

And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,  
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,  
That I was of hir felawshipe anon.

The Monk, dignified and imposing, certainly does not seem like a man ready to open his heart to the first comer, but he unbosomed himself to Chaucer under the sunny inspiration of Chaucer's agreement with his views :

And I seyde, his opinioun was good.  
What sholde he studie, and make himselven wood,  
Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure,  
Or swinken with his handes, and laboure,  
As Austin bit ? How shal the world be served ?  
Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved.

The contradiction between these two representations of the poet remained unsolved until Professor Knott propounded in *Modern Philology* a new interpretation of the Host's remarks to Chaucer. Mr. Knott pointed out that Chaucer's downcast eyes and his elvish look of absorption in some distant and affecting subject, some ' old, unhappy, far-off thing ', were not intended as a portrayal of permanent characteristics, but only of the effect which the Prioress's tale had produced upon Chaucer himself.

It is characteristic of Chaucer that he should have sought relief by the same means adopted by the Host, spiritedly seconding that worthy's efforts to lead the feelings of the company back to the common level of thought and emotion ; for it was obvious that their present mood would, if maintained, spell defeat to the merry-making that had been planned for the Canterbury journey. Some relief from the tension was absolutely demanded, and it was furnished by the swift and sure dramatic sense of the poet.

Chaucer's skill in dramatic narrative appears here under

a twofold aspect. Not only does the device he adopts solve the problem of relaxing the mood of both the tellers and the hearers of the tales from a tensity that could not be long maintained, but it also solves a very interesting problem concerning Chaucer himself as one of the tellers of tales. This problem was one of no small difficulty and delicacy. Obviously it would hardly be appropriate for the poet to assign to himself one of the most beautiful and successful of his tales. Equally, it would hardly be satisfactory to assign to himself one of the least successful, or even one of merely ordinary quality, distinguished from the rest by no special feature. The choice of a tale which undoubtedly amused and delighted the company and at the same time offered an excuse for the rude interruption of the Host and the rough words in which that interruption was made, was an almost miraculously clever device. The skill of this has been generally recognized by students of Chaucer, though perhaps it has not been sufficiently recognized how impossible it would have been for Chaucer to have followed the Prioress immediately with that tale of Melibeus and his wife, Dame Prudence, which, originally assigned to the *Man of Law*, was finally so happily transferred to Chaucer himself.

Although there is general agreement about the skilful use made of the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, there is disagreement and perhaps a little bitterness of feeling over the interpretation of the tale itself. The commonly accepted view of it regards it as a satire on the medieval metrical romances, which were the most popular form of literature current in Chaucer's day. Many scholars have sought to support this view by collecting from the extant romances parallel expressions tending to show that Chaucer had saturated himself with the rhyme-tags and other mannerisms of these romances, and was attempting by his burlesque imitation of them to bring them into disrepute and put an end to their vogue. To this view there has been opposition on the part of many other scholars, lovers of the medieval romances, who, although recognizing the inanities and banalities of incident and diction which abound in the worst of the romances, nevertheless have so strong a sense of the vigour and beauty of the best of them that they cannot

readily believe that Chaucer could have been insensible to their merits or could have wished to heap ridicule upon what was after all the most lively and vigorous form of English literature in his own day, and one which at its best must have made so strong an appeal to his own tastes and sympathies.

Of Chaucer's familiarity with medieval romances there can be little doubt, independently of the evidence furnished by *Sir Thopas* itself. In his earlier work, allusions to the characters and incidents of romances are frequent, and the sympathetic attitude of his later years is sufficiently indicated by the opening lines of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* :

In tholde dayes of the king Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,  
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.  
The elf queen, with hir joly companye,  
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede ;

and by the well-known lines in the *Squire's Tale*, certainly one of the maturer products of his pen :

This strange knight, that cam thus sodeynly,  
Al armed save his heed ful richely,  
Salueth king and queen, and lordes alle,  
By ordre, as they seten in the halle,  
With so heigh reverence and obeisaunce  
As wel in spechē as in contenaunce,  
That Gawain, with his olde curteisye  
Though he were come ageyn out of Fairye,  
Ne coude him nat amende with a word.

It is abundantly clear that although for the most part Chaucer's later work was distinctly realistic and concerned with the life about him, his spirit never ceased to respond to the mystery and beauty of the ancient tales of Arthur, Gawayne, and Lancelot, of Iseult and Idoine, who were perhaps as real to him as Troilus and Paris and Eleyne.

For my own part, I certainly recognize *Sir Thopas* as a burlesque romance, but I am not prepared to admit that Chaucer was insensible to the merits of the best romances, or that in writing *Sir Thopas* his primary intention was to satirize the romances and aid in putting an end to their

existence. To me the romances seem to have supplied, not the object, but the form and medium, of the satire, the object satirized being something entirely different, something the satire of which would meet with a much readier and more enthusiastic response on the part of the audience for whom he was writing.

I do not know how better to present my view than to ask you to consider with an open mind the probable effect of the *Tale of Sir Thopas* upon Chaucer's contemporaries and the object which they would probably have felt that he had in view. Let us hear Chaucer himself :

Listeth, lordes, in goode entent,  
And I wole telle verament  
Of mirthe and of solas ;  
Al of a knight was fair and gent  
In bataille and in tournament ;  
His name was Sire Thopas.

Y-born he was in fer contree—  
In Flaundres, al biyonde the see,  
At Poperyng, in the place.

Do these lines make clear his intention ? If not, let us hear the next stanza :

Sire Thopas wax a doughty swayn ;  
White was his face as payndemayn  
His lippes red as rose ;  
His rode was lyk scarlet in grayn,  
And I yow telle in good certayn  
He had a semely nose.

Undoubtedly his contemporaries would have recognized immediately that he was writing a burlesque romance, but they would not necessarily have concluded that he was satirizing romances as a form of literature. Would not their attention rather have been fixed upon the subject of the burlesque itself and upon the ridiculous figure presented by Chaucer's romantic hero ? Accustomed as they undoubtedly were to poke fun, mingled with not a little resentment, at the efforts of the Flemish *bourgeoisie* to ape the manners of the English and

French aristocracy, and with their new-found wealth to compete in dress, in manners, and in exploits on the battlefield with the ancient chivalry of France and England, would they not have recognized unhesitatingly that the object of satire was the ridiculous pretentiousness of these Flemings?

The evidence for this attitude on the part of the English and French aristocracy is abundant. Froissart, who better than any one else is the mouthpiece of the ideals, the tastes, and the prejudices of this aristocracy, evinces this attitude throughout the whole of his account of the Flemish wars. Even such great figures as those of James and Philip van Artevelde are constantly treated by him with more than a trace of patrician superciliousness, and he tells us expressly of the laughter with which embassies of the Flemings were received at both the French and the English courts. The two most striking examples of this occur in successive chapters of his *Chronicles*. While the Flemings under the leadership of Philip van Artevelde were besieging Oudenarde;

Philip, to put a better colour on his actions, and to know what they said of him in France, resolved to send letters from himself and from the country of Flanders, to the king of France, humbly entreating the king to take the trouble of bringing about a sound reconciliation between them and the earl their lord. He had no sooner mentioned this idea than it was executed: he wrote amicable letters to the king of France and to his council, which he ordered a messenger to carry to France and deliver to the king. The messenger said he would willingly obey, and rode on with the letters until he came to Senlis, where the king was, to whom and to his uncles he gave the letters. The king took them, and had them read in the presence of his uncles and council. After they had been read and comprehended, the auditors burst out into laughter. The messenger, because he had come into the king's presence without a passport, was ordered to be arrested and put into prison, where he remained for upwards of three weeks.

When Philip heard of this, he was very indignant; and, having summoned the captains of the army to him, he said, 'You see what honour the king of France pays to us, after we have so amicably written to him, for which he detains our messenger'.

Philip then decided to send messengers to England. His object, as stated by Froissart, was not really to make an alliance with England, but to induce the king of France to believe that he intended to do so. It was perhaps, therefore, with an intention to defeat the ostensible purpose of the embassy that the messengers were instructed to demand privately of the king of England and his council the repayment of the two hundred thousand crowns which had been lent them forty years before by James van Artevelde and the states of Flanders. The embassy was composed of twelve citizens from the principal towns of Flanders, including Ghent. Upon arriving in London they came in a body to the Palace of Westminster, where they were met first by the duke of Lancaster, the earl of Buckingham, the earl of Salisbury, and the greater part of the council. The king was not present at the first interview. The bishop elect of Ghent spoke for the Flemings, setting forth their desire for renewal of the ancient alliance between England and Flanders and closing with a request for the repayment of the old debt :

When the lords had heard this speech and demand, they looked at each other, and some began to smile. The duke of Lancaster, addressing them, said, 'My fair lords of Flanders, what you have said requires counsel. Go and return to London, and the king will consider your requests, and send you such answers as you shall be contented with.' The Ghent men replied, 'God will it be so.' They then quitted the council chamber, leaving the lords of the council behind, who began to laugh among themselves, and say, 'Did you notice these Flemings, and hear the request they made? They ask assistance, saying they are in very great want of it, and, besides, demand our money. It is by no means reasonable that we should pay, and assist them into the bargain.' They looked on the Flemings as proud and presumptuous, in thus demanding a debt of two hundred thousand old crowns of so very ancient a date as forty years.

Nothing could have happened more opportunely for the king of France, who was eager to invade Flanders ; for if the Flemings had been silent, respecting these crowns, and had only requested assistance from the king of England, he would have gone in person to Flanders, or would have sent thither such a powerful force,

that the Flemings who were in the field might have resisted the greatest power on earth. But it fell out otherwise, as you will hear related in this history.

The Issue Roll of the Exchequer for 7 Richard II indicates that the men of Ghent remained in England from 6 August to 30 December 1383, and received payment from the Exchequer at the rate of a noble a day for the seven. They therefore must have become familiar figures to members of the court and perhaps to Londoners in general. To students of Chaucer it is of even greater interest to know that payment to them was made by tallies which were to be presented for redemption at the Wool Customs. This is indicated in the Issue Roll itself and in a memorandum of 'Descharges' at the Wool Customs in London for 1383-4 which survives. Among the Exchequer Bille occurs the following entry :

Item a gens de gaunt par ij tailles

38*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*

The presentation of the tallies at the Wool Customs doubtless brought the men of Ghent into personal contact with Chaucer, even if he had not otherwise met them. The two Flemings named in the Issue Roll of the Exchequer as receiving the payments are William de Coudenbergh and Nicholas Barber, but there is no reason to believe that Chaucer had either of these men or indeed any other individual of the deputation in mind in his portrait of Sir Thopas.

Miss Lilian Winstanley, who has independently arrived at the theory that Chaucer was satirizing the Flemings, suggests that the original of Chaucer's Sir Thopas was Philip van Artevelde himself. In support of this view she presents several specific arguments. In the first place, she quotes Chaucer's stanza in regard to the birthplace of Sir Thopas :

Y-born he was in fer contree,  
In Flaundres, al biyonde the see,  
At Popering, in the place ;  
His fader was a man ful free,  
And lord he was of that contree,  
As it was goddes grace.

Upon this she argues as follows :

Poperinghe was not the birthplace of Philip van Artevelde ; but it was one of the towns which were most zealous in the league which supported him. Jacques van Artevelde had devoted himself in a quite special way to the interests of Poperinghe ; there was a league among the larger towns—Ghent, Bruges—to limit the right of cloth-making to themselves and to forbid it to the smaller ones ; this would have ruined the smaller towns and they, Poperinghe prominent among them, resisted bitterly. Jacques van Artevelde took the part of Poperinghe and it was the disturbance which resulted that culminated in his death. Thus Chaucer would have a good deal of warrant in representing his hero's father as specially connected with Poperinghe. His father is 'lord of that countree' and we remember that Jacques van Artevelde had been raised to just such a position of supremacy.

Froissart also has a passage (anno 1382) dealing with the homage of Poperinghe to Philip van Artevelde :

*'la vinrent ceux des châteleries de outre Ypres, de Fuenes et de Poperinghen qui se mirent en son obéissance et jurèrent foi et loyauté à tenir ainsi comme à leur seigneur le comte de Flandre.'*

Then on the basis of the passages I have already quoted concerning the embassy to the kings of France and England she argues in favour of a specific reference to Philip. But the passages in question seem to imply ridicule of the Flemings in general, rather than of Philip van Artevelde in particular. Again, Miss Winstanley's parallel between the extraordinary dress and equipment which Chaucer ascribes to Sir Thopas and the extraordinary manner in which the Flemish burghers were armed seems also rather general than particular. More to the point is her citation of a passage concerning the education and tastes of Philip, which she cites as parallel to the tastes and character of Sir Thopas :

Chaucer's Sir Thopas is a person who loves pastoral meditations among the birds and flowers ; he rejoices to be in the woods, hearing the songs of the throstle and the wood-dove. So Froissart represents Philip van Artevelde as having been accustomed, before he was called to supreme power, to a life of retirement and

to have been very fond of meditation in the fields and of gentle and solitary occupations such as fishing. It was, says Froissart, vast presumption in such a recluse to match himself in wars and battles against great captains :

‘ Philip van Artevelde, although he had been very successful at the battle of Bruges, and though fortune had smiled on him at his defeat of the earl and citizens of Bruges, possessed not any abilities for war or sieges. When young he had not been educated for it, but in fishing with a rod in the rivers Scheldt and Lys ; and he clearly proved his incapacity during the siege of Oudenarde. He knew not how to take the town, and, through pride and presumption, thought that it must be his, and that the inhabitants ought to come and surrender it to him. They had no such inclination ; but behaved themselves like valorous men, skirmishing frequently with these Flemings at the barriers, in which they slew many and wounded more ; and then retired without loss into their town.’

Another element in her arguments is that the romantic adventure with an elf queen of which Sir Thopas dreams may have been suggested by the demoiselle who, according to Froissart, accompanied Philip van Artevelde in the field. Modern historians agree that the accusation was a slander, but Froissart undoubtedly represents it as an amorous adventure. The royal state kept by Sir Thopas is also cited as parallel to the royal state kept by Philip van Artevelde. Perhaps the least convincing of Miss Winstanley’s arguments is her attempt to find in the gigantic army under three leaders—Charles VI of France, the count of Flanders, and the duke of Burgundy—the original of the three-headed giant who meets Sir Thopas and casts stones at him with a fell staff sling. The staff sling, to Miss Winstanley’s mind, suggests the well-known artillery of the Middle Ages, the trebuchet or the mangonel, the principal function of which was, in fact, the casting of stones. But this argument—like that which, because the name of the giant, ‘ Olifaunt ’, was the same as that of the horn of Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*, takes the name and the giant as symbolic of French chivalry and the army which opposed Philip van Artevelde—seems to me too far-fetched and complicated to deserve serious consideration.

But whether Philip van Artevelde was the specific object of the satire or not, one who reads the poem without a preconceived theory as to its meaning and object can hardly doubt that it is a satire on the Flemish burghers. This is, indeed, as we have seen, definitely announced in the first two stanzas. That the hero was from Flanders admits, then, of no doubt. Why Poperinghe was chosen as his birthplace and 'the lord of that contree' as his father cannot be settled without further inquiry. The suggestions just quoted from Miss Winstanley are not convincing.

Recently I have come upon some curious evidence which may bear upon the choice. A passage in the contemporary *Cronyche van Nederlent* suggests that the men of Poperinghe were recognized even by their own countrymen as stupid. Writing of the campaign of 1328, the author says:

Then the king—the king of France—pressed on and besieged Poperinghe and Ypres, so that both surrendered, and he almost destroyed West Flanders with sword and fire. Whence arose a Latin couplet:

Flandreses stultos francus rex Cassile multos  
Stravit mille ter C, bis duo sexque quater.

And if we could suppose that both Chaucer and his friends knew the details of the government of Poperinghe—and after the Crusade of 1383, when English armies under the bishop of Norwich operated in that very district, why should they not know them?—the lines

His fader was a man ful free,  
And lord he was of that contree,  
As it was goddes grace—

may have had for them a very humorous twist; for who was the lord of Poperinghe? He was a monk, the abbot of the Abbey of St. Bertin. Mr. F. H. d'Hoop, the editor of the collection of charters of the abbey tells us this in unambiguous terms:

It results from privileges granted by the kings of France and other persons of distinction that the abbot of St. Bertin was temporal lord of the town and district of Poperinghe, and that as such he exercised the civil power through a prior who acted in

his name, except in matters of great importance, such as the alienation of rights. The provost of Poperinghe enjoyed high consideration, and with several monks he occupied very spacious buildings belonging to the church of St. Bertin.

That the hero was not of aristocratic lineage, but a burgher, although a rich one, is emphasized in the next three stanzas :

Sire Thopas wax a doghty swayn,  
Whit was his face as payndemayn,  
Hise lippes rede as rose ;  
His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,  
And I yow telle in good certayn,  
He hadde a semely nose.

His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun,  
That to his girdel raughte adoun ;  
Hise shoos of Cordewane.  
Of Brugges were his hosen broun,  
His robe was of syklatoun,  
That coste many a jane.

He koude hunte at wilde deer,  
And ride an haukyng for river,  
With grey goshawk on honde.  
Therto he was a good archeer,  
Of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer,  
Ther any ram shal stonde.

The terms used in describing his appearance are not only contradictory, but suggestive of the shopkeeper and the craftsman. His face was white, not as the lily or any other romantic object, but as 'payndemayn', white bread ; his complexion is like scarlet cloth, dyed in the wool, and, adds the poet with impressive solemnity :

And I yow telle in good certayn,  
He hadde a semely nose.

His beard and his hair were 'saffroun', a bright yellow used in dyeing cloth and colouring the elaborate meat pies served at festivals. Moreover, in antiquated fashion, his beard reached to his girdle.

In the next stanza we are told how he aped the customs of the aristocracy :

He koude hunte at wilde deer,  
And ride an haukyng for river.

But even here he betrays his plebeian origin, for he rode

With grey goshawk on honde.

Now the authorities on hawking inform us that the goshawk was not the bird for a gentleman but that appropriate to a yeoman. In proof of this it will be sufficient to refer to the treatise on hawking contained in the *Boke of Saint Albans*, which is well known to be a compilation from earlier treatises of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries. The last two pages of this treatise are devoted to 'the naamys of all maner of hawkys and to whom they belong'. After listing the birds belonging to an emperoure, a kyng, a prynce, a duke, an erle, a baron, a knyght, a squyer, a lady, and a yong man, the treatise continues : ' And yit ther be moo kyndis of hawkes. Ther is a Goshawke. and that hauke is for a yeman.'

Similar low-class tastes and equipments are indicated in the next three lines :

Therto he was a good archeer,  
Of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer,  
Ther any ram shal stonde.

It is true that the long bow is associated with the most brilliant military successes of the English in the fourteenth century and that in 1360 Edward III mounted his archers, but the archer was not a knight but a yeoman. Wrestling, likewise, was a sport characteristic, not of knights but of yeomen and other members of the lower classes. Gamelyn was, to be sure, the son of Sir John de Boundys, but he was a younger son and he had plebeian tastes and accomplishments.

