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A. C. WARD

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

IF the foundations of a nation's literature are to be examined with profit, it is necessary to approach the enterprise as an enjoyable undertaking and not as a dull task. I have consequently devoted the first section of this book to some reflections on the art of reading, which declare my faith that literature is a source of pleasurable experience and not simply one 'lesson-subject' among other lesson-subjects.

Since many histories of literature are already available, I have directed attention mainly to the humanistic aspect and to such brief inquiries into technique and method as may open-up new channels of interest. The chronological table of prose-writers, and the reading-list included in the author-index, will provide the student with formal data.

A. C. WARD

TO

MARGARET A. COULING

AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY

§1 *The Art of Reading*

LITERATURE is more than books. Books are only its shell; and may be its prison unless they are regarded aright by readers.

Those who wish to get the best from literature must first understand *How to read.* Once that is understood, reading becomes what it should be to everyone - a gateway to adventure. Literature is the record of what men and women have thoughi ana felt and done during the passing centuries, and through the books they have written we are able to share in those thoughts and feelings and actions. Through books, we can go on strange and distant journeys, experience new and exhilarating emotions, widen our minds and deepen our understanding. Unless literature does all this for us, we have not learned how to read, and the time spent in reading has been largely wasted.

But, in the beginning, very few readers are able to take advantage of all that literature offers. It is better to start with the more modest aim of trying to get *pleasure* from what we read. At first, some famous books may seem dull and dry, perhaps because we are too young for them; or because we are not 'in the mood'; or because there is something in our nature which is not in harmony with the nature of the author; or because we have not understood what the author was trying to do. We should realize, however, that if we do not 'like' a

book that has become a classic, the fault is more likely to be in ourselves than in the book. A classic is not just a book that teachers think we ought to like, and try to make us like. Classics are books that have given real and intense pleasure to multitudes of people for very many years, sometimes for centuries. Shakespeare, Milton, Pepys, Jane Austen, Lamb, Dickens became classics because people loved these writers' books and found in them something permanently satisfying! A new novel may perhaps seem much more interesting than a classic, but books are similar to friends and acquaintances. We meet people who are extremely attractive at first, yet sometimes we find the attraction quickly wearing off and then they seem shallow and uninteresting. There are others whom we find ourselves liking more and more as we know them better, and these become real friends. So is it with books. That attractive new novel may seem unreadable if we try it again in six months' or a year's time. A classic does not fail us, however, no matter how often we return to it. But, it may be asked, why go back to books we have already read, when there are so many others there will never be time to read ? That is a question often asked, though it is a foolish question: as foolish as it would be to ask why we should bother to meet our friends more than once, when there are so many other people we shall never have time to know. Naturally we wish to read the new books being written at present, because they deal with the people and interests of our own time. They enable us to know how our contemporaries are thinking and behaving. We ought to read new books. But we certainly need to read, *and particularly to re-read,* older books - the classics which give permanent pleasure and satisfaction and bring us into touch with wisdom that has survived the wearing test of time. Only by reading and re-reading classics can we develop the

ability to know for ourselves whether a new book is good, moderately good, or poor in quality.

A 'great' book is not merely one that gives pleasure. No book is great unless it gives *lasting* pleasure - a very different matter. Almost any novel gives some pleasure, because a story is always attractive. But great novels are those which continue to give pleasure even when we are thoroughly familiar with the story. This means that there must be something valuable behind the story - fine characters, or wisdom and understanding, or wit, or beauty of style; or, preferably, all these. Why is it that so many new books, highly praised when first published, are completely forgotten within a year ? Why is it that books we were ourselves very enthusiastic about a little while ago now seem empty and boring ? tft is because their attraction was all on the surface and they had no sound substance beneath: We must re-read before we can be sure about the quality of new books. And we must also re-read classics if we are to get from these best books the deep pleasure they are able to give. There are some who re-read the novels of Jane Austen every year, for she is a writer who never grows stale. Though she possibly seems tame at first to younger readers, once we understand her books (particularly in relation to the author herself and the circumstances and time in which she lived) they become endlessly fascinating. Her insight into human character was so acute and penetrating, her wit so delicate and subtle, that at each re-reading we find something we missed before. It is not enough to read great books once only, however carefully. They tell so much about the world and life and human character that it cannot all be taken in at one reading.

A further important reason for re-reading is that while many great books are, of course, suitable to be read at an early age (Dickens' and Scott's, among others) there is very much in great books which we cannot avoid

overlooking in youth. When we come back to them later we feel how much more such books contain than we noticed before. We find the pleasure they now give is deeper and more satisfying than previously. Details we skipped before are now full of interest; what seemed heavy 'padding' is now enthralling - because, in the interval, we ourselves have learned more about life; our perceptions have been sharpened by increase of experience. The first chapter of *David Copperfield*, for example, is probably interesting and amusing to readers (say) twelve or fifteen years old; but if they read it again at (say) thirty, they will certainly discover with delight many tiny details not observed earlier. The great joy of re-reading Dickens is to discover the multitude of. small things missed before. The first time we go into a medieval cathedral town abroad our attention is claimed almost wholly by the chief buildings. If we return several times, we find new and not less intense pleasure from wandering about the byways under the shadow of the cathedral (how much American visitors miss when they spend two hours in Canterbury or Winchester and go away feeling they have 'done' *that* show-place !). It is always a mistake to put a classic aside and say 'Oh, I read that when I was at school.' familiarity with great literature does not breed contempt; it increases respect and admiration and pleasure.

Since that word 'pleasure' has been used here to indicate a first modest aim in the art of reading, we need to be clear as to its significance. Often, nowadays, pleasure is considered only as idle amusement - a means of passing time frivolously. The study of literature, however, always brings us back sooner or later to meditate upon the precise meanings of words. In common use, words become cheapened and vulgarized, until it is often difficult to make ourselves understood as exactly as we wish. Literature should cause us to love

words for their beauty of sound and their lovely associations. It should also make us jealous to preserve their right use and meaning. And so, if we say that the search for pleasure is not only the first aim but also the final aim in reading, we do not mean that the aim is to be the pursuit of idle amusement. Pleasure in our sense hero includes both *delight* and *satisfaction* - neither of which is guaranteed by idle amusement. When we begin to read properly we are rewarded, first of all, by delight. Later, as we become more and more skilled in reading, we find ourselves not only knowing more about the world and people, but also understanding more; and we can only increase our understanding as imagination and sympathy become developed. Imagination is another word often used in a too narrow sense. Imagination implies the ability to form mental images of things invisible to the physical eye - not necessarily of things that have no existence. Let us keep the word *fancy* for use in that connection. Among the many important things that exist but cannot be seen, is what we may call 'the other person's point of view.' Half the misery in the world is due to inability to see other people's points of view. We ourselves see things in a particular way, we have certain habits and convictions, and we tend to persecute (perhaps by jeering, or by an intolerant and irritated bearing) those who think and behave and believe differently from ourselves. Brothers and sisters, parents and children, politicians, nations, when antagonistic to one another are very often so less out of deliberate selfishness or real enmity than because they have not developed the power of imagination that would enable them to appreciate those different points of view which are among the things not visible to the physical eye. In order to see another's point of view, to respect others' habits and beliefs, it is not necessary to change one's own point of view or to abandon personal beliefs and convictions. It

is only necessary to be tolerant, instead of oppressive and persecuting. Youth and age, perhaps, will always be in some degree antagonistic to each other, because imagination (and the far-sighted tolerance that comes of it) depends upon experience. The younger we are the less experience we have had (normally, that is). And unless we are wise, as we get older we may fail to make allowance for the fact that youth is inexperienced.

Reading is tremendously helpful in these really important matters. We are often told that life is more important than books. It is. And that it is much more important to live than to read. That again is true. But in modern civilization, life is much narrower for the majority than it should be. Only a very few have the opportunity to live in a wide and full sense. To spend one's life between school, office, home, and ordinary social pursuits in leisure hours, may leave whole tracts of life untouched. Therefore, in the modern world, reading becomes more and more necessary; not as a substitute for life and experience, but as a means of supplementing and extending experience. Increase of experience is among the chief pleasures that reading can provide. Almost every book that is read should mean, for the reader, one more fragment of experience. The reader has been in contact with another personality, with other happenings, other thoughts, other points of view; and if the book has been read with proper sympathy and attention, the reader should thereafter find his understanding enlarged by that contact. To understand another's point of view does not involve, let it be emphasized, agreeing with that point of view. But it does mean that, however intensely one disagrees, one can yet avoid animosity or bitter feeling - which are as hurtful to oneself as to others.

If reading makes a person narrow, harsh, self-opinionated, ungenerous, dry-as-dust, that person has

never properly learned how to read. He (or she) may be crammed with knowledge, may be stored with facts and information, grammatical and of other kinds, but will not be educated and will not have wisdom. Education is the drawing out and development of the whole personality until it is like a flower rejoicing in warm sunshine, and with much longer life than a flower's. Wisdom is imagination and sympathy and understanding.

So, in considering *How to read,* we started with pleasure (delight) and have reached to wisdom, which is the highest form pleasure can take, since wisdom brings the gift of deep lasting satisfaction and inward peace. Reading will not in itself endow us with that gift. It may very well do so, however, if we apply to life and to our contact with other people the imagination, sympathy, and understanding that reading should develop in us.

There are two other points to be considered. In some instances, it has already been said, famous and much-praised books may seem dull and almost unreadable when they are first attempted. Perseverance is a virtue in this as in other directions, but to develop a *genuine* love of good literature is more important than perseverance for perseverance' sake. Much injury may be done to a reader's literary taste by compulsory (or even self-enforced) reading, however great the book. 'Read only what you enjoy' is a sound principle - but a qualification must be added. The most exhilarating forms of enjoyment demand effort. Motoring is easy; mountaineering arduous. Both are sources of enjoyment. But whereas, for the majority, motor-riding is passive and enervating, mountain-climbing is active and exhilarating. However, so long as mental laziness is guarded against, read only what you enjoy - remembering, further, that it is possible to love next year or five years hence many books that seem unreadable to-day. *The Vicar of Wakefield*

is a lovely book; but some people may need to wait until they are forty before they can realize its loveliness; others may appreciate it at fourteen, though it would be folly (almost criminal folly) to impose it compulsorily on a fourteen-year-old. The pleasures offered by books vary in conformity with the preferences of the various readers. One may enjoy the subject-matter; another, the technical skill displayed by the author; yet another, the beauty of the style; and so on. But all these forms of enjoyment are sources of pleasure.

Further, the degree of pleasure derived from a classic depends upon the reader's degree of understanding. If a reader is content with half-understanding he must be content, also, with no more than half the maximum of possible pleasure. The art of reading, like every art, calls for effort and a certain technique. A writer may have devoted a year, ten years, twenty years to his book. It may be possible to read the book superficially in an equivalent number of hours. Is that all a good book deserves ? Reading has now become so much a habit (even to the point of being occasionally a bad habit - a drug) that it is sometimes thought sufficient to bring a tired sluggish mind or half-attention to any book. For true enjoyment and proper pleasure in reading, however, the effort of an alert mind and full attention is essential. And the technique of reading consists in the endeavour to master the author's meaning or intention, both in detail and in total. Always have a dictionary within reach; and, also, develop the occasional practice of browsing in a dictionary, for that in itself is pleasurable. Acquire the habit of drawing from words and phrases their full significance and value both in sense and sound. In general, it is probably better not to break the continuity of reading (except, of course, in technical or specialized works) in order to hunt-up meanings, but it is easily possible to insert slips of paper between the leaves

where difficulties arise, and to turn back later. When reading poetry, an invariable rule should be made to read through the poem (or complete passage, when it is a long poem) first without interruption; next, to give close attention to definitions, meanings, and other special points; and afterwards to re-read the whole again. But the reading of poetry is a special art, beyond the scope of this discussion.

Reading, then, should be a gateway to adventure, because it admits us to that world of thought, feeling, action, and imagination which is comprehensively called Literature.

§2 *The Continuity of Literature*

The world of English literature is so vast that for convenience in study it is usually divided into (as it were) continents and countries. We speak of 'The Novel,' 'The Essay,' 'The Short Story,' and so on; or of the literature of 'The Elizabethan Age,' 'The Cavalier and Puritan Period,' 'The Eighteenth Century,' 'The Period of the Romantic Revival,' 'The Victorian Age,' These are convenient labels, but nothing more. There are no real dividing-lines or boundaries in literature; not even between the literatures of various countries. We cannot study English authors and their books without learning something also of the writers of Greece and Rome; of France in the Middle Ages; of Renaissance Italy; of Cervantes' Spain; of France again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany; of Russia and Scandinavia in recent times; and of Czecho-Slovakia and America to-day. English literature has been influenced from each of these sources, as other literatures have been influenced also by ours. There are constant intellectual cross-currents passing between one nation and the rest, and also between the present and the past; so that

literature is not only a league of nations but also a league of centuries. Through literature we can become citizens of the world and travellers in time.

However useful it may be for us to separate English literature into periods and types, it is essential (if we are to get our proportions and perspectives right) that we should realize the continuity of literature - the manner in which the writings of one age merge almost imperceptibly into those of the next. We cannot say, for example, where Victorian literature ended and twentieth-century literature began; though we can detect important changes in outlook between our own writers and nineteenth-century writers. We see obvious differences between Dickens and H. G. Wells; but there are also obvious resemblances which satisfy us that Wells' books would have been somewhat different from what they are if he had not read and loved Dickens. This does not mean, of course, that Wells copied Dickens, but only that his mind and outlook were to some extent shaped and guided by Dickens' characters. Still more recently, in *The Good Companions*, J. B. Priestley has written a very long novel which looks back not only to Dickens, but beyond Dickens to eighteenth-century writers such as Smollett, who wrote long novels dealing with wanderings and adventures. When railways superseded travelling on horseback and by coach, the *picaresque* (wandering) novel went out of fashion. The bustling life of the country roads which Fielding, Smollett, Surtees, and Dickens had been able to use in their stories with such pleasant and exciting results, almost entirely disappeared. Then, in the twentieth century, and especially after the War, the rapid increase in motoring brought life back to the English roads and villages and country towns. Realizing this, J. B. Priestley saw the opportunity for writing a modern *picaresque* novel which should do for the twentieth century what Smollett and

Dickens had done for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. So, random wanderings and bustling open-air life and uproarious humour were restored to the English novel. In expressing again that love of wandering, Priestley really went back much further than the eighteenth century. The English have always been wanderers; it is in our blood. When we feel, as many of us do each spring, that we want to escape from our humdrum daily existence and *go* - somewhere, anywhere - we are most probably moved by a faint renewal of that old ancestral longing, of which there is so much in our earliest literature written before the Norman Conquest. Our remote forefathers left their homes on the north-western sea-coasts of Europe and settled in Britain, bringing with them some of their own heroic poems and sagas, such as *Beowulf*, the first English epic. But *Beowulf*, as we can tell from the scenery and manners and customs it describes, must have been composed by a minstrel or minstrels in the northern continental home of our ancestors before they settled in this island. There are other pieces of Anglo-Saxon literature which were evidently composed by men who, obeying that impulse to travel which has made us so remarkable as colonizers, nevertheless felt intensely homesick afterwards.

As time went on, England became Christianized and then more and more settled and civilized, until French culture dominated in this country following the Norman Conquest, and our literature lost much of its rough northern vigour and turned into gentler paths. In the meantime, however, round about the seventh and eighth centuries, there were certain writers in Northumbria (Csedmon and Cynewulf most importantly) who wrote under the influence of a strong Christian conviction, and were desirous to use their literary gifts in the service of religious and moral teaching. It is important to remember this, because English literature from that time to the

present - twelve hundred years or so - has nearly always had some similar deliberate didactic intention. Frequently, art and morality have striven against each other to gain the ascendancy, but morality - or at least some serious purpose - has always held its own. Very few among our great writers have been literary artists first and foremost; and in spite of the many efforts made in recent times to persuade English authors to give as much attention to art in writing as the French have commonly given, we remain a nation of moralists rather than of artists. It has always been more or less true to say: *Scratch an Englishman and you find a Puritan.* The puritan instinct had been strong in our race for centuries before the word Puritan was invented to describe this peculiarly English characteristic, which has, on the whole, been infinitely valuable to us, however much in some periods it may have been extravagantly emphatic.

From Caedmon and Cynewulf to Chaucer is a long jump, but it is impossible in this brief glance to touch upon the way in which English prose began and developed in southern England (with much help from King Alfred - ninth century) or upon the immense poetic chronicles and homiletic works that helped to fill the gap. All the while, from the eleventh century onward, French influences were exercising a potent effect upon English language and literature, until, by Chaucer's time (fourteenth century), Old English had fallen into disuse and modern English was emerging. Though Chaucer's English is different in several respects from the language we use to-day, it is virtually the same language, whereas Anglo-Saxon seems to us almost a foreign tongue. Here are six lines from *Beourulf:*

> Beowulf maSelode, beotwordum spraec
> niehstan sioe: 'Ic geneode fela
> gufta on geogofte: gyt ic wylle
> frod folces weard faeho'e secan,

maeroum fremman, gif mec se mansceaoa
of eorosele ut geseceo'[1]

and here a few from Chaucer (concerning the parson in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales):*

This noble ensample to his sheepe he yaf
That firste he wroghte, and afterward he taughte;
Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte;
And this figure he added eek ther-to,
That if gold ruste, what shal iren doo ?
For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
No wonder is a lewed man to ruste.

As Chaucer lived in contact with Court influences and the centres of learning, the modernizing process reached a further stage in his work than in that of some contemporaries. He looked forward and gave more attention to literature as an art than did William Langland, who wrote at (roughly) the same time as Chaucer, but in an older style. Langland's *Piers Plowman* is one of those works which express a deep religious and moral (and even politica]) purpose. It is a bitter complaint against the then prevalent corruption among priests, and the oppression of the poor and worthy. Studied side by side, Chaucer and Langland show two entirely different aspects of the period in which they lived. Chaucer is an artist; Langland a preacher. Chaucer gives us mainly sunshine and beauty and chivalry and humour; Langland is troubled by the darkness and ugliness and misery which afflicted a great many.

Whereas the fourteenth century was an age of poetry, the next century was chiefly notable for the first great prose work in English literature - the *Morte a"Arthur* by

[1] **Beowulf spake, uttered vaunting words for the last time: 'I ventured many battles in my youth: yet once more I, the old guardian of the folk, will seek the strife, work renown, if that wicked thief will come from his earth-cave and seek me out' - (Kate Warren's translation).**

Sir Thomas Malory. In this book were brought together, chiefly from French sources, a whole mass of the legendary stories concerning King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. By 1470, when *Morte d'Arthur* was finished, the Middle Ages was breaking-up and the chivalric impulse weakening. Malory's book is a vast impressive monument to the age of chivalry, and yet in the pages toward the close where the terrible battlefield scenes are described, we catch a glimpse of the horror that went coupled with honour and arms in the period 'when knighthood was in flower.' *Morte d' Arthur* is the best example of straightforward English prose (Shakespeare and the Bible excepted) until we come to Dry den in the seventeenth century; and in addition to its own intrinsic merits this book has been a fount upon which many English poets (Tennyson in chief) have drawn for their treatments of Arthurian themes.

But the time had not yet come for plain English prose to develop uninterruptedly. From the twelfth century onward, increasing interest was taken in religious plays. As this interest grew, the plays became more and more elaborate and the original religious purpose slowly gave way to secular control, until, by the late sixteenth century, the 'regular' stage was ready for the genius of Marlowe and the greater genius of Shakespeare. Elizabethan drama was a *poetic* drama. What prose was in it was occasional and subordinate to the poetry. With few exceptions, even the non-dramatic prose in that age clung to the cadences of poetry - as in the elaborated artifice of Lyly's *Ewphues,* Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and Lodge's *Eosalynde* (upon which Shakespeare drew for *As YOU Like It).* Curious though it may seem to us who have become habituated to the use of more or less plain prose for all but exceptional purposes, poetry was to the Elizabethans an easier medium of expression than prose. When writing in blank verse, or even in rhymed

metres, they appear to be using a natural language; while in prose they are mostly roundabout, long-winded and uneasy, as though they were eager all the while to escape into the disciplined freedom of verse. During the nearly forty years between the time when Spenser began to publish his poems (1579) and Shakespeare's death (1616) only two vitally important contributions to English prose were published: Bacon's first *Essays* (1597) and the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611). Yet during that same period most of the greatest English plays were produced and much great poetry. Though only one is important in the development of English prose, three other books falling within these years need to be mentioned: Hakluyt's *Voyages* (1589); North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Greeks and Romans* and Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* both of which were used by Shakespeare. North has been described as one of the early masters of English prose, and though his later influence has sometimes been overestimated he was undoubtedly widely read and studied by other writers in his own day.

The energy and fire generated by the awakening associated with the Renaissance and maintained by England's triumphs under Elizabeth, died down as the Stuart age brought a change of national temper. The Elizabethan efflorescence was replaced in poetry by the Puritan austerity of Milton; and as the times grew more troublous, writers needed their gifts of expression rather for argument, protest, and invective than for exultancy and praise. When such needs arise, prose is a more suitable medium than verse, and from (about) 1650 onward, English prose as we know it to-day became established. Dryden was our greatest benefactor in this respect, for it was he who first demonstrated how prose might be made a clean, sharp, plain instrument for workaday purposes. The importance of Dryden's work

as the clarifier of English prose can be seen if his essays are compared with Donne's *Sermons,* Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici,* and Milton's *Areopagitica.* These three wrote prose that was rich, beautiful, eloquent, and impressive, but not easy, workmanlike, everyday prose such as Dryden's. What Dryden had begun, Defoe, Swift, and Bunyan brought to a plain perfection, and with the coming of periodical literature and popular journalism early in the eighteenth century the scope for prose writing increased enormously. Scores of newspapers sprang up in a few years, and their circulation was stimulated by the growth of social life through the coffee-houses and similar places of public resort established in London as the forerunners of modern clubs. The *Toiler,* the *Spectator,* and many another periodical, created a demand for prose of divers kinds. The purveyance of news became subsidiary to discourses upon town life and manners, social comment and satire, literary criticism, and an almost endless variety of topics, as will be seen if the index to the *Spectator* is consulted. Under such conditions prose became increasingly serviceable, adaptable, and flexible: it learned with equal force and effect to inform, instruct, abuse, entertain, persuade, exhort, and uplift. At the hands of Addison and Steele it set itself to entertain, in an urbane and humorous manner. These two invented imaginary or half-imaginary characters as members of the Spectator Club and followed them through a sequence of adventures described in a form which was half essay, half short-story.

The English novel was feeling its way toward full birth for something like three centuries, for the material used by Chaucer in the Prologue would almost certainly become a novel if it were used by a modern writer. Actually, the novel in our present-day sense did not begin until the eighteenth century, because a rich imaginative

impulse had not previously coincided with a prose age. Several promising attempts at novel-writing were made in Elizabethan times, but poetry and drama diverted creative energy away from prose. Bunyan would have been a great novelist, if his convictions had not led him to concentrate upon spiritual allegory. Tentative beginnings came at length to full fruition, however, when a continuous narrative was substituted for the episodic adventures of the Spectator Club. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* were further tributaries flowing into the main stream of the English novel, which is reached when we come to Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. From these writers it is only a step into the next century and to Jane Austen, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes, and George Eliot.

While prose fiction was growing so varied and voluminous, poetry had suffered temporarily from a lowered vitality. Just as the sixteenth century was a poetic age in which some prose was written, the eighteenth was a prose age in which some poetry was produced. In the seventeenth, Dryden's satirical poetry had set a mode which Pope followed (with important modifications) in the next century. The period between 1700 and 1798, known to us as the Augustan Age, was notable because the chief writers (especially the poets) were attracted by classical literature and art and by the ideals of stability and balance favoured in the classical period. But whereas many English writers have been drawn to the works produced under Pericles in ancient Greece (c. 500 to 400 B.C.), the contemporaries of Pope preferred the less exalted and imitative classical types belonging to Rome under Augustus (first century A.D.). English eighteenth-century poetry was therefore very often an imitation of an imitation. This tendency affected Pope less than his disciples, because he was a

genius, though not of the first order. In its own charmingly artificial way, *The Rape of the Lock* is a masterpiece; but in comparison with the work of another poet, say Milton, it is like a dainty filigree ornament beside a great cathedral. Culture, not nature, was the eighteenth-century ideal; artifice, not simplicity; good sense, not sublimity. Enthusiasm, particularly religious enthusiasm, was anathema. Release from this bondage to order and good sense came from three directions. Wesley brought about the Evangelical Revival in religion; the influence of Rousseau, stretching across from France, stimulated the humanitarian movement by appealing to emotion more than to intellect; and Wordsworth, by returning to simple language and to Nature (in reaction from Pope) established the Romantic Revival[1] in English poetry, which was furthered by Coleridge and continued by Scott, Shelley, Keats, and Byron (though Byron's outlook was in some ways purely eighteenth-century). The publication in 1798 of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge was not, in fact, the beginning of the Romantic Revival, but, rather, the culmination of its first stage. More or less muted sounds of a breaking away from pseudo-classicism had been heard from the middle of the eighteenth century onward in the poetry of William Collins, Chatterton, Blake, Burns, and others. Romanticism as opposed to classicism was dominant in English literature and art throughout the nineteenth century, and its force has only begun definitely to wane since the War. A renewed interest in eighteenth-century classical ideals is now clearly evident in many quarters.

Victorian literature is distinguished above that of other periods on account of its unusually *widespread*

[1] **What is known as the Romantic Revival was (a) a return to Nature and to interest in ' natural man'; (6) a revival of interest in the 'romantic' picturesque past; (c) a reawakening of emotional ecstasy.**

excellence, except in the drama, which was dead throughout the nineteenth century (at least until signs of a resurrection came in its last years). In poetry, fiction, essays, travel, history, science, biography, and autobiography, memorable works were added to the language in a richer total profusion than in any other single reign. A number of these books will be considered in some detail elsewhere in this book, and our summary survey of English literature may conveniently close at this point.

What has been said in this section should serve to impress upon the student's mind that, although the following chapters deal with literature under separate headings and according to special types, literature has been from the beginning until now, in all times and all places, a continuous, unbroken, always-flowing stream. Occasionally its currents have been more sluggish than at other times. When the Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, dramatic activity disappeared for a time; yet it did not cease, it flowed still, though thinly and underground. *But it flowed;* and the stream of literature will continue to flow while men and women think and feel and act and are moved by the universal desire to communicate their experiences to others.

§3 *The Function of Prose*

Moderately well-educated people nowadays find so little difficulty in writing down what they have to say, in easy and straightforward language, that it is hardly possible for us to realize that there was a time when even practised writers found prose troublesome to manage. Reference has been made to the fact that, before Dryden, English prose was generally cumbersome; laboriously written and laborious to read. Those weaknesses and limitations were cured by Dryden and his successors, who cleared the way for *plain prose.*

The use of those two words suggests what most sensible people would regard as the function of prose. They would say that so long as a prose-writer makes his meaning plain he has done all that should be expected of him. That view is entirely right so far as it goes, but where literature and the study of literature are concerned it does not go far enough. Literature is an art, whether the medium used is prose or verse. And prose (as well as verse) is both an art and a craft. A craftsman is concerned with utility; an artist with beauty. The craft of verse consists in the arrangement of metres, rhymes, stanzas and so on as skilfully as possible in order that they shall carry the suggestion of beauty most readily to the hearer. The question of meaning also enters in; but, in poetry, meaning is conveyed through the emotional sense more than through intellectual channels which demand the use of logic and reasoning. We often leap instinctively to the significance of a poem, even though we could not express its meaning in a paraphrase. The greatest poetry, indeed, cannot be paraphrased, because its significance can be communicated only in the one special form of words used by the poet. Poets, therefore, are released from an obligation which the prose-writer cannot escape.

A prose-writer must first of all find a form of words which makes his meaning clear to persons of ordinary intelligence. When he has succeeded in doing that, his work *as a craftsman* (but only as a craftsman) is finished. Let us suppose our prose-writer is an historian. When he has made his meaning clear he has fulfilled his function *as an historian.* If we read his book it will put us in possession of certain facts; we shall know what happened at particular times and in particular places - and how and why those events happened. His book will probably help us to pass examinations. Yet having done all that, it is possible that the historian's book will not

be what we call 'literature.' There have been scores of English historians, but not more than a dozen are remembered in literature, because the majority, although craftsmen (probably very good craftsmen), were not artists. They could write plain prose, but they could not make their plain prose so attractive that it could be read *with pleasure.* Once again, then, we come back to the primary truth that if a writer's work is to be remembered - if it is to live and to become classic - it must give lasting pleasure.

An unfortunate impression exists that 'literature' can include only a few kinds of books, and that some subjects are outside the range of literature. Poetry, plays, novels, essays, biography are generally accepted as literature; but not many people think of literature as also covering history, philosophy, science, religion, geography, cookery, and such subjects. In a proper view of the matter, however, no subject need be outside literature. Whether a book is 'literature' or not, depends less upon the subject than upon the writer's skill in presenting his material. There is no reason why a cookery book should not be fine literature; nor any reason why school-books and examination text-books should not be. It is, indeed, a great pity they are not. If wives and mothers could be provided with a cookery book so fascinating that they would read it for pleasure, we should probably get better dinners. If we could read school-books and text-books for pleasure and not because we have to, lessons and examinations might be less troublesome.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is great both as history and as literature. Though historians nowadays have learned about Rome additional facts which Gibbon had no opportunity of knowing, his book continues to give such pleasure that it will never be forgotten. Gibbon so manifestly 'feels' as he writes; he

lives again in imagination whatever he describes; where it is necessary to suggest colour and magnificence to the reader's mind he marshals his words accordingly. , He can stir our emotions, horrify us, make us indignant, fill us with excitement. He may sometimes irritate us with his malice, or sting us with his irony; but he never allows us to be dull while we are reading him. And, always, his language is *appropriate* to the particular passage in which it appears.

We have now distinguished the threefold function of the prose-writer in literature. FIRST: *to express his meaning clearly.* SECOND: *to use appropriate language.* A little more needs to be said about that, because it is sometimes asserted without qualification that a prose-writer must always use simple language. This is too loose a statement, and it does not cover the whole art of prose-writing. It might be sufficient if words had only a sense-value; but they have a sound-value, also. If, for example, an historian is describing a battle, he can convey a more effective impression of the battle by using words which not only express meaning but also suggest the movement and excitement and terror of battle. On other occasions it may greatly help the effect of a passage of prose if the words suggest music, or colour, or passion. None of these effects is allowed for in the mere statement that prose should be simple. If, on the other hand, we say that it should always be *appropriate* to the particular purpose for which it is used, we shall make a full and fair demand for the right words in the right place - and more often than not this will mean simple words.

When a prose-writer has made his meaning clear and used his words appropriately he will usually have fulfilled, also, that THIRD part of his threefold function - *to give lasting pleasure.*

CHAPTER TWO

THE NOVEL . I : THE MAIN STREAM

§1 *The Place of the Novel in Literature*

UNTIL the twentieth century, English people were accustomed to divide literature into *(a)* 'serious reading' and (6) fiction. It was thought that a programme of general reading was unbalanced unless it contained at least one serious book to counterbalance each novel. Even to-day a tendency still lingers to regard the novel as a frivolous kind of writing. Though this is an unfortunate and harmful view, there is some justification for it. Under the heading of 'novels' or 'fiction' in every library catalogue and every book-list there is a great deal of rubbish. But so there is in every other category. It is just as easy to write nonsense under the heading of 'essays' or 'biography' or 'theology' as under any other. There is no guarantee that because it is on a 'serious' subject any particular book merits serious attention.

What then are we to do to ensure that the books we choose to read are worth the time spent in reading them ? In the first place we can rely upon the advice of scholars and critics, or upon the recommendations of friends whose judgment we trust. But though that may be helpful to begin with, it is an unsatisfactory method eventually. We cannot have a teacher or a critic or even a friend always at our elbow to guide us; and if we could it would be a very bad thing for us. We remain poor weak unadventurous creatures unless we learn to rely upon our own taste and judgment. Before we can

do that, however, our literary taste and judgment have to be formed.

Everyone who has stood in a library surrounded by thousands of unknown volumes and faced with the necessity of choosing a book to read, must at one time or another have been overcome by a temporary feeling of helpless perplexity. How *can* we choose sensibly from such a multitude? Yet it is a comparatively simple matter for anyone with a developed sense of literary judgment. Such a reader can take down a book, open it here and there, read two or three paragraphs, and answer almost instantaneously the two questions he will put to himself: *(i)* Shall I 'like' this book? *(ii)* Is this a 'good' book? Being human he will naturally make mistakes sometimes, but usually his answers will be sound. All sensible readers ought to be able to answer those questions *for themselves,* and no one has mastered the art of reading who is unable to do so. But this ability cannot be acquired quickly. We must begin by relying upon the judgment of the past. A book which has given pleasure to many thousands of people over a long period - say, fifty or a hundred years - is almost certain to be a good book. Bad books do not last. The judgment of the majority may be wrong in any one generation, but if that judgment stands unreversed after four or five generations, it is certainly well-founded and we can safely rely upon it.

If, then, we are to train our literary taste and judgment so that we shall be able to note quickly the difference between good books and bad books, we must first make ourselves familiar with books that have stood the test of time - the classics - the books that have given the deepest pleasure to the largest number of people during the longest period. Having observed and become intimately acquainted with the qualities that went to the making of good books in the past, we shall be

better able to decide whether a new book is good or not. Some such training as this is particularly necessary when we are dealing with novels, because in the present day the number of novels published is much larger than that of any other kind of book; and before we can determine what place the novel should properly be given in literature we need to set up a standard.

The low opinion at one time held concerning novels (and still held by some people to-day) was due to a misconception of the nature and purpose of the novel. Bunyan's friends objected to his writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* because, they said, the story was not *true.* This was the very point upon which the main objection to novels was based for several generations. Novels (said the objectors) deal with imaginary people and imaginary happenings; the imaginary is not the true; therefore novels are not true; what is not true is false; falsehood is evil; therefore novels are evil! That reasoning would be sound if it were not based upon a fallacy. Novels - good novels - do not deal with imaginary people and imaginary happenings; they deaLimaginatively with 'real' people and 'real' happenings.

The one invariable and inviolable foundation of all good literature is Truth. However far at times we may wander from Truth, if we have any sound character at all we come back in the end to an assurance that Truth is vital and fundamental in everything that is valuable in human experience. This assurance, unfortunately, does not simplify life. It makes life arduous and tremendously difficult, because Truth has so many appearances, and so much falsity masquerades as truth. But arduous and difficult though the quest of Truth may be, it is just that endless quest which makes Life the high adventure it has always been to men and women of character.

If truth is the foundation of good literature, it follows that a novel can only be good literature when it, too, has

truth as its foundation. What does this mean, exactly ? Relying upon the judgment of the past (leaving aside for the moment our own liking) we accept Scott's, Dickens', the Brontes', and George Eliot's as good novels. But are they *true* ? It was laid down, a few lines above, that good novels deal imaginatively with real people and real happenings. We must decide, first, what is meant by real people. Suppose we knew three men named Arthur Savage, Frank Henslowe, and Martin Field - real people. If someone else who also knew those three wrote a novel containing a character named Austin Fowler and gave him a combination of qualities drawn from Savage, Henslowe, and Field, would Fowler be a *real* person ? Yes - *provided that the novelist observed one main condition:* provided that *the balance of qualities* in Austin Fowler's character was true to human experience.

Turning aside for a moment: Suppose the author in describing the appearance of Austin Fowler, made his features like those of Frank Henslowe, his suit like that of Field, and his style of walking like that of Savage. We should have no difficulty in accepting the description of Austin Fowler as conforming to our notion of a man. But if the author gave him Martin Field's body and two heads (Savage's and Henslowe's) we should protest, quite properly, and say that a man with two heads is a monstrosity and (in the sense in which we are using the words here) not *real* or *true.*

Now, to come back to the former question of Austin Fowler's nature and character. Suppose the author gave him all the virtues possessed by Savage, Henslowe, and Field, and left out every single weakness. Would Fowler then be a real person ? He would iiot. He would be just as much a monstrosity as if he were described as having two heads. And the same would hold true if the author gave Fowler all the weaknesses of the other three, but none of their good points.

The first test applied to a novel by a trained **reader relates** to the characters and their behaviour. If the book outrages his idea of what is credible, if, that is to say, the characters are incredibly good or incredibly bad; if their behaviour is incredibly virtuous or incredibly vicious-the trained reader will reject the book as untrue and as a bad novel.

This question may be asked, however: 'Why should not a novelist create characters so beautiful and virtuous that readers may have the satisfaction of living imaginatively for a time in an ideal world *V* The effect of such novels is undesirable, since (if reading is to have any value at all) we cannot avoid comparing what we read in books with what we experience in life. If we read of a world which is always glorious and beautiful we cannot help making comparisons with the real world - with consequent dissatisfaction and disgust. The inference to be drawn from this is not that unhappy or unfortunate people should not read about the happy or fortunate; but that novels should not be written about *incredibly* happy (or unhappy) people. Shakespeare, who understood as much as anyone has done about such matters as we are considering here, wrote: 'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.' It is the chief function of the novelist to suggest that tangled complexity of life, and to illuminate it. A good novel shows us possible people doing possible things - not necessarily (nor even desirably) actual people doing actual things. A novelist who merely copies particular people in particular circumstances will, normally, produce a book with only limited value: it will be a product of observation and no more. A good novelist employs not only observation but vision also. Observation deals solely with matters that are within the compass of personal knowledge and experience; but a writer does not become great until he penetrates beyond personal experience to

universal experience. What is set down in; great literature is applicable not to a few but to the many. *Hamlet* is true to the experience of one man, but also (and more importantly) it is true to the experience of uncountable thousands of men (and perhaps of women) during more than three centuries. *Hamlet* deals imaginatively with real people and real happenings. It is true to the fundamentals of universal human experience. The tests we apply to *Hamlet,* in these respects, we apply to all imaginative literature, and the nearer a novel comes to passing those tests the better the novel.

Bad, trashy novels are those which falsify life by making it appear so incredibly ugly that the book disgusts us; or so incredibly romantic that weak minds are disappointed and disgusted because life never resembles the false picture.

The demand made of the novel in the twentieth century is that it shall portray life as fully as is possible in literature; that it shall inform us about many important matters; and that it shall illuminate us with increase of knowledge and wisdom. The novel is the most comprehensive form of literature because there are no limits to its subject-matter. It excludes nothing that touches upon human thought and feeling and action. It takes all life as its province, and it may therefore claim a place upon literature's highest levels.

The claim that the novel should take all life as its province was not made deliberately before the twentieth century, and the chief claimant has been H. G. WELLS, whose works (if we look at his books from first to last) are somewhat like a miniature condensed history of the English novel. Quite early he wrote a book called *Certain Personal Matters,* then by stages progressed through a series of stories of individual adventures, and

so onward to domestic, social, and political novels, and finally to novels in which he is mainly concerned with schemes for reconstructing the government of the whole world. This means that, beginning by being interested in himself (personal organization), he went on and extended his interests to other men and women and their affairs (domestic organization), then to social organization, then to politics (national organization), then to still wider affairs (international organization). The English novel has developed to some extent in a similar manner; though it has not been a straightforward movement, but rather like the backward and forward currents of a tidal river. It is this development which makes the novel the most interesting of all literary forms. By studying the English novel we see something of the way in which the human mind has been enlarging, drawing more and more concerns within its common range, and becoming increasingly complex as time goes on.

This is exactly what anyone who has watched men and women would expect the history of the novel to show. Although the human mind has developed through the centuries from the utmost simplicity to extreme complexity, there are still people in our own country whose minds are in one or other of the various stages of development. There are some whose interests do not go beyond their own little affairs - not because they are selfish, but because their mental sight has not been trained to see farther than themselves. If such people talk to us (as they very often do even to strangers), within a few minutes they pour out streams of chatter *about themselves: 'I* sez to 'er . . . an' 'e sez ter mo . . . an' *well,* I sez . . . ' But people who have reached a further stage of education and culture, are more reticent about their own affairs. They see themselves in relation to others, and are prepared to listen as well as (or even more than) to talk. And so the whole process develops. From being interested

in other men and women, we go further and become interested in social affairs, political affairs, international affairs. Therefore, when H. G. Wells claimed that modem novelists were determined 'to get all life into the novel' he was indirectly demonstrating that the human mind had reached the advanced adult stage at which many thousands of ordinary people have become interested in the world at large and the life of humanity in general - not *merely* in themselves, their own family, their own parish, nor even merely their own country.

But H. G. Wells has done no more than plan a beginning for this new and much larger kind of novel. It is comparatively easy to make individual men and women interesting to read about. It is much harder to write of politics and international affairs enthrallingly. In fact it would have been thought at one time that such subjects were not suitable for treatment in novels; that novels must be confined to *entertaining* topics, and other matters left for 'serious' books. That idea held good until national education was introduced and almost everyone learned to read, whereas only a minority had been able to read previously. Then, writers who were concerned about the welfare of society and the world realized that if these important matters were to be brought to the attention of very large numbers of people, the novel must be used for that purpose, for most people read novels.

Whenever we think of 'the English novel,' therefore, we shall best understand its history if we remember that it has all the time been growing and trying to become as large as life itself. Yet this view of the function of the novel has by no means gained universal acceptance. The older imaginative 'unreal' world of fiction still exercises a powerful influence over many readers, who find in highly coloured fiction a pleasanter, a more exciting, a juster and more consoling world than their

own appears to be. Perhaps it is the poetic justice of romantic fiction that provides its most potent attraction. Things that 'go wrong' in actual experience can be made to 'come right' in fiction. That is why so many people demand happy endings; they want the imaginary world to redress the balance of the real world. Women who lead drab lives in contact with troublesome families love to read of beautiful females being swept off in the arms of strong, silent, purposeful men. While men who spend their respectable lives on office stools fly to such excitement as *Bulldog Drummond* provides. Increasing numbers of people, however, want more than this from the novel. They do not want to escape from life; they want to be helped to live courageously and wisely, no matter what trials and perplexities may trouble them. They look to literature, and especially to the novel, to suggest the meaning, or at least the significance, of life. Because of this twofold present demand, the novel has grown to be the all-embracing kind of writing it now is. In its beginnings it was romantic in tendency; it built up a lovely coloured universe of its own. Later, it began to explore the real world in microscopic detail - examined it, analysed it, pulled it to pieces and put it together again. The result has been that between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries the novel has been trying to get two worlds - th*e world of imagination* and *the world of experience* - within its covers. These two worlds might be otherwise described as *Romance* and *Realism.*

On first thought it might seem easy for a writer to describe men and women 'as they are' -realistically. The history of literature convinces us, however, that this is not so. Writers in all periods have been more apt at painting fancy romantic pictures than close likenesses - twopence coloured has for some reason been given a larger place in literature than penny plain. This is no doubt because human personality is a perpetual mystery which we do

not seem to get much nearer to solving. We are continually surprising ourselves by doing what we had never expected to do. A man may go on for years feeling quite sure that he knows exactly what he will do in any given circumstances, and then suddenly astound himself by doing something totally unexpected. In *Victory*, Joseph Conrad tells of a Swedish man, Axel Heyst, living in the Malay Archipelago, who was brought up by his father (a disappointed idealist) to take no active part in the world's affairs. He was just to live his own life, and not let himself be drawn into anyone else's orbit - not to concern himself in the slightest degree with other people's joys or sorrows - to be a spectator of life and not an actor in it. Axel Heyst reaches early middle age without deviating from this set line of conduct. There is every reason to believe that his character has become hardened in that particular mould of impassivity. But one day in a hotel he sees a girl who is obviously being badly treated by her employer. From that moment the whole of his carefully constructed philosophy of non-participation in life is shattered and he is caught up in a tremendous wave of tragic emotion which destroys him and others. There is always this mysterious, unexpected, incalculable, element in human nature which makes it on the whole much easier to draw fancy portraits than realistic ones. Even when writers do try to describe men and women 'as they are,' hundreds of people are eager to protest that the description is false. Few of us are able to agree as to what the human mind and soul really are like.

§2 *Preliminary Stages*

Considering the difficulties just stated, we need feel little surprise that the characters in Elizabethan novels appear much romanticized. ROBERT GREENE'S *Pandosto* (1588) is more interesting to us than many other novels

in that age, since SHAKESPEARE founded *A Winter's Tale* on this book, though he adopted no more than the bare outline of Greene's formal and frigid story, providing a different ending and breathing-in life and fire. Shakespeare had the gift of writing his conversations and speeches in such a way as to make us feel that we are listening to the sound of human voices. His remarkable skill in this respect can be better appreciated if we compare the style of *A Winter's Tale* with passages from *Pandosto.* In the following extract Bellaria (Shakespeare's Hermione) is addressing her infant daughter, Fawnia (Perdita):

Alas, sweet unfortunate babe, scarce born, before envied by fortune ! would the day of thy birth had been the term of thy life; then shouldest thou have made an end to care and prevented thy father's rigour. Thy faults cannot yet deserve such hateful revenge; thy days are too short for so sharp a doom, but thy untimely death must pay thy mother's debts, and her guiltless crime must be thy ghastly curse. And shalt thou, sweet babe, be committed to fortune, when thou are already spited by fortune ? Shall the seas be thy harbour and the hard boat thy cradle ? Shall thy tender mouth, instead of sweet kisses, be nipped with bitter storms ? Shalt thou have the whistling winds for thy lullabie, and the salt sea foam instead of sweet milk ? Alas what destinies would assign such hard hap ? What father would be so cruel, or what gods will not avenge such rigour ? Let me kiss thy lips (sweet infant) and wet thy tender cheeks with my tears, and put this chain about thy little neck, that if fortune save thee, it may help to succour thee. Thus, since thou must go to surge in the gastful seas, with a sorrowful kiss I bid thee farewell, and I pray the gods thou may est fare well.

What mother would talk to her baby with such poetic eloquence as Greene uses here 2 This is a typical example of the minor Elizabethan prose-writers' habit of drugging themselves with sweet-sounding words which drift

almost into a swooning romantic ecstasy. Yet Greene and contemporary novelists could on occasion express simple homely emotions. After 'a poor mercenary shepherd that dwelled in Sycilia' had found out and adopted the outcast, abandoned baby Fawnia,

> The shepherd every night at his coming home would sing and dance it on his knee and prattle, that in a short time it began to speak, and call him Dad, and her Mam.

Here surely is a touch of very early realism. But there is no skill in the use of dialogue, for the characters do not talk to one another with the ease of familiar conversation, but usually with as much elaborate formality as if they were addressing a public meeting. There is little skill, either, in the management of the story. Parts are long-drawn-out and other parts huddled and hurried. In the final paragraph (less than twenty lines) Greene gets the old shepherd knighted; the young people married and sent on a voyage; Pandosto (Leontes) cleared out of the way by suicide; while

> Dorastus [Florizel], taking his leave of his father, went with his wife and the dead corpse into Bohemia, where after they were sumptuously entombed, Dorastus ended his days in contented quiet.

The strictures made upon Greene's *Pandosto* might be applied, with but little need for qualification, to LODGE'S *Rosalynde,* SIDNEY'S *Arcadia,* LYLY'S *Euphues,*[1] and the other contemporary novels almost without exception. Without further discussion, we may summarize the deficiencies of Elizabethan prose fiction under the following headings:

[1] *Euphues* was very important in its immediate effect, though it is tedious to us. Lyly used an elaborate high-flown prose style which so charmed Elizabethan ladies and gentlemen that it became their fashion to speak and write euphuistically. Shakespeare parodied euphuism *in* parts of *Love's Labour's Lost.*

PLOT. - Tho Elizabethan novelists did not frame their stories architecturally. The foundations were usually inadequate, the middle sections too expansive, and the conclusions a hasty sketch.

CHARACTERS. - The men and women were mostly lifeless puppets. There was little dramatic development of character; little attempt to indicate how people are changed and moulded by contact with one another, by circumstances, and by experience.

DIALOGUE. - Long addresses, but no illusion of natural speech.

STYLE. ~ Language wordy, diffuse, shapeless, and unpruned. Little natural simplicity, plainness, or clarity.

Before the novel acquired the ability to deal more faithfully with men and women it had to go back and make a new beginning. In the first half of the seventeenth century many writers (SIB THOMAS OVERBURY, JOHN EARLE, and others) practised a kind of composition known as 'the Character.' They took a particular *type* of person and wrote briefly of general characteristics. These Characters often displayed considerable charm and wit, as can be seen from the extracts below. The first is by Overbury, the other by Earle.

A FAIRE AND HAPPY MILK-MAID

Is a Country Wench that is so farre from making her selfe beautiful by Art, that one looke of hers is able to put *all face-physicke* out of countenance. . . . She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity, and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her mory wheele) she sings a defiance to tho giddy *wheele of Fortune.* She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems *ignorance* will not suffer her to doe ill, being her mind is to doe well. Shee bestowes her yeares wages at next faire, and *in* chusing her garments counts no bravery i' th' world like decency. .. . She dares goe alone and unfold sheepe i' th' night, and feares no manner of ill, because she meanes none; yet to say

truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with *old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers.* . . . Thus lives she, and all her care is, she may die in the *spring-time,* to have store of flowers stucke upon her winding-sheet.

A CRITICKE

Is one that has speld over a great many of bookes, and his observation is the orthographie. Hee is the surgeon of old authors, and heales the wounds of dust and ignorance. . . . Hee tastes styles, as some discreeter palats doe wine; and tells you which is genuine. . . . He is a troublesome vexer of the dead, which after so long sparing must rise up to the judgement of his castigations.

Only a few sentences have been quoted from *A Milkmaid* and *A Critic* (the Characters were usually brief - some running to fewer than two hundred words), but these will show that the Character-writers used a good deal of observation and managed to touch upon numerous qualities. Overbury speaks of the milkmaid's complexion (so fair, that make-up - 'face-physicke' - was not needed !), her nature, her work, her clothes, her courage, and even the kind of funeral she would like. His most delightful phrase is that 'she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers' - she was not empty-headed, empty-hearted, or empty-souled as many moderns are inclined to be. Earle pleasantly pokes fun at the critic for being a 'surgeon of old authors' and 'a troublesome vexer of the dead.' But though the Characters appear to have been drawn often from living models, they are only generalized types, without any special individual features in which we can be intensely interested. They are more like studies in still-life or portraits for the wall than descriptions of people really living. We do not see them *in action,* and consequently they do not live for us. Men and women in novels 'come alive' much more quickly

when we see them in action and hear them speaking: movement and dialogue are imperative. The Characters must be considered, however, from the seventeenth-century angle. Undoubtedly they helped to clear the way for the modern novel, by showing what could be done with a few simple strokes and by the use of language which avoided the high-piled elaboration and rhetorical eloquence of Elizabethan prose fiction. Perhaps for the first time in this direction prose-writers achieved in the Characters *economy of means* - the ability to say what they wanted to say with a minimum of circumlocution.

The next step forward was taken by BUNYAN, who, in all probability, knew nothing of the Character-writer's work, though he tried to do what was actually similar, yet on a larger scale and for a more serious purpose. He set out in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680) to depict 'A Christian' and 'A Wrongdoer,' amid a multitude of other types. Bunyan was by no means the ignorant and uneducated person he was at one time supposed to be, even if his book-learning was extremely small. When he started out to write *The Pilgrim's Progress* he was fortunately free from merely bookish memories and from literary theories. But he had 'knocked about the world' and had been a soldier. He had experience, a much more useful possession to a writer than theory; and he had his memory stored with the Bible and the cadences of its language. Knowledge of life and familiarity with biblical prose constitute as sound an equipment as any author can wish to have. Bunyan probably possessed, also, memories of old wives' tales heard in childhood - tales about dragons and giants, enchanted castles and similar wonders. If we seek to discover from what material *The Pilgrim's Progress* was made, this is it: the Bible; folk stories; personal experience. Consequently Bunyan produced a book (several books,

indeed) full of living human beings (not merely flat Characters) about whom he wrote in simple lovely biblical prose with here and there a touch of adventurous wonder. Even if our tastes and convictions are so different from his that we find the distribution of Scripture texts too liberal and his theology distressing, we should be foolish to allow any such prejudice to blind us to the unique merits of his books. Although all his characters are labelled as types and not named as persons, they *are* persons and not merely personified virtues and vices such as usually make allegories heavy reading. It is impossible to imagine how dismally lifeless his books would have been if the hundreds of characters had been mere abstractions. Instead, they are peopled with human beings like those whom Bunyan lived among, and they carry with them the energy and bustle of vigorous country life. Bunyan was a creative literary artist almost in spite of himself; some instinctive and unpremeditated Tightness guided him. His portraits have a finished accomplishment which commands our interest, and even in occasional references he sometimes gets a whole portrait into a phrase: There was 'a young woman her name was Dull' - seven words only, but enough to make that unfortunate young person an unforgettable inhabitant of our minds. Bunyan is altogether excellent: in plot, in characterization, in dialogue, in style. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the first example of an effective wedding between the two main elements in the novel. Christian's spiritual pilgrimage is a record of truth as Bunyan conceived it and is drawn from experience. But in order to represent the temptations and trials of Christian vividly and forcefully, he was compelled to invent and to draw upon imagination aided by memory for his giants and ravening beasts. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an example of Realism because it is based upon foundation-truths of human spiritual

experience. It is also an example of Romance because its central conflict is presented in imaginative shape. Its effective combination of these two elements helped to establish the kind of novel in which Realism and Romance are coupled - as they are in actual experience. Admiration for Bunyan must not lead us into the error of crediting him with too much. He was not, after all, aiming to write fiction, though we are right in pointing out that he succeeded in doing more than he attempted to do. Bunyan's work was mainly autobiographical and his own interior being was the scene of the conflicts he describes, looked into his heart - and wrote. For the purposes of his writing he was interested in men and women only in so far as their speech and behaviour were indicative of spiritual or of unspiritual standards.

§3 *The Eighteenth Century*

A true novelist must be interested in people *as people* — independently of what they are or do or say. Like a good school-teacher he should have no favourites; or if he has he must conceal his preferences. He must be prepared to give all men and all women 'a fair deal.' STEELE and ADDISON were of that nature. They looked out upon the world for their characters; they chose from among the human multitude, and produced Sir Roger de Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport, Will Honeycomb and Will Wimble. 'Bunyan dramatized his own soul, even though he introduced others to enact the drama. Steele and Addison created beings in the true likeness of humanity: theirs was a conscious creative act in a sense in which Bunyan's was not. Instead of the puritan's rejection they give us the humanist's acceptance of the world with its delights and pleasures. Theirs is a jolly world in which men and women enjoy life without taking too much thought for the morrow. The influence of

eighteenth-century London coffee-house conversation is evident in their easy, informal, yet carefully-balanced and polite style. Improving upon the older Character, they poured warm blood into its sluggish veins, added action and dialogue and humour, and gave their characters a continuous life by writing about them through a series of situations or simple adventures. Sir Roger goes to the theatre, to the Abbey, to the Exchange, with one or other of his friends of the Spectator Club, and when the episodes are collected and read in sequence they form something very like a nineteenth-century novel. After the Spectator Club had run its course, practically all that remained to do in order to establish the novel was to link these serial sketches into a connected whole and to improve the dialogue. When this was done about twenty-five years later by Fielding, the modern English novel was born.