The next three stanzas contain no specific characterization of Sir Thopas, either as a tradesman or as a Fleming, but are clearly intended to continue the ridicule :

Ful many a mayde, bright in bour,  
They moorne for hym, paramour,  
Whan hem were bet to slepe ;

## SIR THOPAS: A SATIRE

But he was chaast and no lechour,  
 And sweete as is the brembul flour  
 That bereth the rede hepe.

And so bifel upon a day,  
 For sothe, as I yow telle may,  
 Sire Thopas wolde out ride ;  
 He worth upon his steede gray,  
 And in his hand a launcegay,  
 A long swerd by his side.

He priketh thurgh a fair forest,  
 Therinne is many a wilde best,  
 Ye, bothe bukke and hare ;  
 And as he priketh north and est,  
 I telle it yow, hym hadde almost  
 Bitidde a sory care.

In the next stanza, however, the tradesman theme is resumed :

Ther spryngen herbes grete and smale,  
 The lycorys and cetewale,  
 And many a clowe gylofre ;  
 And notemuge to putte in ale,  
 Whether it be moyste or stale,  
 Or for to leye in cofre.

The following stanza, on the songs of the birds, is one of the most delightfully inconsistent in the poem. The melodious notes of the sparrow-hawk and the woodpecker, and the loud, clear song of the wood dove suggest that the reading *hir*, applied to the 'thrustelcok' in the Ellesmere group of manuscripts, is Chaucer's own reading :

The briddes synge, it is no nay,  
 The sparhawk and the papeiay,  
 That joye it was to heere ;  
 The thrustelcok made eek hir lay,  
 The wodedowve upon a spray  
 She sang ful loude and cleere.

A slight but subtle suggestion of the hero's entire unfamiliarity with horses and knightly equipment is contained in one of the following lines, which has escaped the attention of the commentators. When Sir Thopas heard the song of the

throstle, he fell immediately into a love-frenzy and spurred his fair steed so that it ran until it sweated blood. Sir Thopas himself was then so weary that he dismounted and gave the horse 'good forage'. The passage has been quoted by lexicographers as being the only one in which *forage* means 'green grass', but one may well inquire whether that is indeed Chaucer's meaning. Elsewhere in Middle English, *forage* means 'dry fodder given in winter to horses and cattle', as in the passage in which the Reeve says:

But ik am old, me list not pley for age;  
Gras-tyme is doon, my fodder is now forage.

Does not Chaucer mean to suggest that although his hero had just been riding over the soft grass and was about to lie down in a grassy place, he did not turn his horse out to graze, but gave him dry fodder? Where this came from we need not stop to inquire.

The whole passage narrating the meeting of the hero with the perilous giant, his excusal of himself from fighting until the morrow, his declared intention to kill the giant with his launcegay—a light weapon which could only have irritated the giant without injuring him—and the whole account of the arming of the hero for the great combat resume the satire theme and distinctly indicate to an audience familiar with knightly customs and weapons the unsophistication and ignorance of the hero:

'Do come', he seyde, 'my mynstrales,  
And geestours, for to tellen tales  
Anon in myn armyng;  
Of romances that been roiales,  
Of popes and of cardinales  
And eek of love likyng.'

The bourgeois tastes of the newly rich appear in the next stanza:

They fette hym first the sweete wyn,  
And mede eek in a mazelyn,  
And roial spicerye;  
And gyngebreed that was ful fyn,  
And lycorys, and eek comyn,  
With sugre that is so trye.

Some of the absurdities in the arming described in the next stanzas have been noticed by the commentators, but, unfortunately for the modern student, many of the details of this passage have been cited by writers on arms and weapons of the Middle Ages as serious evidence of customs and practices that are not recorded elsewhere. But the passage is absurd from beginning to end, as can best be demonstrated by taking it up in detail.

He dide next his white leere  
Of clooth of lake fyn and cleere  
A breech and eek a sherte ;

This procedure is distinctly contrary to the customs of the time, as we learn from documents that are almost contemporary and that certainly represent the uniform practice. The knight when armed for battle or tournament did not wear next his skin breeches and shirt of silk, linen, or any other thin cloth, but a thick, well-padded jerkin. The next items are equally absurd :

And next his sherte an aketon,  
And over that an haubergeon  
For Percyng of his herte ;  
And over that a fyn hawberk,  
Was al ywroght of Jewes werk,  
Ful strong it was of plate ;  
And over that his cote armour  
As whit as is a lilye flour,  
In which he wol debate.

The aketon was not worn by a knight under his armour, but was a padded jacket with plates of metal sewed on it and was specifically the defensive armour of the common foot-soldier. It was therefore an absurdity that the knight should don an aketon ; a double absurdity that he should put on over it a haubergeoun ; a triple absurdity that over these should be worn a 'fyn hawberk' ; and a final touch of perfection that the 'cote armour', which should display the armorial bearings of the knight, was blank :

As whit as is a lilye flour.

Long ago it was pointed out that the tastes and social status

of Sir Thopas were definitely indicated by the objects on which he made his vow to slay the giant. Knightly vows on peacock and on heron were famous in tradition and in romance, the most famous being the vows of the heron, recorded in a contemporary poem as made in 1338 by the young King Edward and his knights and leaders under the provocations of Robert, count of Artois. But Sir Thopas, like a true Fleming, characteristically makes his vows on ale and bread. So would the hero of De Coster's *Thyl Ulenspiegel* have sworn !

It was a sign of ignorance that his spear was made, not of the well-tried ash, but of fine cypress, which, though it may well have boded war and death, was not in use for weapons of war. Equally characteristic is it that his charger was not a high-spirited war-horse, but

His steede was al dappull gray,  
It gooth an ambil in the way  
Ful softly and rounde.

After all these absurdities, we are not surprised that in his enumeration of the 'romances of prys', along with the genuine romances of *King Horn*, *Sir Bevis*, and *Sir Guy*, Chaucer should include *Ypotys*, which is not a romance of chivalry, but a well-known religious poem, relating how the youth Ypotys was miraculously sent to instruct the Emperor Hadrian in the Christian faith.

It is perhaps indicative of the tastes and principles of both the Host and Chaucer, of whom he himself tells us that his abstinence was but little, that the point at which the Host interrupts the romance, if not the immediate cause of the interruption, is the declaration that Sir Thopas drank, not wine, as a good knight should, but 'water of the well'.

This somewhat tedious examination of the details of the romance has seemed necessary to emphasize the fact that throughout the narrative the satire is distinctly centred upon the bourgeois outlook of Sir Thopas and his ignorance of the manners, customs, and equipment of the aristocracy. This fact, together with the definite declaration that Flanders was his country and Poperinghe his birthplace, should leave little doubt as to the intention of the satire.

Of the spirit of boisterous mirth in which the poem was composed, almost every line bears eloquent testimony, though the seriousness of academic annotation and study unfortunately tend to obscure this fact. If doubt remains in the mind of any reader it is only necessary, I think, for him to re-read the lines in which the rollicking spirit of the text itself is reinforced by the character of the versification. The fundamental verse form chosen by Chaucer responds admirably throughout to the frivolous spirit of the undertaking, but in this particular passage the poet allows himself tricky liberties with the verse form which bring out even more delightfully the reckless irresponsibility of the composition.

‘ O seinte Marie, benedicite !  
 What eyleth this love at me  
     To bynde me so soore ?  
 Me dremed al this nyght, pardee,  
 An elf queene shal my leman be,  
     And slepe under my goore.

An elf queene wol I love, ywis,  
 For in this world no womman is  
     Worthy to be my make,  
         In towne.  
 Alle othere wommen I forsake,  
 And to an elf queene I me take  
     By dale and eek by downe.’

Into his sadel he clamb anon,  
 And priketh over stile and stoon  
     An elf queene for tespye,  
 Til he so longe hadde riden and goon  
 That he foond in a pryve woon,  
     The contree of Fairye  
         So wilde ;  
 For in that contree was ther noon,  
     Neither wyf ne childe.

Til that ther cam a greet geaunt,  
 His name was sire Olifaunt,  
     A perilous man of dede ;

He seyde, 'Child, by Termagaunt,  
But if thou prike out of myn haunt,  
Anon I sle thy steede  
With mace.  
Heere is the queene of Fairye,  
With harpe and pipe and symphonye,  
Dwellynge in this place.'

The child seyde, 'Al so moote I thee,  
Tomorwe wol I meete with thee  
Whan I have myn armoure ;  
And yet I hope, par ma fay,  
That thou shalt with this launcegay  
Abyen it ful sowre ;  
Thy mawe  
Shal I percen, if I may,  
Er it be fully pryme of day,  
For heere thow shalt be slawe.'

If now we can agree upon the desire to satirize the Flemings as furnishing Chaucer's motive for writing the poem, it may perhaps repay us to indulge in a little speculation as to the time of its composition. As there is little evidence on this point, this speculation need detain us only a moment, and the results need not be taken too seriously. In brief, a careful consideration of all the available evidence discloses no sufficient reason why such a poem should have been written expressly for the *Canterbury Tales*, whether Chaucer's object was to satirize the romances or the Flemings. But any one familiar with the history of the period and the temper of the English court will, I think, be ready to entertain the suggestion that such a poem would have been highly appropriate, during the visit of the Flemish embassy, which we discussed a few moments ago, or immediately after it. Such a satire would certainly then have had a point and an appeal which it could hardly have had at any time later, and the audience for which the *Canterbury Tales* were put together may perhaps have welcomed with renewed amusement and delight a poem which had aroused their mirth when the object of its satire was still a fresh and vivid interest.

JOHN M. MANLY.

## LA RÉACTION CONTRE LA CRITIQUE ROMANTIQUE DE SHAKESPEARE

**L**A critique romantique avait divinisé Shakespeare. Elle révérait son texte comme une bible. Les commentateurs allemands avaient pris et donné l'habitude d'y découvrir une philosophie qui s'approfondissait de plus en plus à l'examen. Pour qui savait lire ses œuvres, toute vérité y était enclose et il n'y avait chez lui que vérité. Les personnages de ses pièces étaient des créations qui le disputaient en réalité aux êtres vivants, tout en leur étant supérieurs grâce à la lumière que le génie du poète avait projetée dans leur conscience. Il ne s'agissait pas de les critiquer mais de les interpréter et de les comprendre. Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt avaient donné une voix anglaise à une pareille admiration. Victor Hugo, forçant la note, s'était glorifié d'admirer Shakespeare comme une bête. Cent esprits plus modérés de nature avaient répété en sourdine ces hymnes de confiante adoration. Et les échos du culte continuent de se faire entendre aujourd'hui encore dans mainte et mainte page où les résonances du romantisme sont toujours perceptibles.

Cependant, à mesure que l'exaltation romantique allait s'affaiblissant et que l'esprit réaliste croissait en force, il était inévitable qu'une réaction se produisît dans la critique shakespearienne comme dans tout le reste. Le dieu du théâtre était ramené à des dimensions humaines. Plus de culte superstitieux. Son texte, ses intrigues, ses scènes, ses personnages comparaissaient devant le tribunal. Il était admis que son œuvre était œuvre d'homme, partant fautive, qu'elle avait ses taches et ses tares. Le poète était sans doute supérieur à ses contemporains, mais, après tout, de même substance qu'eux, coutumier des mêmes artifices et justiciable des mêmes lois.

Ce quelque chose d'enflé et de tendu qui avait marqué la critique romantique mettait maintenant en défiance et provoquait le sourire. Au lieu de dithyrambes on réclamait des

statistiques. On saluait avec respect la biographie du poète par Sidney Lee parce qu'elle était avant tout documentaire, rassurante par la platitude des détails et par la physionomie tout ordinaire qu'elle prêtait au héros. Vers le même temps une analyse de plus en plus méticuleuse s'acharnait sur le texte même de cette bible qu'était l'in-folio de 1623. Si ce texte est aujourd'hui tenu par plusieurs comme suspect dans mainte de ses pages; si l'on admet qu'il mêle à des scènes vraiment shakespeariennes des scènes que le poète a seulement remaniées, d'autres même qui n'ont rien de lui, comment raisonner sur ce mélange comme au temps où l'ensemble de l'in-folio était accepté intégralement? Comment bâtir sur ce terrain mouvant les commentaires enthousiastes naguère consacrés au génie qui aurait présidé à l'organisation de chaque drame et à la présentation de chaque personnage? Sans doute le scepticisme à l'endroit du texte peut se concilier avec l'admiration la plus béate de l'auteur. On est même en droit de dire que dans le cas, par exemple, de Mr. J. M. Robertson, le culte est d'autant plus fervent qu'il est purifié par mainte exclusion. Mr. Robertson veut en somme enlever à Shakespeare tout ce qui dans l'in-folio lui paraît indigne de l'idée exaltée qu'il a du poète. Il exagère en un sens le dogme romantique de l'impeccabilité shakespearienne, mais il est en même temps convaincu de l'extrême inégalité de l'œuvre mise sous le nom de Shakespeare et il tient pour détestables maints passages qui eurent longtemps leur part des éloges sans réserve adressés au poète. Il est pour sa part l'adorateur du Shakespeare suprême qui n'aurait produit que l'essence exquise de l'œuvre qu'on lui attribue. Pour quelques-uns comme pour lui le culte romantique reste donc vivant, mais à condition que le livre soit tout entier remanié, purgé des additions indues, nettoyé des erreurs et des excroissances. Curieuse combinaison de scepticisme et d'enthousiasme, d'où l'on se demande s'il sort de nouveau la figure d'une divinité ou si le dieu de jadis ne s'évanouit pas en fumée impalpable.

Mais où la rupture avec le passé romantique est la plus nette, c'est dans les récentes études sur les personnages

shakespeariens dues à Levin L. Schücking<sup>1</sup> et à Elmer Edgar Stoll<sup>2</sup>. Avec eux on a mainte fois l'impression d'un retour au jugement de l'école classique. On est arraché aux extases du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Des cîmes de la métaphysique on retombe dans la plaine du bon sens. On éprouve la satisfaction d'échapper au vertige, mais on se demande à l'occasion si la tranquillité rassurante d'une marche terre à terre ne s'est pas achetée aux dépens de vues plus hautes et plus larges.

Le remarquable livre de Schücking a déjà été lu par beaucoup ; il a été commenté, approuvé et critiqué. L'éloge et les réserves aussi qu'il suggère aux spécialistes ont été admirablement résumés dans un article d'Albert Feuillerat.<sup>3</sup> Celui de Stoll vient seulement de paraître et appelle à son tour l'examen.

A vrai dire, il est le résultat d'études poursuivies depuis quinze ou vingt ans avec une unité et une fermeté de dessein impressionnantes. L'auteur tient pour chimériques les notions qui ont cours sur la profondeur psychologique des héros shakespeariens. Il ne voit en eux que des personnages de théâtre qui obéissent à une tradition, sont soumis aux conditions artificielles de la scène, et dont les apparitions successives dans une même pièce sont à l'ordinaire traitées chacune par le poète de façon indépendante, en vue du maximum d'effet immédiat, sans qu'il ait grand souci d'établir entre elles une exacte concordance. Shakespeare procède à cet égard comme ses contemporains, et, s'il leur est supérieur (comme le pense Mr. Stoll qui ne lui marchand pas son admiration), c'est surtout pour des mérites de forme : il a plus de poésie, plus d'éloquence, plus de verve que les autres, et mieux qu'eux il sait donner à ses créations un ton, un timbre de voix qui les individualise. Lui accorder davantage est une duperie. Illusion de voir dans ses héros des êtres naturels, vivants, et de raisonner sur eux comme s'ils avaient une existence réelle ! Ce sont tout simplement des figures expressives, en partie

<sup>1</sup> *Die Charakterprobleme bei Shakespeare*, Leipzig, 1919. Traduction anglaise sous le titre de *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, London, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare Studies*, New York, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> *Litteris*, Lund (Suède), Avril 1926.

conventionnelles, agissant et parlant selon certains procédés attendus des spectateurs.

Idée sensée qui retient par ce qu'elle a de positif et d'apparemment équilibré. Elle est présentée avec une abondance de preuves et une verve d'argumentation qui ne sont pas loin d'emporter la conviction. Mr. Stoll a une parfaite connaissance, non seulement de Shakespeare, mais du théâtre de ses contemporains anglais. Il ne s'en tient pas là. Il a le souvenir présent du théâtre antique, celui des Grecs et des Romains. Il a lu la plupart des pièces françaises, italiennes et espagnoles de la Renaissance. Il a vu jouer mainte œuvre dramatique de nos jours, et jamais, semble-t-il, sans en rapporter quelque observation nouvelle dont il fortifiait sa conception du théâtre shakespearien. Il est fécond en rapprochements suggestifs. Il abonde en formules vives qui sont pour faire réfléchir les esprits trop enclins à déverser soit des idées trop modernes, soit des sentiments trop personnels dans l'œuvre du poète élisabéthain. Voici quelques-unes de ces sentences qui peuvent à l'occasion jouer le rôle d'utiles garde-fous.

Celles-ci ont trait aux personnages des pièces :

Not psychological consistency but dramatic effectiveness is Shakespeare's aim. (p. 439)

[Shakespeare's] mind was creative and accretive, not critical ; synthetic, not analytic. (p. 145)

His [plays] . . . involve processes which disclose primarily not character but events, and, at the end, except for casual conversions, his characters are pretty much what they were at the beginning. (p. 410)

Les suivantes ont pour objet de limiter et de restreindre la portée de la philosophie shakespearienne :

The impression we have of Shakespeare is one of tolerance, geniality, common sense, imaginative power and fervour, rather than of extraordinary enlightenment. (p. 247)

Not only does he laugh as all England laughed, but he believes as all England believed. (p. 186)

Not a single ideal, ethical judgment, or custom of the time does he question. (p. 186)

In his pages there is not the faintest echo of the scorn of [Reginald] Scot, the sarcasm of Harsnett, or the sceptical philosophy of Plutarch and Montaigne ; and all the abundance of Elizabethan superstitious lore appears in his text with never an ironical accent or lifting of an eyebrow. (p. 250)

Always our poet stands by public opinion. (p. 428)

For [the villains] is reserved the stigma of scepticism : it is Edmund and Iago who pooh-pooh Providence and the stars. (p. 394), &c.

Je ne dirai pas que ces maximes tiennent la vérité tout entière, mais sûrement chacune d'elles en recèle un fragment. Il est bon de lire un livre aussi riche d'aperçus. La critique de Stoll est saine ; elle met en garde contre les subtilités ou contre les excès systématiques. Elle fait entrer un air vif, un peu cru, dans la bibliothèque des commentateurs. On lui doit beaucoup pour l'œuvre de bon sens qu'elle accomplit. Même si l'on est amené à formuler des réserves, il n'est que juste de rendre hommage à un si vigoureux et si salubre labeur.

Mais la bataille que Mr. Stoll livre avec tant d'ardeur à la critique romantique a forcément mis en lui l'esprit du combattant. Bien que son livre ne soit pas composé en forme et s'offre comme une série un peu décousue d'articles, c'est une véritable thèse qu'il y soutient. Il y joue le rôle d'avocat et non de juge. Il n'est pas en toute rencontre impartial. Il ne prête pas toujours l'attention qu'ils méritent aux arguments adverses. Dès le début, pour établir que les drames de Shakespeare ne furent pas prisés très haut par ses contemporains, il déprécie les témoignages qu'on possède de l'admiration contemporaine. Il parle en simple parenthèse du jugement fameux de Meres et semble en faire assez bon marché. On est néanmoins en droit de conclure, à voir celui qui n'était socialement qu'un acteur mis au premier rang par un maître ès-arts d'Oxford et de Cambridge, que Shakespeare devait être bien populaire dès 1598. De même peut-on, sans solliciter les textes, tenir les résistances, les critiques réitérées de Ben Jonson, non moins que son magnifique tribut final,

pour autant d'indices qu'il voyait en Shakespeare le plus grand de ses rivaux. Mais Mr. Stoll pour les besoins de sa cause étouffe un peu ces puissantes présomptions pour insister sur des indices contraires.

Quand il entre dans le vif de son sujet, Mr. Stoll montre encore à plus d'une reprise sa partialité d'avocat. Il ne veut reconnaître à Shakespeare, semble-t-il, aucune supériorité sur ses émules pour ce qui est de la profondeur d'observation et de la vérité psychologique. L'idée qu'aucun de ses personnages pourrait, à force d'intuition, révéler une âme indépendante des intentions purement théâtrales de l'auteur lui paraît assez ridicule. Il raille Mr. Hudson d'avoir émis l'idée qu'à de certains moments où il fait appel à notre commune humanité Shylock a échappé à Shakespeare (*got too much for Shakespeare*). En fait, pour Mr. Stoll, Shylock est et doit rester d'un bout à l'autre, sans broncher, un coquin à la fois odieux et grotesque. Il n'était du moins pas autre chose pour Shakespeare et pour son auditoire. C'est uniquement notre époque sentimentale qui aurait vu des éclairs de pathétique dans le personnage.

Faut-il le lui accorder? Y a-t-il entre les générations cet abîme qu'une pareille conception suppose? Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle serait-il le premier à être capable de secouer par instants la convention des genres ou le poids des préjugés? La question se pose à deux reprises pour le personnage du juif dans le théâtre élisabéthain. Avant Shakespeare Marlowe avait conçu un Barabbas qui serait un monstre au physique et au moral. Il l'avait affublé d'un nez rouge gigantesque et lui avait donné une âme capable de tous les crimes. Cependant, il n'avait pu s'empêcher dès le début de le transfigurer en une sorte de poète lyrique exalté par l'idée de ses richesses et du pouvoir infini qui en découle. Mieux encore, au cours de la scène où le gouverneur de Malte impose aux Juifs de fournir à eux seuls la rançon de l'île, ce même Barabbas protestant avec force contre pareille spoliation trouvait un langage si éloquent et des arguments si forts qu'il prenait soudain figure de haute victime et que le gouverneur chrétien apparaissait comme un despote appliquant hypocritement, au nom du salut public,

une règle arbitraire. La force qui guidait ici la plume de Marlowe n'était peut-être pas tant, il est vrai, le besoin de vérité que la joie d'exhaler au passage son mépris de la chrétienté et de démasquer une morale sophistique. Mais le résultat n'était pas douteux : à ce moment tremblait le plateau de la balance. Il ne fallait rien moins ensuite que les abominations de Barabbas pour compenser cette impression momentanée de grandeur.

De même pour Shylock, avec cette différence toutefois que Shakespeare n'est pas comme Marlowe emporté par l'élan lyrique ou satirique, mais entraîné par l'irrésistible vérité du personnage qu'il a imaginé. Il se peut que le lecteur d'aujourd'hui mette plus d'accent sur le fameux passage : 'Hasn't a Jew eyes . . . ?' que n'en mettait un Élisabéthain et qu'il y voie indûment un plaidoyer en règle pour une race persécutée. Mais si les mots ont un sens, ils évoquent brusquement la commune humanité de tous les vivants, bons ou mauvais, juifs ou chrétiens. Si Shakespeare ne l'a pas précisément voulu, ce serait donc une preuve éclatante de la force logique avec laquelle la vérité humaine s'imposait à son imagination, fût-ce à son insu, fût-ce contre son dessein primitif.

Le cas n'est pas isolé. Pareille chose arrive à tout grand esprit qui travaille dans un genre fixe, asservi à d'étroits usages. Quoi qu'en dise Mr. Stoll, ni Cervantès ne se laisse enfermer jusqu'au bout dans la parodie, ni Molière dans la farce. Ils ne sont supérieurs que pour être capables de briser par moments la convention qui enchaîne le commun des auteurs. Si les maris trompés ou les barbons de Molière ont pu paraître par moments plus pathétiques que ridicules, c'est sans doute qu'ils le sont. Il en est de même pour Chaucer. Le vieux poète ne peut prendre le plus cynique des fabliaux—celui du Poirier—sans que la vérité y pénètre par endroits, transformant le vieux mari jaloux, objet consacré d'un rire impitoyable, en un être qui souffre tout de bon et devient touchant par sa souffrance. Écoutez les propos qu'il tient, pauvre vieillard aveugle, à sa jeune et jolie femme dans le jardin où elle s'apprête à accueillir son amant :

‘Now, wyf,’ quod he, ‘heer nis but thou and I;  
 Thou art the creature that I best love,  
 For, by that Lord that sit in heven above,  
 Lever ich hadde dyen on a knyf,  
 Than thee offende, trewe dere wyf!  
 For goddes sake, thenk how I thee chees,  
 Noght for no coveityse, douteless,  
 But only for the love I had to thee . . .  
 And thogh that I be jalous, wyte me noght,  
 Ye been so depe enprented in my thoght . . .<sup>1</sup>

Quand à ces paroles sincères et émouvantes du vieux Janvier la jolie Mai répond par des protestations fausses tout en œilladant l’amant caché tout auprès, la sympathie se retourne en dépit des règles du genre. Plus troublant encore est le cri de douleur du vieillard à qui la vue vient d’être rendue pour lui faire voir de ses yeux la trahison :

And up he yaf a roing and a cry  
*As doth the moder whan the child shal dye . . .*<sup>2</sup>

Chaucer, qui n’avait pas jusque-là ménagé la raillerie à son Janvier, rompt brusquement avec la tradition comique. Il faudrait vraiment le croire bien maladroit pour supposer qu’il ait, même dans les endroits dont il vient d’être parlé, entendu lui conserver son rôle purement ridicule. Le masque est tombé soudain ; la douleur réelle du vieillard s’est révélée à lui et à nous.

Si Chaucer dans le fabliau, Molière dans la comédie, sortent ainsi parfois des limites assignées par la tradition, combien plus probable encore que Shakespeare s’en soit affranchi, lui qui écrivait des pièces composites où il allait du bouffon au tragique, sollicitant tour à tour le rire, l’enthousiasme, l’effroi et la pitié ! N’est-ce pas justement le cas de son *archand de Venise* ?

On ne peut accorder à Mr. Stoll que les personnages shakespeariens soient, par besoin de clarté dramatique, tous inscrits dans une catégorie nette : bons ou mauvais, héroïques ou grotesques. Sans cela, nous dit-il, les spectateurs qui veulent

<sup>1</sup> *The Merchant's Tale*, v. 916-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 1120-1.

savoir à quoi s'en tenir ne s'y reconnaîtraient plus. Or, c'est justement le propre du poète d'avoir en mainte rencontre abattu les barrières. Certains de ses personnages, et non les moins caractéristiques, sont justement placés sur le bord incertain du comique et du sentimental. *Est-il bon, Est-il méchant?* (le titre du dialogue de Diderot) s'appliquerait parfaitement à une création telle que celle de Jacques le mélancolique.

Le duc qui voit sans aveuglement les défauts du sire admet pourtant que sa misanthropie est pleine de substance (full of matter). Ce cynique railleur est tantôt sympathique, tantôt bafoué. Il a des élans de sentiment où il semble bien que le poète soit avec lui. Pour le cerf mourant il montre la même tendresse pitoyable que l'auteur de *Vénus et Adonis* pour le pauvre lièvre pourchassé. Si ses façons excentriques prêtent plus au sourire que les manières banales des seigneurs qui l'entourent, ses paroles invitent plus à la réflexion que les leurs. Il a sans doute tort de répandre sur toute chose le sarcasme et le pessimisme, mais il a l'avantage d'avoir réfléchi sur la vie. Il a pu avoir la jeunesse d'un épicurien sensuel et sa sagesse peut n'être qu'une forme de la satiété, mais il a ramené de son expérience bon nombre d'observations qu'il ne nous est certes pas demandé de prendre pour de pures sottises. Tantôt nous nous sentons attirés vers lui, comme le duc, tantôt repoussés par lui comme Rosalinde qui le cingle de ses plaisanteries. Au total nous pensons de lui : 'C'est un original.' Nous n'allons pas comme George Sand jusqu'à faire de lui le philosophe bienfaisant de la comédie, plein de vertu et de sagesse. Mais nous ne pouvons lui refuser non plus une certaine estime. Ce n'est pas sentimentalisme de voir en lui un être tramé de fils divers, mêlé de bien et de mal. Jacques n'est pas à coup sûr la création d'un esprit simplificateur, à l'auteur dramatique qui craint de se rendre intelligible à son public par la complexité des caractères qu'il met sur la scène.

Comme il était inévitable, le cas de Hamlet a beaucoup occupé Mr. Stoll. Pour lui, étant donné le thème primitif, point de doute : Hamlet est un héros, c'est-à-dire un homme

d'action qui accomplit son dessein, qui est la vengeance. Ainsi l'exigeait le public, ainsi entend le peindre Shakespeare. Le rêveur empêché d'agir par sa méditation, paralysé par sa conscience, c'est là une conception moderne, une illusion transportée dans le passé par les hommes d'aujourd'hui qui ont trop connu le doute. En fait, Shakespeare veut nous faire admirer l'énergie du jeune prince et ne le tient nullement pour défaillant. Il lui attribue en chaque circonstance une parfaite adresse, une ingéniosité sans cesse renouvelée. Si l'acte de vengeance est retardé, c'est qu'il fallait remplir les cinq actes. Ainsi disserte Mr. Stoll.

Vraiment, dans son souci de balayer les divagations romantiques, Mr. Stoll en arrive à oublier les confessions mêmes de Hamlet. Lui qui, par ailleurs, nous somme de toujours tenir les monologues shakespeariens pour autant de renseignements directs et sûrs donnés au public, il fait ici bien peu de cas des paroles que Hamlet y prononce, de ce qu'il nous affirme lui-même de leurs honteuses temporisations et de ses causes. Et notez que presque tous les passages de ces monologues où il le fait n'existent pas dans l'in-quarto de 1603. Selon les probabilités ce sont des additions de Shakespeare complétant et commentant une pièce antérieure, ou sa première ébauche du sujet. Presque toute la philosophie que ces monologues contiennent s'est venue poser sur le canevas un peu aride de l'œuvre primitive.

Or ce n'est pas nous qui l'avons inventé. C'est Hamlet lui-même qui se blâme d'être inactif et qui en attribue la cause à l'excès de réflexion. Rien n'est plus expressif ni plus explicite que ces passages dont Mr. Stoll nous affirme qu'ils ne doivent en rien troubler l'idée que se fait le spectateur de la décision du héros. Est-ce un commentateur romantique qui a ajouté au célèbre monologue ces vers :

[Thus conscience does make Cowards of us all]  
And thus *the native hew of Resolution*  
*Is sicklied o're with the pale cast of Thought*  
And enterprizes of great pith and moment  
With this regard their Currants turne away  
And loose the name of Action . . . ?

De même, est-ce la subtilité du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle qui lui a prêté les scrupules qui paralysent le bras du vengeur, ou est-ce Hamlet en personne qui se morigène en assistant à la marche militaire de Fortinbras ?

. . . Now, whether it be  
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
*Of thinking too precisely on the event,*  
 A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom  
 And ever three parts coward, I do not know  
 Why yet I live to say ' this thing 's to do ' ;  
 Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
 To do 't . . .

Mr. Stoll n'ignore ni ne nie ces réflexions de Hamlet, mais il n'en persiste pas moins à raisonner comme si elles n'existaient pas et si c'étaient des fictions de notre époque. On pourrait lui répliquer que si les spectateurs élisabéthains n'y ont pas pris garde, ainsi qu'il l'affirme (conjecture en somme assez gratuite), c'est tant pis pour eux, mais que ce n'est pas faute d'avoir été avertis par le poète.

Ces exemples montrent que dans sa réaction contre la critique romantique Mr. Stoll se laisse assez souvent entraîner à l'excès opposé. Les oscillations du pendule continuent et l'équilibre n'est pas encore trouvé.

En somme, on pourrait le suivre dans chaque partie de son argumentation et le convaincre de tirer presque chaque fois une conclusion exagérée d'un principe où il y a beaucoup de sens et de sagesse. Il appelle justement l'attention sur le fait que les personnages shakespeariens sont dispersés à travers une histoire et qu'ils apparaissent successivement dans des circonstances diverses et en face d'interlocuteurs différents. Le poète, pense-t-il, se préoccupe de chacune des scènes en vue de produire le plus grand effet possible de comique ou de tragique, mais il ne se soucie guère de relier entre elles ces manifestations successives de chaque personnage. Peu lui importe qu'elles impliquent contradiction et mènent à une certaine incohérence psychologique.

Accordons-lui la dispersion et la variété des aspects qui en

résultent. Mais pouvons-nous concéder qu'il n'y ait pas sous ces diversités un plan d'unité, une possibilité pour l'analyse d'accorder les disparates et de concilier les contradictions ? N'est-ce pas justement cet accord secret qui fait que Shakespeare est Shakespeare ? N'est-ce pas de là que vient l'illusion qu'on a dans ses drames affaire à des êtres réels ? N'est-ce pas grâce à cette complexité plausible de ses créations qu'il se distingue à la fois d'un Ben Jonson qui résout ordinairement le problème au moyen d'une simplification inhumaine, ou de ceux de ses contemporains qui ont travaillé selon le même système dramatique que l'auteur de *Hamlet* ? L'irréremédiable infériorité de Beaumont et Fletcher n'a pas d'autre cause profonde. Ces derniers n'ont véritablement cure que d'effet dramatique et l'on est souvent incapable de mettre d'accord les traits de leurs héros ou de leurs héroïnes. Qu'on examine de ce point de vue l'une des plus saisissantes de celles-ci, l'Évadné de *The Maid's Tragedy*. C'est un admirable rôle, mais ce n'est qu'un rôle. On ne peut guère à l'examen concevoir la nature de cette femme. C'est une ambitieuse et non une amoureuse. Comment alors accepte-t-elle ce pacte avec le Roi qui l'oblige à se cacher et lui ôte le prestige de la maîtresse déclarée ? Parce qu'elle n'est qu'une ambitieuse sa conversion paraît d'autre part trop brusque et trop complète. On comprend qu'elle cède à la force virile de son frère, mais non qu'elle se retourne avec des élans de tendresse vers son mari, cet Amintor si fléchissant. Sa férocité dans la scène où elle tue le roi est mal préparée par ce que nous savons d'elle : nous ignorons trop comment elle a succombé pour admettre cette explosion de haine. Y avait-il donc dans son cœur des sentiments plus profonds que cette ambition qui seule l'avait précipitée dans son premier crime ?

Si Shakespeare ne présente pas de pareilles incompatibilités, c'est sans doute qu'il suit à travers les scènes successives les lois d'un développement intérieur conforme à l'expérience que nous avons de la nature humaine. S'il admet les changements de caractère ou d'attitude, c'est dans certaines limites et en maintenant l'identité à travers les modifications. C'est justement parce qu'il faisait ce que les autres étaient peu capables

de faire que ses drames se sont imposés par leur consistance et leur vérité—du moins tous ceux qu'il a pris la peine de conduire fermement d'un bout à l'autre, non les pièces comme *Measure for Measure* où il a fait suivre de puissantes scènes d'une conclusion postiche.

De ce que Shakespeare fait un fréquent usage dans son théâtre des fantômes, des sorcières, des signes annonciateurs de désastres, Mr. Stoll incline à croire que c'est le rationalisme des temps plus récents qui lui prête un esprit supérieur aux superstitions qu'il exploite. Il n'examine pas s'il suffisait au poète de trouver ces superstitions chez beaucoup de ceux qui l'entouraient pour les peindre et de savoir leur efficacité scénique pour les représenter sérieusement. Il ne veut pas considérer que, si l'on est induit à le croire lui-même dégagé des crédulités ambiantes, c'est en somme à cause de la qualité de sa pensée libre qu'atteste presque chaque page. Chez ce lecteur assidu de Montaigne il y a une atmosphère de sagacité et de raison qui est mal conciliable avec des croyances aveugles. Ceci ne peut guère vivre avec cela. Le plus simple est encore d'admettre qu'il ne donnait à ces choses qu'une foi poétique.

Partout où Mr. Stoll entreprend de faire rentrer Shakespeare dans le cadre étroit de la tradition, il provoque la même objection, car nous sentons que sa grandeur vient justement de ce qu'il s'est souvent libéré de la tradition ou encore de ce qu'il l'a vivifiée en l'acceptant. Par exemple ce sont d'ordinaire les femmes qui font dans ses comédies la cour aux hommes. 'Très vrai,' dit Bernard Shaw faisant une fois l'éloge de Shakespeare. 'Mais non,' réplique Mr. Stoll. C'est le contre-pied de la vie. C'est une fiction romanesque flatteuse pour l'homme et à cause de cela très courante en littérature et au théâtre. Ces héroïnes en costume de page qui courent le monde à la recherche de leur amant, vieux thème et fantaisie pure!' En effet; mais il reste à savoir si Shakespeare n'a pas su employer le procédé déjà surmené à l'expression de la même vérité humaine que Shaw met en lumière crue dans *Man and Superman*. Rosalinde et Hélène devançant ingénument Ann Whitefield; Bénédicte et Bertram préfigurent Tanner.

En somme, on peut accorder à Mr. Stoll que le romantisme n'avait pas assez tenu compte des conventions scéniques qui limitaient la vérité des peintures shakespeareiennes, mais on est en droit de lui reprocher à lui-même d'avoir trop représenté Shakespeare comme l'esclave ou la victime de ces mêmes conventions.

Mr. Stoll a raison de nous rappeler que Shakespeare était un homme de son temps, mais il a tort de laisser croire qu'il était incapable de s'élever au-dessus du niveau moyen de son temps. Si Chaucer était Gower il ne serait pas Chaucer. Si Shakespeare était Heywood ou Fletcher il ne serait pas Shakespeare.

Mr. Stoll a raison de dénoncer les divagations de la mystique du génie, mais il a tort de raisonner comme s'il ne croyait pas au pouvoir exceptionnel du génie.

Il a raison d'accuser le romantisme d'un manque fréquent de bon sens, mais le romantisme aurait beau jeu pour lui répliquer qu'un Shakespeare ne peut être mesuré avec la seule toise du bon sens.

ÉMILE LEGOUIS.