In 1739 a firm of publishers in London requested SAMUEL RICHARDSON to write for them 'a little volume of letters, in a common style, on such subjects as might be of use to those country readers, who were unable to indite for themselves.' Responding to the invitation Richardson asked: 'Will it be any harm, in a piece you want to be written so low, if we should instruct them how they should *think* and *act* in common cases, as well as *indite V* The publishers eagerly agreed to the amended scheme, and Richardson immediately set to work. The result was not a 'model letter-writer,'[1] but a long novel written in letter form: *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740). *Pamela* was immediately popular among all classes, and was read by society women, servant girls, preachers and blacksmiths. Here was the

[1] **After *Pamela* was published there came out (in 1741) a little book by Richardson called *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the most important occasions.***

'penny novelette' type of fiction raised to a high literary level. Pamela was the first of a race of heroines which has never since disappeared - the servant girl who marries her young master after thrilling escapes from peril and after resisting strong temptation. Richardson intended her to be a model of virtue, but we may be excused if we agree rather with the verdict of her master, Mr. B., who called her 'a sauce-box and a bold-face,' She was only fifteen years old; a tender age for so sophisticated and designing a minx. Her perils are related in full detail in long letters written to her parents at a distance. They respond with many pious injunctions, and with masterly inaction. Pamela, though much distressed, did not attempt to escape - because she was embroidering a flowered silk waistcoat for Mr. B., her persecutor ! We should not be human if we were not immensely amused by this eighteenth-century picture of Beauty-in-distress, for whom marriage excuses all. No doubt Pamela's prudential standard of morality was usual in her day, for Richardson had had exceptional opportunities of studying the minds and emotions of such young women and he was almost certainly drawing 'from the life.' Whether or not we admire Pamela's ideas of virtue, Richardson's drawing of her is a masterpiece of minute analysis of character - the first in English literature. Popular fiction in that age had hitherto confined its attention to ' noble' heroines and heroes, but *Pamela,* breaking away from the current mode, found its characters in less exalted circles; and Richardson also rejected the artificial language employed by the popular romancers, and used natural everyday speech. Whereas in *Pamela* a mean type of virtue is 'rewarded,' *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson's next novel, is a tragic record of virtue overcome but not defeated. Clarissa is as near to "Treing~~a great and noble woman as it was within Richardson's power to create. He was an amiably

virtuous man but too complacently vain to be capable of touching heights of tragic emotion. Nevertheless, Clarissa's account of her experiences at the hands of Lovelace and his agents is fine and moving writing, if we can find it possible to overlook the incredible assumption that an injured, heartbroken woman would solemnly sit down and serialize her nightmare-like experiences through a long sequence of letters to her friend, Miss Howe. Richardson's revelation of a suffering heart and vision of a tortured soul are masterly, but the machinery of the epistolary novel is hopelessly cumbersome for such purposes. Lovelace is a typical eighteenth-century rake - handsome, clever, witty, but rotten at the heart - and the novelist, an industrious moralist, was so alarmed to learn that many readers found Lovelace an attractive figure that he wrote a further novel to counteract the effect. This was to be called *A Good Man,* but the title was changed to *Sir Charles Orandison* (1753), Richardson's longest and most tedious book. He made the mistake of getting away from the life he knew, and tried to invent more than in his other books. Of society and society people he knew little, and he did not possess the invariable discretion and sense of fitness that made Jane Austen keep always within the known range of her powers. He tried high flights for which the narrow wings of his imagination were ill-fitted. But we should not forget, as we read him now and regret the enormous length of his novels, that he was writing for a generation which lived more slowly and had incomparably more leisure than is available to us.

Despite the disadvantages inherent in the novel-in-letters, this particular form permitted Richardson to analyse character much more minutely than had been done before in prose fiction. It enabled him to take the reader *inside* the personality of Pamela and Clarissa. When these advantages are noted, however, there still

s the drawback that in the epistolary novel it is *At* to create and preserve the essential illusion of *cy*. As we read, we cannot easily put aside the iction that normal people do not sit down and write most continuous letters in order to anatomize them- *Aves* day by day and in every mood - particularly in fimes of crisis and stress. The machinery in *Clarissa* smashes at the very point where it is most important that it should operate effectively in order to carry conviction.

Richardson's two invaluable contributions to the development of the English novel were *(i)* the advance he effected in the analysis of human character - particularly the characters of women; *(ii)* his improvement in the management of dialogue. As a boy he listened closely and learned how people talk; later, as a writer, his literary skill enabled him to reproduce dialogue with fair success. His chief limitation was a lack of dramatic ability. Most of his characters remain, as it were, pinned flat upon the printed page. They scarcely ever seem to rise up and move about in an actual world. Richardson analyses them and makes them talk, but they are an anaemic kind of mental automata, imitating the behaviour of humanity without being quite fully human.

Then came Fielding to let sunlight and the breath of life into what was still the dim laboratory of English fiction. He seemed to throw up all the windows, open the doors, and a bustling crowd of outdoor folk came tumbling in. Life swept into and through and over the novel, which came fully alive after struggling feebly for centuries.

When *Pamela* appeared, FIELDING was a poor barrister on the Western circuit. The mercenary virtue of Pamela, her 'strange conjunction of purity and precaution,'

greatly amused Fielding. He thought the idea too preciously funny to be let die, and began to write a story with Pamela's brother Joseph as the footman hero, submitting him to temptations from Lady Booby similar to those Pamela had resisted from Mr. B. The parody was carried as far as chapter x, and then abandoned. By that stage the characters had taken upon themselves an independent life; Fielding was no longer able to keep them tied to Pamela's apron-strings, but Pamela had fulfilled her destiny, by being the unwitting agent for the production of a really great novel - *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* (1742). Fielding's main triumph in *Joseph Andrews* is with the secondary characters, Parson Adams, Mrs. Slipslop (worthy to be the sister of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop and Dickens' Mrs. Gamp), Parson Trulliber, and Mrs. Tow-wouse.

To come from Richardson's novels to *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* is to feel the refreshing and invigorating nature of Fielding. He is the natural man (neither moral nor immoral), whereas Richardson never quite escapes being an old woman. We can think of Fielding tramping about with thorough enjoyment across fields and through forests, but Richardson, we feel, would be much more content sitting muffled up in a big armchair by the fireside watching the family behaving itself nicely. The picture of life given by Fielding is richer, fuller and franker than any other novelist's up to that time. Some twentieth-century novelists, trying to be franker than Fielding, seem to be engaged,'only in raking over a nasty dustbin in a backyard. Fielding is occasionally unpleasant, but men and women are occasionally unpleasant, also. He does not emphasize the unpleasantness. In his best novels he has no 'purpose' except to provide an antidote against mawkishness, insincerity, affectation and hypocrisy. To him, natural man was a

lovable animal moved by generosity and good-heartedness; combative and immensely diverting. His theme is the Human Comedy. Though Fielding brought wit and subtlety to his own handling of the characters, they themselves are as ingenuous and innocent as nature - except when he sets out to draw deliberately unattractive people such as Blifil, Square and Thwackum in *Tom Jones*. Thackeray said that *Tom Jones* was 'the last book in which an English novelist was allowed to depict a man.' He was speaking, of course in. the Victorian age, when frankness abouthuman foibles and lollies of a particular sort was taboo and when writers had grown accustomed to whitewashing their heroes Thaekeray might "have saicTwitri still more truth that *Tom Jones* was the *first* English novel in which a writer had had the skill to depict a man at full length. In truth, from the present-day standpoint, Tom is less engaging than other people in the book: Partridge, lovably and innocently absurd: Squire Western, more John Bullish than any other character in literature, full of strange oaths, living only the life of physical satisfaction, and looking upon Sophia, his daughter, as a charming but sometimes perverse piece of property; Sophia, unsentimentalized flesh and blood, womanly and pure in a dissolute age. In *Tom Jones*[1] the eighteenth century is embodied, not embalmed.

Fielding put into *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* the rough and tumble of a lively world of stage-coaches and adventures at inns and on the roads. If any single writer was the master to whom Dickens was more indebted than to any other, that one was surely Fielding.

[1] The introductory chapters to each book in *Tom Jones* belong more to the eighteenth-century essay than to the novel. Though they are extremely interesting in themselves they can quite safely be skipped at a first reading so that the narrative shall not be interrupted. But sooner or later they should certainly be read for their own sake.

When the last stage-coach rumbles out of the last page of Fielding, at the next turn of the road it rumbles into Dickens' *Pickwick Papers.*[1]

Literary descent does not always go in direct line from one generation to another. Richardson influenced his contemporaries; Fielding and Smollett influenced the Victorian novelists. At the end of the nineteenth century it would have been true to say that LAURENCE STERNE had scarcely influenced any other writer. Strangely enough, however, after a century and a half, Sterne attracted the attention and admiration of several twentieth-century novelists. Readers accustomed to nineteenth-century novels (where a straightforward story was invariably provided) are inclined to be impatient when they pick up, let us say, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway.* There seems to be scarcely any 'story ' and the book never appears to be 'getting anywhere.' The impatient reader may put down *Mrs. Dalloway* with a shrug, and complain, 'Why can't the woman write in the old way *V* Actually, Virginia Woolf's way is very like one 'old way' - that of Laurence Sterne - though not so exasperating as his. H. G. Wells has said:

Tho master to whom we of tho English persuasion, we of the discursive school, must for ever recur is he, whom I will maintain against all comers to be the subtlest and greatest *artist* - 1 lay stress upon that word artist - that Groat Britain has ever produced *in* all that is essentially the novel, Laurence Sterne.

A good many readers might think it curious that Wells should describe Sterne as an artist when both *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* seem o uite formless. An artist, jn WeiIs' estimate, is one who communicates the sensation of *life;* and Sterne undoubtedly does this

[1] For Smollett see Ch. I 1 l , §2.

in spite of his annoying tricks, He plays absurd jokes with language, and strings together a jumble of English and foreign phrases; he amuses himself in a heavy way by inserting blanks, asterisks and dashes; black pages, marbled pages, pages with chapter-headings but no chapter; chapters in wrong places; and so on. ' On the first page of *Tristram Shandy* Sterne starts to bring the hero into the world, but by the end of volume ii he is nowhere near being born. A conversation between Uncle Toby and Dr. Slop is unfinished when the second volume closes. Nearly two years later, when volume hi of *Tristram Shandy* was published, Sterne took up that same conversation in the middle. And yet, in an extra-ordinary manner, Life is all the time trickling through the cracks of this apparent chaos. Humour and pathos run side by side, often intermingling.' What Sterne gives *is the essence* of character, not its solid body; he. gives us the flavour and aroma of perasonality Walter Shandy s wife is thus describe by the son:

It was a consuming vexation to my father, that my mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand. 'That she is not a woman of science,' my father would say, 'is her misfortune; - but she might ask a question.'

My mother never did. - In short, she went out of the world, at last, without knowing whether it *turned round* or *stood still.* - My father had officiously told her above a thousand times which way it was; - but she always forgot.

That is not a complete portrait of a woman, but it is a revelation of a mind; and revelation, for such purposes, is infinitely more valuable than description.

In Fielding, Smollett and Sterne the novel strayed some distance from that moral purpose which Richardson and others endeavoured to impose upon it. Not until

GOLDSMITH brought out *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) were unexceptionable morality and literary excellence combined in fictional form. Those who, having read Goldsmith's novel at an early age, remember no more than the rather dull little story, the unexciting virtuousness and the incredible coincidences, are not likely to return to it later. Yet it is only in later life that we are able to appreciate the full savour of *The Vicar of Wakefield,* which is wiser and wittier, more deliciously and truly humorous than most books, in the first half, page after page sparkles with guiet incisive humour, delicate irony and subtle understanding of human character .only equalled by Jane Austen. Praise of the simple virtues can easily be made tedious in a novel, but Goldsmith is never mawkish: his Lady Virtue has always a twinkle in her eye Though old Dr. Primrose loves every member of his family heroes, not .hesitate to laugh at them and their amusing absurdities: at his wife's social ambitions; at the mild vanities of Olivia and Sophia; at the precocious pedantry of the boy, Moses. And he laughs not least at himself for combining serviceable wisdom with so much admirable exhortation. The plot is no more than a rough piece of kitchen carpentry; but the prose style is as lovely and warming as pale golden sunlight.

The greater novelists in the last quarter of the eighteenth century tried to get something near a full picture of life into their books. Their successors turned to the intensive culture of smaller patches, and women writers began to develop what came to be known as the Domestic (or Tea-table) Novel. women had been writing novels for nearly a century before they began to specialize in a kind of fiction dealing particularly with 'the woman's outlook' and 'the woman's sphere.' Toward the end of

the eighteenth century 'the womanly woman' came into fashion. For a hundred years or more before that time women had been as outspoken and broad-minded as men. Now, as the nineteenth century approached, womanliness and modesty increasingly supplanted coarseness and indelicacy. The phrase 'tea-table novel' is not to be regarded as a sneer. At its best this type of novel depicted a world in miniature. Space counts for little to a skilful writer, and a group of people sitting round a tea-table in an ei hteenth-century parlour can be made representatiye of many truths common to humanity. The pioneer of the Domestic Novel was FANNY BURNEY, a close friend of Dr. Johnson. *Evelina* (1778), her best novel, describes the experiences of a girl of good birth (an orphan) who is brought up by her guardian in Derbyshire. She is introduced into London and county society, visits a family of vulgar cousins in Hoi born, and at length marries Lord Orville. Fanny Burney wrote (in the preface to *Evelina)* that she wanted to draw her characters from nature, shunning any imitation of other authors: her men and women were to be 'the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire.' She recognized that it was useless to attempt to compete with Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and others, because they had already 'culled the flowers; and though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren.' It is useful to note these statements, because Fanny Burney said, in effect, what certain writers in our own time are saying: 'Let us not spend time in trying to do what has already been done excellently. Let us break away from the imitation of models, and give our attention to different phases of life and new aspects of men and women.' But whereas twentieth-century novelists have interested themselves in the new complexities of character opened up by psychological and psyoho-analytical study, Fanny Burney needed only to turn to domestic life in

order to discover a field that had not, up to that time, been fully explored by the novelists. Being a pioneer, she has suffered the fate that attends many pioneers: she did her work, and was forgotten when others followed her and did it much better. *Evelina,* however, is still readable for its own sake and not simply because it is a landmark in the history of English fiction.

About twenty years later JANE AUSTEN brought the domestic novel to perfection in *Pride and Prejudice* (written about 1796 but not published until 1813). We treasure Jane Austen with a particularly deep affection because she is so genuinely and finely English. No country but England could have produced her. The life she writes about could be found nowhere but in England. Her people are English people, her delicacy is English delicacy, her humour English humour. She is the immortal exemplar of the one immortal English *virtue: that we see our own follies and laugh at them.* The first and greatest of Jane Austen's virtues is her thoughtful,sweetenirig, self-critical inexhaustible but always quiet laughter. Her secret is that she not only laughed, but also loved. Even when her satirical humour is sharpest, when the dry wine of her wit seems to be on the point of changing into vinegar, she never quite loses her all-embracing love of men and women: she still keeps a hospitable corner in her heart for Miss Bates, Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, and her other simpletons and fools. She once said, in response to a request that she should write a romance dealing with royal personages:

I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into

laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter.

She realized that she could not write about life on the grand scale, and spoke of her "little bit of ivory two inches wide, on which she worked with a brush so fine as to produce little effet after much labour,' What she described as 'little effect' is, actually, small perfection; and it was the main part of her power that she had the unwavering literary tact not to allow herself to be tempted to try larger effects. A village rector's daughter, Jane Austen passed her quiet life between Steventon (Hants), Reading, Bath, Southampton and Winchester; and the family circle was her world. While she lived, the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars was shaking England, but no sound of it enters her books. She appears hardly aware of nature outside the house, except for an occasional snowstorm or some such happening as cannot be ignored. Observing her consistent limitation of range, some readers deplore that Jane Austen is 'so narrow.' But she is really no more narrow than Life itself is narrow for quiet people who are born and taught, who read, talk, learn, dance a little, love, marry and bring-up families, and, in the end of things, die peacefully. Must life always be heavy with condiments, and served with spiced sauces of passion, intrigue, lying, grabbing, spending, pain, bitterness, hatred, cruelty, violence and noise ? Jane Austen does not give 'the whole of life.' No novelist does, no matter what pretence is made of doing so. But she does give a great deal of the best of life. Scott, who was so good at what he himself called 'the big Bow Wow strain,' admired Jane Austen intensely, because 'that young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feehngs and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with.' As a girl she scribbled much, and the

juvenile fragments collected in *Love and Freindship* (not published until 1922) show her making game of the sentimental romantic novels she had read. Her sense of humour, which was later to be almost perfectly disciplined by a sense of fitness and order, was farcical and almost riotous in her girlhood; but she was a mature novelist by the age of twenty-one when she wrote *Pride and Prejudice* Her novels have no 'plot' in the formal sense. They are nearly all variations on the theme ironically stated in the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice:* 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of ia wife.' The society she lived in was very much engaged in match-making, with all the display of affectation, jealousy, cupidity, snobbishness and self-conceit which that engagement fosters, and which are displayed to the life in Jane Austen's novels, Her main triumph, however, is in her management of conversation. She is the most perfect dramatist who never wrote a play. She comes, as it were, before the curtain, speaks a brief prologue (as in the first words of *Pride and Prejudice),* lays her finger upon her lips as the curtain goes up and then slips away into the wings. There are her characters on the stage, alive and talking. The author has completely detached herself from them, and there is nothing else for them to do but to go on naturally with their everyday conversation and behaviour. Jane Austen is among our greatest, gentlest and most subtle humorists because she never (or scarcely ever) brings herself into the scene: she rarely comments and never condemns. She makes it possible for us to see Mr. Collins both *as he thinks he is* and also as Elizabeth Bennet sees him. But Jane Austen never jogs us with an author's elbow in order to say, 'Isn't thls man" a fool? she makes him come to life, then she steps aside,detaches herself, and leaves him to us. And we smile at Mr. Collins *with our minds.*

§4 The Nineteenth *Century*

From Smollett's last novel to the last of Jane Austen's was a period of about fifty years, during which the novelists had been experimenting with various specialized types of fiction, including the Domestic Novel and the Novel of Terror. By 1812, or thereabout, the time was ripe for a revival of the large-scale novel with a wide-embracing view of life. Such a revival came with Scott, yet it came through a specialized and departmentalized type - namely, the Historical Novel, [1]

Keeping to the main stream, the next outstanding figure is DICKENS, whom we find occupying a world different in every way from Jane Austen's. Though the stage-coach seems to run straight out of Fielding's books into those of Dickens, important things had happened in England since its journey began. When Fielding wrote, the industrial system had not taken its grip upon England. The countryside and country life still dominated; but in the eighty years between, the town and the factory had become important. Dickens' childhood and youth, indeed, were spent in a period of unrest, when the labouring classes were already beginning to revolt against many of the excesses of the factory system, which had brought workers in like a flood from the rural districts to the towns. He was destined for a time to suffer under some of the evils of the factory system, and being an inordinately sensitive child he never forgot his unhappy boyhood. Those early experiences inspired him to become a powerful agent of social reform in his books, which moved the national conscience to rouse itself more than it might otherwise have done over certain evident evils. Concern with Dickens' 'purpose' sometimes leads to neglect of his genius as a novelist of character and incident. His early experiences accustomed

[1] See Ch. HI, §3.

him to rub shoulders with many kinds of people, even with the worst, and if all the circumstances of his life and experience up to the age of twenty-five are taken into account, we may well hesitate before we describe his characters as mainly caricatures. Grotesque figures were certainly more common in the early nineteenth century than they are now, though we must consider, also, that Dickens' aptitude for singling out queer people was in line with a then current tendency in literature and art. It is only necessary to look at pictures by Hogarth, Gillray, Rowlandson and others to see how frequently they exploited physical deformity and eccentric dress, and what a sense of contorted depravity animates their drawings. The early illustrators of Dickens' own books show the same tendency, and our conception of his characters as grotesque creatures may depend more upon the artists than upon the author. So far as we can say (for we have not the original models to compare them with) Dickens probably caricatured his originals less than was common at the time, and ushered in a more naturalistic period. Considering, too, how bitter were his memories of youth, and what an intense passionate resentment he felt, we might well be surprised that he combined so much humour with his attacks upon unpleasant people and hateful institutions and customs. No doubt his use of humorous spectacles was a means of dulling his own acute sense of pain at the misery Eesaw in the world. He had to laugh at these people - Bumble, Mrs. Gamp, Squeers, Stiggins, Micawber - to prevent his falling into vain anger and vituperation . The reformer's most potent weaoon is laughter. Evil-doers are rarely deterred by outbursts against their wickedness; but few can endure being made to look ridiculous: and ridicule much more often than angry protest was Dickens' weapon against oppression and wrong-doing.

Dickens' method of humorous portraiture was very different from that of Jane Austen. She relied chiefly upon revealing people from the inside: that is, she tells us very little about what her men and women looked like, and she does not indulge them in many tricks of speech. Though she is less uproariously funny, she is much more subtle in her methods than Dickens. Her "characters would remainthehumorous figures"they are, even if they could be transported to other circumstances, dressed in different clothes, and made to talk the idiom of another generation. Dickens, however, relied a good deal upon accessories. If we could take Mrs. Gamp, wash her, and clothe her in a plain white gown, she would lose half her funniness; for she, as well as the majority of his characters, depends largely upon funny costume and funny surroundings.

Mrs. Gamp had a large bundle with her, a pair of pattens, and a species of gig umbrella; the latter article *in* colour like a faded loaf, except whore a circular patch of a lively blue had been doxterously lot in at the top. . . . She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. . . . This lady lodged at a bird-fancier's, next door but one to the celebrated mutton-pie shop, and directly opposite to the original cat's-meat warehouse; the renown of which establishments was duly heralded on their respective fronts.

That is memorable humour, but it is not subtle. Dickens' lifelong interest in the theatre and acting made him continuously aware of the amusement that can be obtained from 'dressing-up.' We must not hastily assume from this that he was incapable of a more subtle humour,

He was, throughout his career, trying to write for the largest possible audience. If the sales of a book fell off to any serious extent during serial publication he was deeply disturbed and took what steps he could to modify the following instalments and make them more popular. He loved 'to play to a full house.' In his instincts and intentions he was both an actor and a preacher, and any man who is either or both naturally desires to have the largest possible body of listeners. So with Dickens. Jane Austen's quiet methods would have been useless to him, because they appeal only slowly. In choosing the 'broad grin' rather than 'thoughtful laughter' he showed his understanding of popular taste, and his appreciation of a universal principle of humour. Half the casual humour we get from life is drawn from unusual *externals.* Naturally we laugh more often at external appearances than at peculiarities of character, because the one is more obvious than the other. Yet Dickens depends not only upon physical clothing but also upon eccentricities of mental clothing, which, again, is a trust in *surface* rather than *texture.* He gets much effect, for example, from the use of repeated phrases on the lips of his characters, but these are little more than humorous labels. Our familiarity with Mr. Grimwig *(Oliver Twist)* depends largely upon his repeated threat to eat his head. We should know Micawber *(David Copperfield)* less well than we do if he had not always been 'waiting for something to turn up.' And the verbal peculiarities in which Sam Weller *(Pickwick Papers)* indulges go far to build up his character in our minds. This use of humorous labels scarcely ever fails to be effective and likeable. It has been used with amusing results by later writers, such as H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw who in *Heartbreak House,* for example, makes Captain Shotover frequently express his wish to attain to 'the seventh degree of concentration.' Modern civilization is all

the time tending to draw us nearer to a common uniformity of appearance, speech, manner and mind. We are becoming standardized and mechanized, and if ever that tendency reaches completion we shall be human automata and humour will perish from the earth.

No other novelist gives us so much strong and vigorous life in his books as Dickens gives, and this keeps him in the forefront of English novelists. But it is impossible to overlook his serious shortcomings. To some extent he suffered, as all writers do, from the literary conventions imposed by the fashions of his own time. His books were published, as the custom then was, in monthly parts; and since publication had usually begun long before the particular novel was completed, there is often little constructive plan underlying the work. The story was improvised from month to month, and it had to fill a certain number of serial parts even though it might have ended more naturally before the allotted length was reached. Partly because of this, but partly also because he had so much to write about, his books are frequently loose, disjointed and untidy. He was overflowing with matter which clamoured to be written down and refused to be pressed into any carefully shaped mould. It was at one time a habit among critics to depreciate Dickens' prose style - even to say, absurdly, that he had no style. At its best his style is magnificent. He had the greats "writer's special genius of intense curiosity, close observation and a visualizing power that enabled him to *see,* mentally, whatever he was describing. The Excellence of his narrative style is evinced in a hundred passages, but special note may be taken of the journey of the "Muggteton coach in *Picltwick Papers* (chapter ix) and David's Journey along the Dover Froad in *David Copper-*

(chapter xiii) . His style was not unfformly excellent, and his special weakness lay in an inclination

to fall into metrical writing which is neither good prose nor good verse.

His young heroines are rarely successful. He insists tediously upon their imaginary angelic qualities, and fails to make them interestingly human. His young heroes are often as dully priggish as Shakespeare's. He had, also, an altogether lamentable but typically Victorian liking- for pathetic scenes, though he handled them mawkishly and without the delicacy and reticence that alone prevent pathos from slipping into bathos. AS a critic of society his attention was distributed over a number of interests: [1] education, industrialism, the punishment of debtors the slowness of legal procedure, the circumlocution of legislative ritual, and inhumanity in the operation of the poor-law. He" attacked these things with scornful ridicule, yet in spite of his passion for reform Dickens was not a social rebel. He regarded discontent as an evil thing and deprecated violence as a means of changing the order of society. His hope was in *reform from within,* in the growth of universal benevolence and universal wisdom, which he hoped might lead men to cease from cruelty, evil and folly. Dickens' power of swaying the multitude was so great that if he had been thus inclined, he might have led an army of revolt. Instead, he chose to do a more difficult thing - to pacify the afflicted multitude even while he endeavoured patiently to remove their afflictions. He accepted the idea that there should be social ranks and classes, believing not in equality, but in a system of fairy godfathers and godmothers. Figuratively speaking, his novels are populated by heartless and sullen ogres, who frequently become miraculously transformed to generous and good-hearted fairies, and thereafter go about distributing turkeys and plum-puddings and gold. We feel that Dickens would have been completely happy if he could have lived in a world of rich and poor, where it was

always Christmas Day and the rich were always benevolently distributing largesse among their less fortunate brethren. A modern poet, Ralph Hodgson, speaking of ill-used animals, talks of animal-lovers kneeling down with 'angry prayers' for

> Wretched blind pit-ponies,
> And little hunted hares.

Many will feel that in some circumstances it is necessary that our prayers should be *angry* and that we should be filled with a violent indignation which sweeps away calm principles. Not so did Dickens feel. He was determined that he must not make his readers angry. In a letter to Forster, his biographer, he asks, 'Do you think it may be done without making people angry?' His fear of angering people was partly out of regard for his own popularity: he had to make a living by his books, and money was a continuous source of anxiety to him. but he also had a sound instinct that anger is an unsatia' factory weapon of reform and that more things axe wrought by laughter than this world dreams of. As a social reformer, therefore, Dickens forswore anger, bitterness and provocative discontent, and chose to arouse laughter and sympathy and understanding. His reformatory zeal naturally made it necessary for him to introduce numbers of 'low life' characters into his books, though he had a personal horror of 'lowness.' Fielding and Smollett treated their 'low life' characters realistically, making them talk and act in a 'low' manner. But Dickens deliberately refrained from realism of such a kind. Nevertheless, he did get the suggestion and the effects of vulgarity, lowness and brutality without bespattering his pages with the actual thing. He realized that the illusion of reality can be secured more effectively by suggestion than by definite statement. We are in no danger of mistaking Fagin and Sikes for gentlemen,

although Dickens makes little attempt to give a realistic presentation of the full debasement of their characters or the complete violence of their conversation. In his use of humour Dickens did not aim merely to make us smile gently. When he has succeeded in making us laugh wholeheartedly - at Mrs. Gamp, Mr. Bumble, Mrs. Corney, Squeers, and others - he suddenly opens the door, as it were, and lets in a cold wind that chills the laughter on our lips. When, for example, we have been laughing at Mrs. Squeers as she doles out brimstone and treacle and porridge to the pupils of Dotheboys Hall, Dickens lets in a draught of chilling air by telling us that Nicholas

could not but observe how silent and sad the boys all seemed to bo. There was none of the noise and clamour of a school-room; none of its boisterous play, or hearty mirth. The children sat crouching and shivering together, and seemed to lack the spirit to move about.

From *Pickwick Papers* onward Dickens' humour was commonly used in such a way, as an instrument of social criticism. He made his readers laugh themselves into a nice warm comfortable state, and then made them shiver most uncomfortably by bringing in the.cold blast of reality

THACKERAY presents more literary problems than Dickens, because his own character was more complex and there is greater variety in his work. Which was the *essential* Thackeray: he who wrote *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis;* the historical novelist who gave us *Esmond;* the student of eighteenth-century literature and history *(The English Humorists* and *The Four Georges);* or Thackeray the satirist and caricaturist ? There is good reason for holding that it was under the last heading that he did his most significant work; not his greatest, but at

any rate that part which none but he could have written, and which accords most closely with his own temperament and individual outlook. And yet - how could Thackeray have been the acidulated satirist we sometimes think him, when he was capable of such delicacy of emotion and sensibility as is in *Esmond;* of the large-hearted sympathy needed to make Becky Sharp an immortal; capable of exquisite pathos, and yet capable also of the dramatic force which makes the battle-scenes in *Vanity Fair* glow with fire that sears our hearts ? Both Dickens and Thackeray were inheritors of the eighteenth-century tradition in literature: Dickens through the novelists; Thackeray through the essayists, journalists and satirists. Both were influenced by the caricaturists; both were uncomfortably aware of the badly-ad justed social system under which they lived. But they came by different ways to these influences and impulses. Dickens was attracted by the robustious vigour of Smollett and Fielding, and by their rollicking full-blooded characters. Thackeray, on the contrary, noticed first the meannesses of humanity and the .under-currents of life. In regard to caricature, Dickens was stimulated by eccentricity and a sense of sharp difference between individual persons; Thackeray was depressed by the recognition of deformity. Facing his own age, Thackeray seems to have been often embittered; whereas Dickens, though a harder hitter than Thackeray and more indignant, could express pain and bitterness without suggesting permanent disgust. All this, of course, is no more than to say that Thackeray, though more diversely gifted than Dickens, had a less capacious and penetrating vision. We do not grow permanently embittered about mankind, however much we may castigate it, if only we take a sufficiently wide and embracing view of the manifold weaknesses and absurdities of men and women.