## SCOTT AND CARLYLE

(The Substance of an Address to the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club)

THE lives of the three greatest of Scottish imaginative writers—Burns, Scott, and Carlyle—overlapped in an interesting and, for each successor, an influential manner. Burns prepared the way for Scott's interpretation and popularization of Scottish character and history. Carlyle's *French Revolution* would not have been composed in the vivid dramatic manner it is but for the *Waverley Novels*, for 'these historical novels have taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men . . . but men in buff or other coats and breeches, with colour in their cheeks, with passions in their stomachs, and the idioms, features, and vitalities of very men. It is a little word this ; inclusive of great meaning ! History will henceforth have to take thought of it.' And Carlyle, before Macaulay, took thought of it in composing his first and greatest historical picture.

Scott was fifteen years old when Burns came to Edinburgh, and every one knows the story of their one meeting. He never wrote a study or biography of Burns, but his references to him in letters and journals, and in a short review of Cromek's *Reliques of Robert Burns* (1809), show a keen sense of the poet's genius—'When I want to express a sentiment which I feel strongly I find the phrase in Shakespeare or thee.'—And in the last article he supplies a more vivid glimpse of the poet's temperament and character than Scottish piety has always been willing to allow us :

Robert Burns was the child of impulse and feeling. Of the steady principle which cleaves to that which is good he was unfortunately divested by the violence of those passions which finally

wrecked him. It is most affecting to add that while swimming, struggling, and finally yielding to the torrent, he never lost sight of the beacon which ought to have guided him to land, yet never profited by its light. The dignity, the spirit, the indignation of Burns was that of a plebeian—of a high-souled plebeian indeed—of a citizen of Rome or Athens; but still of a plebeian untinged with the slightest shade of that spirit of chivalry which since the feudal times has pervaded the higher ranks of society. This ardent and irritable temperament had its periods not merely of tranquillity, but of the most subduing tenderness. . . . It was in female society that his powers of expression displayed their utmost fascination. . . . The traits of sensibility which told of another would sound like instances of gross affectation were so native to the soul of this extraordinary man, and burst from him so involuntarily, that they not only obtained full credence as the genuine feelings of his own heart, but melted into unthought of sympathy all who witnessed them.

The paragraphs from which these sentences are taken are worth all the *apologiae* of Burns that have ever been written. We see the man who wrote the few amazing poems and songs that alone are the real Burns. Carlyle, like Burns a high-souled plebeian, the son of laborious, serious, pious peasants, came to Edinburgh, a student fourteen years old, in 1809—the year between *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. In the year of *Waverley* he left college and began to look round for a profession, and during all the years that the novels were flowing from Scott's pen Carlyle was struggling to find a livelihood in or in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, struggling with dyspepsia, poverty, 'the condition of the country', which he viewed with other eyes than Scott, and the spiritual crisis which is described in *Sartor*. Of the novels and their author he says but little in contemporary letters and notes, and what he does is in the carping, contemptuous tone with which he generally spoke of contemporaries. Scott is the 'literary restaurateur of Europe'. 'What are his novels—any one of them? A bottle of champagne, claret, port, or even ale-drinking. Are we wiser, holier, stronger? No, we have been amused.' The romantic career of Byron had more interest for the fundamentally romantic Carlyle; and in *Wilhelm Meister*

he finds 'more insight into the elements of human nature, and a more poetically perfect combining of them, than in all the other fictitious literature of our generation', though to Miss Welsh he has to admit a year later that *Wilhelm* is worth next to nothing as a novel.

But Carlyle *did* read the *Waverley Novels* and admire their treatment of history, and when news of Scott's death reached him he spoke in more generous tones:

Sir Walter Scott died some days ago. Goethe at the spring equinox, Scott at the autumn one. A gifted spirit is wanting then from among men. Perhaps he died in good time, so far as his own reputation is concerned. He understood what history meant; this was his chief intellectual merit. As a thinker not feeble—rather strong and healthy, yet limited, almost mean and *kleinstädtisch*. I never spoke with Scott (had once some small epistolary intercourse with him on the part of Goethe, in which he behaved not very courteously I thought), have a hundred times seen him from of old, writing in the Courts, or hobbling with stout speed along the streets of Edinburgh, a large man; pale, shaggy face; fine, deep-browed, grey eyes; an expression of strong, homely intelligence, of humour and good humour, and perhaps (in later years) among the wrinkles of sadness and weariness. A solid, well-built, effectual mind; the merits of which after all this delirious exaggeration is done, and the reaction thereof is also done, will not be forgotten. He has played his part, and left none like or second to him. *Plaudite*.

Seven years later, when the twenty-three years of struggle and uncertainty were at last leading to some measure of competence and long delayed recognition, Carlyle wrote his article on Scott for the *Westminster Review*. It is a remarkable study, not without insight and an element of justice in its implied protest against indiscriminate eulogy. The tone of the criticism is a blend of that of the early contemptuous references and the more generous tone of the note written when he heard of Scott's death. But the fact is, it was almost impossible for Carlyle to write of Scott with entire fairness, and that for reasons which throw light upon both Scott and Carlyle. It was always difficult for Carlyle to praise a contemporary whole-heartedly. In nothing did he differ more from Scott.

Carlyle was a peasant, a great-souled plebeian, and had a measure of what is perhaps the besetting sin of his class and country—an inclination, I will not say to envy, for that implies malignity, a readiness to do injury, and that is not a common Scottish failing and was certainly not Carlyle's, but a tendency to look with very critical eyes at a contemporary who has been more fortunate than ourselves, more prosperous but especially more popular, a disposition to say with Cassius :

and this man  
Is now become a god, and Cassius is  
A wretched creature, and must bend his body  
If Caesar carelessly but nod on him ;

and Scott, ill and in trouble, omitted even to nod when Carlyle forwarded a letter from Goethe. The years of Scott's greatest prosperity and popularity had been those of Carlyle's long-drawn-out suffering, poverty, ill-health, and spiritual conflicts. When in July 1821 Scott was setting out for London to attend the coronation, Carlyle was wrestling with the devil in Leith walk, 'toiling along the dirty little Rue St. Thomas de L'Enfer in a close atmosphere, and over pavements hot as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace'; and ten years later, when Scott passed through London, Carlyle was there still unknown to all but a few, still given the cold shoulder by publishers. Scott could not but seem to him the embodiment of worldly prosperity—one at ease, not even in Zion but in Domdaniel.

His life was worldly ; his ambitions were worldly. There is nothing spiritual in him ; all is economical, material, of the earth earthy. A love of the picturesque, of beautiful, vigorous, and graceful things ; a genuine love, yet not more genuine than has dwelt in hundreds of men named minor poets : this is the highest quality to be discerned in him.

Scott's only aim is to amuse.

The Genius of a faithless sceptical age had said to himself : What man shall be the temporary comforter, or were it but the spiritual comfort-maker, of this my poor singular age, to solace its dead tedium and manifold sorrows a little ? So had the Genius said, looking out over the world, what man ? and found him

walking the distant outer Parliament House of Edinburgh with his advocate-gown on his back ; and exclaimed, that is he.

But novels written to amuse and to make money must want serious interest, and so the *Waverley Novels* lack depth and reality of character as well as all philosophy of life.

It were a long chapter to unfold the difference in drawing a character between a Scott, a Shakespeare, and a Goethe. Yet it is a difference literally immense ; they are of a different species ; the value of the one is not to be counted in the coin of the other. We might say in a short word, which means a long matter, that your Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards : your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards. The one set become living men and women ; the others amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted automaton.

These famed books are altogether addressed to the everyday mind : there is next to no nourishment in them. Opinions, emotions, principles, doubts, beliefs, beyond what the intelligent country gentleman can carry along with him, are not to be found. It is orderly, customary, decent ; nothing more.

The *Waverley Novels* 'are not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating in any shape'. So speaks Carlyle, justifying what he said of himself to Jane Welsh, that there was a strange dark humour in him over which he had no control. His demon was—as many demons are—a conflict of unharmonized impulses. Like Byron, he was at war with himself, a passionate believer with no creed ; censorious in his judgements, utterly kind-hearted in his actions ; lover of solitude, yet miserable if for long cut off from intellectual companionship ; the apostle of silence who wrote and spoke interminably, for even when alone he talks to himself in journals and notes. He must find expression for every thought and humour. But the tormented man is critical of the happy man, and if ever there was a happy man, despite some bitter and lifelong disappointments, it was Scott. He was one of those fortunate beings who, in the words of a psychologist and critic, 'had achieved an ordered life, whose systems have developed clearing-houses by which the varying claims of different impulses are adjusted'. Historian, anti-

quarian, happy in the country and happy among his fellow-lawyers and literary friends in town, commercial adventurer and great imaginative creator, and above all loving and loved by his fellow-men, even by dogs and cats and donkeys and pigs. Scott had endless interests and was happy in them all. We tend to love such persons for what they are. 'The esteem and respect accorded to persons with the social virtues well developed is only in a small degree due to the use which we find we can make of them. It is much more a sense that their lives are rich and full.'

We do not know enough of Shakespeare's life to be certain, but one suspects, that his life had something of the same fullness—poet, actor, courtier, burgher of Stratford, the gentle Shakespeare whom even Jonson, a bit of a Carlyle in his censorious temper, loved 'on this side idolatry'. At any rate, one feels uncertain how Shakespeare would have fared at Carlyle's hand if he had lived in the nineteenth century, for much that Carlyle says of Scott applies immediately to Shakespeare. Did Scott 'write daily with the ardour of a steam-engine that he might make £15,000 a year and buy upholstery with it'? Well, did not Shakespeare write plays, or cobble up old ones, at the rate of two a year that he might buy a spurious coat of arms, and become the owner of the best house in Stratford, and end his life as an influential burgher, leaving the editing of his plays to look after itself?

Shakespeare (whom you and every play-house bill  
Call the divine, the matchless, what you will)  
For gain, not glory, winged his roving flight,  
And grew immortal in his own despite.

Did Scott write only to amuse? 'If literature had no task but that of harmlessly amusing indolent, languid men, here was the very perfection of literature.' Well, had Shakespeare any other conscious purpose? One may gather wisdom from his plays—and from Scott's novels—and critics, German and English, have discovered there much which would surprise Shakespeare. A candid student will, I think, come to the conclusion that more than any dramatist of his age, except Beaumont and Fletcher, Shakespeare accepted the role of

a purveyor of amusement to Court and people, the role of 'Master of Revels to Mankind'; that he wrote both comedy and tragedy with less of didactic purpose, genuine or assumed, than George Chapman or Ben Jonson or Webster or Cyril Tourneur, or even Philip Massinger, who all had, whatever we may think of it, their conception of the ways of God, of the nemesis that follows crime, which they take trouble to enforce. Shakespeare tells his story and leaves it without comment for you to read as you may. There it is; the rest is silence.

But indeed Carlyle admits that Shakespeare had no other end in view than Scott's—to delight by his art: 'Since Shakespeare's time there has been no great speaker so unconscious of an aim in speaking as Walter Scott. Equally unconscious these two utterances: equally the sincere complete products of the minds they came from, and now if they were equally deep? Or if the one was living fire, and the other was futile phosphorescence and mere resinous fire-work? It will depend on the relative worth of the minds, for both were equally spontaneous, both equally expressed themselves unencumbered by an ulterior aim. Beyond drawing audiences to the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare contemplated no result in those plays of his. Yet they have had results! 'Utter with free heart what thy own *daemon* gives thee; if fire from heaven it shall be well; if resinous fireworks it shall be—as well as it could be, or better than otherwise.'

The detachment of these two great artists could not be better put if the implied censure of Scott was as shortsighted as ungenerous; and this brings us to the crucial indictment that Scott could only draw his characters 'from the skin inwards'. Is it not the case that in this respect also there is a closer resemblance between Scott and Shakespeare than Carlyle is willing to admit; that Scott's method as an artist of character is Shakespeare's; and that if he is a less great dramatist and poet he did yet, for reasons not entirely personal, portray some classes of men more generously, more sympathetically, more understandingly than Shakespeare?

If it is a matter of degree, if Carlyle meant only that the dramatist saw deeper and expressed more adequately the

deeper passions of the heart, we need not question it. Shakespeare was a greater poet. Scott is a genuine but not a great poet. His poetic style is not of the highest order. As Adolphus pointed out, you will not find in Scott the marvellous phrases which only the great imaginative poet can strike out lines like those of Shakespeare :

Now . . .

. . . creeping murmur and the poring dark

Fills the wide vessel of the universe ;

or those of Milton :

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,

Now to the moon in wandering morris move ;

and where, describing the battle of the angels, he says that the war

soaring, on main wing

Tormented all the air.

You will find them in Wordsworth :

Newton with his prism and silent face,

The marble index of a mind for ever

Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.

But whatever difference there may be in degree of insight and power, Scott's method of drawing his characters and Shakespeare's are the same. They both draw their characters from without inwards, inasmuch as they both make them reveal themselves by their actions and speeches as they mingle with other men. Their method is not that of Racine or Richardson. Even Shakespeare's soliloquies are not like those of the French dramatist, when the character speaks to himself or to a confidant. Shakespeare's are not revealing analyses of motive and character. They are outbursts in which the hero relieves his feelings, and generally reveal his character just as much or just as little as his dialogue with others or his actions. Hamlet's soliloquies betray the torture of his mind ; they do not explain his delay, which Hamlet does not understand himself. Would it be fair to judge Brutus's motives for killing Caesar by his soliloquy just before the conspirators arrive ? We must judge him by his conduct and words throughout the

play—this puzzled, conscientious man, a kind of forecast of President Wilson. Neither Shakespeare nor Scott cared to play the omniscient spectator behind their characters, revealing the hidden motives, the subtle secretions of the brain which determine conduct almost unknown to the actor himself. *Clarissa* and *Madame Bovary* are the work of a different order of artists. There is nothing in which Scott's debt to the Elizabethans is more obvious than his way of introducing his characters and gradually revealing them in dialogue. Compare the opening scenes in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* with the first scene in *The Heart of Midlothian*, when the crowd are dispersing after the reprieve of Porteous :

'An unco thing this, Mrs. Howden,' said old Peter Plumdamas to his neighbour the rousing-wife, . . . 'to see the grit folk o' Lunnon set their face against law and gospel, and let loose sic a reprobate as Porteous upon a peaceable town !'

'And to think o' the weary walk they hae gien us,' answered Mrs. Howden, with a groan ; 'and sic a comfortable window as I had gotten, too, just within a penny-stane-cast of the scaffold—I could hae heard every word the minister said—and to pay twal-pennies for my stand, and a' for naething !'

'I am judging,' said Mr. Plumdamas, 'that this reprieve wadna stand gude in the auld Scots law, when the kingdom *was* a kingdom.'

'I dinna ken muckle about the law,' answered Mrs. Howden ; 'but I ken, when we had a king, and a chancellor, and parliament-men o' our ain, we could aye peeble them wi' stanes when they werena gude bairns—but naeboddy's nails can reach the length o' Lunnon.'

And so the scene develops, and through it emerge Bartoline Saddletree and his wife, and Reuben Butler ; and in their wake come Davie Deans and Jeannie and Dumbiedykes, none of whom are to be dismissed as 'deceptively painted automats'.

But Carlyle's charge may bear another significance. It is true that some of Scott's characters, at least in single scenes, are what the older dramatists called 'humorists'—that the externals of dress and archaisms, and the technical terminology of hawking and hunting, make up nearly all we get. The

friar in *Ivanhoe* is a bundle of humours drawn from folk-tales rather than either life or history. Even some of the historical characters, as James in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, are not much more. Cromwell is for Scott, as for many others, somewhat of an enigma. It is one of Carlyle's services to history to have made Cromwell more human, but Carlyle could not quite bring himself to admit that the zealous Puritan and the Machiavellian politician which revolution forced Cromwell to become were not compatible; that Cromwell used the language of religion to darken counsel because he could not squarely tell his followers that England was not to be ruled by the saints, that saints are not meant to rule the world, that men must render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. But was Shakespeare really more successful than Scott with great historical characters of whom we have more than some vague traditional knowledge? is Julius Caesar drawn from the heart outwards? Moreover, it is with Scott as with Shakespeare. If a character is at first only a property or a humorist, a frame on which to hang old clothes and manners of speech, should the character begin to interest him, to enter into the story, ten to one he will quickly become a vivid personality. It is so with Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*; and in Scott's case with, for example, Adam Woodcock in *The Monastery*. At his entry we think he is to be a piece of pure 'tushery', as Stevenson calls it, a display of Scott's knowledge of falconry; but when Roland Graeme is banished and encounters Adam, with whom he had quarrelled, lo! Adam becomes a real man, a rough but generous Englishman whom, with a certain malicious pleasure, Scott contrasts with the Scottish friend who has just thrown him over:

'What now,' said he. 'Master Rowland, do you, who are half an Englishman, think that I, who am a whole one, would keep up anger against you, and you in distress? That were like some of the Scots (my master's reverence always excepted) who can be fair and false, and wait their time, and keep their mind, as they say, to themselves, and touch pot and flagon with you, and after all, when time serves, pay off some old feud with the point of

the dagger. Canny Yorkshire has no memory for such old sores.'

and Adam becomes Roland's first friend and a living if minor character.

But a character of comedy. Scott's domain is comedy in a large sense of the word. Tragedy, says Professor Saintsbury, was certainly not Scott's forte to the same extent as were comedy and history. This is doubtless in the main true, and the fact gives support to Carlyle's sweeping judgement, for no doubt comedy presents a more superficial aspect of character than tragedy. It is in tragedy that a man's soul is laid bare. We do not know what is in a man, what is in ourselves, until we are involved in tragic or possibly tragic issues. 'I write for general amusement', says Scott in the introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, which is Carlyle's charge. But one must not always take Scott's confessions at their face value. He belittled his own work as much as Wordsworth was disposed to exalt his. He hated to make parade of his deeper feelings, or to pose as teacher or author. He accepted, like Shakespeare, the role of entertainer of the public, a public often interpreted to him by James Ballantyne, who induced him to evade the tragical issue in *St. Ronan's Well*. But he had a deeper motive than to amuse and make money; his own delight in his work, the thought of which was never absent from his mind; and he knew that 'amusement' is an inadequate word to describe the satisfaction we derive from a great work of art, be it drama or poem or novel or piece of music; even 'pleasure' is at least a misleading name for the satisfaction of some of our deepest instincts which art may give and life deny us. And tragedy is the source of the deepest satisfaction which literature can afford, as certainly as the greatest music is serious, passionate, tragic. As his power developed Shakespeare moved from comedy and romance to tragedy. *Othello* and *Lear* are greater works than *Henry IV* and *Twelfth Night*. That Scott realized this may be gathered from his own work, despite the preponderance in it of romance and comedy; for, leaving over for a moment his one pure tragedy, in several, and those the best, of his novels the tragic

is the source of the intensest interest. The comedy which relieves and supports the tragic is generally excellent, but the romantic story of the hero and the heroine is not infrequently the most insignificant part of the whole. What are the fortunes of Edward Waverley and Rose Bradwardine compared with the tragic fate of Fergus and Flora MacIvor and Evan MacCombich? The only interesting thread in the story of *Ivanhoe* is found in the fortunes and character of Rebecca and the Templar; the rest is 'tushery' and fun for boys. The far finer comedy of *Redgauntlet* does not outweigh the poignant tragedy of the last scene in the long drama of the Stewarts or in the life and death of poor Nanty Ewart. (But what has not been sufficiently emphasized is that all that is really good in the novel in which Scott reached his highest level, *The Heart of Midlothian*, is tragedy of the purest kind. It hardly alters the fact that in the end Effie Deans is saved. That is an accident due to the caprice as much as the kindness of the Queen. Jeanie might have made her heroic journey and pleaded with all her native eloquence in vain. In the great trial scene Jeanie Deans makes a tragic choice as certainly as Antigone when she scattered dust upon her brother's body; and that whatever view we take of her conduct, whether with the author we feel that she did the right thing, or think with Mr. Bernard Shaw that she should have lied with equanimity. In the first case the tragedy is of the kind which Hegel thought the highest—a fatal conflict between two great principles, her duty to her sister and her duty to her fellow-men, the all in each of us that is the voice of conscience, or, if you like, between the love of her sister and the fear of God. If the other be the right view, if she was in bondage to a too scrupulous, superstitious conscience, then the tragedy is that which Aristotle defines. Through a noble error she dooms her sister, her father, and herself. The final issue and the remorse which it must have brought with it is evaded; but it is on the level of tragedy, supported rather than relieved by comedy, that the story moves from the Porteous Riots to the eloquent appeal of Jeanie to the Queen. Thereafter the novel loses all interest.