Thackeray's affinities were with the eighteenth century, not with the nineteenth in which he lived. This backward-looking tendency may have been due in some degree to his having been born in India and inheriting Anglo-Indian conservatism through his forbears, who held important offices under the East India Company. Certainly the eighteenth century coloured all his work and confirmed his own peculiar outlook. The eighteenth century was a sceptical and disillusioned age: Thackeray was a sceptical and disillusioned man. Reading Dickens we feel that humanity is capable of generosity and every virtue, but Thackeray makes us feel that humanity is capable of every meanness and vice. It is not that Thackeray, like Swift, thought the worst of humanity; but rather that he did not permit himself to expect too much of it. Almost in spite of himself, when he came to write *Vanity Fair*, it was not the passively virtuous Amelia who made herself the heroine but the actively vicious yet entirely charming Becky. To a good Victorian, Amelia would have been the centre of attraction; but the eighteenth century would have been bored by her and would have delighted in Becky as an adorable baggage.

The differing experiences of Dickens and Thackeray no doubt accounted for much. Though the former had a hard and unhappy childhood, he stumbled almost without warning into immediate and overwhelming success when he was twenty-five. Thackeray had to struggle for about fifteen years before he was sure of public esteem, and he was thirty-six when *Vanity Fair* at length brought him fame. As a young man he had considerable experience of the seamy side of life - of gaming and bankruptcy and general misfortune. These, together with his peculiar cast of mind disposed him to see the world as a place with dark and cobwebby corners where human beings might be seen scuttling about in a

black-beetle-like fashion that seemed to him horrible and at the same time amusing in a shuddering way. He wrote, in *The Book of Snobs:*

Yonder comes Captain Bull; spick and span, tight and trim; who travels for four or six months every year of his life; who does not commit himself by luxury of raiment or insolence of demeanour, but I think is as great a Snob as any man on board. Bull passes the season in London, sponging for dinners, and sleeping in a garret near his Club. . . . If he can't catch a lord he will hook on to a baronet, or else the old wretch will catch hold of some beardless young stripling of fashion, and show him 'life' in various and amiable and inaccessible quarters. Faugh ! the old brute ! If he has every one of the vices of the most boisterous youth, at least he is comforted by having no conscience. He is utterly stupid, but of a jovial turn. He believes himself to be quite a rospectablo member of society: but perhaps the only good action he ever did *in* his life is the involuntary one of giving an example to be avoided, and showing what an odious thing *in* the social picture is that figure of the debauched old man who passes through life rather a decorous Silenus, and dies some day in his garret, alone, unrepenting, and unnoted, save by his astonished heirs, who find that the dissolute old miser has left money behind him. See ! he is up to old Carabas already ! I told you he would.

That passage leaves an unpleasant sensation behind, as Dickens' descriptions of base people never do, and suggests that Thackeray did not share Dickens' large love of men and women; that his outlook was frequently ill-tempered and bilious, and his sympathy limited. He soured himself by seeing snobs[1] everywhere; they are too populous in his novels, and disabled him from seeing life in right proportion.

His original intention in beginning *Vanity Fair* was

[1] 'He who meanly admires mean things is a snob' (Thackeray's definition).

to display 'a set of people living without God in the world,' but he grew more interested in the characters than in the moral. He said that he wrote by a sort of instinct, and under its influence the figures in his books moved beyond his control.

The characters, once created, lead me and I follow where they direct. I have no idea where it all comes from. I have never seen the persons I describe, nor heard the conversations I put down. I am often astonished myself to read it after I have got it on paper.

Though in the introduction to *Vanity Fair,* he speaks of his preparedness to love the characters, 'if they are good and kindly,' in none of his books does he love them as Dickens' people were loved by their author. Thackeray is much more the showman, patronizing what he calls 'the famous little Becky puppet,' 'the Amelia doll,' 'the Dobbin figure.' The truth about *Vanity Fair* clearly is that Becky Sharp soon got tired of being treated as a puppet. She came alive, lifted up the story on her shoulders and marched off with both it and Thackeray - who, willy nilly, had to go her way. It is all admirably written: simple and straightforward, yet full of vigour and power, energy and variety. Its characters, major and minor, are most skilfully drawn, but none shares the brilliance and marvellous vitality of Becky, *Vanity Fair* combines the domestic novel, the novel. of character and sletntiment, and the period novel. the scenes in Brussels efore the battle of Waterloo are as fine as anything in any historical novel, and lead up to what is possibly the greatest single passage in Thackeray's books:

No more firing was heard at Brussels - the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

pendennis is autobiographical in essence though not in detail. Many of Arthur Pendennis' experiences had been Thackeray's also; but they are treated imaginatively by the author, who transforms them, even while keeping close to central truth. Though this novel has its enthusiastic admirers, in comparison with *Vanity Fair* it justifies Thackeray's own comment: 'It is a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader, which must often be dull, often flag,'

Thackeray was among the first to appreciate and encourage Charlotte Bronte, whose writing brought a new note of passion into the English novel. From the seventeenth century to the present day women novelists have been in the forefront of English fiction, and their genius is displayed more certainly in this than in any other branch of art. Both CHARLOTTE and EMILY BRONTE rank higher nowadays than previously, because readers are no longer perturbed by what was at one time regarded as the Brontes' unwomanliness, and because Chiario has come to be considered as a more or Jess unconscious pioneer in the women'a freedom movement. she did not, of course, initiate any campaign to that end, nor put forth any propaganda; but in allowing natural emotion to escape from repression she was perhaps the first woman writer to break the tradition that though women might feel intensely they should not express emotion in public, and still less should they reveal passion. The ancestry, early experiences and environment of the Brontes conspired together to defeat this repressive tradition. Celtic fire was in their blood, from an Irish father and a Cornish mother; as children, the sisters (left motherless almost as babies) found on the wild Yorkshire moors their opportumty to escape from the unnatural quiet imposed upon them at home

by their father, a self-centred recluse; and the violently-passionate self-destructive nature of their only; brother Branwell, provided them with a model for terrifying characters (Heathcliff in Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and perhaps for Rochester in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre)* which would otherwise seem to be beyond the range of such women as these. It is not easy to escape the sensation that a tragic doom overhung this family from the time their father went to the typhoid-ridden moorland parsonage at Haworth in 1820 to the day of Charlotte's death in 1855 (after less than twelve months' happiness in marriage), the last survivor of five sisters and a brother. The taint of consumption was upon them all, yet they could display indomitable Viking courage. Branwell, though a wastrel, insisted upon standing upright upon his feet to die, and Emily met death with equal fortitude. Their motto might be found in Charlotte's words: 'Life is a battle. God grant that we may all be able to fight it well.' Even Anne, the meekest and weakest of them all, with her last breath 'thanked God that death was come and come so gently.' Anne Bronte's two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* would probably not be remembered at all apart from her sisters' books: she had scarcely any of their genius or passion. There could be little purpose in attempting to assess the comparative stature of Emily and Charlotte. Emily's passionate power like a consuming tempestuous fire: Charlotte's like a swirling tujhujent nver. "*Wuthering Heights* is undoubtedly a masterpiece of the first order. Its complex structure, stretching over three generations, is accurately planned down to the least detail[1]-a fact which earlier critics neglected to observe when describing the book as 'crude.' Its narrative method, foreign to the general

[1] See *The Structure of Wuthering Heights,* by C. P. S. (Hogarth Press, London, 1926).

Victorian style, is less disconcerting to later generations grown familiar with a somewhat similar method consistently practised by Joseph Conrad. There is no greater novel than *Wuthering Heights* in English literature, for there is no other like it. To, find anything cox= responding with its terrible force it is necessary to turn to Greekjtnd Shakespearean tragedy. Emily's power was jbitanic; Charlotte's deep-flowing and human. The turning-point in Charlotte's life came in 1842, when she and Emily went to a school in Brussels to improve their knowledge of languages. Brussels transformed her, both intellectually and emotionally, mainly because of the influence of Constantin Heger, who controlled the school to which she went and in which at a later visit she taught. The Brussels experiences stirred her nature to its depths and, by developing her powers of expression, enabled her to secure through her novels an outlet for that emotional stress which might otherwise have shattered her physique, as happened to Branwell and Emily. *Jane Eyre* (1847) has qualities (particularly in the earlier chapters which describe in a faint guise of fiction the Bronte children's schooldays) which will probably make it always her most popular novel; though *Villette* (1853) is the best constructed and best written, and is even more directly autobiographical. In the character of Lucy Snowe, Charlotte records some of her own Brussels experiences, and Paul Emanuel is drawn from Heger. *Shirley* (1849), less uniformly interesting, is notable for the gHmpses it gives of labour disturbances in northern England at the time when the industrial revolution was ushering in our modern Machine Age. It is CharlptJe Bronte's gassionate spirit thatkeeps her no vela, alice, not their style, whieh is often hectic and .strained.

No Victorian reputation has fluctuated so much as

GBOBGB ELIOT'S. She was extravagantly overpraised by her contemporaries - being likened to Moses, Sophocles and Shakespeare, among others - and when a reaction came the depreciation was equally extravagant. But she was great enough to survive both extravagances. For high seriousness, moral fervour and intellectual grasp; for strength in characterization, brilliant humour and sense of the English countryside: for all these there are few novelists to equal her. And yet, fully recognizing her remarkable gifts, we may still feel uneasy about her. Was she not inclined to be over-serious, ponderous and heavy; weighed down by moral and spiritual problems? Authors must master their problems, not be bowed down and mastered by them. The deadly seriousness of George Eliot, and of the Victorian age generally, discredited them in the eyes of many early twentieth-century people, who held that even the most serious issues in life should be faced with a sense of proportion and with a conviction that, in relation to the totality of things, our problems are as minor as we ourselves are puny. George Eliot, however, was truly and magnificently Victorian in accepting Man as central in the universe; and (although her views were in certain respects unorthodox) in regarding *nobility of conduct* as central among human ideals and duties. Her novels fall into two groups, with *Romola* as an interlude between them. The first group *(Scenes from Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss,* and *Silas Marner),* written between the ages of thirty-nine and forty-two, consists of books based upon her own knowledge, observation and experience - the foundation of all good novel-writing. The men and women are such as she had known in her native Warwickshire and these novels are written throughout with intense understanding and human sympathy, out of which proceeds the rich humour that always marks the work of writers who maintain a close

contact with living creatures. Laughter is life's preservative. In the later group *(Felix Holt, Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda),* written between the ages of forty-seven and fifty-seven, George Eliot intellect wamped her humanity. She had for some years been separated from rustic life, and, owing to George Henry Lewes' excessive care, was secluded from what he feared might be distracting influences but were actually the breath of life. A recluse may possibly be a good scholar in the pedantic sense, but a recluse cannot be a good novelist. And so, though in the way of love and kindness, Lewes did infinite harm to George Eliot the novelist by being excessively devoted to George Eliot the woman. Her last three novels are based upon mental speculation: upon what she *thought* about .sertain aspects of human life, rather than upon what *she knew.* They are a mental reconstruction, not a product of observation, experience or imaginative vision. There is, consequently, so extraordinary a lessening of humour, that, if judged by these books alone, she might be thought incapable of comedy. When reading those later novels we have, therefore, a general impression of travelling in an elevated wilderness, very stimulating and good for the soul, but certainly a wilderness and not the comfortable, warm, delightful, pathetic world of men and women. In *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858) George Eliot began with stories and characters so photographic in their reproduction of actuality that she offended some among her acquaintances who recognized themselves in pseudo-fictional dress. George Eliot had not then solved the writer's problem of treating actuality in such a way that it becomes a revealing picture, true in essentials, though not photographic in detail. In the books which followed, she succeeded in portraying life without copying it slavishly. *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* are unlikely to lose their high place among the greatest

English novels. Adam Bede himself is a fine solidly-constructed English countryman, and Mrs. Poyser an immortal comic figure, with more ordinary robust "humanity than is common with SUCH characters. Her sharp tongue, the wit and verbal resource which lead her to deliciously preposterous flights of fancy, are combined with shrewdness, vivacity and strong affections such as command admiration and respect. George Eliot was less successful as an architect of plots than as a constructor of characters. The reprieve motive at the close of *Adam Bede* is clumsily managed, and the progress of the book is held up as if waiting for Arthur Donnithorne to take his cue and rush on to the stage for a melodramatic final curtain. *'The Mill on the Floss* is probably still unmatched for its rendering of children's emotions. Maggie's childhood is extremely well realized: there are the natural swift alternations of mood, and the child's (Everychild's) sensation that its small woes are world-shaking catastrophes. The bottom *does* fall out of the child's world in a five-minutes' unhappiness, because a normal child can cram eternity into five minutes. Maggie's aunts and uncles are below only Mrs. Poyser as humorous creations.

In her earlier books George Eliot desired to reveal what might be called 'the glory of the commonplace.' She wrote: 'Learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.' And again: 'If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. . . . The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures,' Those quotations express her

early motives. Later she took a different view, and declared that we should learn to do without any kind of spiritual, mental or moral opiate and to live consciously through all our pain. It is possible that she banished humour from her later books because she feared that humour was an opiate for suffering. She also feared that novels in themselves were an opiate, the drugging effect of which might be sensibly lessened if they could be turned into philosophical and moral documents, instead of being designed for entertainment and delight. But when artists aspire to be teachers also, they can only be effective in either character if they teach *through* their art, and avoid making the teaching so obtrusive that art disappears. Much profound teaching can be discovered in Shakespeare's plays, but he never parades it. There are definite moral principles in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, but the morality is presented through the medium of literary art, which uses for its purposes sympathy and humour and delight in description. The teacher who teaches most and teaches best does so by giving delight, not by making knowledge and wisdom painful and lifeless.

§5 *Post-Victorian*

With George Eliot's death in 1880 the work of the great Victorian novelists may be said to end. Though GEORGE MEREDITH and Thomas Hardy were still living and at the height of their powers, in spirit and general tendency both belong to the post-Victorian period. All their novels were written within the reign of Victoria, but the history of the Victorian age is, to a considerable extent, a record of attempts to cast-off the habit of submission to a set of authoritative rules governing human conduct. Against the Victorian principle of conformity there ran, here and there throughout the reign, the

protesting voice of the free human spirit - in Browning, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as in the later novelists. But the prevalent atmosphere was, in general, too overwhelming for these heralds of revolt, and they had to wait for a later acceptance.

Both George Meredith and Thomas Hardy were poet-novelists. Not only did they each write poetry as well as novels, but their novels were such as only poets could write. With that, however, any resemblance between Meredith and Hardy ends, for whereas Hardy's genius was epic in quality, Meredith's was lyrical. His novels are the most lyrical in the language - almost, indeed, the only lyrical novels written in English - and it is largely from this fact that his much-discussed obscurity arises. Meredith's prose is often (though by no means always) difficult to follow; but the difficulty is lessened if the reader approaches the novels in the frame of mind that is usually brought to the reading of poetry. The 'obscurity' of Meredith is wrongly so-called, since it is rarely more than the difficulty of *compressed statement* - the desire to pack as much thought as possibly could be packed into the fewest words (which is, precisely, the constant aim of good poets). Readers have grown accustomed to such compression in verse, and full enjoyment of Meredith depends upon familiarity with a similar kind of intellectual shorthand in his prose. His constant desire, as he said, was 'to catch the flying thought,' and his alleged obscurity lies not in dark thinking but in swift thinking and equally swift expression. Consequently, he relied much upon the effect of aphorisms in his novels: darting sentences that carry a wealth of meaning and association in a dozen or so words. Meredith at his best is never tedious, yet he is often tiring because he makes continuous demands upon the reader's attention.

Only a few outstanding characteristics of this complex

novelist can be spoken of here. Thirst, in illustration of his lyricism, there is *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), unique among English novels for its sustained suggestion of the lyrical ecstasy of young love - especially in chapters xv *(Ferdinand and Miranda)* and xix *(A Diversion Played on a Penny Whistle),* where external nature is wonderfully described in phrases of fluttering and almost swooning ecstasy in harmony with the mood of the young lovers. Hardly any other English novelist has succeeded in conveying (few have attempted to convey) the precise sensations of pure, urgent youthful love, and for this reason *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* stands alone as, almost,"a prose *Romeo and Juliet.* Meredith's greatest service as a reformer was rendered through his attitude toward women. Though it cannot be said that he fathered any scheme for their social emancipation, he did perhaps more than can be assessed to bring about that intellectual emancipation through which social emancipation afterwards came. Meredith began his writings at a time when custom still decreed that woman should function as an attractive social and domestic parasite, living upon and drawing from man; sheltered and pampered and treated with chivalrous deference, sometimes a tyrant, but always a dependent. Meredith's typical heroines (such as Clara Middletonin *The Egoist* and Diana Warwick) are free-spirited women - attractive *as* women, but staunch and stalwart and courageous and robust enough to endure the buffeting of life's rough-winds. It is impossible to read Meredith with understanding and sympathetic appreciation and yet approve the Ruskinian ideal of woman as a cloistered idolized household servitor? Meredith anticipated Ibsen in desiring tojrelease women from their dolls' houses An implied criticism of the nineteenth-century male lay in Meredith's pioneering efforts to establish the intellectual freedom of women. The man who assumes that the

women of his family and acquaintance are subordinate to himself is a humourless egoist - one who is inclined to believe that the world is pivoted upon himself, and to regard himself as the shining centre of the universe. Such a man is Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist* (1879), the greatest of Meredith's novels because it presents, with mature wit and poetic concentration, one of life's major problems. In one respect or another, and more or less, the great majority of human creatures are self-centred, some tragically some onlv comically. *The Egoist,* a serious comedy, illustrates in action the theories set out by Meredith in the famous *Essay on Comedy,* and this novel is his highest intellectual achievement in prose, as *Richard Feverel* is his finest emotional work. The most easily readable and high-spirited of Meredith's novels is *The Adventures of Harry Richmond,* in which his laughter is also more robust than elsewhere.

Probably no other among the heralds of revolt did so much as THOMAS HARDY to shake the settled somnolence of prosperous contentment which fell upon the later Victorians. Though Hardy eventually ceased to write novels, after *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* appeared Victorianism never recovered its former authority. Thenceforward there swept in with ever-increasing rapidity the anti-Victorian principle that *the only rule is that there are no rules.* Yet Hardy's attitude cannot be defined in any such phrase. By implication, in many places in his works, he attacked the Victorian system of (as he regarded it) inhumane morality founded upon a pitiless religious code. He was angry with a system that led to the ostracism or worse of unorthodox men and women - whether consciously unorthodox like Jude, or unconsciously like Tess. But if Hardy was not a nineteenth-century Christian, he was

certainly not a twentieth-century agnostic. An agnostic is usually a person without spiritual foundations; whereas it could be said of Hardy that, on the contrary, he was all foundations. He was neither a nineteenth-century Christian nor a twentieth-century agnostic, but a first-century pagan - the Ancient Briton of literature. Hardy happened to be born in A.D. 1840 in a region which retained much of the physical character it had in A.D. 40 - and Hardy felt altogether at home in it. He felt less at home, however, with the modern people who shared this region with him; he felt that they were alien to the place. If we could visualize an earnest and intelligent Ancient Briton trying to understand nineteenth-century elementary or secondary school people, we should arrive at something near a mental picture of Hardy's uneasiness amid the modern generation. He was at homeinStonehenge; the people buried in the mounds and barrows were his people - all dead, centuries since. And here was he, alone; an isolated figure against the skyline, gazing forlornly into a remote past. He looked round and said (in effect): 'Dorset ?- Devon ?- Wiltshire ? - Hampshire ? These are strange words used by a strange people. This country was called Wessex; let it again be called Wessex. Places should have their proper names.' And did he not say in one of his poems:

> I have lived with Shades so long
> And talked to them so oft

that they would lead him

> And show from there
> The dwindled dust
> And rot and rust
> Of things that were.

An imaginative artist might paint Hardy as a black pensive figure silhouetted against a stormy night sky

beside Stonehenge, with the quiet ghosts of an ancient people round about him, and with suggestions of 'the dwindled dust and rot and rust of things that were.' No man is boisterously happy if he is conscious of exile. Hardy was an exile not in Space but in Time - and of the two kinds of exile that is the worse. His novels are dissimilar from those of other English novelists in several respects: (I) *In their representation of the tragedy of life.* Nowhere else in the novel is the tragic so fully studied. In Charlotte Bronte the romantic (even the melodramatic) element dilutes the tragic; in George Eliot's work as a whole, psychology and philosophy counterbalance tragedy. For Hardy's tragic characters the only compensating principle is endurance. When endurance is absent, as it is with Fanny Robin *{Far from the Madding Crowd)* and Sue Bridehead *(Jude the Obscure),* catastrophe is complete and the sense of disaster overwhelming. Catastrophe and disaster do not necessarily connote tragedy; they may be its negation, since tragedy should end in exaltation, not in despair. Except in the two instances named, Hardy's tragic characters inspire us by their capacity for staunch endurance or by some quality - Giles Winterborne's devotion, for example *(The Woodlanders)* - which raises them above defeat by circumstance. (II) *In the total sense of completion given by Hardy's novels.* He wrote novels for twenty-five years and then devoted thirty-two years to poetry. As a novelist, therefore, his work *was finished;* we can look all round it, not as round an uncompleted building, but as round a structure to which the artificer has put the final touches. (Ill) *In their monumental stature.* Hardy's novels convey the sense of being as large as life itself; of being a part of the actual procession of fife, and not merely framed pictures painted on a two-dimensional surface. Despite their extensive tragic content, they do not (except perhaps the last of all, *Jude)* neglect humour,

nor fail to give an impression of full and varied humanity, and of beauty. (IV) *In the importance of their background.* Hardy grouped his principal prose-books as 'novels of character and environment.' To us, many of his men and women are unforgettable; but will posterity be equally moved by them ? No such question needs to be asked concerning the environment. The hills and valleys, heaths and woodlands, in Hardy's novels are surely for all time. Other novelists have painted small landscape pictures; the Yorkshire moors are integral to the Brontes, and the broad lands of Warwickshire to George Eliot; but no other writer has given so dramatic a value to background and environment as Hardy does. His characters fall into two main groups: those who are in harmony with their environment - the true children of Mother Wessex; and those who are in conflict with the environment, and are therefore disturbers. The major importance of background in Hardy's work was not evidently marked until his fourth novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd,* though it is foreshadowed to a slight extent in the pastoral beauty of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872); and even in the first novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), there are signs of Hardy's love of nature and his intense interest in all its manifestations. It is in *The Return of the Native* (1878) that environment becomes fully as significant as human character. Egdon Heath is endowed by the novelist with a life of its own; it is, almost, a mighty animate Being, dwarfing all others, shaping and directing their lives. Clym Yeobright is a native of the Heath; he cannot exist happily away from it; yet he is sent into exile by the demands of modern civilization. Eustacia Vye, on the contrary, bound to the Heath by circumstance, hates it: 'Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym.' Eustacia, the modernized woman, prayed: '0, deliver my

heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness: send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die.' Put against the background of the Heath, the people seem puny and insignificant - or if significant, then significant of trouble. The second chapter-heading reads: *Humanity appears upon the scene, hand in hand with trouble.* If (inconceivably) Hardy's novels should in the future cease to be valued for any other reason, they will retain an uncommonly high value as a panorama of disappearing local folk-customs, and of rustic humour in which Hardy shares the highest distinction with Shakespeare.

After Hardy the main stream of the English novel flows forward beyond our sight into futurity. Those whom we account the great writers in our own generation may seem relatively unimportant in the judgment of readers and critics half a century hence. At the moment, however, we feel with some confidence that *The Forsyte Chronicles* by JOHN GALSWORTHY will 'live' for a considerable time, inasmuch as this extensive novel (or connected sequence of novels) has a social and historical value. Galsworthy has provided a detailed analysis of at least one important phase of Victorian mentality, and has shown the devastating effects of that narrow, yet intense, possessive instinct which was so characteristic of the nineteenth century. Apart from this factor *The Forsyte Saga* is effective and memorable for the figure of Soames Forsyte, whose character slowly changes and mellows before our eyes as the long years pass.

Finally, however, the probable future standing of Galsworthy's work leaves us with many doubts. Few such doubts should disturb us in relation to JOSEPH CONRAD. Again it is too early to attempt any final judgment or valuation of this modern writer, though the manifold merits of his novels inspire confidence that they

will have enduring life. It is doubtful whether any other writer of fiction in our literature has dealt so penetratingly with human character so far as spiritual (not religious) significances are concerned. While other writers seem more or less confined by the surface qualities of character or by those qualities which lie only little below the surface, Conrad penetrated into the uttermost recesses - not necessarily into dark and grubby places, but into those where the springs of character are to be found. He was not, however, only, or even mainly, a psychological or analytical novelist. If he were that chiefly, he would be no better than half a dozen other modern novelists. His greatness lay in an altogether personal ability to attach to his presentation of the interior life a remarkable glamour and sense of adventure. He was, in some respects, an adventure novelist. His characters - sailors and others - live in an excitingly vigorous physical world, and it would be possible to read much of Conrad's work for pure enjoyment of the things that *happen,* and also of his marvellous power of creating the atmosphere of places. Very few other novelists have possessed his ability to suggest atmosphere. And in addition to their action, atmosphere, insight into mind and character, and sense of deep spiritual significance, Conrad's novels are also the work of as conscientious a literary artist as we have had among novelists writing in English. He sought not only to create, but also to give to his creations much of the pure aesthetic value which we find more immediately apparent in painting or in music. He thought, indeed, that a novelist should give to his prose some such quality as music possesses for the immediate transmission of emotion and sensation. Yet in the furtherance of this endeavour he did not (as James Joyce, for example, has done) sacrifice the coherence of words in order to attach to prose the sound-value of music. In such pieces of writing as *Anna Livia*

Plurabelle James Joyce concentrates almost wholly upon words as a system of musical notation in which meaning and coherence are made subsidiary to sound. Conrad, on the other hand, is always perfectly coherent, and the aesthetic effects at which he aims arise from the overtones of meaning, and are not destructive of meaning. It should be emphasized, however, that such elements as these can be altogether neglected when reading Conrad, and he can be taken, if readers so choose, as an adventure novelist pure and simple - at any rate in such books as *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' Typhoon, Nostromo, Victory* and others. Though he was of Polish birth and did not learn our language until he was almost adult, his use of English is sensitive and often lovely, and he is generally regarded as one of the foremost masters of modern English prose. His long experiences as a sailor brought him into contact with men and women of several races, between all of which he seems to have perceived fundamental likenesses as well as national and racial differences. Conrad also did for English literature what was (for an inland foreigner) the strange service of supplying this nation of ocean wanderers with what are perhaps the finest sea-pictures in English prose.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NOVEL • II: TRIBUTARIES

§1 *The Realistic Novel*

So far, attention has been given to novelists whose chief aim, consciously or otherwise, was to deal with men and women *as* men and women, and not either as convenient mouthpieces for the propagation of special theories, or as human symbols of an idea or an ideal. In some measure, of course, every serious novelist expresses theories, ideas and ideals; just as all theorists and idealists who write novels must necessarily deal with men and women. It is convenient, however, when studying the novel in general, to distinguish between the main stream of progress and development (where human character is the dominant interest) and the tributaries in which some special current tends to divert interest away from character to problems of method or subject-matter.

We have seen in the previous chapter that, on the whole, the main stream flowing from the sixteenth century steadily down to the twentieth was all the time bringing the novel increasingly close to a true and full view of human experience and of the nature of men and women. That this should have been so, is in part a consequence of the acquisition of greater literary skill by the novelists; and in part a consequence of man's ever-increasing knowledge and understanding of himself. Though man still remains a mystery to man, the mystery seems to lose, from time to time, some trifle of its dark

intensity. In the twentieth century, considerable light has been shed upon the mystery by the researches of psychologists, and of those super-psychologists - the psycho-analysts. Under the influence of these studies, particularly as directed by Sigmund Freud, twentieth-century novelists have found a hitherto unexplored field of human personality open to them. Psycho-analysis provides (for those who accept its theories) an altogether changed view of human action. Belief in personal freedom of will to determine good or evil behaviour, which was the root principle underlying Victorian (and most pre-Victorian) Ideas of conduct, has been shaken by the psycho-analysts' conviction that 'guilt' may be attributable to remediable errors of development, and that 'guilt' (or the sense of guilt) may be abolished from the individual make-up when the subconscious mind has been opened up and thereby rid of unhealthy repressions. 'Guilt' stands in intimate relation to conduct, and the psycho-analysts, by transferring 'guilt' from the region of religion and the supernatural to that of science and treatment,,'have given a changed balance to ideas of conduct. Under the psycho-analytical dispensation, aspects of character which were hitherto covered up and kept away from notice because they were 'evil,' are now frankly displayed, .because the modernists regard ALL aspects of character as legitimate for literacy treatment. They are hardly to be rebuked on literary grounds for taking this attitude - since literature, as an art, cannot fetter its legitimate freedom by putting any subject whatever automatically outside its purview. Art must not prejudge. Every subject in the world and every aspect of the mind and soul of man is legitimate for treatment in literature. An 'ugly' subject may be made to deliver up beauty or profundity or some other 'value' (as in Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, and in much of Dickens). Ugly subjects are only illegitimate for

literary purposes when they are treated in a manner yielding nothing but ugliness; or when they are given a disproportionately large place, to the exclusion or over-balancing of the non-ugly elements in life. Only a minority agree upon this point, owing to the difficulty found by English readers in separating moral judgment from aesthetic appreciation. The point is certainly extremely important. Unless writers and artists are allowed complete freedom in their choice of subject, they will be perpetually under the control of conflicting and changing ideas of what is and is not 'fit' for art. Rather unfortunately, Realism as a theory - has become entangled with these questions of morality and conduct. A Realist in literature is a writer who claims the right to treat any aspect whatsoever of the life about him. Realists therefore quite naturally opened a good many doors that had hitherto been kept closed; objectors attacked them for opening those doors and for breaking taboos; and Realism consequently came to be associated particularl with the treatment of ugly and 'forbidden' subjects, In the proper sense, of course, a Realist should be one who is prepared to draw equally from all sides and to admit sunshine as .wellas darkness in the proportion to which these and all intermediate elements enter into life. Jane Austen came nearer than any other English novelist to the truly realistic *approach.* She approached and dealt with the life she happened to know, with a total absence of bias and a complete suspension of judgment. We should not accept her as a realist in the special modern sense, because her experience was limited to a tiny segment of life; but within the confined limits of that segment she was a perfect realist. She did not *deliberately* exclude anything, except matters about which she was uninformed.

Realism is, in fact, particularly dependent upon *the manner of approach* upon treatment, rather than upon

choice of subject - and this question of manner began to engage attention early in the development of the English novel. It will indicate, amusingly, how difficult is the would-be realist's task, if we glance at CONGREVE'S *Incognita* (1692), probably the first novel written with the deliberate purpose of bringing prose fiction into closer touch with actual life. Congreve said that although a novel might deal with accidents and odd events, they must not be such as are 'wholly unusual or unprecedented' (as, of course, the romantic novelists' are); they must be near to our own experience and beliefs. But intention does not guarantee achievement, and although *Incognita* is notable as probably the first English novel in which an author had *a conscious sense of direction*, Congreve did not succeed in his purpose. His book is at only one remove from the Elizabethan novelists' stiff high-flown romanticism. The hero, Aurelian, addresses a lady thus:

If I do not usurp a privilege reserved for someone more happy in your acquaintance, may I presume, Madam, to entreat (for a while) the favour of your conversation, at least till the arrival of whom you expect, provided you are not tired of me before; for then upon the least intimation of uneasiness, I will not fail of doing myself the violence to withdraw for your release.

We cannot believe that conversation was conducted in such terms even in Congreve's day. But it is well for us to see first what is *not* Realism, in order to appreciate more fully the achievement of DEFOE, the first English realistic novelist. Defoe's aim was to start with the imaginary and make it seem actual; to *invent* 'truth' (if such a term may be used) by taking fiction and so treating it as to make it appear more like plain fact than fact itself. His *Journal of the Plague Year* (published 1722), though almost wholly an invention, is as convincing as any official statistical document could possibly

be. He desired not only to create an illusion in the reader's mind (every novelist needs to do that), but actually to delude and deceive the reader so far as to make fiction indistinguishable from fact. That is to say, Defoe wanted to produce the *conviction* of truth, and not merely to create an *illusion* of truth. This aim demanded a very careful method of deliberately flattening his style to the utmost plainness, as he does in *Robinson Crusoe* even when describing surprising adventures. Defoe also set a fashion for later realists in *Moil Flanders* and *Roxana,* where he concentrated upon a realistic treatment of the seamy side of eighteenth-century life. He was so amazingly industrious and his work is so enormous in bulk that he has never yet received from English readers anything approaching the full credit due to him. He did not begin to write novels until he was nearly sixty, though, in addition to being a pioneer of Realism, he was also a born story-teller.

Although every good novel is to some extent realistic, the two qualities essential to thorough-going Realism are matter-of-fact treatment and a plain unornamented style. After Defoe, no novelist produced this kind of realistic novel (noting what has already been said concerning Jane Austen) until the mid-nineteenth century, when Trollope began to write. Dickens' subject-matter was spasmodically realistic, but his temperament was completely romantic.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S reputation went into eclipse immediately after his death in 1882, owing to the publication (1883) of his autobiography, in which he had written down frankly all that was to be told about his method of authorship. He described how he drilled himself to become a writing-machine, turning out novels at the rate of 250 words every quarter of an

hour. He also gave a detailed table of the money he earned by his books. These were regarded as shocking 'revelations' in the art-for-art's-sake 'eighties and 'nineties, and a general delusion grew up that novels produced under such conditions could not be good literature. So Troll ope dropped out of general notice until, round about 1912, a new generation rediscovered him and found his novels uncommonly good. Trollope is both substantial and readable; he could tell a story; he could create amusing and convincing characters. Though his literary style is neither brilliant nor beautiful it is sound and workmanlike; it has no airs and graces, but it gives the satisfaction always yielded by a job thoroughly well done. He is as satisfying as is plain bread-and-butter to healthy hunger. That he is in the second rank, and not the first, is due *(a)* to the absence of any poetic quality from his work (he is incapable of those inspired flights that the very best writers can bring off); and *(b)* to his mawkish tendency in emotional passages - he was often baffled when deep feeling became imminent. Though a really excellent literary workman, Trollope was poor as a literary artist. But he was English to the backbone - as English a man as Jane Austen was an English woman. His best work - the group of Barsetshire novels (beginning with *The Warden,* 1855, and ending with *The Last Chronicle of Bar set,* 1867) - is a loosely connected sequence of six books in which the principal characters pass or sojourn, as the leading inhabitants of any actual district come into and pass out of sight of other persons living there. In his autobiography Trollope describes how he stood on a little bridge within sight of Salisbury Cathedral on a midsummer evening in 1851 and got the first idea for *The Warden.* But Barchester is not Salisbury and Barsetshire is not Wiltshire. The whole locality is built up out of scenes and recollections drawn by Trollope from

several quarters. He knew the English counties with unusual intimacy from riding along the roads and lanes on horseback while transacting his business as a high official in the Post Office. The Barchester atmosphere is the quiet, mellow, retired atmosphere usual to such towns as Winchester, Salisbury, Bath and Canterbury. The inhabitants' most tempestuous moral problems are no more terrible than a very occasional conflict between conscience and worldly wisdom. There are mild clerical love-affairs, mild place-hunting, mild domestic squabbles. Among Trollope's church dignitaries and their wives and families are mean people and worldly people, yet he never makes humanity as a whole appear mean. His world is a pleasant and comfortable place, warm and half-sleepy, but never dull. As the Barchester novels proceed, he indicates skilfully the characters' increasing ages, and gives, with close fidelity, many pictures of their everyday life, practising the theory enunciated by himself:

The novelist has other aims than the elucidation of his plot. He desires to make his readers so intimatoly acquainted with his characters that the creatures of his brain should be to them speaking, moving, living, human creatures. This ho can never do unless he know those fictitious personages himself, and he can never know them unless he can live with them in the full reality of established intimacy. They must be with him as he lies down to sleep, and as he wakes from his dreams. He must learn to hate them and to love them. He must argue with them, quarrel with them, forgive them, and even submit to them. He must know of them whether they be cold-blooded or passionate, whether true or false, and how far true, and how far false. The depth and the breadth, and the narrowness and the shallowness of each should be clear to him. And, as here, in our outer world, we know that men and women change, - become worse or better as temptation or conscience may guide them, - so should these creations of his change, and

every change should be noted by him. On the last day of each month recorded, every person in his novel should be a month older than on the first. If the would-be novelist have aptitudes that way, all this will come to him without much struggling; - but if it do not come, I think he can only make novels of wood.

Because he knew his characters thoroughly, inside and outside, Trollope creates, as few writers have done, 'the illusion that is of all illusions the most difficult to create - the illusion of ordinary life.'

The prevalent mood of the Trollope novels is placidity, which hardly ever merges into serenity. Placidity is entirely absent from the novels of GEORGE GISSING, whose work is closer than Trollope's to the modern unduly narrowed use of the word Realism. With Gissing began the modern realistic novel with a strong psychological interest. He was less detached and unimpassioned than a Realist should be, and if, on the whole, he lets life speak for itself in his books, it is at the same time too often obvious that he was himself filled with dull resentment against life. The half-contemptuous, half-resentful bearing of Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile* (1892) suggests Gissing's characteristic sense of frustration, of being denied his rightful heritage. An unfortunate boyhood love-affair was responsible for Gissing's leaving Owen's College in disgrace, after his health had been ruined by overwork at school. These two events induced a morbid mental condition, and he cut himself adrift from his friends and became a voluntary outcast. His own unhappy life-story can be reconstructed piecemeal from his novels. *Demos* (1886), the first novel to bring him into general notice, is impressively gaunt, with the sort of gauntness that would beset a man who, like Gissing, had been denied the opportunities he most

craved and who brooded over such denial. Gissing's instincts and abilities were those of a scholar. With his birthright lost, he turned in dismayed disappointment and desperate resentment to batter himself against the world, sometimes with tragic foolishness - as when he rushed into the street determined to marry the first woman he met and, doing so, fell into further disaster. Allowing for a general more or less faint distemper, his novels are as faithful a description of middle-class and lower middle-class life as any, and *New Grub Street* (1891) stands alone as a grimly realistic account of a struggling writer's experience.

If cold photographic detachment be necessary to the realistic novel, Gissing's novels could hardly be admitted to this category, since they are unduly tinted by the author's personal sensations. Gissing was not a detached writer. No such objection could be made to GEORGE MOORE, an artist who is also almost scientific in the care he brings to the observation of humanity. In his first period, Moore was strongly influenced by the French novelists, and his early stories resemble Zola's in some respects. *Esther Waters* (1894) has often been described as the first modern English realistic novel, and from that date the attention of writers in England was certainly directed, as it had not previously been, to Realism as an aesthetic principle, demanding the literary artist's dissociation from any extraneous purpose that should tend to divert the novel from a true-to-fact representation of life. Beginning with *The Brook Keriih* (1916) George Moore entered upon a new 'stylistic' period. He revised most of his earlier work, trimming away all decoration and cultivating an entirely unornamented, clear and luminous prose. In the service of absolute clarity he has dispensed (as the Bible does) with such

aids as quotation-marks for dialogue, and relies only upon a meticulous precision in sentence-structure. There is nothing else in English literature quite like George Moore's latest prose style, and nothing quite so beautiful within its limits. As he became increasingly interested in the art and craft of writing he abandoned the treatment of modern themes and became at last an historical novelist. This change is due less to any particular interest in the remote past, than to the development of a theory that 'pure literature' demands the complete withdrawal of the person and sensations of the writer - the absolute emotional detachment of the author from his creation. Such perfect detachment is easier to secure when a remote period is chosen for treatment, though the result is somewhat bleak when remote period, emotional detachment, and austere prose style are united. But there is a place for austerity in literature, and in his later work George Moore has given something new to the English novel. To read *The Brook Kerith* is to receive such sensations as are given by a cold, clear day in early spring, when the trees are scarcely in bud and the earth still bare; when the sun is pale gold, when everything is seen in sharp definition and there is a tang in the air. That book endeavours to re-create the personality of Jesus by connecting his life-story with a legend that he was not dead when his body was removed from the cross, but lived on among the Essenes (a Jewish pastoral community) and met St. Paul. George Moore begins with the assumption that Jesus was human as those about him were human - a simple man, and at first a humble man. A time came when he proclaimed himself as more than a man. What, then, *was* he ? How did he impress his contemporaries ? In particular, how did he impress those in closest sympathy with him ? Again, what manner of men were his disciples ? And yet again, how did Jesus appear to

himself ? Though *The Brook Kerith* attempts to answer such questions, it must be read as an ambitious work of imaginative art, not as an attempt at the reconstruction of history, nor as a piece of rationalistic propaganda. It is an English prose masterpiece, devoted to a theme of such magnitude as amply justifies the fine workmanship. At first it is far from easy to read, but as soon as Jesus appears the narrative increases in force and the passages in which Jesus and Paul converse are tremendously powerful. *Esther Waters* was realistic both in method and in theme; in *The Brook Kerith* the realistic method is retained for the treatment of a non-realistic theme.

Since *Esther Waters*, ARNOLD BENNETT'S *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Riceyman Steps* are the outstanding examples of what must already be called the older type of realism. It was at one time a habit to use the adjective 'photographic' to describe Bennett's principal novels, because of his use of much detail. But it was inaccurate to do so, since a photograph reproduces whatever is before the camera lens. The camera cannot select and reject. Arnold Bennett is a very skilled selector. He assembles minute details but does not accumulate them unnecessarily or obtrusively as (say) Theodore Dreiser does in his enormously bulky American novels. There is no detail in either of the Bennett novels mentioned above which does not add its specific quota toward completing the desired picture. The whole of each book is organized and planned to produce a particular effect, and nothing is given a place unless it contributes to that effect. The attitude adopted by many readers to these two novels suggests how badly English people stand in need of aesthetic education. Both books contain passages and episodes that are superficially 'ugly'; yet these uglinesses contribute to a final effect

that is, aesthetically, beautiful - for beauty, used in this sense, must include everything in art that stimulates the finer sensibilities. Beauty is a 'combination of qualities that delight the "sight or mmd ' or spirit of inan . *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Kiceyman Steps*, read with proper appreciation, stimulate the sense of pity and increase understanding - an end which ugliness *qua* ugliness cannot serve. Esthetic education and cultivation of the art of reading prevent that confusion of the object with the effect of the object which limits the enjoyment of so many English readers. Arnold Bennett has never fully accommodated himself to the rigid theoretical requirements of Realism, with its demand for detachment. Life delights and excites him so much that the colour of his own sensations tinges the narrative. Intellectually he is a realist; emotionally he is a romantic. Withal, he is a magnificent craftsman who has written at least two exceptionally fine novels.

The later developments of Realism in the twentieth-century English novel are manifested by DOROTHY RICHARDSON, JAMES JOYCE and VIRGINIA WOOLF, who have endeavoured to explore the human consciousness and to express its illogical and discontinuous workings. They have made much use of the 'interior monologue' as a means of revealing man's communings with himself, and through a variety of devices have made it clear that the novel is far from exhausted and that the capacity of life to provide material for the novel is also far from exhausted. It is still too early to attempt even a partial valuation of the ultra-realistic 'stream of consciousness' school, which appears so far, however, to have shown an insufficient regard for the requirements of literary art and, in particular, an unhappy neglect of the principle of selection.

§2 *Adventure and Mystery*

However much the average reader may be rebuked by critics and scholars for his simple preference, he will continue to expect that a novel should, before all else, tell a story. He will not be impressed if we remind him that mere story-telling has never yet kept a novel alive or made it worth re-reading. The average reader sets little store by re-reading, and he does not regard books as friends but only as chance companions for an idle hour. Therefore his values are not literary values; they are only temporary amusement values. So the standards of the average reader have no true bearing upon literature, and we must test the relative importance of the several factors which make up a novel by ascertaining the reasons which have kept the great novels alive in human memory. Beyond question, it is, primarily, memorable characters that assure long life to a novel - characters that are recognized as fundamentally human; next, there is much importance in such robust narrative vigour as Fielding and Dickens had at command; after that, all else is subsidiary. Mere story, mere plot, mere adventure, is not enough.

Almost the only adventure novels which have lasted long enough to be called immortal are Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* But who reads either nowadays ? Ninety per cent, of their twentieth-century readers are children who read for the magnificent story-interest, or students who read for the purpose of examining Defoe's style and methods and Swift's style and virulent satire. So far as the great bulk of adult readers is concerned, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* are either nursery memories or books respected but not read. Yet there is so much excellent matter in both (and Swift's satire is so penetrating and in many respects still 'modern') that they should be read by all

sensible adults - particularly as children quite properly do not get Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* but only an abridgment which omits the satirical passages which were the whole purpose of the book. These two early examples must be mentioned in any account of the English adventure novel, though neither is closely associated with its development. For the beginnings of this type of fiction it is necessary to look outside England, to CERVANTES' *Don Quixote.* We also borrowed from Spain the word used to describe what may reasonably be regarded as the characteristic English type of adventure novel, the *picaresque* (from *picaroon* [Spanish *picaron]:* a rogue, an adventurer, one who lives by his wits). As used in this country, the term Picaresque Novel has come at length to cover any adventure novel of the wandering or bohemian type; though formerly it was more precisely applied to stories dealing with the fortunes of rogues or adventurers. Not attempting too precise an historical inquiry (in which Nashe and others would need to be mentioned), we may turn at once to SMOLLETT, the first large-scale picaresque novelist in English. His are rambling inelegant stories of more or less disorderly people wandering across countries and continents, to an accompaniment of much noise and vigorous movement. If Fielding drew the portrait of John Bull, Smollett painted that of Jack Tar, full of rough-and-ready virtues and rough-and-ready vices. The great difference between these two eighteenth-century novelists is that (though both may be immoral according to present-day standards) Smollett had a nasty mind, whereas Fielding was a full-blooded healthy human animal. Smollett wallows in repulsive descriptions; but then so also do Chaucer and Cervantes - geniuses both, and both capable also of extreme delicacy. Outside the repulsive passages, Smollett's best novels are a glorious bank-holiday revel. Not all people have the

bank-holiday temperament, and enjoyment of Smollett depends in a degree upon whether we have or have not that temperament. In *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), and *Humphry Clinker* (1771) he shows considerable inventive ability and considerable humour, and crowds his pages with all manner of people in rich profusion. The continental scenes in *Roderick Random* are comparable with the great passages in Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth. Roderick Random* also contains (see chapter xiii) some Hogarthian glimpses of eighteenth-century London; while the passages in *Humphry Clinker* which describe wanderings in England and Scotland throw much light upon social manners and customs in that period. One-eyed Commodore Hawser Trunnion in *Peregrine Pickle* is probably the best among numerous clever character-studies of a type exclusive to Smollett.

In some respects both Fielding and Smollett were eighteenth-century Realists. Certain lesser novelists who followed them are more important historically than intrinsically, because their books are indicative of the general change of temper which came over England toward the end of that century. The romantic tendency in thought and in poetry was reflected also in prose fiction. There is no means of fixing a date for the beginnings of this change, but ROBERT PALTOCK'S *Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins* (1751) may be referred to as an early example of the eighteenth-century romantic-imaginative novel which other writers were to direct into a different channel. *Peter Wilkins* forms a link between Defoe and Swift on the one hand and H. G. Wells on the other. Paltock took the Crusoe and Gulliver type of imaginary voyage and grafted on to it a newly-invented feature - winged and flying men and women.

Yet the story strangely lacks all sense of marvel and wonder, and is a typical eighteenth-century example of matter-of-fact rationalization. It provides no real thrill, and is weakened by a jargon of invented words (gawry, arkoe, filuses, colambat, crullmott, etc.). Peter Wilkins, cheated of a fortune, goes to sea, is captured by the French and turned adrift in an open boat. After fifteen days' hunger and thirst (powerfully described) he is captured and driven into slavery in Africa. At length he escapes, only to be wrecked on a volcanic island, where, after voyaging for five weeks along an underground river, he meets the winged woman Youwarkee and her family. There follows Wilkins' marriage to Youwarkee and a description of their life together and an account of political affairs in the island. The story is not persuasive or convincing, because Paltock appeals more to reason than to imagination, bothering the reader with confused descriptive detail instead of trusting to the instinct of marvel.

Paltock had set out upon the sea of romance, but in the wrong boat. If it should be asked what would have been the right kind of boat, the answer is, obviously, the kind of boat launched by Coleridge in *The Ancient Mariner* nearly fifty years later. Only thirteen years after *Peter Wilkins,* however, romanticism took a long leap forward in HORACE WALPOLE'S *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), the first example of 'the Novel of Terror' which was to have such a vogue during the next half-century and to reach a virtual end in Jane Austen's parody, *Northanger Abbey,* before its occasional revival in various guises by Stevenson, Bram Stoker, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Edgar Wallace. *The Castle of Otranto* succeeds in stirring (though perhaps all too faintly to impress the sophisticated twentieth-century mind) the sense of wonder, the sense of the marvellous, and the spirit of supernaturalism, as *Peter*

Wilkina fails to do. Walpole had come under the influence of German romanticism and the Gothic school (which loved to flirt with picturesque medieval gloom). Prompted by a dream, he wrote this story of a usurping prince miraculously killed on his wedding-day by an enormous helmet which falls and crushes him. His father persecutes the bereaved bride, and she has 'thrilling ' adventures while escaping through subterranean passages. Portraits come to life and walk about; there are strange mutterings and rumblings, claps of thunder at suitable moments, moonlight through castle windows, knights in armour, visions of giants - a complete array of pantomime properties and effects. The book fails, partly because Walpole's supernaturalism is scarcely more than a series of stage-tricks, but more because he could not create characters. His men and women do not live, they only strike attitudes, and have no consistency. The women are romantic ninnies, except when they are striking attitudes of filial or wifely duty. But though it may be to us a compound of dullness and unconscious humour, *The Castle of Otranto* is a landmark in the progress of the romantic movement. The most popular writer among the Novel-of-Terror group was MRS. ANN RADCLIFFE. Her sensationally successful *Mysteries of Udolpho (l794)* was really the pivot of the whole movement, though it is now almost unreadable. She was a kind of dark-browed eighteenth-century Marie Corelli, resembling this later writer in having little practical experience of the world and in relying almost entirely upon her own imaginative and inventive faculties, which failed badly under the strain. Mrs. Radcliffe invented scenery, character, and incident quite without regard to truth or fact; yet some of her characters were so powerfully imagined that Byron is supposed to have taken her heroes as a pattern for his own pose of picturesque romantic melancholy. With Mrs. Radclifie's

name are associated those of MATTHEW GBEGORY LEWIS and CHARLES MATURIN as the principal exponents of the Novel of Terror" All three are wildly extravagant and the two latter sometimes revoltingly horrible; but Mrs. Radcliffe and 'Monk' Lewis (in *Ambrosio, or the Monk,* 1795) both show some mastery of the super-natural - an important fact in view of the use which Scott (especially) afterwards made of such material; while Maturin (in *The Fatal Revenge,* 1807, and *Melmoth the Wanderer,* 1820) combined a horrid ability to thrill with a notable faculty for analysing human character.

Mystery and terror served Scott, Dickens and Wilkie Collins as material to be utilized on occasion along with material of other kinds. It was left for ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON to make full use of the terror motive and yet to diirect it to both moral and artistic ends. Stevenson had three highly-developed qualities: he was a moralist in all his writings; he was a conscious prose-artist; and he was a tale-teller. He civilized the picaresque novel in *Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae* and *Treasure Island)* he civilized the tale of terror in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and some of his short stories. Everything that becomes civilized, at length becomes devitalized also; we cannot tame people or things without robbing them of their wild vigour. If Stevenson is more decent than Smollett and less extravagant than Mrs. Radcliffe, he is also much less robust, and his style is too mannered and precious to be suitable for warm-blooded and robustious narrative. *Treasure Island* is unique - one of those literary miracles that happen once and never again. But even *Treasure Island* is only a minor miracle: its blood and thunder are anaemic blood and stage thunder. Stevenson loved to play with toy-theatres, and all his novels, with one exception, are reflected

through the toy-theatre temperament: life is not in them. The one exception is the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston,* and Stevenson's real tragedy is that he died before this magnificent fragment could be completed. The characters in his other novels are only puppets of his mind, figures in dreams; but Kirstie is alive, a flesh and blood woman, vital and passionate. If we leave out of account the amazing new power shown in *Weir of Hermiston,* Stevenson is less important as a novelist than as an essayist and short-story writer.

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RUDYABD KIPLING, also, must be mainly considered under the heading of the short story, but one novel, *Kim,* brings him into the adventure-novel category. Outside the museum in Lahore, Kimball O'Hara, the young orphan son of an Irish colour-sergeant, meets an old Tibetan lama seeking the river that washes away sin. Kim joins the holy man as his disciple, and journeys with him along the Grand Trunk Road which runs from Lahore for fifteen hundred miles, bearing a great natural pageant of Asiatic life. For the rest, the book is an enthralling and exciting record of journeyings, varied as the life of northern India is varied, coloured by the splendour and dirt of the East, filled with the prayers of holy men and the curses of horse-dealers and beggars. *Kim* swirls the reader into the movement, bustle and din of Eastern life, and seems to confer the power to hear and understand a hundred voices at once. The boy Kim is the hub of it all, the unifying centre of the whole otherwise disorderly pageant; he is the meeting-point of East and West, the 'Little Friend of all the World,[5] the harmonizer of racial discords; a child with the serpent's wisdom, the devotion of a servant and the authority of a ruler: the soul of obedience and the incarnation of waywardness. The strands of the story are equally

intertwined: military efficiency and religious credulity, subtlety and ingenuousness, modernity and antiquity, sophisticated youth and childlike age. *Kim,* like *Treasure Island,* is a miracle and unique; but, unlike *Treasure Island,* it is a major miracle and fully alive.

§3 *The Historical Novel*

'Historical novel' is likely to become an increasingly ambiguous phrase, inasmuch as many present-day social and political novels will serve as historical novels a hundred years hence. To say that is, of course, to stretch unduly the meaning of the phrase; yet, nevertheless, it is already difficult to define an historical novel. *Henry Esmond* is an historical novel; *Vanity Fair* is not; *The Heart of Midlothian* is betwixt and between. *An historical novel* (if we may leap at once to a definition) *is an imaginative re-creation of a remote period.* What shall or shall not be included in this category depends upon the interpretation given to 'remote.' There is a related kind of fictional narrative dealing with the less-remote past, which can be called *the period novel.* To this category *Vanity Fair* might be assigned and Dickens' *Barnaby Budge.* If the historical novel is to be an *imaginative* reconstruction, it is reasonable to suggest that the period written about should be sufficiently distant to put the author beyond reach of first-hand evidence and also beyond the reach of hearsay from (or criticism by) those who participated in the events concerned. No exact figure can be fixed, but a hundred years seems a convenient time-limit. A novel dealing with past events within a hundred years is *a period novel;* and a novel going back beyond a hundred years is an historical novel - but only on certain further conditions. Recorded historical events or important historical personages should play a part in any historical novel; a

judicious combination of the actual and the fictional is required; the book should combine the products of research and of imagination. A brightly-written transcript of documents is insufficient, for the historical novelist's function is not to record, but to provide a dramatic re-creation: the atmosphere of the period and its emotional temper must be restored, and the whole body of a past time be resurrected. Twentieth-century historical novelists have considered closely the problem of how best to ensure, through words, that readers shall receive an adequate sense-impression of the past. Descriptions of costume, customs, events and persons are not enough. Some nineteenth-century historical novelists tried to solve the problem by the free use of archaic idioms, such as (to give only crude examples) 'zounds,' 'by'r lady,' 'gadzooks,' 'ods bodikins,' 'sirrah,' and so on. The more modern writers incline to the opposite view that idioms of the past cannot stir *in us* any emotional response corresponding to that experienced by the people who used such idioms in their ordinary daily speech. From this it is argued, further, that it is more effective to write about the past in *the idiom of the present* because so long as we are reading archaic phrases we shall have a sense of foreignness and shall not feel ourselves in the *atmosphere* of the past. An imaginative reconstruction needs to be so persuasive and convincing that the reader forgets he is simply reading *about* the past, and enjoys the illusion that he is living *in* the period and on perfectly natural terms with its people. He cannot feel this (so the modernists believe) so long as he is reading an unfamiliar idiom. A single sentence from *(a)* Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (period A.D. 79) compared with one from (6) Naomi Mitchison's *The Conquered* (period 58-46 B.C.) will indicate the verbal difference between the two schools: *(a)* 'Ah, what delicacy hast thou in store for us now, my Glaucus *V (b)* 'I found Coisha in

the kitchen making some of those delicious little cakes of hers; you never give me anything half so good !' This question of idiom, however, is probably little more than an academic one, upon which the success or otherwise of an historical novel does not finally depend.