It will not do therefore to deny to Scott the capacity for poignant tragedy, whatever view we may take of his one story that is carried through to a tragic catastrophe. *The Bride of Lammermoor* has been very diversely judged. Professor Saintsbury condemned it, evoking a protest from Sir Henry Craik. My final feeling after repeated reading is that it is a great tragedy with some obvious faults. It suffers from certain superficial flaws which all Scott's works reveal, but which are more felt in a tragedy—a touch of facetiousness in the humour, of theatricality in the serious and impassioned speeches (the style of the romances of the day from which Scott escapes entirely only when he writes in Scotch, for his Scotch is purer even than that of Burns), the tone, on the other hand, of common sense to which he always reverts, but which, while it gives solidity to his portrayal of life, is a little jarring in a work whose tone is that of high, even poetic, tragedy. In a word, if it is not as satisfying as its model *Romeo and Juliet*, it is because *The Bride of Lammermoor* is not clothed in such golden poetry, for the action is more essentially tragic, and the hero is a finer character than Romeo. The fate of Romeo and Juliet is an accident. The bar that divides them is an inherited feud which, as Father Lawrence hoped, a marriage might have healed. Till the death of Tybalt, after the marriage, there is no dividing river of blood. A deeper and darker gulf divides the heir of Ravenswood from the Ashton family. To woo Lucy Ashton is from the first for Ravenswood a tragic choice, a fatal error. Between them lies, in his own words, 'an ancient house destroyed, an affectionate father murdered'.

'What have you to do with Lucy Ashton? why should your steps move in the same footpath with hers? Why should your voice sound in the same chord and time with those of Sir William Ashton's daughter? Young man, he who aims at revenge by dishonourable means. . . '

'Be silent, woman!' said Ravenswood; 'is it the devil that prompts your voice? Know that this young lady has not on earth a friend who would venture farther to save her from injury.'

'And is it even so?' said the old woman, in an altered but melancholy tone—'then God help you both.'

It is not just, with Professor Saintsbury, to dismiss the hero as 'a sulky, stagy creature in theatrical poses and a black-plumed hat'. Whenever we come to close quarters with Ravenswood he shows himself both a gentleman and a man of right feeling; and he is, as Adolphus pointed out, the only one of Scott's heroes who dominates the story throughout, 'is the ultimate and paramount object of every passion—whether admiration, hatred, love, hope, or fear—which vary and animate the successive scenes'. The hero is too often in Scott's stories simply the person who marries the heroine, and the heroine the person who marries the hero. But Lucy Ashton cannot be dismissed with a contemptuous reference to her want of courage to run away and join her lover, hemmed in as she is and her lover she knows not where. Lucy's weakness is atoned for by the entirety of her love; and it is the completeness of her surrender to her love that overcomes every scruple in Ravenswood's mind, whether of prudence or honour. No; if *The Bride of Lammermoor* is not entirely successful it is because the story is conceived, and the greatest scenes are written, in the spirit of great imaginative poetry, and these are not entirely harmonized with the matter-of-fact tone of the lower levels of the story. Scott had Shakespeare in his mind at every turn, the 'waking' and the grave-digger scenes for example; and Caleb Balderstone is hardly a less pathetic and poetic figure than the fool in *King Lear*. Though written in prose, it is the most *poetic* tragedy in our literature since the Elizabethans.

It will not do then to deny to Scott tragic power and the deeper insight into character and passion which tragedy requires, if he was often disposed to forgo its exercise, and sacrifice the more serious aims of the artist to James Ballantyne's demand for what would amuse, and if, as little as Shakespeare, he was disposed to analyse the subtler phases of the human heart. Scott had the seeing eye, the creative imagination, and Carlyle, despite himself, recognizes it, for it will not do to say at one moment that Scott can create only 'mechanical cases, deceptively painted automatons', and at the next to tell us that the *Waverley Novels* have taught historians

that the bygone ages were actually filled by living men. That is true, because Scott described the Porteous riots and similar scenes as vividly as though he had viewed them through the window, and gave life and character to the actors, whether known by name to history or the creations of his imagination.

But I do not wish to end on this note. There is another explanation of Carlyle's grudging estimate of Scott's work. Carlyle was a teacher, a prophet; Scott was content to be an artist. Hence Carlyle's preference for *Wilhelm Meister*. Carlyle was at war with the world as he found it. He was the apostle of the dynamic power of the spirit in an age of ever increasing faith in mechanism, in an age that looked to the ballot-box and 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' and political economy as machines that were to secure indefinite progress as by the turning of a mangle. He and Ruskin and Arnold were in different ways the troublers of Macaulay and Roebuck and the complacent believers in progress and our unexampled age. And Carlyle brought to his task the seriousness without the faith of his Puritan ancestors. To him, as to Baxter and the Puritans of the seventeenth century, all that partook of the nature of pastime was suspect if not actual sin. 'That young man prefers seriousness to truth,' said Chalmers, after a conversation with Carlyle. 'Love not pleasure; love God. This is the Everlasting Yea wherein all contradiction is solved.' To a John the Baptist thus preaching seriousness as the first of virtues Scott's life, as he read it in Lockhart, and Scott's novels, all novels and poems that did not directly teach, were suspect. Scott is a Mr. Worldly Wiseman. But in fairness we must distinguish.

'A man of the world, not a worldly man,' a lady friend said to me, speaking of a clergyman whom I had criticized, and the distinction is a real one. A worldly man is one who will sacrifice to worldly end things of higher value—self-respect and friendship and love. Scott was no such man. He made one great mistake in his life, which laid him open to Macaulay's charge that he wanted a scrupulous sense of honour, yet it is clear that he did so without realizing the implications of his

actions ; and when disaster brought them home to him he set himself to redress the ill he had done most honourably. Nor was it a vulgar motive, a wish to rise in society, that made Scott a reckless purchaser of land. There is something pathetic in the simplicity with which he confesses in the preface to *Rokeby* the depth of his early conceived desire to possess land he could call his own. It was, as Lockhart says, one expression of his imaginative temperament, his idealization of the Scottish aristocracy.

But a man of the world Scott was, if that means one who appreciated the world as he found it, who enjoyed those class differences which other men dislike or condemn. Scott accepted with joy the values of every class—distinction and refinement in the upper class, worth and enterprise in the middle class, honesty and good sense and kindness in the lower, even the Bohemianism of John Ballantyne as well as the solemnity of Wordsworth. He is far fairer to what are called 'the people' than Shakespeare, who sees only their humours and their faults. Scott saw more than humours in his servants and tenants and in the creations of his imagination—Edie Ochiltree and Evan MacCombich, and Mause and Cuddie Headrigg, and the Deanses, and Richie Moniplies, though the creator of Andrew Fairservice was not blind to their faults. And he was not blind to the faults of the upper classes, nor did his sentimental feudalism and love of loyalty as a virtue blind him to the very mixed feelings with which the humbler classes justly regarded their betters. You remember what Ravenswood learned from the grave-digger :

'If Lord Ravenswood protected his people, my friend, while he had the means to do so I think they might spare his memory.'

'Ye are welcome to your ain opinion, sir,' said the sexton, 'but ye winna persuade me that he did his duty either to himsell or to huz puir dependent creatures, in guidin us the gate he has done—he might hae gien us life-rent tacks of our bits o' houses and yards—and me that's an auld man living in yon miserable cabin, that's fitter for the dead than the quick, and killed wi' rheumatize, and John Smith in my dainty bit mailing, and his windows glazen, and a' because Ravenswood guided his gear like a fule.'

‘It is but too true,’ said Ravenswood, conscience-stricken, ‘the penalties of extravagance extend far beyond the prodigal’s suffering.’

Scott’s worldliness was just one side of the quality that made him the great creator he was—his love for his fellow-men of all sorts and descriptions. If he was not so great a poet as Shakespeare, his sympathies were perhaps wider, his affections warmer. Like Cervantes, he had difficulty in making any of his characters positively hateful, for what Lockhart calls his angelic sweetness of disposition made it hard for him to hate any one. He is ready to find an explanation, which is also a partial excuse, for active villainy as that of Rashleigh Osbaldiston. In general his villains, as Glossin or Dousterswivel, are more contemptible than hateful. And so Scott, though neither teacher like Goethe nor prophet like Carlyle, made his contribution to not only the amusement but the welfare and happiness of men. In Scottish, one might say in British, history Scott has been the great reconciler. The harmonizing work of his imagination has had its reactions in national history and sentiment. He reconciled Highlands and Lowlands, Celt and Angle. A lowlander himself, a borderer, his interest in the Highlands was early awakened through his father’s Jacobite friends and from *Waverley* to *The Two Drovers* he shows a deep interest in, if not so native an intimacy with, that strange people, barbaric as Homer’s heroes are barbaric and as chivalrous as the knights of the Round Table. But he reconciled also Scotland and England. Ardent patriot as he was, no one could be fairer to the English character, whether of a gentleman like Colonel Mannering or a yeoman like Adam Woodcock. He even helped to reconcile Britain to the continent and the continent to Britain after the long years of exile and isolation. Goethe hailed in him the first exponent of the worth of German literature. A passionate supporter of the long war with Napoleon, he never wrote of the French with the contempt which was common in his day, and earlier. Consider Miss Burney’s treatment of the French character in *Evelina*. In *Quentin Durward* he celebrated ‘the Auld Alliance’ and won the heart of France. He reconciled Pres-

byterian and Episcopalian, for, despite Dr. MacCrie's protest, his treatment of the Covenanters has left no bitter feeling in Scottish hearts. He reconciled rich and poor, for Scott's aristocratic ideal, if a dream, was a generous dream, 'a scheme of life so constituted originally, and which his fancy pictured as capable of being revived as to admit of the kindest personal contact between (almost) the peasant at the plough and the magnate with revenues rivalling the monarch'; and of all the characters to which his imagination gave life none are more vital than his peasants and common people.

To this work of reconciliation Scott was assisted by one circumstance which also in part explains Carlyle's attitude, and explains another fact which Englishmen have remarked, that Scott does not hold quite the place in the hearts of his countrymen, of Carlyle for example, that is occupied by Burns. Burns and Carlyle stand more in what has been the main stream of Scottish tradition since the Reformation. For there have been always two streams—the one aristocratic, Catholic, Episcopalian; the other democratic and Presbyterian. It was the Presbyterian Church which made Scotland democratic. The General Assembly was the first real Scottish Parliament. This has been so much the main, at least the noisiest, stream that the other has been to some eyes hardly observable. And though they both kicked over the traces, Burns and Carlyle were bred in and remained of that tradition. In abandoning the Church of his fathers Carlyle abandoned Christianity altogether. He could never speak but with contempt of Jesuitism and Puseyism. He never gave to either any careful study. All forms of institutional religion but that of his father and mother, which he had perforce abandoned, were Mumbo-Jumbo, old clothes in Houndsditch. Scott clung to the other tradition. He was proud of his ancestry, and idealized the Scottish aristocracy, which Carlyle admits he detested, and which excited Burns's wrath:

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord.

Scott was brought up a Presbyterian and remained all his life a staunch Protestant. He never fails to speak of the Catholic Church—not indeed as Anti-Christ—but as a corrupt and

oppressive institution from which the Reformation had delivered England and Scotland. He calls it 'a mean and depraving institution'. If at all responsible for the Oxford Movement it was in a very indirect way by reviving interest in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> But, as Lockhart tells us, 'he took up early in life a repugnance to the mode in which worship is conducted in the Scottish Establishment and adhered to the sister Church, whose system of government and discipline he believed to be the fairest copy of the primitive polity, and whose liturgies and collects he revered as having been transmitted to us from the ages immediately succeeding that of the apostles'. Now the member of a minority, when passions have died down, is often better able than another to do justice to his country's history in its entirety. The influence of the victorious tradition is so obvious and omnipresent that he cannot ignore it, and he is not so entirely ignorant of, or so prejudiced against, the minority as one in the main stream may easily be. As an historical novelist Scott swears allegiance to no faction. His reason again and again corrects the bias of his feelings. But he feels the poetry which invests both winner and loser at every turn. Carlyle declares that 'to me there is nothing poetical in Scotland but its religion', nothing poetical but Knox and Melville and the Solemn League and Covenant and the wild saints of the moss-hags! Well, there is poetry for the seeing eye in all these passionate agitations and heroic characters. But to Scott the whole history of his

<sup>1</sup> I do not think his considered position is anywhere better stated than in *The Abbot*: 'But he on whom the office of Abbot of Saint Mary's was now conferred had a mind fitter for the situation to which he was called. Bold and enthusiastic, yet generous and forgiving—wise and skilful, yet zealous and prompt—he wanted but a better cause than the support of a decaying superstition, to have raised him to the rank of a truly great man. But as the end crowns the work, it also forms the rule by which it must ultimately be judged; and those who with sincerity and generosity, fight and fall in an evil cause, posterity can only compassionate as victims of a fatal but generous error. Among these we must reckon Ambrosius . . . whose designs must be condemned, as their success would have rivetted on Scotland the chains of antiquated superstition and spiritual tyranny.'

country was steeped in poetry—Wallace and Bruce, Highland clans and Border families, dour and fierce Covenanters, but also the loyal and gallant Dundee, nobles, ministers, merchants, lawyers, peasants, and fishermen. If he did not love the Presbyterian mode of service he is never other than just to her clergy, and has described some features of Scottish worship with appreciation—the psalmody, even the extempore prayers. And the Scotland that his imagination created and re-created in all its aspects he made known to the world. We owe our character in the eyes of other peoples to Sir Walter Scott in the first place. Before him we were known but not seen in a very favourable light. To the French we were old allies, but that was long over and had left a memory of a brave but a proud and turbulent race. To the English we had been first a constant thorn in the flesh, then when James united the countries a swarm of locusts descending on their richer country. If things improved under the more dignified Charles, in the end a Scottish army invaded England and that army sold to his enemies the King for whom both Englishmen and Scotchmen had laid down their lives, and endeavoured to impose on England an infallible Kirk and its discipline. And even so we had to quarrel with the Commonwealth and be held down by Cromwell and his army after forcing the Covenant upon poor Charles the Second. The Puritan and republican Milton hated the Scotch as much as the Royalist Cleveland :

Had Cain been Scot, God had reversed his doom,

Not forced him wander but confined him home.

And when the Restoration came, and the end of the rule of the Saints, of all the Saints none left so evil an odour behind as the Presbyterians who had claimed for themselves the authority and infallibility of the Church they denounced as Anti-Christ ; and who, but for the restraining hand of Cromwell, would have made the yoke laid on the neck of other sects as heavy as that of Laud and the Star-Chamber, for if a Pope at Rome or Canterbury is an oppression, a Pope in every parish is not less so :

More haughty than the rest the wolfish race

Appear with belly gaunt and famish'd face :

Never was so deform'd a beast of Grace.  
His ragged tale betwixt his legs he bears  
Close clapp'd for shame, but his rough crest he rears,  
And pricks up his predestinating ears.

The eighteenth century did not quickly improve the relations between Scotch and English. For then came the Darien scheme and the Massacre of Glencoe, and the '15 and the '45—which were not to men of the day quite the romantic episodes that Jacobite songs and Scott made them later—and the premiership of Bute, and the *North Briton*, and Dr. Johnson's gibes at Scottish poverty, and at the conspiracy of Scots to speak well of one another, and the battle over Macpherson's *Ossian*. An ill-conditioned man of genius like Smollett was not the person to heal the breach. Burns began the work and Scott completed it. The Scotland that lives in the imagination of other peoples is the Scotland of the *Waverley Novels*. What would England be without Shakespeare, Carlyle asks: 'for our honour among foreign nations, as an ornament to the English Household, what item is there that we would not rather surrender than him.' But Shakespeare has not always carried England with him. The Germans account him so much their own as to be conscious of little obligation to England; and the French regard him as the great example of English genius and English want of art, a glorious barbarian. But Scott and Scotland go together. We sat this year, in a coach in the Salzkammergut, beside a little Austrian who boasted that he had read all Scott and longed to see Scotland.

We doubtless need prophets like Jeremiah and Carlyle to rouse us if we are too much at our ease in Domdaniel, and to preach the duty of hard work and the virtue of being unhappy. But we also owe something to the artist who has gladdened life by adding to the stock of harmless pleasure. And one element in the pleasure we derive from the work of an artist like Shakespeare or Cervantes or Scott is the impression conveyed of his own personality. Everything in Scott's work, as he said with less truth of Beaumont and Fletcher, is set to a good tune. Wherever we feel his own presence in his life

or his work we have the same impression of a large generous nature, an angelic sweetness of disposition.

This is what one is always drawn to lay stress on when one hears criticism of Scott's style. Of the purity, beauty, and power of his style when he writes in the vernacular there is no longer any question. It is Scott's English style, in the narrative body of his work, that has provoked criticism from the time of Adolphus to our own day, and especially during the vogue of his young disciple and rival, Robert Louis Stevenson. But it is necessary again to distinguish. There have always been two schools of stylists and critics of style, the exquisites, as one might call them, and those who possess, or who value above everything, the creative touch. The greatest of French novelists, Balzac, has also been accused of writing a bad style. Flaubert is the idol of the exquisites, the precious stylists. But the late Professor Angellier, the biographer of Burns, was not of the same opinion. 'Of a truth', he says, 'Flaubert has an expert understanding of the vocabulary. He has mastered the science of words. His style is beautiful, but it is always the same. What can be more regular, better ordered, more classical, than his style? Yet he is an inferior artist, for he has never got beyond the words. His rhythm has no variety. He never understood that variety of movement is one of the artist's tools. It is the same with Leconte de Lisle. He understands only the science of the word. He is incapable of giving movement to a phrase. He has no syntax. In a word, they are poor creatures, beggars, paupers, all these people when put beside Balzac. They have got a goffering iron, and can turn out frills.' It is Shakespeare as well as Balzac whom Angellier was defending against the advocates of correctness. But with due distinction much of what he says can be extended to Scott. He, too, may lack correctness and the studied effects of vowel and consonant music on which Stevenson and his admirers laid such stress; what flow and movement his style gathers in the great scenes, and what an evocative power. Of the greater scenes you can say, as Dryden said of Shakespeare, you do not only see what he describes, you feel it too. One would think that Scott had

been in the streets of Edinburgh on the night of the Porteous Riots. Flow, vision, and the impress of a large and generous nature, these compensate for faults of carelessness that to a smaller writer would be fatal. Not even Shakespeare gives us such an impression of largeness and generosity and wisdom as Scott. The iron of a harder life than Scott's, a dishonoured calling, had entered deeper into his soul:

O for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
The guilty Goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds.

and

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed.