A few tentative and unsuccessful historical novels were written, mostly by women, before SCOTT achieved complete success in this form with *Waverley* (1814). The earlier experiments failed owing to the authoresses' inability to transport themselves or their readers imaginatively into the past or to convey its spirit. They believed, mistakenly, that a novel of sentiment could be made into an historical novel by incorporating a block of history carefully cut from authentic records. This is not enough. Nor is it enough for novelists to saturate themselves in the history of a past period in preparation for writing historical novels. The historical novelist needs to *assimilate* historical fact - to make it a part of himself and to give it out again transformed in some subtle way by his own personality. At best, historical documents tell almost exclusively of important persons; the lives of ordinary people are neglected. The historical novelist can fill up history's blank pages by allowing imagination to play around stray hints thrown out here and there in contemporary records. He can work only according to the laws of probability, and his interpolations are unlikely to be strictly accurate; but if he succeeds in creating a sense of *the living past* he is a most useful auxiliary to the formal historian. Scott was frequently guilty of inaccuracies and anachronisms, but he makes the past live, and his characters (both historical and fictional) are impressively human. He took over the older type of romantic fiction, with its glamour, adventure and excitement, and gave it a basis of reality by

turning it into historical channels. Thus he was able to secure a basis of fact upon which his imagination could work; and he also found opportunity for that display of pageantry, mystery, colour and movement which he loved, as all the romantic medievalists did. At the same time, Scott's historical novels are as much a commentary upon life and general experience as any novel dealing with modern themes, for in them he takes account of profound and permanent human interests that are as apposite to-day as they were in his own day or in relation to the earlier times about which he was writings

Scott was already famous for his poetry before the Waverley novels began to appear (anonymously). He laid the foundations for his lifework in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Marmion,* and *The Lady of the Lake,* which are historical novels in verse. *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), widely regarded as his finest novel, exemplifies the best elements of Scott as a novelist: his vivid narrative power and ability to make scenes from the past live again; his humour and pathos (in the latter he was as strong as Dickens was weak); his broad sympathies and insight into character, and his acute penetration into moral and spiritual issues. A reader's memories of Scott are rich and crowded, and not only with the numerous outstanding figures; beyond those is a multitude, and beyond those again an extensive landscape - a great region full of folk, all active and many of them engaged in life-and-death affairs. There is no other writer-not even Shakespeare or Dickens-who gives this sense of multitude and purpose so unforgettably as Scott. To recall only *The Heart of Midlothian* is to find recollections tumbling eagerly over one another, to recapture memories of *people* - Jeanie, Effie, Davie, Meg ; of *episodes* - the attack on the Tolbooth, Jeanie's interview with the Queen, the prison scenes ; of *places* - Edinburgh, the long road southwards, London. . . .

If Scott had great virtues he had faults in proportion. He was nearly always an exasperatingly slow beginner *(Waverley* maunders along for sixty pages before it can be said to have begun), and in the body of his novels there is infinite leisureliness with constant digression. Sometimes he reveals the naked scaffolding of a book - as in this passage from *Waverley:*

> We shall take the opportunity to introduce the reader to some particulars of Fergus Mac-Ivor's character and history, which were not completely known to Waverley till after a connexion, which, though arising from a circumstance so casual, had for a length of time the deepest influence upon his character, actions, and prospects. But this, being an important subject, must form the commencement of a new chapter.

Scott was a victim of contemporary publishing requirements as well as of his own hampering peculiarities. *The Heart of Midlothian* would be a better book if it ended a hundred pages sooner; but the author contracted to write a four-volume novel and the fourth volume had to be written though the book had worked itself to a proper conclusion by the end of volume three ! But when toll has been taken of whatever literary faults can be charged against him, what remains is the great work of a great novelist who was also a great man.

Scott is still unchallenged as the foremost historical novelist in English literature, though there are two other novels which, in the judgment of many, are finer than any novel by Scott. THACKEBAY'S *Henry Esmond* is one of these, and critics who consider it the greatest among historical novels are influenced by their admiration of the unequalled skill with which Thackeray summons up the eighteenth century in every necessary particular. Thackeray's curious affinity with the century before his

own has already been referred to (page 62), and nowhere does *Esmond* seem to be outside that century. The problem of idiom does not arise, because the reader has no thought that the author himself is outside the period in which the narrative passes. Henry Esmond tells the story in autobiographical form and, throughout, he is (the reader never pauses to question it) talking and writing his natural language. As he moves about on his business he meets the great people of that day-Marlborough, Swift, Addison and others. The re-creation is perfect and the illusion is complete. Yet when this has been observed and duly admired, it is quite likely that, for some readers, admiration will go little further. The characters have no great charm (even Beatrix has it only temporarily) and it is not easy to care very much what happens to most of them. To say this may be in itself a tribute to Thackeray's success in conveying the eighteenth-century antipathy to emotionalism; though on the other hand it may be, equally, that Thackeray's books in general call out intellectual admiration and literary respect much more than affection. If somewhere, miraculously, there remained in a state of perfect preservation a fragment of Queen Anne's England, still peopled by men and women who lived in her reign, we should visit it and look on with respectful interest. But the inhabitants of that colony, sidetracked by Time, would be horrified by our exuberant manners and we should be chilled by their formality. We should have no wish to live as aliens among them. So may we look upon *Esmond;* so admire it; and so breathe more freely when we have passed on.

How few of us have any similar sensation concerning *The Cloister and the Hearth.* Thackeray's eighteenth-century England is polite and cultured, a fine product of civilization. CHARLES READE'S fifteenth-century Germany is barbarous and terrifying. But who would be so

dead in soul as to decline a chance of joining Gerard and Denys in their wanderings, if that were possible ? And who is not fascinated by the Dutch domestic scenes at the beginning, and touched to the inmost heart by the later distresses of Gerard and Margaret ? *'Dear* Margaret !...', as Charles Lamb might have said if he could have known her. Reade was a prolific and uncommonly painstaking novelist who achieved one masterpiece among many comparative failures. His fatal weaknesses were undisciplined emotion and an extravagant style. Beneath his extravagance, or inseparably entangled with it, was that immense exuberance which makes the Victorian novelists irresistible. But whereas the greater novelists controlled and directed their exuberance and energy, Reade was a happy slave to his: he was swept off his feet by it and enjoyed the experience hugely, like a fat jolly baby kicking in the surf. In his books Reade is continually shouting at the top of his voice: employing large capital letters when he wishes to be particularly emphatic; descending into microscopic type for mysterious and thrilling moments. His great strength is in his remarkable ability for telling a story. If it were possible to imagine a writer made up of one part each Dickens, Scott, Stevenson, and Sidney Webb; three parts Mrs. Henry Wood; three parts natural genius; and the whole mixture slightly watered - that would be Charles Reade. Frigid critics insist that *The Cloister and the Hearth* has as many faults as his other books, but its dazzling merits send Reade soaring into the company of the greater novelists. The highest praise cannot be withheld, nor even diluted, in regard to a book which, as we read, makes us as instruments upon which the writer can play what notes he pleases throughout the whole gamut of emotion, and at the same time gives us generous intellectual satisfaction - not merely at a first reading but again as often as we re-read. For once, and this once

only, Reade succeeded in creating living **characters** instead of constructing puppets. Nearly all the people in *The Cloister and the Hearth* are memorable: Gerard, his parents, his brother, Margaret Brandt and her father; Denys; the Van Eycks (the Dutch painters); even the old woman at the German inn where Gerard and Denys slept on straw. And the incidents - in the tower, with the bear, with the robbers - are perennially exciting. Reade (for this, as for his other novels) made himself familiar with masses of documents; but whereas he is weighed down by unassimilated information in the other books, he digested and mastered it in *The Cloister and the Hearth,* making the period part of himself and himself part of the period.

CHARLES KINGSLEY'S historical novels are perhaps too definitely Victorian in outlook to take an assured place in literature. The indisputable merit of his narrative gifts tends to be obscured by a heavy insistence upon religious (particularly Protestant) convictions, and it is hardly possible to overlook the Views' and to concentrate upon the story. *Purpose* was Kingsley's keynote in all his writings. He even went so far as to regard his history professorship at Cambridge as a means less of teaching history than of inculcating spirituality and nobility of conduct in the young men who attended his lectures. Kingsley's immense earnestness commands respect, but it enfeebled his ability both as a teacher of history and as an historical novelist, by dividing his attention between incompatible aims. Yet *Westward Ho!* (1855) is an almost indispensable record of Elizabethan adventure and the spirit of some Elizabethan Englishmen; pre-eminently a book for younger readers who can take pleasure in the story without undue concern w'ith the author's limited vision. Kingsley was so

lost in admiration of formal patriotism and formal Protestantism that he had no doubts even about questionable actions and principles when they appeared to have served the causes he had at heart. This was not in any degree due to insincerity (he was most rigidly honest in every way), but to inability to see far enough or to recognize clearly that good ends do not condone every means. Kingsley himself remains an interesting person, because he is more fully symbolic of Victorianism than any other Victorian writer. Victorian England was inhabited mainly by Protestant Englishmen - of whom Kingsley was the type and example. It was difficult for him (as for them) to recognize that patriotism and Protestantism may be as susceptible of error as any other convictions. A person who shouts, 'My country, right or wrong; my religion, right or wrong,' usually does so because he cannot conceive of either his country or his religion ever being wrong. This spirit among Victorian Englishmen led to some curious anomalies, as any study of social reform in that age suggests. *Hypatia* (1853) (written of the time when the Roman western empire was on the point of downfall) is Kingsley's best book, and typically Kingsleyan in *(a)* the moral and spiritual lessons it aims to inculcate; and (6) its entirely one-sided view of the Goths. It is possible to be in sympathy with the ideas for which he stood, and yet at the same time to recognize that Kingsley was a bigot - a high-principled bigot - whose convictions limited his vision and distorted his judgment, and made him, in that respect, the antithesis of Scott.

Those who are interested in the technique of historical fiction find GEORGE ELIOT'S *Romola* (1863) a valuable book to study, for it is a great novel which is also a bad historical novel. To prepare herself for writing *Romola,*

George Eliot spent some months in Italy, undertaking research into Florentine history in the time of Savonarola. She stored her mind with masses of knowledge and came back fully informed. But either she did not allow herself time to digest the knowledge, or her mind was not of the type that can disintegrate facts and integrate them anew in terms of human character. Consequently, while *Eomola* is impressive and marked by high seriousness and psychological penetration, it is not an historical novel but a novel with (so to speak) a tapestry background upon which are worked flat pictures of old-time places and historical personages. Tito Melema and Tessa are admirable, Tito's character being profoundly understood; but all that is essential in the hero and heroine could have been equally well presented if they had been drawn as a nineteenth-century Englishman and English girl. Savonarola thunders his prophecies in fine style; but his sermons if read outside this particular context would be equally forceful. As an historical novel *Eomola* fails because it does not *re-create* the period, and therefore cannot give readers the sensation that they are themselves living in the time and amid the scenes wherein the action is intended to be played.

The historical novel bristles with intricate problems for authors who attempt this kind of fiction, and it demands a rare sense of balance and control, combined with special knowledge and dramatic power. Only Scott, *Henry Esmond* and *The Cloister and the Hearth* completely satisfy these requirements. Scores of historical novels have been written since Reade's masterpiece, but one must hesitate over them all, with the possible exception of HARDY'S *The Trumpet Major,* though that is better described as a period novel. Earlier, G. P. R.

JAMES (1801-1860) was a very minor Scott, combining melodrama with dullness; while of HARRISON AINSWORTH little more can be said than to express gratitude for the entertainment he has given to young people, who are not critical of his many infelicities. In the present century, STANLEY WEYMAN, MAURICE HEWLETT, CONAN DOYLE, and FORD MADOX HUEFFER are among an able company who might best be described as writers of historical romance - the romantic dominating the historical. Still more recently, NAOMI MITCHISON has turned back to ancient history (Greek, Roman, and barbarian) in a series of sound and solid stories of exceptional literary merit. She has broken the sword-and-cloak tradition which in the previous half-century caused too much emphasis to be placed upon the picturesque; but, so far, she has moved a little heavily under her knowledge, and is inclined to handle her barbaric material a little too ruthlessly (as in the flogging and mutilation episodes in *The Conquered)* and without that mature control which is necessary for the successful treatment of horror. One very notable and quite unusually distinguished historical novel is H. F. M. PRESCOTT'S *The Unhurrying Chase* (1925), which has *power* (the rarest quality in literature) and spiritual significance, as well as dramatic skill and intimate knowledge of twelfth-century France. The author really 'knows' the period, has assimilated her stores of detailed information, is sensitive to beauty both in nature and man, and has created characters who cannot readily be dismissed from memory. Some passages in the book are as memorably and austerely terrible as the battle scenes in Malory.

§4 *Sociology and Politics*

From as early as LANGLAND'S *Piers Plowman* and the medieval plays on biblical themes, English imaginative

literature has from time to time voiced the\spirit of protest against man's inhumanity to man. Between **the** sixteenth and nineteenth centuries most of this **protest** literature was in pamphlet form, but when the **new** industrial system and oppressive factory conditions brought indignation to boiling point in 'the hungry 'forties' of last century, the novel had by that time so firmly established itself that it was obviously an effective channel through which the sufferings and disabilities endured by a multitude of unfortunates could be brought into general notice (though it was in poetry that Mrs. Browning made her contribution to this group of writings). The following table sets out the chief social and industrial novels which have survived from a troublous time and passed into literature:

[1841. Mrs. Browning's *The Cry of the Children.']*

1845. Disraeli's *Sybil.*
1848. Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton.*
1848. Charles Kingsley's *Yeast.*
1849. Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley.*
1850. Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke.*
1854. Dickens' *Hard Times.*
1855. Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South.*

Of this series, MRS. GASKELL'S two novels are among the most effective, because of her whole-hearted sympathy and devotion toward the poor and suffering. The lavendered delights of her *Cranford* are so well known as to have overshadowed her other works, though the pastoral beauty of *Cousin Phillis* and *Sylvia's Lovers* should charm no less than *Cranford,* and her industrial novels are more serious in intention than these. Her concern with injustice and abuses, in *Mary Barton* and *North and South,* stirred much political prejudice against her, but since she was an absolutely honest observer who

know at first hand the places and the lives of the people about whom she wrote, there seems no reason to doubt her evudonce in these novels. She married in 1832 the Rev. william Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, and after years of happy life together they were afflicted by the death of an infant son in 1844. It was in an attempt to obtain relief from this sorrow that Mrs. Gaskell began her earliest novel, *Mary Barton,* describing (in the first chapter) country-scenes which have since been swallowed up by Manchester streets. Her pictures of family life among the Manchester workers are drawn with skill and fidelity, and in describing the workers' intolerable miseries the book tells also of their pathetic efforts to get education (by reading at the looms) and the elements of culture (through the Mechanics' Institutes). Though Mrs. Gaskell had a strong dramatic impulse and unlimited sympathy with the factory operatives, she does not display intimate knowledge of their inner life; her characters are seen mainly from the outside. *Mary Barton* attracted Dickens' attention, and Mrs. Gaskell became a fairly regular contributor to his paper, *Household Words,* in which *Cranford* appeared, as a series of sketches, at intervals between 1851 and 1853. It was not designed as a novel, and is more closely related to the eighteenth-century periodical essay than to the novel proper. Nevertheless, it embodies a beautiful and rather pathetic piece of old English life, and once again Mrs. Gaskell's wide and deep sympathies are evident.

When politics absorbed the Tory statesman who died as Lord Beaconsfield, English literature lost the eminent novelist, BENJAMIN DISRAELI, who virtually invented the political novel and was also a pioneer among industrial novelists. The more one knows about Disraeli the more reasons appear for admiring him. He was sometimes

(both as man and novelist) bombastic, egotistical, stagey and possibly insincere - though what seems to us insincerity may have been simply the oriental instinct for reconciling opposites; and occasionally he was a mountebank. Yet it is not easy to escape the conviction that he was from the first a great man, and certainly one who carved out his own destiny. His first novel, *Vivian Grey* (1827), is an extraordinarily able and vigorous book for a young man of twenty-three. Its latter part is merely a record of European travel interspersed with extravagant episodes, but the first half is full of movement and high spirits with patches of good humorous characterization. At moments, *Vivian Grey* is as bad as the Novel of Terror at its worst; yet very occasionally it has an accent of quiet irony worthy to be compared with Jane Austen's; and at other times it anticipates the epigrammatic wit of Oscar Wilde without his self-conscious posturing. Disraeli's greatest literary work is the trilogy - *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847) - which sketches the ground-plan of his own social and political faith. He was already by this time a notable politician, who had begun as a Liberal and had then become a Tory with pronounced liberal principles. The Young England Party, to which he belonged, championed the cause of both the lower and the upper classes against the increasingly powerful manufacturing middle class, and Disraeli's trilogy manifested many of that party's ideas, though he went further in impassioned sympathy for the factory-workers than some of his colleagues were prepared to go. But for a certain deficiency in characterization, it would be reasonable to refer to *Sybil* as one of the greatest nineteenth-century novels. Its intensity and narrative sweep are astonishing, while no writer pleaded the cause of the underdog in a more wholehearted spirit of protest than did this young Tory statesman; nor was anyone more farsighted

than he in pleading for a different standard of industrial relations. *Coningsby* details Disraeli's ideal that the country should be governed by a natural aristocracy with a highly-developed conception of service and public duty. *Tancred* foreshadows that grandiose Eastern policy which was a lifelong interest with him and which he afterwards brought to what seemed then an unclouded triumphant issue with the purchase for England of the Suez Canal and the proclamation of Victoria as Empress of India. The trilogy is so remarkable that it seems beyond doubt that if Disraeli's chief energies had not been diverted to politics, he would have become the foremost novelist of his time. As it was, he outmatched in some respects the greatest contemporary writers; he was free from most of Dickens' worst faults, and though he lacked Dickens' intimate knowledge of the great lower half of society he knew far more than Dickens concerning the other half. He was not nearly so good an entertainer as Dickens, though that too might have come with more practice, judging from the characters of Tadpole and Taper in *Coningsby*. Late in life (after an interval of about a quarter of a century) Disraeli returned to novel-writing, and in *Lothair* (1870) showed the persistence of his literary power. He could paint the social and political scene as no one else has done; and, with more than Wells' knowledge of practical political organization, he utilized the novel for certain of those purposes for which Wells demanded (more than fifty years later) that it should be used.

Disraeli and KINGSLEY were in almost every respect, temperamentally, as distant as the poles. Yet their political creeds were almost identical. Disraeli was a liberal Tory and Kingsley a conservative Radical: both looked for the establishment of a select, dutiful and qualified aristocracy, animated by some such principle as 'The few for the many, not the many for the few.'

But, of the two, Disraeli was the more practical. In Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850) there is much more emotional protest than constructive suggestion. Curiously enough, it is precisely for this reason that Kingsley's social-reform novels were incomparably more influential at the time than Disraeli's. Kingsley fired indignation in a multitude of contemporaries because his appeal was (in no unworthy way) primarily to the emotions and to the natural sense of justice. When such an appeal is made it is not vitally necessary to propose definite remedies; it is enough to convince readers that the conditions described are intolerable and must be remedied; readers are thus given scope for exercising warm-hearted humanitarian impulses, and the remedy can be left to them. Disraeli appealed at least as much to the mind as to the emotions, and stood by the sound though not popular conviction that hard thought and harder work are necessary if social and political systems are to be bettered. Although Kingsley displayed such passionate sympathy for the poor (and endured some persecution on their behalf) he had no trace of revolutionary tendency. He wanted to stir in the rich a sense of their responsibilities; he wanted the workers to trust in God more than in man and man-made schemes for reform. When the troubles of the 'forties died down 'he became tolerably reconciled to the existing order,' and his naturally conservative temperament smoothed over such radical impulses as had moved him in time of stress. If Kingsley had been so constituted as to feel less acutely and to think more steadily and painstakingly, his immediate popularity might have been less, but his ultimate influence and permanent rank would beyond question have been higher.

The most ambitious social and political novels written

since the great Victorians finished their work are those of H. G. WELLS. At the moment it is altogether impossible to say which among his many novels will seem most important half a century hence, though by analogy it might be prophesied with some confidence that his earlier novels will survive longer than the later ones. He was born and brought up amid the small-shopkeeper class which struggled desperately and often hopelessly against the creeping implacable menace of trusts and big businesses. Wells knew this class so well and understood its emotions, aspirations and disappointments with such intimacy that he has preserved it (immortally perhaps) in English literature. A master of narrative and of humorous characterization, he succeeded in his earlier novels *(Love and Mr. Lewisham,* 1900; *Kipps,* 1905; and *The History of Mr. Polly,* 1910) in combining effective social criticism with most of the fine qualities necessary to good novels. Concurrently he wrote a series of scientific fantasies in which the impossible was made to seem entirely credible, and in some instances these books proved to be remarkably intelligent anticipations of things which actually came to pass after years had elapsed. From 1909 onward Wells' interest centred upon political affairs, and, since the War, upon international politics especially. This has led him to speculate concerning abstractions so vast that they soar beyond the compass of finite minds and are thus denuded of human interest. His remedy for the world's undoubted evils is a worldwide federation of peoples, superseding the present system of separated nations, suspicious, jealous and pugnacious, always fearing war and often on the verge of war. Though Wells' remedy is admirable and not incredible, he has commended it in explanatory statements and in word-pictures that suggest a terrifyingly large political laboratory, in which world-statesmen will be rather like super-surgeons

perpetually operating on the bodies of countries and continents. There seems to be no argument to bring against H. G. Wells' World-State; but at the same time there is reason to pray that it may not, with its petrifying efficiency, come to pass until we are beyond its pale. Man chafes against imperfection; but perfection he could not endure. The best political novel of the period was Wells' *The New Machiavelli* (1910), which, with its refrain of 'love and fine thinking,' was looking, on the whole, in the same direction as Disraeli had looked in *Coningsby;* and, as that earlier novel had, it included living characters in a thin fictional guise. *Marriage* (1912) stated in an extremely interesting manner the problem of conflict between love and work, only to end inconclusively and even evasively. *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* (1916) gave a valuable impression of England at the beginning of the War, and was the starting-point for Wells' wavering religious speculations. *Joan and Peter* surveyed the English educational system with some irritation and prepared the way for *The Outline of History* (1920), which came as part of a contemporary movement to create in children the peace-mind by teaching them to regard themselves as citizens of the world and not merely of a country with interests at variance with those of other countries. None of these books, however, can compare for general importance or literary excellence with *Tono-Bungay* (1909), a novel that will probably remain a landmark in English literature. In this novel H. G. Wells captured the last lingering notes of feudalism, dying away before the onrush of a vulgarized and mechanized democratic system. This representation of a democracy passively gulled by blatant, self-seeking, self-assertive, swindling ignorance - ignorance so utterly ignorant that even its swindling propensities are more pathetic than criminal - is like a deep lament over a modern Babylon. No praise

could be extreme for the humour, sympathy, moral passion, human interest, intellectual penetration and narrative mastery shown in *Tono-Bungay*.

On that high pinnacle we may take leave of the English novel.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SHORT STORY

COMPARED with the novel, the short story resembles a miniature beside a large oil painting. There is the widest possible technical difference between the two forms of fiction, and it is only within the last few generations that English authors have paid particular attention to the fascinating problems of craftsmanship presented by the short story. Story-telling in a brief form is both one of the oldest and one of the newest literary activities. From very early days it must have been customary for congregations of people to be entertained by story-tellers - centuries before the invention of printing, or even before it became the practice to write down any kind of literature. Although, so far as the evidence shows, oral story-telling in the early centuries was in verse form (for convenience in memorizing), the custom of narrating stories must have begun long before the earliest tales now known. Speculation as to the form taken by these oral stories can only be based upon what we know of certain permanent elements in human nature, and it is safe to assume that, in general, the method of narration bore at least some resemblance to the style adopted by Ernest Bramah in his Kai Lung stories (see *The Wallet of Kai Lung,* 1900, etc.). In these pseudo-Chinese tales the genial but mercenary professional story-teller begins his long-drawn-out yarns by some attractive titbit calculated to claim the immediate attention of his hearers and induce them to disburse the fee required for the continuance of the tale. Naturally, a professional

tale-teller, who relied for his livelihood upon such small sums as he might extract from curious bystanders, could not afford to begin with any such prolonged preliminary dissertation as a modern novelist finds possible. However dull a verbal story-teller might happen to be in the later parts of his narrative, it was essential that he should make an immediately attractive beginning; and in noting this point we note also one of the primary differences between the technique of the short story and the technique of the novel.

Until (roughly) the beginning of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, English writers had not produced the kind of fiction which can strictly be called short stories in the modern sense. This statement must be qualified, however, by pointing out that although short stories which took account of the special technical problems associated with this type of fiction had not been written by professional authors, there was nevertheless a considerable body of stories in the English language which did more or less conform to the short-story type. These were, however, in their origins, undoubtedly oral in form, for they consist in fairy-stories and folk-tales which had been on the lips of the people for generations and handed down from father to son - or, rather, from mother to child, and from nurses to their charges. Germany and other countries are perhaps richer in fairy- and folk-tales than England is; yet, nevertheless, considerable numbers of English, Scottish and Irish fairy-stories exist to show the inherent love of story-teliing that is common to all nations, whether civilized or not. It is indeed doubtful whether without this basis of folklore we could have had the works of one of the first modern British short-story writers, Robert Louis Stevenson. The fascinatingly grim and fantastic ideas he embodied in such stories as *Thrawn Janet,* and even the *New Arabian Nights,* must be attributed in

a considerable degree to the way in which, as a child, his imagination was stimulated by Alison Cunningham, the nurse to whom, in later life, he frequently expressed his indebtedness.

Before proceeding to comment on modern short stories, some reference must be made to certain earlier pieces of writing which are usually included by editors in anthologies of English short stories. There is probably a sense in which the great sequence of Arthurian legends incorporated by Malory (in the fifteenth century) in *Morte d'Arthur* might be regarded as a collection of short stories; or even Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* Chaucer, however, can be left on one side, because, with one or two exceptions, the *Tales* are narrative *poems* and therefore excluded from consideration in a survey of prose literature; while, on the other hand, the Arthurian legends are linked in a protracted series which prevents each particular incident from having that completely self-contained quality which is, or should be, one of the technical features of the short story proper. The Elizabethans, who came so near to establishing several other literary forms in the English language, also experimented with short stories. But that intense concentration of interest on the drama (of which mention has already been made in connection with the Elizabethan novels) prevented the pioneer work of such writers as Thomas Deloney, Robert Greene and others from following what might have been a normal line of development which would probably have produced the modern type of short story centuries before this was actually achieved. Between the sixteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth there were a few spasmodic attempts at short-story writing, and, among these, probably the most notable was Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal.* Even

those literary historians who wish to find the beginnings of the English short story in past centuries are not, however, completely at ease until they reach Sir Walter Scott, from whose works they are inclined to produce *Wandering Willie's Tale* with a triumphant gesture, saying that *here,* at any rate, is a real short story. But, in truth, there is little ground for regarding either this or anything else by Sir Walter Scott as actually belonging to the short story proper.

Wandering Willie's Tale appears in the middle of a novel, *Bedgauntlet,* and this fact alone persuades other critics to exclude it from the category of the short story. It is sometimes asked why a story which happens to be embedded in a long novel may not be extracted and regarded as a short story. The answer is that we should not accept as a piece of miniature painting a beautiful fragment of work which had been cut from a large canvas. Scott was not trying to write short stories. He was writing novels into which he introduced a variety of episodes. Moreover, even if this objection is overruled, there remains the fact that *Wandering Willie's Tale* does not conform to the technical requirements of the short story.