He had seen sides of human nature that made it hard for him not at times to hate human nature; known types of men and women he could not forgive. Moreover, Shakespeare's sympathies were somewhat circumscribed by his courtly and London audiences. For common people he has little sympathy. The common man has not yet emerged for polite literature. To learn something of his virtues we must turn not to the Elizabethan dramatists, but to Bunyan. The writer who gives me any impression of the same depth and range of sympathy as Scott is Cervantes, of whose great novel it has been said that of the six hundred odd characters introduced not one is wholly odious or despicable. Burns is the most fiery star in the heaven of Scottish letters, radiating laughter and love. Carlyle is a splendid erratic star, a comet with a glittering tail, who, like other comets, will return from time to time to startle and delight us. But Scott is the largest and most beneficent luminary. He has built the golden bridge that will for ever connect the Scotland of to-day with the Scotland of the past. In the actual course of events Scotland is turning away from her past, not only her feudal, but her religious past, with a startling, an alarming rapidity and recklessness. A modern industrial people, what has she to do with the past, whether Bruce and kings and nobles, or Knox and Presbyterians and Covenanters? Her eyes are

fixed upon the future. Her religious ardour is evoked by economics not covenants. But Scott's work holds the past before her imagination, and appeals, quite as much as Carlyle's, to her soul, for the soul of man has more needs than are to be satisfied by puritanism. Chivalry, generosity, loyalty, honour, a sense of the beauty of nature, and the beauty of human nature in every class, a deep regard for right, a sober fear of God—all these things one may learn who reads Sir Walter, and all of them Scotland needs if she is to advance into the future without a moral disaster. Are all Carlyle's effusions over the Eternal Verities more 'doctrinal to a nation' or individual than the sober words in which Scott justifies himself for not assigning to Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* a happier fate? 'A character of a highly virtuous and lofty stamp is degraded rather than exalted by an attempt to reward virtue with temporal prosperity. Such is not the recompense that Providence has deemed worthy of suffering merit. . . . A glance at the great picture of life will show that the duties of self-denial and the sacrifice of passion to principle are seldom thus remunerated; and that the internal consciousness of their high-minded discharge of duty produces on their own reflections a more adequate recompense, in the form of that peace which the world cannot give or take away.'

H. J. C. GRIERSON.

## SHELLEY'S MENTAL PROGRESS

MONSIEUR MAUROIS has made it impossible for us to forget that Shelley called himself 'Ariel'. After seeing him in an exquisite picture, '*comme un oiseau sauvage*', we can scarcely remember that physically he was wingless. We have acquired a pernicious habit of treating him as a mystery, and we listen to his music as if it had strayed across from elf-land. For this tradition his friends were partially responsible. ('He was like spirit', wrote Leigh Hunt, 'that had darted out of its orb, and found itself in another world. I used to tell him that he had come from the planet Mercury.') But Shelley was a man, and not a lost spirit. He sprang from the earth, and not from the planet Mercury. However and wherever his poetry may have come to him, it lifts us to the skies. We are more likely to keep track of him among the stars, if we first realize that it is a man we are following and not an alien spirit.

Shelley's poetry demands not so much an intellectual as a strong imaginative effort; and to make this effort we must understand his mind. On every side of his nature it moved outwards in flights which tended to become quests. In all his adventures he set forth pursued by some phantom of his own mind. He fled from himself, yet swung back into passionate introspection.<sup>1</sup> He fled from men; but to them he made no return. His flight from God ended in a partial discovery of the very Power from which he had been fleeing.

This means that he was a man who *grew*. Mr. Santayana<sup>2</sup> has delineated him as a curious being who came into this world impervious and complete. Though life could hurt him—so we are told—it could not change him. It would rather seem that Shelley differed from ordinary men in the extent of his conversions. If we compare him in 1813 with what he had

<sup>1</sup> For Shelley's attitude to himself, see my article on him in the *Contemporary Review*, March 1927.

<sup>2</sup> *Winds of Doctrine*.

become by 1822, the contrast is overwhelming. As man, as thinker, and as artist he made stupendous journeys.

These journeys concern us if we are to grow into the secrets of his art. Otherwise it will descend on us like an alien voice from the skies, only to be drowned by the familiar sounds of earth. Many readers turn from Shelley because they think him unearthly; others of esoteric turn cultivate him like some strange divinity. Neither attitude is in relation to the plain facts of the case. Shelley's journeys are matters of human experience. Many other men have followed similar paths, though not entirely in his fashion. Shelley has much in common with all men who have asked questions and dreamed dreams; who have persevered against failure, who have lost hope and regained it. From such experiences sprang that magical thing, his art. We, who cannot co-operate in his creation of beauty, may yet participate in his intellectual and emotional experience.

## I

To Shelley man was an 'intense atom', exalted by his intensity, humiliated by his limitation. This was not only a theoretical paradox, but a practical dilemma. Through human contacts the poet sought exaltation; he often found defeat.

He approached humanity at two points—the community which had to be regenerated, and individuals who were to be loved. It is a comic yet glorious fact that he set himself, single-handed, to find a remedy for the human tragedy. He suggested to Peacock<sup>1</sup> the subject for a fictionary hero Scythrop who put forth a treatise entitled, *Philosophical Gas: or a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind*. Like Scythrop's enchantress Stella he had too lively a sense of 'the numberless scenes of injustice and misery which are being acted at every moment in every part of the inhabited world'. However absurd Shelley may have appeared, he was also generous and daring. His words rang to the exhilaration of conflict. From youth he had prepared his soul, so that it might 'walk forth to war among mankind'. In those early days

<sup>1</sup> In *Nightmare Abbey*.

defeat seemed farther away. He came to hate the confusion brought in the train of revolution. Yet he clung to his conviction that worst of all things is the surrender to evil. 'Anarchy', he wrote, 'is better than despotism; for this reason, that the former is for a season, and that the latter is eternal.'

His poetry is steeped in the atmosphere of a stupendous conflict. The representatives of the Evil and the Good principle emerge in a progressive series. First among the incarnations of Evil came Zastrozzi—a figure almost entirely absurd. At that time Shelley felt the unholy fascination of wickedness. He soon ceased to give the devil his due, and represented the workers of iniquity as irrational monsters like the Iberian priest in the *Revolt of Islam* or Rosalind's husband. Next in order came the terse reference to Ozymandias 'king of kings', vanquished by Time, not man. After him emerged the figure of Zeus in *Prometheus Unbound*—not an incarnation of Evil, but a representative of Ultimate Power. The first completely studied portrait is that of Count Cenci, who is set forth with a cynicism impressive if not entirely convincing. He seems like a new type of being akin to humanity, and possessing an indefinable air of reality, even though he may belong to an unrecognized species.

These strange touches of reality appear in the dim portrait of Archbishop Laud, who comes out into the light with a burst of impassioned pride. Most significant of all is Mahmud, the villain given over to despair. As defeat creeps nearer, he loses his position as the representative of evil, and goes onward with fatalism merging into faith. This remarkable inconsistency proves that Shelley was growing towards the apprehension of personality. Cenci and Laud were types; Mahmud began as a type, but ended as a defeated individual humanly attractive. It may be that Shelley, fighting on the opposite side, was touched with fellow-feeling.

There are no other finished studies. In *The Triumph of Life* the tyrants and deluders of men are named and denounced. It is doubtful whether Shelley would ever again have represented the Principle of Evil as incarnate in a single human form.

Among the protagonists as among the workers of evil there

is a distinct process of evolution. The Ahasuerus of *Queen Mab* is best apprehended in the light of his subsequent appearance in *Hellas*. Passing over the declamatory Laon we come to the dim and shapeless form of Prometheus—a voice rather than a man. Unlike Milton's Satan, to whom he is compared, he is a disinterested rebel; but he lacks the massive elemental dignity of the Arch-Fiend. It is suggested that others are fighting on his side. There is a fleeting picture of Christ;

A youth

With patient looks nailed to a crucifix.

But he remains a picture—an emblem, says the Fury, of the disillusioned idealist; and Prometheus cannot bear the sight of his agony.

Then comes Beatrice; and here a great step has been taken. She represents no principle of faultless innocence, but is 'a tragic character', marred with imperfection. Prometheus was a shadow in a myth. She is a woman subject to scandal, belonging to a definite period of history, and swayed by the doctrines of her society. With amazing detachment and an air of intense conviction she stands apart from her deed to declare her innocence. Claiming to be guiltless in motive, she deliberately evades acknowledgement of the actual fact. Obtuse to the real situation, she acts as if she were the victim of a strong delusion. Shelley scrupulously apologized for her revengeful emotions; but for these anybody could recognize an excessive provocation. What he never considered a matter for apology was her treatment of Marzio; and that is precisely what nobody—except Shelley—can tolerate. In certain matters of elementary conduct his moral sense differed from that of ordinary men. Here it appears worse, not better than the average.

Still more significant are the portraits of Ahasuerus. The first juvenile attempt at a monologue is merely declamatory. When the Wandering Jew appears in *Queen Mab* he has at least a semblance of personality. Like an immature Satan he prefers 'Hell's freedom to the servitude of Heaven', and in ranting speeches defies the 'Omnipotent Fiend' who rules the Universe. He is no longer recognizable when he reappears in

*Hellas* as a mystic. Here he makes no more querulous complaints, no more negations or references to temporal incidents. What are Past and Future surveyed in the light of Eternity? In a short time the anticipated Future will have become a portion of the Past. The Ultimate Reality stands aloof from all accidents of sense and time. All through his strange prophetic interview with Mahmud he seems the spokesman of Eternity. The first Ahasuerus was a forecast of Prometheus; the second Ahasuerus is more like an incarnation of Demogorgon. This, if we are to understand Shelley, is a fact of tremendous import. Between the two portraits there is an interval of something like nine years. They touch the extreme limits of his brief career in poetry. He first conceived Ahasuerus as a rebel preaching a negative doctrine of dissent. His final estimate placed him among the prophets, declaring a positive message. Shelley, it has been said, learnt Revolt before he found Faith. He transformed the irreverent protagonist of *Evil* into the awe-struck worshipper of eternal Righteousness.

This conflict between light and darkness was waged in a certain spirit, and with certain methods. Shelley described Goodness fighting with weapons of pity and knowledge against forces miserable, aged, dull, and barren.<sup>1</sup> His conception of Goodness was increasingly removed from action to emotion. Among the 'spells'<sup>2</sup> enumerated by Demogorgon for the establishment of the true order only one—defiance of absolute power—involved any necessary outlet in action. In his subsequent dealings with the spirit of Goodness—Beatrice Cenci alone excepted—Shelley laid emphasis on the passive rather than on the active strength by which it achieves its purposes.

So much for the fact of conflict. What of its issue? Early in his career Shelley projected a poem on a future golden age. 'After', he added, 'I shall draw a picture of Heaven.' This was an unconscious prophecy of his mental progress.

His Utopian descriptions first appeared in *Queen Mab* and

<sup>1</sup> *Prom. Unb.* I. 480; II. iv. 47-8; *The Cenci*, II. ii. 38; v. iv. 20-2; *Peter Bell the Third*, 343-4, 703-4; *Prom. Unb.* III. i. (See also O. W. Campbell, *Shelley and the Unromantics*, 219.)

<sup>2</sup> *Prom. Unb.* IV. iv. 568-75.

*The Assassins*. Except in matters of arrangement and compression *The Daemon of the World*—a re-handling of the former—showed little change in its sociological passages. These prophetic declarations, remote from life of the immediate present, were bound to react into discouragement. Mr. Clutton-Brock discerned traces of this pessimism so early as *Alastor*. Yet the visions of hope could not be quickly blotted out from Shelley's imagination. *The Revolt of Islam*, imperfect though it may be, pulsed with expectation :

Haste, haste to the warm home of happier destiny !

Even here the vision is imperfectly fulfilled, for Laon and Cythna die with their plans unachieved ; but they die in hope. Shelley did not part easily with his optimism. Like his Julian he desired to test the chains binding the human spirit—' brittle perchance as straw '. In the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* his confidence was fading. This dream of a rejuvenated earth is even further removed from actuality than the sociological phantasies of *Queen Mab*. Here the dreamer himself is inadequate :

Longing with divided will,  
But no power to seek or shun.

( In *Prometheus Unbound*, with its restatement of the old vision, hope and discouragement struggle side by side. Some passages read like a heightened paraphrase of *Queen Mab*. Others foretell the evolution of a negative human species, ' equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless '. ) Wherever or whenever this consummation may take place, it will be in no atmosphere breathed by men. When earthly considerations intervene, the note of disillusion is sounded. ' Fear and self-contempt and barren hope '—this is the epitome of all temporal existence. The Furies goad Prometheus with the taunt that however noble the message and however unblemished its prophet, it is foredoomed to abuse and misconception. So far as historical events may enter a myth the French Revolution is brought forward to point a moral of despair. The good want power, the powerful lack goodness ; such, declares the Fury, is the position of the opposing forces. Even the spirits of

hope imply that Love, shadowed as it is by Ruin, will not emerge triumphant till a far-distant future out of time and space.

Shelley recognized himself as 'one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy, but who are ready to be partially satisfied in all that is practicable'. As a natural consequence his visions became more evanescent and remote. On the brains of sleeping men the Witch of Atlas may inscribe her 'strange dreams' of a life freed from avarice, superstition, tyranny, and violence. But these Utopian fancies, no longer a challenge to action or endurance, have become a toy to relieve the oppressed imagination. ( In *Hellas* Shelley returned for the last time to serious preoccupation with dreams of a perfected society. There he was haunted by the dread that all reform must be followed by reaction. The Future, so bright to our dreams, will become in its turn a portion of the discredited Past. The poet looks forward to no earthly revivals of an ancient order, but to a transcendent Greece in the spiritual kingdom. From these visions of the 'brighter Hellas' he sinks back on the earthly reality, wishing that it were over.

To Shelley the Past was barren of message. In the story of the nations he saw nothing but 'a record of crimes and miseries'. *The Triumph of Life* is an indictment of man's achievement. His life passed in 'serious folly' is blind, fettered, and ignorant. The whole course of history appears like a shadowy phantom dance where the insincere, the deluded, the ambitious, and the foolish are swept along without purpose and without joy.

Some men have found in the individual what they missed in the crowd, but for Shelley there was no such compensation. Only with a few companions could he obtain the relief of spasmodic fellowship. Eventually he grew into the conviction that he was unqualified for any human contacts. Here also he characteristically began with dreams. In *The Assassins* he described a 'happy enthusiast' possessed, like himself, with 'an insatiable famine' for love. In a prose fragment he approvingly quoted Sterne's comment that 'if he were in a desert,

he would love some cypress'. Even from the first Shelley had misgivings lest his affections should be limited to love of the cypress. This dread hangs over the whole of *Alastor*. In *Prince Athanase* he was caught away from his forebodings by the sheer delight of contemplating Love in the abstract. He must have found additional serenity and resource through the mere translation of Plato's *Symposium*. The reminder of Petrarch's love for Laura touched his spirit like a light flashed on 'things unearthly'. In *Prometheus Unbound* he dwelt on the mystic raptures of the Moon and the Earth, welcoming love as security against the fierce trappings of 'the tiger joy'. In certain moods he suspected joy as profoundly as Wordsworth trusted it. It is doubtful whether Wordsworth ever experienced anything like the younger poet's living ecstasies, perilous because so nearly perfect.

It was impossible for Shelley to protect himself with the baseless fabric of his visions. He could find no solace in dreams denied by the actualities of his own bitter experience. He expected beautiful women to minister to his spirit like clouds or flowers. When this expectation proved illusory, he steadily lost faith in the high possibilities of human love. It may be, as Sir Walter Raleigh suggested, that although he possessed the 'supernatural wisdom' of the passions, he lacked 'the natural wisdom of the affections'. Yet his treatment of 'Claire' and Allegra proves that he acquired a certain faculty of protective love. He never expected spiritual ecstasy unless from sexual love; and in this experience he failed. At times he drugged his imagination with phantasies of a sexless love. The Witch of Atlas, herself unsexed, took delight in the sexless image of her own creation. In *Epipsychidion* Shelley dallied with his old hankerings after free love long after he had lost belief in its practical efficacy. In the fragmentary passages connected with the poem there is, as in the *Witch of Atlas*, a significant use of the term 'hermaphrodite'. From such fancies he turned to the anticipations of faith. The poem with its tale of past dismays and its hope of future alleviations, concludes with a gesture towards the unseen.

He lost taste for the sweetness of 'Love's very pain'. The

beautiful *Hymn of Pan* was pierced with a sense of futility in earthly passion, pursuing a maiden and clasping a reed—'It breaks in our bosom, and then we bleed.' Shelley adjured the lady who had inspired *Epipsychidion* to leave him uninfected by the touch of love. The poem itself became repugnant to him. 'The person whom it celebrates', he wrote, 'was a cloud instead of a Juno. . . . I think one is always in love with something or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.'

It is true that he occasionally found his 'mortal nature's strife' bound to a 'momentary peace'. It was in a more habitual temper that he cried out against the lot appointed for the frail victims of Love, left 'naked to laughter'. As Miss Melian Stawell<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, he was tending to transform the victim into the culprit. 'In *The Triumph of Life*', she writes, 'the seeker himself is judged, and the judgement is stern. . . . Those lovers who lose their self-control are shown to us as the captives of Life, and not its conquerors, even though their love should have as noble stuff in it as Plato's.' In this poem Shelley escaped for a moment to the memory of one man who had found satisfaction where he himself had been defeated. He was coming back to his dreams in the light of Dante's visions. Yet he fell from that to petulance with the dullness of men. He may have been beginning to turn the petulance inwards upon himself. 'As to real flesh and blood', he had written, 'you know I do not deal in these articles; you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me.'

On every side he was driven from actuality. Peacock had known all along that the enthusiasm of a Scythrop was doomed to react into misanthropy. By arriving at misanthropy Shelley had somehow missed his road. From the very beginning he seemed to be looking in one direction for a path which was leading in another.

Some have held that his failure was due to an inadequate dogma. However greatly Shelley's poetry may intensify our

<sup>1</sup> See her study of *The Triumph of Life*, in Volume V of this series.

consciousness of evil, it throws no light on the mystery of its existence. Taking the evidence of his writings and adding to them the testimony of his wife, most critics have agreed that he conceived evil as the arbitrary imposition of some external power. Mrs. Campbell,<sup>1</sup> however, maintains that almost from the beginning he recognized something in the nature of original sin. One thing is certain. Whatever he may have felt about sin, original or acquired, in other people, he was slow to recognize it in himself. The Furies taunted Prometheus with the terror of such a discovery,<sup>2</sup> and he seems to have admitted its possibility ; but he never behaved, any more than the immature Shelley, like a being who had made that discovery. It is hardly to be expected that a man bewildered by the outward manifestations of evil should be able to afford an explanation of its hidden meaning. Shelley testifies to such perplexity in the obviously autobiographical study of Prince Athanase. This accounts for the lack of conflict within the souls of his own creation. Not only did he fail to comprehend evil ; he did not always recognize it.