It will clarify the whole issue, if, having in mind *Wandering Willie's Tale* and certain corresponding examples which occur in the novels of Dickens, we attempt to lay down the minimum requirements which distinguish the true short story from other forms of prose fiction.

There is first, obviously, the question of length. H. G. Wells has suggested that a short story should be of no greater length than enables it to be read in some twenty minutes; but this is perhaps arbitrary, because there is so much variety in the speed at which people read - and it would be better to find some more satisfactory basis,

THE SHORT STORY

A short story should concern itself with one particular piece of action or one particular situation. There is no limit to the complexity of structure which a novelist may use, but a short story is altogether different from a novel. Irrespective of comparative length, some of Joseph Conrad's briefer tales are short stories, some are condensed novels. Thomas Hardy's *The Three Strangers*, referred to by one writer as the finest short story in the English language, is not in fact a short story. It is a condensed novel. The matters dealt with in *The Three Strangers* cover an extended period of time; there is a good deal of preliminary explanatory and descriptive matter; and the tale continues for some pages after the main interest of the story has concluded. The middle section of *The Three Strangers* would make a magnificent short story, but the whole thing, as Hardy conceived and wrote it, is in its form a short novel. So also with such tales as Conrad's *Youth* and *Typhoon*, to mention no others belonging to the category of condensed novels. The interest in both *Youth* and *Typhoon* is extended over a considerable area in time and space, and in *Typhoon* there are references (in themselves interesting) to people not immediately concerned in the storm which is the main feature of the tale. If Joseph Conrad's story *The Secret Sharer* is compared with either of these, an immediate difference will be noted. *The Secret Sharer* is a short story, because the whole interest is concentrated upon one particular incident - the picking up of a man from the water and the happenings in the captain's cabin while the man is hidden there. Neither *Wandering Willie's Tale* nor any other similar piece by Scott, nor any of Dickens' shorter tales, observe this necessary concentration upon a single episode; and only by such an extension of meaning as makes the term 'short story' meaningless, can these two novelists be regarded as authors of short stories.

A short-story writer needs also to observe the following technical requirements: The *.beginning* (as we have already noted) must be such as to engage the reader's immediate attention in the opening words (see, for example, Bret Harte's opening sentences); a novelist, on the other hand, may begin in a leisurely preparatory manner. The *characters* should be revealed swiftly in action or in speech; there is no space available for the analytical or descriptive methods suitable to the more spacious novel. *Dialogue* needs to be brisk and dramatic in quality, whereas in a novel it is possible to linger over conversations that may be in themselves delightful. Pure *description* must be reduced throughout to a minimum, and what descriptive matter is required should as far as possible be conveyed briefly through the conversation of the characters. The *ending* of a short story may (as in 0. Henry's most characteristic pieces) carry a surprise in which the chief point of the tale is concentrated, but this is only one of a variety of suitable types of endings; the important rule to note is that the ending of a short story should not attempt to summarize a mass of detail in order to 'round-off' the narrative - which may, indeed, leave some things unsaid, thus stimulating the alert reader's imagination. In brief, the technique of a short story is more closely akin to that of a play than to that of a novel.

It was the Americans, in the early part of the nineteenth century, who began to study and cultivate the special technique of the modern short story, and English writers owe more to American experiment in this branch of literature than in any other. Though we may feel with assurance that we taught American writers most of what they have known in other branches of literature, they were the pioneers in this one kind. It is no part of

our present purpose to examine the development of the American short story, but it should at least be pointed out that a proper idea of this branch of literature cannot be obtained unless a student has more than a passing acquaintance with the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Bret Harte, and with such later American short-story writers as Henry James, Ambrose Bierce, and 0. Henry. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that there was little in the works of the English short-story writers up to the period of the Great War which had not been learned directly or indirectly from Poe, Harte, James and O. Henry. But even if British writers were not originators of the short story, they have at least equalled, and in some instances improved upon, the best American models. No better short stories have been written than the best of Stevenson's, Jiipling's, Wells', and Conrad's. In more recent years the American short story has lost most of its former authority, for a reason which is not wholly unconnected with the specific merits of some of their earlier writers. Edgar Allan Poe and Bret Harte to some extent, and 0. Henry much more definitely, perfected brilliant methods of presentation which scores of younger writers learned with mechanical precision. The American schools and colleges also began to teach their students the art of short-story writing, overlooking the fact that no art can be taught, although a craft may be. The consequence is that (with the enormous and unsatisfied demand for magazine stories which exists in America) hundreds of writers, lacking personal genius, learned how to copy Bret Harte's slickness or O. Henry's audacious humour and his trick of the surprise ending; a number also learned how to imitate Edgar Allan Poe's power of suggestion; and the result has been an enormous outpouring of short stories purely mechanical in type. The American colleges have created a multi-cylindered

short-story-producing machine, but, so far as can be seen at present, not a single short-story writer of genius. The English short story has escaped this misfortune, partly because English people are less easily persuaded to believe that art is merely a matter of observing formulae, and partly because magazines in England have a much less powerful hold upon the reading public than they have in America, and there are fewer glittering prizes to be won by writers of popular short stories. It is true, of course, that the general level of magazine short stories published in England is no higher than the general level in America; but in the post-War years there have been a few English short-story writers (notably Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard) with particular genius in this form, who have broken away from the mechanical tradition and have carried the short story into areas of human interest that had not previously been explored.

Whatever developments have been brought about in more recent years, however, the great period of the English short story was roughly between, say, 1880 and 1914. It might be better to check the impulse to assert that ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON was pre-eminently a master of the short story, in order to say what is perhaps even truer: namely, that the short story happened to be peculiarly suited to the limited genius of Stevenson. He had undoubted inventive ability, but as an inventor he was shortwinded. He began *Treasure Island* with a magnificent story in his mind, but having written a few chapters he found the bubble of invention exploded, and the book had to be put aside until a second bubble could be blown. It is hardly to be expected that a writer lacking sustained power would be at ease in writing novels. But given a form which allowed him to bring a piece of writing to an end as soon as the spasm of invention

was exhausted, Stevenson could write forcefully. Reference has been made in a previous chapter to his unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston,* which is so magnificent as to make us deplore that he died, before the book could be completed. On the other hand, it is possible that if he had lived to complete *Weir of Hermiston,* what was to come might not have matched what we actually have. Stevenson was, it must be repeated, happier in dealing with small things than with large, and it was no doubt this fact that enabled him to produce a sequence of short stories which in their own way have not been bettered. His *New Arabian Nights* combines, with the utmost skill, a gift for brief narration, humour, high spirits and some at least of that agreeable moralizing tendency which was one of Stevenson's special gifts. The use of the short-story form for moral ends is of course traditional: folk-stories and fairy-tales are frequently devoted to the illustration of some moral precept, for children love a moral. There was always something of the grown-up child about Stevenson "and something of the grown-up fairy-tale even in the grimmest of his stories. He had a remarkable faculty for making his moral so palatable that we rarely notice that we have been under a moralist's tuition. The *New Arabian Nights* will always remain an alluring memory to those who read the book in early years, though the volume entitled *The Merry Men* contains Stevenson's three greatest stories: *Will* o' *the Mill, Markheim* and *Thrawn Janet.* To remember from *New Arabian Nights* the episodes in the history of the Suicide Club, particularly the deliciously named *Story of the Young Man with the Cream Tarts,* is to feel that one lived for an all too brief time in an enchanted but possible world - a world which is, after all, the world of piratic daring transferred to the London streets. Yet *The Suicide Club* and *The Rajah's Diamond* are but play. *Will o' the Mill, Markheim* and

Thrawn Janet are concerned with more permanent and important matters. Will, with his experiences and desires in the 'falling valley between pine-woods and great mountains' is in many ways the figure of us all. The traffic of life passes up and down the valley into some unknown beyond - over the hills to the Eternal City. The young man's continuous piecing together, bit by bit, of his 'broken notions of the world below' may stand for the everlasting human endeavour to penetrate beyond our own limitations and the things we see. Will's love and the loss of his love move to the irresistible muted music of unfulfilled desire which is the animating spirit of half the romances of literature; and Will's final meeting with the stranger, Death, brought back into literature a theme with which the medieval writers had played persistently, though with less than Stevenson's romantic ability. Perhaps, technically, *Will* o' *the Mill* is not a successful short story, for though it has unity of theme, it is too extended in time, the interest is dispersed rather than concentrated, and the story begins more slowly than it should. *Markheim,* however, is a model of technique. It plunges immediately into the situation which is to be laid bare, and the interest is definitely concentrated both in Time and Space: like *Thrawn Janet* it creates the atmosphere of terror with extraordinary force; and both these pieces provide Stevenson the moralist with fruitful opportunities. If these stories should fail to retain the place they at present hold in English literature, it will probably be because Stevenson's style tends to grow somewhat old-fashioned in its accents. We are still too near to him to be able to determine what impression later generations will receive from his writing; but the persistent slightly mannered tone may cause his style to 'date' for future readers almost as much as Elizabethan prose is dated for us.

Whatever high merits we allow to Stevei
story writer, he was less richly equipped t
KIPLING. Dogmatic statements in such
usually ill-advised, but there seems no need for hesitation in saying that Kipling brought the English short story of the traditional type to a full perfection which should be independent of changes in taste and outlook. However much some of Kipling's ideas may be detested, no one with a sense of literary values can fail to concede that he has done a particular piece of work as well as it is possible for such a piece to be done. His mastery in the art of the short story is based upon his unmatched power as *a teller of tales.* This is what the Samoans called Stevenson; but they would hardly have called him this if Kipling had been in Vailima at the same time. Kipling's stories produce upon the reader all the effects of oral narration. The man can be heard talking and we listen entranced, even though our minds should decline to approve the things of which he is talking. And whereas from among Stevenson's short stories it is common to choose some half dozen as of special merit, it is difficult to select from among Kipling's scores of stories any that can be regarded as certainly better than others, except on grounds of personal liking for certain kinds of subjects. It is hardly possible to speak of Kipling without repeating what is already a commonplace in connection with his work - that he is the Laureate of the Mechanical Age. He is this in more ways than one. Not only has he written of modern machines, but his own mind has the unrelaxing efficiency of a thoroughly well-constructed and well-managed machine. This is not to say that his literary craftsmanship is mechanical in the way in which the American short story has become mechanical. He does not work to a set formula; he has no stereotyped tricks; he has mannerisms of style, but no deliberately exploited mannerisms of construction. He tells his

;hey seem to come naturally but in perfect lips, rather than appearing to be con- literary craftsman wiio is consciously and nicely calculating his effects. Kipling coincided in time with a period when the machine was more prominent in the consciousness of men than ever before. Therefore Kipling utilized the machine as an important part of his literary material, but he has transformed the machine in the imaginations of thousands of readers, because he sees (as no other writer ever has seen) into what may be called, paradoxically, the mind and soul of the machine. If we take such stories as *'ooy* and *The Ship that Found Herself,* we discover that the mere external mechanical appearance of machinery (beautiful though this may be in itself) is made relatively unimportant in comparison with the true secret of the machine - the perfect fulfilment of its function. A ship or a railway engine or an aeroplane exists for the performance of a special piece of work its justification in the sight of the God of the Machines is that it shall perfectly fulfil itself. The pride of the machine if machines may be imagined as having sensation - is in the exact and unremitting satisfaction, moment by moment, of the purpose for which it was constructed. 'For Kipling, the beauty and the significance of the machine consists not in its appearance, but in the full performance of a set piece of work The reader also develops an awareness of the beauty and significance of machines in this relation, because few normal human beings can resist the attraction of contemplating that which is perfectly accommodated to its end. But what is a merit in Kipling when he is dealing with machines, tends sometimes to become a limitation when he is contemplating human beings. He is accustomed to the perfectly reliable functioning of the modern machine, and the value he sets on the work of human beings appears often to depend upon their maintaining

an unrelaxed drive in the performance of the
It is true that Kipling has written charmi
but his fantasy is 'all of a piece,' as it were: it is .
going fantasy. He would hold that human beings must not lapse into fantasy or behave illogically when they are engaged on some piece of the world's work. Probably in this the angels are on the side of Kipling; but the angels, by their nature, are other than men. It is - perhaps unfortunately, but quite certainly - part of the nature of human beings to behave fantastically and illogically even at the most inappropriate moments. However much this may dislocate the world's work, few of us would wish human nature to be otherwise. A wholly and irrepressibly efficient and logical human race would banish from the earth much that is more invaluable than the reliability it would establish. The total effect of this element in Kipling's work is that while, in general, he has humanized machines - making them seem to many of us like sentient creatures - he has tended to mechanize human beings and to deprecate just those qualities through which human beings remain human. If Kipling has dealt with one branch of humanity more than any other, it is with the British soldier and civil servant in India, where Kipling's characteristic ideas of function and service are capable of emphatic demonstration. As Kipling sees the matter, the British are in India not for their own pleasure but for the performance of the function of civilizing and serving the Indian that is the white man's burden. So far as human beings may be prone to fantastic and illogical actions, they are unfitted for the performance of that particular function. The needs of India and of subject races are, in Kipling's view, too urgent to allow scope for the operation of human weaknesses. And if this is the purpose for which British people are in India, it is necessary that they should be helped in their duty of civilizing and uplifting

the Indian himself. The Indian should w himself to be *served* (that, for the time his function) and not desire hurriedly to serve himself or to make himself independent of those who are there to perform that duty for him. From this conception arises Kipling's impatience (or, as some would prefer to say, his intolerance) of native endeavour and of the desire for independence which seems to the Nationalist mind the quickest and most direct way of arriving at upliftment and civilization, but which to Kipling, on the other hand, appears merely to be putting grit into the machine and creating friction which prevents the British sahib from creating the ideal State. All this, of course, is highly controversial matter, upon which it is possible to have a variety of opinions; and the large part which these controversial questions play in the work of Kiphng has prevented full justice being done to his importance as a literary figure. He is one of the great literary craftsmen; and away from India, and concerning places where such problems as those just mentioned are of less immediate importance, Kipling has written some of the most uproariously lighthearted stories in the English language. *Brugglesmiih* and *The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat* are magnificent fun; while his stories of animals, in the *Jungle Books* and elsewhere, are full of that extraordinary understanding of non-human creatures which makes Kipling unique. It is less easy to speak of his soldier stories, because his British Tommies are conventionalized figures rather than convincingly realistic representations of the private soldier as he appears to be to himself and his companions: Kipling here has hardly penetrated below the surface as he has in other connections. Of all the modern English writers Kipling probably stands to gain most by the passage of time. When the differences of opinion of which he has been the disturbing centre are no longer urgent in the

minds of readers, his subtle literary qualities, his understanding of children as well as of animals and machines, and his absolute efficiency as a craftsman, will receive proper appreciation.

After Stevenson and Kipling, H. G. WELLS is probably the best of the remaining writers of short stories in the traditional form, and in this department of literature he shows a wider range, greater resource and power of invention than either of the others. He is particularly apt in the use both of humour and horror, in addition to his unmatched power of providing semi-scientific thrills. It seems almost certain that Wells' collected short stories will be regarded as a permanent contribution to modern fiction, especially on account of such moving parables as *The Country of the Blind.*

From time to time in the foregoing comments the phrase 'traditional short story' has been used, in reference to the kind of story in which there is a clearly defined plot, normal character-drawing and a sense of completion. In later years a different type of short story has been practised by English writers, most importantly by KATHERINE MANSFIELD, who was much more desirous of suggesting mental states than of relating incidents. She had extraordinarily acute insight into the minds of many differing types of human creatures - particularly of children, whose fluttering, illogical, disproportionate impression of life she conveyed with deep sensibility in such stories as *Prelude* and *At the Bay.* Katherine Mansfield could with equal success get herself 'into the skin' of an out-of-work cinema actress *(Pictures),* an unhappy charwoman *(Life of Ma Parker),* or the spinster daughters of a deceased soldier *(The Daughters of the Late Colonel).* To her, the interest of people was in proportion

to the extent to which she could represent their emotional states. For the time being, as we read her stories, we *become* those people, reproducing whatever sensations they may experience. Sometimes the sensations are intensely disturbing, as when we share the mounting hysteria of the Colonel's daughters. It is not unnatural if some readers feel that Katherine Mansfield's stories are sometimes unpleasant just because of this disturbing quality; but there can be no doubt of the service she rendered in enlarging our sensibilities and in increasing our sensitiveness to the experiences of a variety of other persons.

CHAPTER FIVE

ESSAYS AND LETTERS

§1 *The Essay*

FEW words in the English language are less popular than *essay*. It is associated in our minds with occasions when we sat down in front of a blank sheet of paper to write so-many-hundred words on a given subject concerning which we seemed to know nothing whatsoever. Yet that task, an ordeal to most, can be a pleasure to some, and under such conditions writers have produced and will continue to produce essays which are pleasant to read and were pleasant to write. But perhaps a qualification should be made. Authors who write delightful essays, have, more often than not, no 'given' subject. They may frequently sit down before a blank sheet of paper to write an essay on . . . *anything*. That is the ideal condition for a particular type of essay-writer - who may have to produce a monthly, weekly, or even a daily essay for a magazine or newspaper on whatever topics occur to him; or who may write essays because he finds delight in writing - that is, in 'expressing himself or in trying to communicate to others his own thoughts and sensations. The little that has so far been said on this matter will already have made it clear that there is more than one kind of essay. Students and scholars are rarely able to sit down to write an essay on anything they choose. A subject is given; the essay must be kept strictly to the subject; it must either display knowledge or convey knowledge to others; and that knowledge must be

presented in an orderly and logical manner. But when we speak of The Essay,' as a branch of literature, we usually do not mean the essay that conveys knowledge; we mean, rather, the essay that gives pleasure (it may incidentally convey knowledge, but that is subsidiary to its principal purpose).

There are, then, two main divisions into which essays fall: *(a)* the informative essay let that be called more briefly *the formal essay; (b)* the pleasure-giving essay; and since essays of this kind usually have a strong personal note and tell us a good deal about the author himself (quite indirectly, perhaps), we may call that *the familiar essay.* Macaulay wrote formal essays; Charles Lamb wrote familiar essays. In order that the difference between the two kinds shall be seen, at first, in a simple form, let us imagine an instance. An author who contributes essays to a weekly review goes into his study one morning after breakfast to write his next essay, which he must dispatch to his editor by midday. He has looked through the morning newspapers, but it is August; and as that is a holiday month for many journalists, newspapers are usually duller then than at other times. The newspapers have suggested to the author no topic for his essay that day, though they will usually suggest many possible topics. However, there is still the essay to write - topic or no topic. The author sits down, picks up his pen, hesitates a moment, scratches a few vague strokes on his blotting paper and - *got it ! Blotting Paper* - that topic will do as well as any other. He begins . . . but he writes nothing about blotting paper. Blotting paper has suggested instantaneously another but a related topic - *Sponges.* And that, instantaneously also, suggests a further related topic. The words with which the author begins (we are still dealing with our imaginary instance) are 'Mr. Boanerges . . .'; and he writes straight on for an hour (or possibly typewrites) and gets his essay

off to the editor in good time, with some title quite different from *Blotting Paper.* What has Mr. Boanerges to do with sponges or blotting paper ? In Bernard Shaw's play, *The Apple Cart,* there is a blustering character named Boanerges, an aggressively democratic Cabinet Minister who comes to the palace to interview King Magnus. Boanerges considers himself to be a man with very decided opinions, some of which he proceeds to set before the king. The king, a quiet, subtle man, voices some of his own opposing opinions. At a later Cabinet meeting, Boanerges expresses to his colleagues the very opinions he has taken over from the king a short time before. Boanerges, like many men and women, is a human sponge. He soaks up other people's ideas, and afterwards they drip out quite unchanged and as though they were his own. A large number of essays could be written about such people; our author has written one - wittily and in a pleasing style, adding comments drawn from his own observations of men and women, and providing not only pleasure but also a piece of useful social criticism. But *a formal essayist* who began with blotting paper, would have to keep to that subject - writing about how blotting paper is made, the uses to which it is put, and so on.

Some daily newspapers, most weekly reviews, and a few monthlies and quarterlies print familiar essays usually by essayists specially retained for that purpose. The necessary equipment of such writers is: interest in the world's affairs and in the doings of men and women; unrelaxing curiosity about life; and as much varied experience as they can possibly obtain. What their editors require of them is that they shall keep an eye on the world and on human nature: that their essays shall be a mirror of the age - usually of those aspects of the age which are not commonly seen, but which are nevertheless important. The essayist reflects the age in which

lie lives, not in a clear mirror, but in a mirror tinted by his own personality. In essays of this type the personal element is usually stressed, as it is in Lamb's *Essays of Elia.*

A happy example for brief analysis comes to hand (as these words are being written) in *The Week-End Review:* a 'familiar essay,' by Ivor Brown, entitled *Eternal Blazon.* The choice of titles is important for familiar essays *(Blotting Paper* would have been a very bad title), and care should always be taken to use a title which will' either stimulate the reader's interest at the very outset, or stir his curiosity. *Eternal Blazon* does both: it arouses interest in those who recognize it as a quotation from *Hamlet,* and stirs curiosity in those who do not. The words have an attractive sound, and, standing alone, they have a strange appearance which entices the potential reader. Ivor Brown's essay is concerned (or begins by being concerned) with the thousandth anniversary of Vergil's birth; but, as a familiar essayist should, he soon digresses - to memories of his own schooldays and to a delightful old schoolmaster who first led him to Vergil's Sixth Book of the *JSneid.*

He gave us English words that quivered and murmured like thf Latin. He suddenly persuaded us that translation washot just a matter of grubbing in the 'die.' and fishing out an equivalent that wouldn't be crossed out. All the blue-pencil side of the business, all of the twelve-out-of-twenty accountancy of the mark-book, filtered out of mind. The elephants *in* Eutropius had been a joke and the Gauls in Caesar a bore, but the spirits stretching out their hands in yearning for the further shore were quite a different company. You could even remember them out of class. The great tags of Vergilian pathos were a melody in the mind'. Lessons had become quite different.

The essayist goes on from that particular schoolmaster to teachers in general, to their opportunities and how they

withui the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work ! Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like helldogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man. The blessed glow of Labour in him, is it not as purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up, and of sour smoke itself there is made bright blessed flame ![1]

As a young man Carlyle was tortured by religious doubts which were resolved while he was walking in an Edinburgh street one day in June 1821, and his spiritual new-birth is described in the *Everlasting Yea* section of *Sartor Besartus.* That book states Carlyle's view of life in a ruggedly humorous style as a Philosophy of Clothes presented by a German Professor-of-Things-in-General: 'All visible things are emblems . . . Whatever represents Spirit to Spirit is properly a Clothing, a suit of Raiment, to be put on for a season, and to be laid off.....The whole External Universe is but Clothing.' Carlyle's influence was strongly pervasive throughout the Victorian generation and few of the leading minds escaped without some mark from it. He detested almost every tendency in the Britain of his time, and his affinities were with the Germans more than with his own nation. For democracy he had no liking, and his lectures on *Heroes and Hero-Worship* were intended to demonstrate that 'the world has always been guided by inspired persons' conscious of their destiny and working to fulfil it. Both as a biographer (of Cromwell and Freder' the Great) and as an historian *(The French Revolt*

[1] *Past and Present.*

Carlyle achieved fame, but these departments of his work are subsidiary to his philosophical and prophetic utterances. His reputation fluctuates from age to age, and in the twentieth century has reached a low ebb, except for those who retain recollections of the esteem in which he was at one time held. Of his literary style there is little to say. No one could call it admirable, yet the personal force behind it is often sufficient to compensate its ungainly turbulence and caprice. It is virile, and if we accept Carlyle we accept his style and his distrust of art as an indispensable part of himself. The *Essay on Burns* shows him in a more placable and likeable mood, and is, altogether, an attractive piece of work.

The familiar essay went out of fashion when Lamb and his contemporaries finished their work and did not come in again until STEVENSON began. Once again, in his essays, we find strong emphasis laid upon the personal note and the appeal to sentiment. Stevenson's popularity as an essay-writer depends largely upon his nicely calculated combination of cheerful optimism and picturesque pessimism. He knew the potent effect of romantic gloom, such as he indulges in *A Christmas Sermon,* and in *Pulvis et Umbra.* It is one of the paradoxes of human nature that the optimist is never so happy as when he is saturating himself in a mist of melancholy. When Stevenson writes, 'We look for some reward of our endeavours and are disappointed; not success, not happiness, not even peace of conscience, crowns our ineffectual efforts to do well,' he is using that nacticular kind of emotional weapon which he wielded

ore skill than almost any other English writer.
e possible to banish this one element from his
d retain all the rest, it seems fairly safe to say

that his popularity with the majority of readers would automatically disappear. Is he not all the time telling us what splendid fellows we are in facing those fearful odds which most of us love to feel we are battling against? Yet Stevenson also appears to be informing us, almost continually, that we shall certainly be defeated - 'our frailties are invincible, our virtues barren; the battle goes sore against us to the going down of the sun'; but, even so,

> God forbid it should be man that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy: Surely not all in vain.[1]

Stevenson is one of several amusing illustrations that literature affords of the way in which incurably optimistic people can be persuaded into emotional acceptance of the blackest pessimism, provided only that it be veiled in language that has 'a dying fall.' Definitely, however, the source of the fascination which Stevenson exercises over most minds is in his attitude to life and not in his literary style, although a confusion is often made between the two. Round about 1875, when Stevenson was beginning to get into print, English writers were developing a much more self-conscious interest in Style than they had in previous generations. Though earlier writers had considered the problems which arise from the business of putting words together attractively, they had on the whole thought more of matter than of manner. But from the eighteen-seventies to the nineteen-hundreds a group of what might be called professional stylists played an important part in English literature, and Stevenson was one of this group. He has himself told of the way in which he learned to write by deliberate imitation of earlier authors, and it would be true to say

[1] *Pulvis et Umbra.*

that his own style, if not a patchwork, is certainly a mosaic. If readers consistently followed Ruskin's advice and sought out the meaning of every word, to read Stevenson would be an arduous task, as may be seen from the first paragraph of *A Plea for Gas-Lamps,* which contains numbers of references and allusions which lazy readers (meaning most of us) take in their stride without examination. It all sounds exceedingly pleasant, and it is one of the dangers of this particular style of w[r]iting that the pleasantness of its sound is sometimes accepted as a satisfactory substitute for precise comprehension, though the pleasure we derive from reading should come at least as much through meaning as through style. No one who is sensitive to the satisfaction which can be given by words as words, would deny Stevenson's attraction. The danger may be, however, that we are inclined to credit him with a profundity of thought which in fact his writing does not truly display. He lives (however long he may live) by the grace of his style and by the fact that he is most of the time flattering his readers by creating in them the sensation that they are 'eavesdropping at the doors of his heart.'

A greater influence than Stevenson among other writers toward the end of the nineteenth century was WALTER PATER, who somehow earned the reputation of being a great stylist in spite of the fact that he occasionally shows a total inability either to punctuate or to write good English. His style is often so self-conscious that he exhibits such prancing mannerisms as a dancer might be forced to display on a dancing-floor strewn with fragile glass balloons. He did good service, however, by insisting on Schiller's principle that the artist may be known by what he *omits.* In literature, Pater goes on to say, 'the true artist may be best recognized by

his tact of omission.* When he adds, on the following page:

> For in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the Jast finish of the gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy, in the rough-hewn block of stone

—would it be merely impertinent to inquire whether some surplusage is not present even in this sentence, as well as in a great deal more of Pater's writing ? The good stylist is he whose prose is devoid of most of those features commonly associated with good style by professional stylists. As soon as style becomes as mannered as Pater's was, it ceases to be good style in the plain and honest sense. Whether he was aware of it or not, Pater gave a true picture of himself in the following sentence:

> A lover of words for their OWTI sake, to whom nothing about them is unimportant, a minute and constant observer of their physiognomy, he will be on the alert not only for obviously mixed metaphors of course, but for the metaphor that is mixed in all our spoech, though a rapid use may involve no cognition of it.

That sentence appears in the essay on Style which prefaces the volume called *Appreciations:* but that sentence is certainly not an example of good style. Pater was a most perceptive and illuminating critic, as his essays on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Browne and others (in *Appreciations)* indicate, but as time elapses, readers will probably come round more and more to the co ction that (by his contemporaries) Pater was ad sd on the,wrong grounds. At his best, he was a hig skilled craftsman in an artificial style; but, una- wa he did a good deal of disservice to other writers

of his own time by creating an impression that good style meant an artificial style and not a natural style. His *Marius the Epicurean* is a striking reconstruction of an historical period, and it contains incidentally one of the most beautiful of the several English renderings of the Eros and Psyche story.