Bagehot declared that Shelley never experienced a war within his own spirit. But here, as in other instances, Bagehot was prone to base his judgements on immaturities which Shelley outgrew. Towards the end he was becoming aware of his own inadequacy—in judgement of others, or in capacity for human fellowship.<sup>3</sup> When, in *Adonais*, he painted the last of his self-portraits, it was with the addition of a startling and significant detail :

His branded and ensanguined brow  
Which was like Cain's or Christ's.

At one time Shelley had conceived human society as perfectible, and himself, the individual, as an innocent victim. Finding the enigma more stubborn of solution, he tended to postpone this, like other problems, to Eternity. It was certain, he held, ' that there is a true solution of the riddle, and that

<sup>1</sup> *Shelley and the Unromantics*, 205 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Prom. Unb.* i. 483 ff., specially l. 489.

<sup>3</sup> See my article in the *Contemporary Review*, March 1927.

in our present state that solution is unattainable by us'. If he came to hope less from men, he was also freed from the overwhelming sense of evil. In early youth he was obsessed by evil precisely as he was obsessed by terror rather than beauty. But he grew out of that spiritual malady. He wrote the tale of *Zastrozzi* because at that time he could think of nothing but monstrous iniquity. In later years he wrote of the Cenci—a theme far more appalling in its crime; but he was no longer hypnotized by evil. As De Quincey remarked, his true motive in selecting such a subject was, 'not its darkness, but . . . the light which fights with the darkness'.

Shelley started with his eyes fixed on man who was to be redeemed by love. As the hopes of redemption became fainter, he turned his glance elsewhere. Once convinced that man was incorrigible, he shrank from contact with him. Failing alike with the crowd and the individual, he had to seek the 'Spirit of Delight' among waves and winds and storms 'untainted by man's misery'. He recoiled from all mention of the 'Aziola' till he was assured it was 'a little downy owl' and nothing human:

No mockery of myself to fear or hate.

With the additional provocation of an unprovoked slander he cried that he would fain retire with wife and child to a solitary island in the sea, and shut upon his retreat 'the floodgates of the world'. 'Where two or three are gathered together', he added, 'the devil is among them.' He became haunted by his own incapacity for fellowship. He had endeavoured to love rather than to be loved. Though he scarcely realized it himself, he received more than he gave directly. It is possible that no man has been more intensely loved by a few chosen spirits. Hardly any poet appeals in the same intimate sense to the affection of posterity. He was one of those who cannot be loved, either in the flesh or through the printed page, except with the whole heart. What he gave he gave indirectly—the stimulus which awakens emotion, the idealism which has survived his own disillusion. Human society to-day is richer for Shelley's dreams. He could not know anything beyond his immediate failure. The general sense of weariness and dis-

taste was soaking through his mentality. Mrs. Shelley said that he could not accommodate himself to the human subject of *Charles I*, and flung it aside unfinished for *The Triumph of Life*. It was a repetition of the mood which had made him write *The Cenci* one year and *The Witch of Atlas* the next. Humanity left him with a bitter taste in his mouth. He turned for relief to draughts of ethereal sweetness.

## II

When Shelley knew nothing of men he was prepared to live in their fellowship. He learnt enough of them to feel them alien, too little to find them akin. He was not the man to flee from anything in a blind panic, but went out from his fellows deliberately that he might find something else. His was a quest rather than a flight.

He made few apologies for his adventures. When he translated portions of Goethe's *Faust*, he must have felt his own kinship with the dreaming hero so disdainfully observed by Mephistopheles :

The fool's meat and drink are not of earth.

If he justified himself at all it was on the grounds that within his heart he carried 'the lamp of love'. The conditions of the quest required that disentangling himself from matter, he should try to become 'an unbodied joy' like the skylark. He must put himself in a mood to receive intangible visions :

Splendours and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations  
Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies.

Like Mahmud he must endeavour to keep his 'mighty trance' unbroken by sounds of 'the importunate earth'. For one significant moment Shelley implied that even the most 'godlike mind' soaring forth in its delight could obscure the final reality — 'making earth bare and veiling heaven'. This had to be an uncompanied quest. Its only clue was to be found in the activity of the emotions beside which the physical accidents of life and death are 'a mockery'. Through our emotions and through them alone we may lay hold on a fragment of reality.

Beside them what are the ingredients of the temporal Universe?—

Worlds, worms.

Empires and superstitions.

To keep our emotions in life we must have recourse to Beauty. In Shelley's case Beauty first exercised her mastery by casting out fear. In early youth he was mesmerized by the lure of terror. He set a faggot-stack on fire to have 'a little hell of his own'. In the course of his 'nefarious scientific pursuits' at Eton he attempted with unexpected results to raise the devil. He passed under the spell of black magic. He sought enlightenment from ghosts, and would spend the hours of darkness pacing a churchyard or writing 'maddened stuff' by the midnight moon. Even his prose descriptions of Nature took on a savage character. In all this he was catching the general infection satirized by Peacock in his references to the 'hag-ridden' literature acceptable to a reading public which lived on 'ghosts, goblins and skeletons'. 'The nightshade', wrote Bagehot of Shelley, 'is commoner in his poems than the daisy.' Such criticism must be restricted to a temporary phase of his art. Shelley was imaginatively sick when passing out of his teens. He grew out of his childish complaint and arrived at a state of health where the nightshade no longer obsessed his fancy. By 1819 at least he had transferred his emphasis from terror to beauty. In that year he found such emphasis in Da Vinci's 'Medusa', but missed it in Michael Angelo's 'Last Judgement'. Though he never lost the sense of terror, he saw it purged by its contact with beauty. He visualized the west wind as destroyer *and* preserver. He wrote of a visionary youth 'as terrible and lovely as a tempest'. Feeling that an element of fear brought its own sublimity, he invoked Beauty with an accompaniment of terror :

Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror !

Beauty established her authority in Shelley's haunted spirit because he met her with an instinctive welcome. But he had doctrine as well as instinct to support him. In the first

instance it was Plato who expelled the goblins from his imagination. In *The Daemon of the World* he inserted—what was not foreshadowed in the original draught of *Queen Mab*—a suggestion of 'earth's insubstantial mimicry'. In *Alastor* the poet exclaims that he has searched on earth for the shadow of the transcendent reality. The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* formulates a doctrine of the Invisible Presence. These references, coming one after the other, show him possessed with the joy of a new discovery. He wrote like a man who had suddenly found a gospel.

The same doctrine is stated, with lessened rapture, in *The Revolt of Islam*. Shortly afterwards Shelley was translating the book of his good news. Plato's *Symposium* taught him that the beauties of earth, linked in a common fellowship, are steps by which we may rise to communion with the supreme invisible Beauty. This message thrilled him to the very core of his being. He missed or misused many treasures which Earth bestows on her most ordinary children. This treasure, once found, was guarded by him to the end. He held it, not as a material jewel, but as a passport to the regions of the spirit.

Through Plato Shelley found at least a part of himself—the only part that was ever realized here on earth. (Untouched by the Platonic doctrine of beauty he might have remained for ever a poet of ghosts and fairies; he might never have parted with *Queen Mab*. Even in *Prometheus Unbound* there is a temporary retrogression to the minute ideas of fairy-land.<sup>1</sup> There for a time he played with the fancy that the earth is filled with myriads of tiny lives existing self-sustained. For the moment he forgot the higher conception of an invisible Power focussing all things into a perfect unity.) Later on *The Witch of Atlas* proved that Shelley had not entirely lost the elfin habit of mind. The fairies eventually went away; and the spirits reigned in their place.

The doctrine once accepted had to be applied. Shelley had two channels of material beauty—human beings whom he

<sup>1</sup> II. ii. 70 ff.

could try to love, and the glories of external nature. As we have seen, the first channel was running dry before his death; the second kept him going to the very end. The intimacies and stabilities of human love were somehow beyond his reach. Nature made less demands—presented no problems of conduct, left him in no dilemmas; and in return he gave her his heart. She was his first, and in some senses his only love. He delighted in painting her loveliness. Even in *The Assassins* we can see this young love, crude but growing towards maturity. In *Alastor* he advanced beyond the mere picture to a recognition of his kinship with 'bright bird, insect, (and) gentle beast'. In those early days he was wont to pit himself against Nature, and consider that he represented something greater. Looking at Mont Blanc he felt that apart from human thought Nature itself was a 'vacancy'. The glory of the sky might interpenetrate his spirit; yet his mind could leap out with a mightier response—'peopling the lone Universe'. Shelley could never describe Nature as something scientifically abstracted from human emotion. Sometimes he humanized his pictures so much that they hardly represent the objects with which ordinary people are acquainted. In *The Sensitive Plant* he suggested that at least certain portions of Nature are dependent on human cultivation.

Up to this point he tried to commune with Nature on equal terms. Then the emphasis shifted, so that he decreased while nature increased. *The Cloud*, written the same year as *The Sensitive Plant*, contained an opposite doctrine. For the cloud is independent of human contacts; it has its transcendent serenities, and it holds some secret of everlasting life. Similarly the skylark seems possessed with an insight and rapture denied to men. The death of Napoleon can bring no misgivings to 'Mother Earth', who remains unshaken by the ruin of her most portentous sons. *Adonais* tells the same story. John Keats may be dead, but Nature has the power of continuous revival. What is man against 'the immortal stars'? True, even the stars are subject to mortality. They also will fade among the Whole 'of suns and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers'. Viewed in the light of Eternity stars are no

more enduring than men. Viewed from the standpoint of men they suggest at least a relative immortality. In this sense Nature is greater than Man. She commands wider spaces and a vitality less subject to decay. Radiant herself, she throws a glimmering light beyond the horizons of Time. To Mrs. Shelley the beauty of Lerici, isolated from human society, was 'unearthly in its excess'. She retained sufficient grip of humanity to shrink back from the adventures of the naked soul. Her husband, shrinking from humanity, was utterly fearless before the mysteries of the spirit. He was not dismayed by space lying empty between him and the Eternal. He had a curious affinity to Donne—that angel preaching to himself 'from a cloud, but in none'. Each was straining forward to realize the same ecstatic vision, whereby 'Ants and Bees and Flowers and Kings and Kingdoms' shall be 'all as nothing, altogether nothing, less than nothing, infinitely less than nothing, to that which shall then be the subject of my knowledge, for *it is the knowledge of the glory of God*'.

This was the goal of Shelley's quest. For several years he tried to adjust himself concurrently to the claims of carnal men and to the beckonings of the spirit. As he proceeded farther the spirit mastered the flesh. In early days he denied the existence of any god other than an 'Omnipotent Fiend'. He conceived the principal of Goodness as embodied in a fairy queen. The same figure reappeared as the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, which by its very mystery gives nourishment to the human soul, 'like darkness to a dying flame'. In *Queen Mab* and *The Daemon of the World* Shelley attempted a portrait. In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he tried to discern a figure glimmering through a veil. Unless beauty dazzled his eyes the vision seemed incomplete. To him the Ultimate Loveliness was something 'dark with excessive bright'.

Year by year his conceptions became more indefinite. Panthea living in a world of dim visions was bewildered, yet soothed by the sweetness of unformulated desire. Demogorgon, 'a mighty darkness', was felt rather than seen; and he, who represented the final secret, was almost inarticulate:

But a voice  
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless.

When in the last act he reappeared, no longer on Earth but in Eternity, his tongue was unloosed to 'an universal sound like words'. He was dark with the mystery of unutterable knowledge. There was another radiant spirit almost without a name. 'Life of Life' is all we can call her; and she also was folded from sight. Behind these shadowy forms there lay something vaster. Demogorgon instructed Asia on all she dared demand. Tersely he informed her as to the nature of God, merciful and almighty, creator and source of inspiration.

Then for a time Shelley put aside his attempted portraits of elemental forces. We can only wonder what he might have done if he had lived to write his projected poem on the Creator. He turned from this, the remotest mystery, to others less out of his compass—from Demogorgon to the Witch of Atlas, an elfin lady 'garmented in light'. For this poem he made the apology that it was intended to be playful rather than edifying. He sought respite in what we may call his favourite hobby. As the violinist draws his bow to bring out the least possible vibration of sound, so Shelley touched his pencil to leave the faintest impression discernible by human sight. In this poem there is a pendulum between the material and the immaterial. The lady may climb the ladders of the clouds, follow the track of the 'serpent' lightning, or run upon 'the platforms of the wind'; but she descends to the 'massy temples' of Egypt to work her spells on the minds of sleeping men.

In *Epipsychidion* Shelley returned with fresh ardour to his old theme of the Ultimate Beauty, and dreamed of some remote yet earthly Paradise, with the Spirit burning at its heart 'like a buried lamp'. This Spirit is more intrinsically real than the actual objects—'waves, flowers, clouds, woods, rocks'—which it warms and illumines.

The same figure appeared for the last time in *The Triumph of Life*, but with a significant change. This Shape, standing 'amid the Sun' possesses some obscure power of destruction, and he who seeks her does so at his own peril. With her feet she tramples his burning thoughts 'into the dust of death'.

One drop from her proffered cup makes his brain 'as sand'. At the same time it opens his eyes to a 'new vision, never seen before'. It may be that Shelley was at last realizing the danger of a 'sensuous love of the unseen'. As Miss Stawell points out, Goethe's *Faust*, which he was then translating, must have confirmed his private experience of the fact that the thirst for the infinite must be steadied by 'the endurance which can support its privation'. The fault lies, not in the Absolute Beauty, but in the mood of the seeker. 'The Shape can be good', writes Miss Stawell, 'and yet her cup a cup of danger. . . . The actual evil lies, not in the cup itself, but in him who drinks it unworthily. And it is hard to be worthy.'

This should not be taken as Shelley's last word on the final mystery. *The Triumph of Life* was the natural outcome of a reaction from the emotional experience which had occasioned *Epipsychidion*. All his days Shelley had been seeking something, somewhere, 'felt like a want'. In almost every instance he had visualized it as a dim figure more or less like a woman. Between *Epipsychidion* and *The Triumph of Life* came *Adonais* and *Hellas*, with something vaster emerging beyond their horizons :

The One,  
The unborn, and the undying.

To a certain measure this is a Greek conception. It occurs in the finely spun argument of the *Parmenides*. Plato carried Shelley so far on the way ; but he was travelling beyond Plato back to Palestine. The Greek philosophers and the Hebrew prophets journeyed from different points towards the Ultimate Unity. It was through the mouth of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, that Shelley uttered his most impassioned conviction. In his mind the Hellenic ecstasy was mingling with the Hebraic majesty.

Ahasuerus learnt his secret through centuries of earthly experience. Shelley became convinced that so far as he himself was concerned, death would teach more than life. He could not, like Prometheus, search his 'unexhausted' spirit

for hidden truths. He came to the stage where he expected to find nothing on this side of the grave.

Shelley's increasing preoccupation with death was of the utmost significance to his quest for the ultimate secret. Very early he may have had a certain clinging to life. Later, brooding among the Euganean Hills, he shrank from the negations of death. But this was not an habitual temper. For a moment Beatrice felt the terror of the unknown; but almost at once she turned from this blankness of spirit to welcome the 'strange joy' which would atone for her earthly disasters.

From the time he wrote *Alastor* Shelley's imagination went out in a strange continuous pursuit of death. His curiosity was at one time slightly tempered with misgiving. When, on their flight to the Continent, Mary lay resting between his knees, he meditated on death as 'rather a thing of discomfort and of disappointment than of horror'. 'I hope', he wrote, 'but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die.' Even at that time it was change and not extinction that he chiefly dreaded.

In *The Revolt of Islam* he implied that personal immortality is not to be anticipated except in terms of a vague fame after death:

We meet again  
Within the minds of men.

This comparatively early poem contains little positive affirmation of immortality. Laon endeavours to comfort himself for the reported death of Cythna by considering the incessant revivals of Nature. It took Shelley another four years before he could return to the same conception with more heightening and conviction. He saw the flowers springing from the grave of Adonais in mockery of 'the merry worm that wakes beneath'. The revival of Nature is a guarantee for the revival of man:

Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows  
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath  
By sightless lightning?

This is more than the expression of a passing ecstasy. There is a great difference between the prose comments on Keats set in the preface and the exalted homage paid to Adonais in the

poem. Something must be allowed there for the heightenings of poetic creation. But this 'death of ecstasy'—as Donne would have called it—finds its echo in the prose notes on *Hellas* where Shelley speaks of our 'inextinguishable thirst for immortality'. That thirst was received by him as a guarantee of its eventual satisfaction. 'The destiny of man', he wrote shortly before his own passing, 'can scarcely be so degraded, that he was born only to die.'

He was usually content to accept the hope of everlasting life with few attempts at further elucidation. *Adonais*<sup>1</sup> alone contains most significant hints of personal immortality. There he conceived the self as retaining no separate existence, in the sense that it performs no isolated functions. It does not sing a solitary melody but mingles its voice in the universal harmony. It exists for the sake of the harmony.

Such a vital conception could not dwell beside the imagination of death as an eternal rest. This idea hardly entered Shelley's mind unless towards the end of his life—in a poem to Edward Williams, and in his request to Trelawny for prussic acid, 'that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest'. Shelley never seriously wanted rest. He yearned for life and vision. He tired of earth because it seemed to preclude him from a greater experience. So early as 1815 he had hankered after the 'sweet secrets' to be disclosed after death. In *Prometheus Unbound* he peered beyond the veils of sense to some place mysterious and apart where the very language is known 'only to those who die'. He believed that his yearnings had a prophetic meaning:

Or what is it that makes us seem  
To patch up fragments of a dream,  
Part of which comes true, and part  
Beats and trembles in the heart?

Nothing short of death could bring him to realization of the whole dream. He desired something rounded and complete, and was restless to know in part:

Follow where all is fled!

<sup>1</sup> See ll. 340, 370-1, 379-80, 465. See also my article in the *Contemporary Review*, March 1927.

He suffered a capricious disappointment when Trelawny, in rescuing him from drowning, deprived him from finding Truth at 'the bottom of the well'. He felt that he had been baulked of an exhilarating adventure. 'It's a great temptation,' he exclaimed; 'in another minute I might have been in another planet.' He thought he had no ties binding him to earth. He did not realize that if he were withdrawn, life would become 'a desert' to Mary Shelley. He could not believe that he served any useful function in the world. And beyond the grave stood Truth. It astonished him that any one should be afraid or perplexed. 'What', he wrote to Medwin, 'were the speculations which you say disturbed you? My mind is at peace respecting nothing so much as the constitution and mysteries of the great system of things—my curiosity on this point never amounts to solicitude.' To Trelawny he confessed that the intellectual enigma left him untouched by curiosity. —'I am content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded; —when Death removes our clay coverings the mystery will be solved.' He had learned to acknowledge the mystery with absolute confidence:

The dark arrow fled  
In the noon.

Yet there are people who say Shelley found nothing at all. He was preparing himself to find God. It is true that he lost men. If he had found God he might have rediscovered them. But his search was not over, and he died at the age of thirty. In less than ten years he travelled painfully all the way from the 'Omnipotent Fiend' to 'the One'. Yet he is called 'an ineffectual angel!' It is something, at all events, to be an angel; and ineffectual is a curious epithet to apply to one capable of such a lonely difficult progress.

Though some will have it that he gives us no intellectual satisfaction, an eminent modern scientist and philosopher seeks him for 'intellectual ecstasy'. Shelley did not explain life, but he *lived*. If he does not try to prove by logical demonstration the existence of a God, he makes us certain that he at

least believed it. He did not fulfil the plan of his youth and paint a picture of Heaven ; but—to quote Mr. Clutton-Brock—‘ he . . . convinces us that he has been there by the manner in which he describes it.’ The most confirmed sceptic must find in Shelley’s later poems a faith piercing in its intensity. What is the explanation of this intensity? How can it be there unless it means something? Shelley passed his life, like Britomart her vigil, in an enchanted chamber full of doors. The exhortation ‘ Be bold ’ was not required for one ready like him to try them all. He never hesitated before the inscription ‘ Be not too bold ’—not even if it should stand over the doors of death. He was trying closed doors up to the very end. All his life he went looking for a secret. If he never found it, because after all that searching there was nothing to be found, his was the uttermost tragedy, and this is the worst of all possible worlds. Everything in life failed him ; or, some might prefer to say that he failed with everything in life. But he expected to succeed with death. It is incredible, intolerable, that a spirit like this should have been mocked alike by life and by death. Shelley, by his very intensity, gives us a conviction of his everlasting life. It is possible to think of that vitality going on, searching, finding, bestowing. The one thing that is quite impossible is to think of Shelley dead.

If we learn nothing else from him, we get a new fact in human science. We may watch him discovering God ; but he can also tell us of man. Even if we accept him as a pathological specimen, he is still a representative of the human race. A modern writer has complained that we are apt to restrict the epithet ‘ human ’ to certain fundamental loyalties and impulses which we share with the brutes ; should a man rise above ‘ these homely jungle virtues ’ to others worthy of ‘ a being calling himself *Homo sapiens* ’, he is reproached for ‘ inhumanity ’. This is particularly true of Shelley. He is called non-human, as if he had fallen below the average human type ; in reality he has risen above it. He extends our conception of human nature. He makes us feel that we are greater than we know. By his unique imaginative discoveries he widens our conceptions of human possibility. As moun-

taineers and explorers afford a new evidence of man's developing faculties, he heightens our whole conception, merely by going where ordinary men cannot venture. All of us have some 'thoughts that wander o'er Eternity'; but our minds are timid and slow. Shelley gives us wider claims in Eternity. We can follow his figure down the void. Not only has he enlarged our conceptions of our own nature; he has extended the circuit of our spiritual adventures.

### III

So we come to the result of it all—the positive creation of beauty. Shelley's poetry is so fragile that its magic slips away from the touch of heavy fingers. We may talk about his philosophy, his wrestlings with evil, or his sense of insufficiency. These things which we can touch are not his poetry, but the soil from which the poetry grew—a background to the frail petals of his exquisite flower. All we can do is to accept this grace and lose ourselves in its presence. We can see the faint beauty taking on its colours; we can hear the disconnected phrases being gathered together and swept into harmony; we can stand by and watch beauty growing. No poet gives us this opportunity more freely than Shelley.

Everywhere in his art we find these tokens of growth. We are not looking at a picture or listening to a succession of sounds; we are in touch with something that *lives*. The poet lived in a world filled with 'odours and gleams and murmurs'. All the senses act in concert—the oceans 'flow and sing and shine'. Everywhere as the crowning glory of life is colour. It may quiver and burn 'deep in the orange light of widening morn', or it may fade into shadow like the 'white, green, gray and black' visions controlled by the Witch of Atlas. Here Nature has no distinct moods of her own, but is quickened with a life common to all created things. It is usually said that Shelley travelled skywards; it is often forgotten that by his vital imagery he brought the sky in contact with the familiar life of earth. He looked at the clouds flitting

Like splendour-winged moths about a taper,  
Round the red west when the sun dies in it.

or he watched the constellations reeling and dancing like fire-flies. By so doing he made the far-away clouds and stars throb with an intimate life. We feel that we are sharing in a universe where nothing is dead. It is inevitable that his figures should glow with an extraordinary intensity :

I see cars drawn by rainbow-winged steeds  
Which trample the dim winds ; in each there stands  
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.  
Some look ahead, as fiends pursued them there,  
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars ;  
Others, with burning eyes, lean forth, and drink  
With eager lips the wind of their own speed,  
As if the thing they loved fled on before,  
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks  
Stream like a comet's flashing hair ; they all  
Sweep onward.

The very words seem to tingle and breathe. Everything is alive—winds and stars and wild-eyed charioteers. When shall we realize that there was nothing stagnant in Shelley? How could he, living in this throbbing world of the imagination, have been himself an abortion? He was growing at the heart of a living universe. He never stopped growing till the day of his death. 'I always go on', he said to Trelawny, 'until I am stopped ; and I never am stopped.'

An easy criticism would have it that Shelley was a poet of one or two ideas ; but they were ideas that *grew*. His mind repeated itself in spirals, not in circles. Nobody reading *Zastrozzi* could have foretold *Prometheus Unbound* or *The Cenci*. The Ahasuerus of *Queen Mab* does not anticipate the Ahasuerus of *Hellas*. *Adonais* can no more be considered a re-statement of *Alastor* than the flower can be regarded as a repetition of the bud. It has changed because it has grown.

*The Duemon of the World* is a development rather than an alteration of *Queen Mab*. The lines are reduced in quantity but enriched in quality. The pictures are clearer in outline,

fainter in substance. With deepening of emotion come subtleties of contrast. The conceptions have become wider and more significant. In the later version Shelley's imagination has learnt to take longer flights into infinity. The two versions of *The Invitation* and *The Recollection*, written with only a short interval between them, cannot provide so fruitful or suggestive a contrast. Yet even here there is a distinct change in the quality of single words and phrases, for in the second version they have become more vital, rich or significant. Shelley's second thoughts tended to a greater intensity than his first ones. He did not elaborate; he became more fully alive.

This beautiful thing, Shelley's art, was nurtured in the mind of a poet acutely conscious of both his own life and that of the living world without. His growth kept pace with that of his poetry. Though his art was ahead of his personality, it was never beyond all contact with it. Some have suggested that Shelley's art was in the heavens, and he himself in a much lower place. But in his personality there was some quality which linked him to the beauty he created. *Queen Mab* was wiser than the tone of his early letters or his actual treatment of Harriet. As Shelley matured in grace, his art matured in vision. His advancing individuality was the basis of his advancing art. Year by year he grew upwards to the strange faculty which impelled him. Year by year he was becoming freer and more inspired in his creation of beauty. We cannot tell how far he might have gone if he had lived beyond thirty. Yet is it not much to feel that he never stopped? Let us consider where he ended. We can put aside his unfinished poems and his beautiful occasional lyrics. Even *Hellas* must go as a work which he considered imperfect. We are left with *Adonais*—the only poem which gave him unqualified satisfaction; and there is probably nothing greater in human speech. It seems to have contained within itself Shelley's unique subject. The death of a brother poet was an accidental stimulus which released this, the final expression of himself. If *Adonais* were the fulfilment of Shelley's earthly destiny, we need not complain that he died so young. On our side we have the

beauty which he found and brought down to earth. He said that his thoughts slipped from his mind. As we read his poetry, we seem to be rediscovering something that we ourselves have missed. Our lost thoughts come back transfigured :

How beautiful they were, how firm they stood,  
Flecking the starry sky like woven pearl !

MARJORY A. BALD.

## ENGLAND LANGUAGE CONDITIONS!

WHEN a language so rich in treasure as our own deteriorates, some inquiry into the causes of our loss seems to be advisable. The slightest investigation will show that several good useful English words have dropped out of the language, many have lost their fine and exact meanings, others are used wrongly, and gaps are filled by new words that have sometimes no meaning at all. In support of the tawdriness towards which our language is tending many say, 'Oh, but a language must grow'. This is perfectly true, and the words *telescope*, *telegraph*, and *seismograph* are very good examples of this. Obviously an age that has a thing like a seismograph must have a name for it. Then we come to another class of growth, represented by the word *bicycle*: there we have a need for a new word, but the word is not well put together, and the growth is not a healthy one, as two different languages have been used in order to make this word. Fortunately there has been a yet further growth and the word *bike* is superseding the word *bicycle*, a little vulgar perhaps, but much the healthier word of the two. Another phase of modern life needing a new word was named the *cinematograph*, but that is a word that I for one never use, because no one seems to know how to pronounce it, and if I were to pronounce the first two letters of it correctly I should naturally be known as a pedant. The word *cinema* (pronounced sinnymmer) strikes me as a horrible word, but fortunately this very popular amusement has a vulgar popular name, which strikes me as most admirably suited to it, and I never describe it myself by any other word, the Movies. These words, then, and hundreds of others, represent the necessary and proper growth of a language: words like *telescope* and *movies* are indeed a necessity, and only dead languages do not grow. But my complaint about the growth of our language to-day is that in most cases the sole determining factor of the growth is ignorance. It is not a growth

but a withering. This withering of sense is caused usually, in the case of a word, and always in the case of a phrase, by the conversation of educated people being overheard by the uneducated. For instance, a man coming back from a rain-spoiled holiday is asked by a friend what the weather was like. 'Something chronic' comes the answer. Now how on earth did such a word come by such a meaning? Everything in the world is of interest; even ignorance. It is not enough to say of anything that the cause is ignorance: one wants to see how the ignorance worked. Where, then, did educated men using the rather unusual word *chronic* come in touch with the uneducated frequently enough to get this word started on its wanderings at all? Obviously it was the doctor.

'How be he doing to-day, doctor?' says the old woman.

'Well I'm afraid it has become chronic with him,' the doctor replies.

'Chronic. Be that bad?' says she.

'Well, it is rather,' says the doctor.

So *chronic* means bad. No harm is done to the language yet: the doctor's talk is left to the doctor, and simple country people go on talking much as their forbears talked for ages and ages. But the young man with his new collars who has gone up to London gets to hear of this fine word *chronic*, and uses it a bit for himself; and still no harm is done. But one day he says to another young fellow, 'Bit chronic that motor. It's splashed mud all over my spats', and his friend daren't say that he doesn't know what *chronic* means. That's where the harm begins. To retrieve his self-respect, shaken by the momentary confusion of not knowing the word *chronic*, the second young man uses it as soon as possible upon a third. 'Bit chronic the way they won't let you buy a drink after 9 o'clock', he says, which of course in a way is true, but *chronic* is started on its way as a word meaning simply bad, and nobody dares stop it. Far, far worse is the case with phrases.

All the metaphors in use to-day are the remnants of good conversation overheard in the past and remembered. Why, it may be said, should not any one use again the conversation

that he has heard from his betters? There is no reason at all, if he can get their thought; but the empty phrases without it are like banknotes in an unknown language on a bank that has closed its doors. The brilliant metaphor of Disraeli, for instance, when, explaining to another statesman that he knew just what the Derby was, he called it 'the blue riband of the turf', is in constant use to-day. But how many people that use the metaphor have the faintest idea what the blue riband is? A far more brilliant metaphor than that is 'winning hands down'. It is a most perfect metaphor; but how many people use it who have never seen a race, and who consequently cannot know that if a man wins with both hands down on his horse's neck there is no competitor within a hundred yards of him, and that if he wins with his left hand still on his horse's neck there is still no other horse within fifteen or twenty yards of him. A perfect metaphor, but a Dean's wife, speaking to a Canon about competitors in a whist-drive, should not use this metaphor, because it does not make her own thought more expressive, or perhaps make it much clearer to the Canon. People should use their own metaphors; and their speech never fails to be illuminated by it when they do, whether they are educated or totally illiterate. I think that on the whole the most brilliant metaphors I have heard have been made by illiterate men. The antiquity of a good metaphor is often extraordinary, and to this day the metaphor of 'a bombshell in their midst' is used as though the arrival of a solitary shell, and a very old type of shell at that, were the most shocking surprise that could possibly occur to troops.

It may be felt that to use a metaphor once well spoken, although it no longer has any particular meaning, can do no especial harm. But one ruinous harm they do to this language of ours. They prepare, and have already prepared, the minds of millions to expect in the course of conversation a phrase that has no meaning, and to accept it when it comes. Whether this phrase is taken from the conversation of some scholar of the eighteenth century, or whether from the purely technical phraseology of some modern industry totally unknown to speaker and hearer, or whether it be newly invented in the

Press, it is readily accepted as are dirty half-franc notes of various nationalities amongst the Arabs of Northern Africa. That is a very great harm indeed: hearers and readers no longer look for meaning as being the essential business of words. Nobody ever rejects a phrase by saying, 'I don't understand what you mean,' or even hinting this ever so politely. It is a phrase, and that is good enough; it does not need to have a meaning. The truth is that people are afraid of a phrase. It may be the phrase used by the right people, and the fear is that if it is not accepted as having some meaning they may show themselves ignorant of something that the best educated people know; so that to reject a pretentious phrase might be to lose one of one's own fakes and pretences. And so any phrase gets accepted. An excellent example of this is the report of a university cricket match in newspapers. It is not merely cricket that has to be described, but Oxford-and-Cambridge cricket. There must be an educated and even a cultured air about it. This can only be conveyed by putting in the right phrases in use at Oxford and Cambridge. But what are those phrases? If the journalist has not been to either university how can he know? But wait a moment: do the million know? That million amongst whom the paper circulates. No, the whole million of them can't have been at a university: there wouldn't be room. But they are looking for phrases, so phrases are given them. Will they doubt that they are phrases in daily use at both universities? Certainly they will not, for is it not their favourite paper? They will accept what it says. And if the journalist has been at Oxford or Cambridge, still these phrases will be required of him, and far more than can ever be used in any university about a simple game like cricket. So he deals out much the same phrases as the rest, building up a wholly unnecessary technology about bat and ball and wickets. And so amongst simple expressive English words is daily shot a multitude of rubbish. I think my reader will agree with me that this kind of thing is nothing more than what is sometimes called cheesing the mustard. Will my reader pardon this rather homely metaphor? Did my reader think that there might be any sense in

it? That is the kind of phrase that is slipped into conversation nowadays, and into writing in newspapers, and is allowed to pass. Nobody has used that actual phrase. I invented it myself. But the nonsense in it is, I maintain, quite the equal of the nonsense in many phrases we do hear and do accept. These phrases, then, represent gaps in thought into which a heap of words has been tumbled, as noisy empty tins might be thrown in to help fill a hole in a road. This is one way in which English words are being ill-treated.

And then there is another way; and it is breaking up the very formation of our sentences. Amongst the words that have become lost from the language some are adjectives. And when these are lost, nouns have to take their place. An example of a lost adjective is the word *hostile*. I don't believe that in the dispatches of any English leader in the field, up to and including the time of Lord Roberts, the word *enemy* has ever been used as an adjective. But now it always is, simply because of the loss of the proper adjective. Very recently I read in an important daily paper 'the centre line of the eclipse'. One would hardly think that the word *central* was one of our lost adjectives. Yet, if it is not lost, why use the noun to do its work? The adjective *Roman* is long since lost, for you always read of 'our Rome correspondent'; and the words *Kentish* and *Turkish*; but now the very word *English* is just beginning to go the same way, for one reads of 'the England XI'. The Australians were always allowed their adjective up to last year, when a few papers began to speak of 'the Australia XI', as though the adjective were dead, or rather moribund, so that the noun could do its work better. Sometimes one thinks one can almost trace a definite wish to further this strange change that is coming over our language, as when one hears alien enemies called enemy aliens, as though some actually preferred to see the noun doing the work of the adjective. For further instances one need only look at the papers to see nouns every day driving adjectives on to the dole. But I think that the increasing number of nouns that fill English sentences more and more every year is due to something more than an ignorance of adjectives. It is a

Germanization of our language. I do not think we can have got it direct from Germany, but it seems to me possible that in copying American journalists we may have copied some that wrote English after the German fashion, for the whole North American continent is not entirely Anglo-Saxon. But, whatever the cause, we read daily such sentences as 'the arsenic poison case sensation is fully reported'. Three nouns each trying to do the work of an adjective, and looking as silly as poor performing dogs carrying cups of tea. In German these four nouns would be represented by one word *schneidefestegungenstudt*. Correct me if I am wrong.

And sometimes whole sentences have to do the work of an adjective in modern writing; and one reads: 'Candidate raises the no bread without butter cry.'

Once I read a headline to a lady, asking her what on earth it meant. She replied: 'Let me see.' I then read it again. And she said: 'But let me see the article.' So I handed her the paper and she began to read the article. And very soon she said: 'Why, it means so-and-so.' But she had to read the article before being able to make head or tail of what the headline meant. And that is an example of the harm that is done to the language if nouns or anything that comes handy are to be used instead of lost adjectives: the mind has to grope about a bit before it sees quite what is meant, like a scholar unravelling a Babylonian script; and some of the obscurity of a dead language seems creeping ominously into ours. And that will mean that, amongst the innumerable obstacles between mind and mind, another is slowly creeping up; only like small weeds at first, but growing stronger and stronger. 'Oh, but slang is so expressive,' I have heard people say (and I suppose the same argument applies to bad grammar). But there is very little slang that does not wholly change its meaning in the course of a lifetime, and often within ten years; and no language could be more expressive than the language we are rapidly losing.

Then, again, there are derelict words floating about amongst our sentences, a danger to the traffic of thought. One of these words is *conditions* when used after the word *weather*. A con-

clusive proof that this word, in this use, has become utterly derelict of meaning is that whenever you read, or ever have read, the phrase 'weather conditions' you find the meaning complete if you eliminate the word *conditions*. 'The weather conditions were favourable', and 'the weather conditions prevented flying', mean 'the weather was favourable' (though a literary stylist would prefer to write 'it was a fine day') and 'the weather prevented flying'. The word *conditions* is a mere obstruction.

It may be that most of those that will see this article will regard the kind of writing that I have mentioned as hardly worth serious attention, and it may be that criticism of it in a volume of the English Association may seem rather like killing mice at a meeting of the Shikari Club. But what seems to me serious about it is that, if the million are reading and speaking slipshod English while only the thinkers write purely, a gap is widening between ordinary men and those who on the mountain-tops of thought can see a little more clearly through the mists that lie around man's destiny, and would tell the rest if only the rest could hear. If the poets come to appear pedantic and precious the poets will be derided, and that they have always been, and know how to bear it; but the people will be cut off from their message, and will not be the better for that. Or else the poets will write in the new jargon; but the trouble, then, is that it is incapable of carrying so much of their thought as was the English of Milton. Those who so champion modernism that they would support the prevalent trend of our language to-day, merely because it is of to-day, will surely hold that our day is a great day and has something to tell to others. We can read without difficulty what the Elizabethans had to tell us. Will the people of three or four hundred years hence, if our language continues upon its downward slope, be able to make head or tail of what we thought or cared about?

DUNSANY.

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