The most notable of Pater's disciples was Oscar Wilde, whose prose is at once more highly elaborate and more smooth-flowing than Pater's; but whereas Pater's prose at its best had a certain cool chastity of style, Wilde's is an exotic hothouse-growth, though irresistibly attractive because of its colour and melody. Whether they represent a good style or a bad style, who can possibly resist such sentences as these from *The Critic as Artist:*

On the mouldering citadel of Troy lies the lizard like a thing of green bronze. The owl has built her nest in the palace of Priam. . . .

It is twilight always for the dancing nymphs whom Corot set free among th^ silver poplars of France. In eternal twilight they move, those frail diaphanous figures, whose tremulous white feet seem not to touch the dew-drenched grass they tread on.

In the twentieth century the writers of familiar essays have been so numerous that it is impracticable to particularize them here. Nor indeed is it necessary to *d&* so, because most of them have inherited their method and (so far as they could) their style from Lamb, and there is little new to say of them. The best of this group are probably E. V. LUCAS, ROBERT LYND, and A. G. GARDINER (Alpha of the Plough). Almost the onh n-temporary essayist who has struck an entirely indr lal note is MAX BEERBOHM, who began as one of th(m-nered stylists (though a particularly delightful c of

the eighteen-nineties, but who, in his later development, has seemed to rely less upon precursors than any essayist of his time. His style is much more incisive and astringent than that of most of the familiar essayists, and his choice of subjects is marked by a much greater measure of individuality.

§2 *Letter-writing*

Letter-writing has been rightly described as the 'gentlest' of the literary arts, because it is the most intimate. When reading a volume of letters we often feel that we are eavesdropping, overhearing something not intended for our ears, and a curious point in ethics is raised by the publication of personal letters. In private life we consider it a shabby thing to read (while the writer is alive) letters not intended for our eyes. After his death, however, we publish them with but little compunction. Occasionally protest is made by sensitive people - such as those who considered it wrong to print the Brownings' love-letters, or Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne - but, in general, we accept it as ethically permissible to reveal the intimacies of a dead writer's soul through his letters. We might indeed state, as a more or less definite principle, that the only letters worth publishing are those which were not intended for publication: such letters are delightful because they show the writer in his spiritual pyjamas-at his homeliest and most informal. Perhaps entirely naked souls would be disconcerting; but, at least, we do desire to get as close as we can to the real self of a writer, and it is in his letters that we come nearest. What a difference the thought of publication may make can be seen by comparing Robert Louis Stevenson's early and informal letters with his *Vailirna Letters* written to Sidney Colvin as a record of life in Samoa and for possible collection in a printed volume. The early letters to Stevenson's family and

friends are a living picture of Stevenson the man, who was so loved by those about him. We do not need the personal testimony of his friends to assure us that R. L. S. was lovable - the letters testify directly to us. But the lengthy communications from Vailima are sometimes, in comparison, tediously journalistic, and show much more of the husk of tHe"man as he appeared in the public eye.

In the introduction to the definitive edition of the Letters of R. L. S., Sir Sidney Colvin says that in reading them we feel as though we are listening at the door of the author's heart; and those words exactly express the compel ling power of letters as a form of literature. Most of us are, metaphorically if not literally, incorrigible eavesdroppers and listeners at keyholes; our curiosity is unquenchable, and through diaries and private letters we can slake this thirst of curiosity with deep draughts of personal revelation.

Necessarily, letters for friends will be marked by a quietness of tone and a degree of intimacy inappropriate to writings intended for publication. The more a man decks himself out in literary graces the further he withdraws himself from communion with his audience. Good 'literary' writing is achieved, usually, by painstaking and frequent revision. We get, not the spontaneous thoughts and expressions of an author, but his second thoughts and his third thoughts and his afterthoughts. We get the author less *as he is,* than as he wishes us to think he is. But unless a man is undesirably self-conscious he will not make a practice of revising his familiar letters. They are and should remain ore digged fresh from the mental mine - and it is because they contain the dross along with the pure metal that letters can be so valuable to a true estimate of the man himself.

The earliest extant collection of familiar correspondence in English is the *Paston Letters,* written

between 1424 and 1506 by members of a family belonging to the village of Paston in Norfolk. Though the *Paston Letters* are more important as history than as literature, they nevertheless provide a fascinating first-hand record of domestic life in medieval England, which is the more valuable because it is entirely ingenuous and uncoloured by any thought of publication. Out of this collection, it is the letters of a woman that are most attractive, for Margaret Paston's contributions (written in the last half of the fifteenth century) are specially interesting in their quiet ordinariness. She writes on one occasion to her 'right worshipful husband, John Paston, to be delivered in great haste' a letter asking him to send another pot of treacle:

for I have been right evil at ease, and your daughter, both, since that ye went hence, and one of the tallest young men of this parish lyeth sick, and hath a great murrain, how he shall do God knoweth.

That letter was written from Norwich in 1451. Fifteen years afterwards, Margaret Paston is sending good advice to her 'well-beloved son, Sir John Paston,' who had evidently run away from home. Margaret is sad because her husband thinks she assented to the boy's departure, and that, she says, 'hath caused me to have great heaviness.' She advises Sir John to beg his father's pardon - 'as lowly as ye can' - and also asks him to write and say 'how ye have shifted for yourself since ye have departed hence'; but he is not to let his father know that he is writing to her. Five or six years later, she is sending him matrimonial advice. Mothers and sons, clearly, were much the same four or five hundred years ago as now.

To the other accomplishments of Queen Elizabeth must be added her piquant quality as a letter-writer. On one occasion she had desired Dr. Cox, Bishop of Ely,

to perform some duty, but the bishop had evidently demurred. The queen responded:

PROUD PRELATE,—You know what you were before I made you what you are now. If you do not immediately comply with my request, I will unfrock you, by God !

ELIZABETH.[X]

Coming to the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, it is still women letter-writers who engage attention - even though we pass by such men as John Evelyn and Jonathan Swift. First, in the seventeenth century, there are the letters of Dorothy Osborne, daughter of Sir Peter Osborne (the Royalist defender of Guernsey Castle against the Parliamentarians in the Civil War). Dorothy was devotedly attached to Sir William Temple, a lukewarm Royalist whose enemies accused him of being willing to serve either side, and it is to him that her surviving letters are written. He was a year younger than Dorothy and the couple had to wait seven years because of her family's opposition to the match, and they were not married until 1655, when Dorothy was twenty-eight. She was an accomplished woman of fine character, living a steadfast and pure life in a dissolute age. Nowhere else, outside the pages of Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, do we catch such charming glimpses of seventeenth-century rural life.

You ask me how I pass my time here. I can give you a perfect account not only of what I do for the present, but of what I am likely to do this seven years if I stay here so long. I rise in the morning reasonably early, and before I am ready I go round the house till I am weary of that, and then into the garden till it grows too hot for me. About ten o'clock I think of making me ready, and when that's done I go into my father's chamber, from thence to dinner,

[1] See *A Letter Book*, edited by George Saintsbury.

where my cousin Molle and I sit in great state in a room and at a table that would hold a great many more. After dinner we sit and talk till Mr. B. comes in question, and then I am gone. The heat of the day is spent in reading or working, and about six or sevon o'clock I walk out into a common that lies hard by the house, where a great many young wenches keep sheep and cows, and sit in the shade singing of ballads. I go to them and compare their voices and beauties to some ancient shepherdesses that I have read of, and find a vast difference there: but, trust me, I think these are as innocent as those could be. I talk to them, and find they want nothing to make them the happiest people in the world but the knowledge that they are so. Most commonly, when wo are in the midst of our discourse, one looks about her, and spies her cows going into the corn, and then away they all run as if they had wings at their heels. I, that am not so nimble, stay behind: and when I see them driving home their cattlo, I think 'tis time for me to retire too. When I have supped, I go into the garden, and so to the side of a small river that runs by it, where I sit down and wish you with me. ... In earnest, 'tis a pleasant place, and would be much more so to me if I had your company. I sit there sometimes till I am lost with thinking: and were it not for some cruel thoughts of the crossness of our fortunes that will not let me sleep there, I should forget that there were such a thing to be done as going to bed.

In those passages from a letter written about 1652 we have the setting of Dorothy Osborne's quiet and satisfying though sometimes slightly melancholy days. From other letters we gather that she was constantly pestered by relatives who wished to dissuade her from marrying Temple. Her brother was one of the most insistent objectors, until Dorothy lost patience and so defied him that he was troubled by a sleepless night. Yet how delightful is the picture of their ceremonious goodnight. Dorothy writes:

We parted in great anger with the usual coremony of a eg and a curtsey, that you would have died with laughing to have seen us.

Then, next night, when company is gone, brother and sister sit silently together until long after the rest of the household is abed. At length the brother makes a stumbling apology and the two grow to [4]calm and peace with all the world.' Even if Dorothy Osborne is not the most accomplished of the English women letter-writers, there is in her such quiet stability, sincerity and charm as are unsurpassed even by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu - in turning to whom we launch into the next century - the eighteenth - which Professor Saintsbury has described as the Golden Age of English Letter-writing.

Lady Mary, the eldest daughter of the Duke of Kingston, was born in 1G89 and noted as much for her wit as for her beauty. Dorothy Osborne's quality as a letter-writer lay in her innate ability to combine self-revelation with just enough of external description to provide an appropriate setting to her own personality. Lady Mary was a sophisticated 'great lady,' a blue-stocking, and a widely-experienced traveller with a keen eye and considerable skill as a descriptive writer. She spent many years on the Continent, and as the wife of Edward Wortley Montagu, British Ambassador at Constantinople, had opportunity for observing Eastern manners and customs, which she describes in some of the best travel-letters we possess.

Among other eighteenth-century letter-writers of outstanding interest are the poets Thomas Gray and William Cowper, and such men of the world as Horace Walpole and Lord Chesterfield. Gray was a conscious and deliberate artist in words, pre-eminently a man of second thoughts and third thoughts - rarely impetuous or spontaneous. Yet, in addition to being a great little

poet, Thomas Gray is one of the best English letter-writers. It has been said that he never 'spoke-out,' even in his letters, but we certainly get closer to the real man in the letters than in the poems. When, in his own words, we read of Gray standing up to write a letter to Walpole, because all the chairs are occupied by his uncle's dogs, he becomes a much more human creature than the reflective poet contemplating tombs in Stoke Poges churchyard. In this letter he speaks of old trees as 'reverend vegetables' - a delectable coupling of words; and how many who dislike dogs would realize as Gray does that, for dog lovers, *'comfortable* noise and stink' is a phrase with the perfectly affectionate and expressive adjective ?

Wesleyan Methodist services have been variously described, yet who but Walpole would have designated such a service as 'an opera' %

My health advances faster than my amusement. However, I have been at one opera, Mr. Wesley's. They have boys and girls with charming voices, that sing hymns, in parts, to Scotch ballad-tunes: but indeed so long that one would think they were already in eternity, and knew how much time they had before them. The chapel is very neat, with true Gothic windows (yet I am not converted); but I was glad to see that luxury is creeping in upon them before persecution: they have very neat mahogany stands for branches, and brackets of the same in taste. At the upper end is a broad *hautpas* of four steps, advancing in the middle; at each end of the broadest part are two of *my* eagles, with red cushions for the parson and clerk. Behind them rise three more steps, in the midst of which is a third eagle for pulpit - scarlet-armed chairs to all three. On either hand, a balcony for elect ladies. The rest of the congregation sit on forms. Behind the pit, in a dark niche, is a plain table within rails - so you see the throne is for the apostle. Wesley is a lean, elderly man, fresh-coloured, his hair smoothly combed, but with a *soupcon* of

curl at the ends: wondrous clean, but as evidently an actor as Garrick. He spoke his sermon, but so fast and with so little accent that I am sure he has often uttered it, for it was like a lesson. There were parts and eloquence in it; but towards the end he exalted his voice and acted very ugly enthusiasm - decried learning, and told stories, like Latimer, of the fool of his college, who said, 'I *thanks* God for everything.' Except a few from curiosity and *some honourable women,* the congregation was very mean.

Almost interminable hymn-singing was a feature of the Evangelical Revival - many of the hymns came near to being versified sermons - a point upon which Walpole touches with characteristic wit.

Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son contain the very perfection of well-bred worldly wisdom untroubled by spiritual aspiration. Impeccable, according to the standards of the time, both in literary phrasing and in the pattern of manners commended, the Chesterfield letters preserve the precise tone of the eighteenth century's ideal of the complete gentleman. Nor was that ideal so debased as we are now sometimes persuaded to believe. If man were indeed a creature of mind and manners alone, Lord Chesterfield would be unmatched as a guide: and even though we recognize the limitations of his outlook we may still find in his letters much admirable and sound sense.

In William Cowper's work there are frequent foreshadowings of the approaching break-up of the eighteenth century ideal of intellectual self-possession. The 'enthusiasm,' or emotional and spiritual exaltation, that Walpole found so ugly in Wesley was to be the inspiring force of the next generation, which brought in the romantic movement in literature. Much of this new spirit is present in Cowper's poetry, while his correspondence is expressive of that simple humanity -

embracing piety, pathos and playfulness - which makes his letters so charmingly intimate.

The poets of the early nineteenth century were also notable as letter-writers. To many readers, Byron's letters are more 'likeable' than his poems; while Keats' letters would establish him in literature as a rare genius even if there were no *Odes*, no *Endymion*, no *Eve of St. Agnes*. In fact, those who know only the poems cannot possibly appreciate the sanity, scope and penetration of Keats' genius as this is apparent in the letters - leaving aside the deep disturbance evident in those addressed to Fanny Brawne. Keats is unique in this branch of English literature, for none other than he has written a body of letters displaying such natural and irrepressible intellectual greatness.

The possession of Charles Lamb's letters would go far to compensate us if we were somehow to be deprived of his *Essays of Elia*. Lamb's circle of correspondents was an extensive one: he knew almost everyone who was anyone among the writers of his day, and in his frequent letters to such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, among many others, there are. the closest possible glimpses of Lamb's most intimate self. As occasion arises, he tells, at one time of the sad tragedy of his sister's affliction; at another, of his pleasure in wandering about London's streets; at yet another, of his sly fun with solemn or effusive visitors. Lamb had the not too common ability really to *live* actively in every moment of his life - even in the quiet moments: and of that eager, delighted living his letters are an exquisite record.

Something more than reflected glory must be allowed to Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) for his *Journals and Correspondence*. The familiar of numerous poets and other well-known people, both English and foreign, he made it his life-work to preserve in writing his conversations with and impressions of eminent

persons. Crabb Robinson was neither a 'lion-hunter' nor a snob, and his admiration of the great was always tinged with an astringent perception of their limitations and shortcomings. Consequently, he has added very considerably to our understanding of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb, among many others of his time; and while he is illuminating their characters and dispositions, he concurrently reveals himself as a witty and agreeable companion.

If the once tardy but now extravagant fame of the translation of the *Rubdiydt of Omar Khayyam* had not overshadowed his other writings, Edward Fitzgerald would no doubt be more generally known as a letter-writer ranking below only the best. His correspondents included Crabbe, Borrow, Thackeray, and also Carlyle, who once wrote to him: 'Thanks for your friendly human letter. . . . One gets so many mhuman letters, ovine, bovine, porcine, etc., etc.: I wish you would write a little oftener.' It was the warm-hearted 'humanness' of Fitzgerald that made him a cherished friend even to those who were conscious of his eccentricities. The rendering of *Omar Khayyam* is so much more a naturalization than a mere translation, that it would be reasonable to attribute to Fitzgerald himself something of the romantic pessimism and picturesque fatalism of the *Rubdiydt* in its English dress. How far removed he actually was from echoing such sentiments may be learned in the letters, the simplicity and affectionate friendliness of which represent the true character of Fitzgerald.

In a century so rich as the nineteenth in writers of divers kinds it was inevitable that the bulk of published letters should have been enormous - whether in separate collections or interpolated in biographies of the 'life and letters' type. From among the host, the Browning love-letters must be singled out as an uncommonly beautiful

and sensitive interchange of the deepest emotions of two devoted people. Though, ethically, a case might be made against publication, these letters can never diminish admiration of the writers' nobility of character.

The present state of letter-writing has been injured, and the future prospect imperilled, by the typewriter and the telephone. The clicking of a machine does not promote the quiet intimacy of thought and expression necessary for familiar letter-writing; while dictation to a typist involves the very negation of the right spirit for correspondence with friends. And further, the more telephones the fewer letters - until telephonic writing comes to preserve our spoken messages. Yet, though the mechanical outlook encourages a pessimistic expectation that letter-writing will pass, as conversation has passed, into the limbo of lost arts, there are still a few good things to look for in this department of literature. Hardly longer ago than yesterday the letters of Joseph Conrad brought us closer to that fine spirit: and there is good reason to believe that when the future brings the collected correspondence of Bernard Shaw and J. M. Barrie the English classic letter-writers will be worthily reinforced.

CHAPTER SIX

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

§1 *Biography*

AT first thought, biography would seem to be the simplest of all literary forms, since a biographer has merely to accumulate the available facts, and select from among them what appears to him to be relevant to the life of his subject, and then to marshal the selected facts in order and present them with what literary skill he can command. That is to say, the biographer, unlike the novelist or the dramatist, has no creative work to perform. He is in better case also than the essayist, who is at least compelled to choose a personal point of view, even when he is writing formal essays. And yet, simple though the biographer's task may seem, the history of literature has proved that it is in fact one of the most difficult. While it is possible that the number of biographies actually written in the course of the centuries may be scarcely fewer than the number of novels, the English biographies which have survived the test of time can be counted almost on the ringers of two hands.

What, then, is the source of the biographer's obvious difficulty ?

In the first place, in earlier times, it arose from the fact that the material available after the death of an eminent person was comparatively small. The habit of preserving records had not yet grown upon the human race, and what survived did so either by accident or through the precarious channel of the human memory.

In the second place, in later centuries, the biographer's difficulty has arisen from a lack of agreement as to what is or is not proper to tell of the life of an eminent person after death. We should say, almost instinctively, that the aim of a biographer should always be to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the subject of the biography. But it is just here that the crux of the biographer's problem lies. We come back always to the never-answered question, *What is Truth ?* Indeed, as we have suggested before, the whole truth about any human being is almost undiscoverable, because the vital part of the truth often lies embedded in the heart and consciousness of the person himself and is never revealed to any other. We may say, in general, therefore, that the truth about himself is the secret every person bears to the sanctuary of the grave. Yet even this is not the real difficulty which has faced the modern biographer, since all that we can reasonably ask of him (if truth is the ideal to be aimed at) is that he should reveal just so much of the truth as is made available to him in whatever records pass into his hands. There remains, to harass him, the fundamental disagreement as to how much of the available truth Should be told about anyone. In the Victorian age particularly, the main object of writing biographies of eminent people (and only eminent people were subjected to biographical examination in that period) was to hold up examples of exalted conduct and achievement before the eyes of those wh o read. It was th eref ore considered well to underestimate human weaknesses and to emphasize human virtues. We may say that this is the desirable course to, pursue: that faults and failings should be forgotten and only virtues remembered. This would be true enough if our approach to the lives of the eminent was to be merely personal to themselves. If we wish only to know what So-and-so achieved, there is little purpose in

pointing out that So-and-so had a variety of more or less amiable weaknesses. But if on the contrary our interest in biography arises from a desire to understand the workings of the human heart, mind and soul-if, in short, we come to biography in order to further our understanding of humanity, then we shall be extremely reluctant for biographers to hide anything which may shed light upon the eternal enigma of man.

It is necessary to note in this connection that the important difference between the twentieth-century outlook and that of the Victorian age, is that we have now developed a strong desire to probe for the whole truth, and are not content with only so much of the truth as happens to be palatable or to redound to human credit. If great people sometimes behave discreditably we cannot possibly eliminate the discreditable element from the human character unless we first realize clearly that it is actually present, trying to understand why it is there and by what means it may be eliminated. The Victorians, however, were firmly persuaded that unpleasing truths should be veiled and virtues emphatically stated. The difference between the two points of view is irreconcilable. We can understand the Victorian attitude, and one part of our minds will almost certainly approve it; but the twentieth-century mind is possessed by an insatiable desire to explore the whole of human personality and, when the truth is known, to refrain from passing judgment even upon the weakest and most faulty. So far as interest is concerned, it is beyond Question that a biography which reveals both the good and the bad is more fascinating as literature than a biography which concentrates only upon the good.

In biography more than in any other branch of literature, therefore, a gulf is fixed between twentieth-century and nineteenth-century practice. The difference is not merely one of moral attitude; it is based also on

considerations of literary art. The publication in 1918 of LYTTON STRACHEY'S *Eminent Victorians* marked the "ctfviding of the ways for the modern biographer. Up to that time-at least for something like a century previously - biography had been dominated by the desire to use this form of writing either as a subsidiary means of teaching history or for the purpose of inculcating high ideals. For the most part also (considering the number of such books published during the nineteenth century) biographers had been neglectful of the literary side of their craft. Almost any biography can be read with *interest* if the reader has some preliminary reason for being interested in the person about whom it is written; but, with one or two notable exceptions, it is almost impossible to derive *pleasure* from Victorian biographies. Lytton Strachey, on the contrary, was convinced that biography should be primarily a form of literary art capable of giving the pleasure that art should give, independent of its subject-matter. As much aesthetic pleasure can be obtained from a Rembrandt picture of an ugly person as from an entirely beautiful Italian Madonna. On the surface it would appear that a picture of a beautiful woman must be more desirable and give greater delight than a picture of an ugly man. But, as everyone who has any acquaintance with painting will know, the subject counts for less than the treatment of jthe subject. And so it is in literature also. There- is every temptation for us to assume almost automatically that the life of a saint should give greater satisfaction to read about than the life of a less admirable person. Actually, however, the question of treatment counts for as much in biography as in painting. During the Victorian period, biographers in general concentrated their attention upon *the subject* to the almost entire neglect of *the art of writing.* But if biography is to be regarded (as it obviously should be) as a branch of literary art the

kind of person written about is a less significant factor than the kind of person who writes the biography. A biographer must have insight into character - a sense of human values as well as of moral and intellectual values; he must be interested in human beings as human beings, and not merely in human beings as virtuous human beings; he must not suppress vital facts nor obscure those aspects of character which help a reader to build up a picture of the man as he Jived. Unfortunately, this makes it inevitable that true biographical portraits of eminent people cannot be written immediately after they are dead. Relatives and friends are naturally reluctant that intimate details should be paraded before the world, even if those intimacies in no way suggest notable weakness of character. We must probably accept it as inevitable, therefore, that first-class biographies can only be written lone after the subject's death. For this reason Lytton Strachey was right in believing that much remained to be told concerning the Victorians and that the time had come for a re-assessment. Although, following the publication of *Eminent Victorians,* it was widely assumed that the importance of the book lay in the new aspects of character it revealed, these were in truth secondary to its value as literature. *Eminent Victorians* can be read a first time with intense interest because of the light it sheds upon unfamiliar aspects of Manning and Newman, Florence Nightingale, Gordon, Gladstone, Arnold of Rugby, and others. But the book may be read a second and a third, even a tenth time, for the delight we take in the uncommon literary skill with which it is written. Lytton Strachey has a sense of literary form and of the value and significance of words, which is in itself enchanting; and he also has a gift of irony which has hardly been equalled in literature since the great English and French eighteenth-century masters, Gibbon, Voltaire and others.

There was also a tendency to assume too hastily that nothingjike *Eminent Victorians* had previously been written inEnglish. Its 'frankness' was supposed to be new. It was not new; it was a return to an earlier method which had been neglected. Lytton Strachey's method is a combination - whether deliberately or not - of the methods of the two greatest biographers in world literature, Plutarch and BOSWELL. Lytton Strachey, like Plutarch, favours brevity; and, also like Plutarch, he prefers to concentrate upon a few significant aspects of character rather than to attempt a full-length portrait of the subject concerned. Like Boswell, Lytton Strachey does not think it necessary to hide anything. There is nothing in *Eminent Victorians* or *Queen Victoria* or *Elizabeth and Essex* which is in any way more startling than the frank picture which Boswell gives of Johnson. Johnson was almost the god of BoswelTs idolatry; to Boswell he was the hero of heroes. But Boswell thought, rightly, there was nothing discreditable in allowing readers to see Johnson exactly as Johnson was seen by Boswell and other people round about. Curiously enough, one feels that if Boswell had praised Johnson far more than he does and veiled his less pleasant characteristics, Johnson would seem less great, as he would also seem incomparably less human. A biographer has mastered the main principle of his art when he creates in the reader the impression of actually living with the person and hearing the person speak. The early pages of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* show that he, too, went back to the example set by Plutarch. Boswell quotes with approval Plutarch's statement that it is not 'always in the most distinguished achievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges, or the most important battles.' Boswell quotes

Johnson's own views in regard to the writing of biographies: 'There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyrick, and not to be known from one another but by extrinsick and casual circumstances. . . . The business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life.' Boswell had the advantage of living in the eighteenth century, which was less squeamish than the age which followed. He had the advantage also of having been in intimate contact with the person of whom he was writing, though in fact the actual number of days which Boswell spent in Johnson's company was remarkably small. It would be idle to pretend that this greatest of all biographies has a uniform excellence from beginning to end. Many readers will find the earlier pages tedious, and it is possible that some have been discouraged on that account from reading it. But from the moment Boswell reaches the description of his own first meeting with Johnson, the book comes vigorously to life and goes forward with tremendous energy and liveliness.

Boswell was at once a literary artist and an inspired reporter. For long, a legend persisted that Boswell was little more than a fool and a sot, who had somehow become miraculously endowed with the ability to write this masterpiece. But whatever inspiration may have gone to the writing of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, the amount of patient labour and skill was even greater. In his account of the first fifty-four years of Johnson's life, before their personal acquaintance began, Boswell was compelled to rely upon what he was able to extract from Johnson himself and from other sources; thereafter,

he relies mainly upon his own observations and **upon** his records of the great man s conversation and actions. Boswell had many enemies and the fact that the accuracy of his book was not seriously challenged on its publication is the best evidence that cculd be adduced as to its essential accuracy: we may therefore take it as established that Boswell satisfies the requirement that a biographer should be truthful. The artistry of the book is a matter we are able to judge for ourselves. Apart from the somewhat heavy-going earlier pages there is almost inexhaustible dramatic interest in the presentation not only of Johnson's character but also of that crowd of subsidiary figures which constituted Johnson's personal circle. We see Johnson as he lived and moved and had his being; he exists in three dimensions and is not merely an inanimate figure in a book; we know him perhaps more intimately than anyone else in literature, with the exception of Samuel Pepys. Our intimate" acquaintance with both Pepys and Johnson is due to exactly the same reason: that Boswell tells us about Johnson, and Pepys tells us about himself, those thousand and one trivial incidents which go to make up the fabric of life. A biography or an autobiography which tells us merely of the outstanding and 'important' events of the man's life is no more like the actual life of a human being than a series of mountain peaks breaking above a mist is like an actual landscape. It is the teeming inexhaustible life of the common earth that makes up the world, and a multitude of incidents of daily life that makes up men and women. If a biographer or an autobiographer succeeds in getting these things into his book with a fair amount of literary skill, we may be sure that the book will live and that the man or the woman will live in the book. Boswell's achievement was, further, in his uncommon skill in marshalling and displaying his facts and incidents - as we know not only from what

he included but also from what he excluded. He included whatever was relevant to a full picture of Johnson, but excluded such things as would have confused the outlines of the book. He was, that is to say, a literary artist who knew what touches would give life and vigour to his picture; he knew also what other things would only blur and confuse and obstruct a clear impression of the man.

There had been biographers in the English language from as early as the sixth century. BISHOP ASSER'S *Life of Alfred the Great (c.* 893) scarcely belongs to English literature since it was written in Latin; yet it is of importance as representing practically the first attempt in this country to write a biography. If, however, we look for the first English biography with a distinct literary value, it is to the sixteenth century that we must turn and to WILLIAM ROPER'S *Life of Sir Thomas More* (1626), which does succeed in conveying a living, even if only a partial, portrait of the great humanist. Great gaps are left, but we catch intensely interesting glimpses of More in his personal relationships, and Roper handles both conversation and pathos with real dramatic ability. This book, however, and GEORGE CAVENDISH'S *Life of Wolsey* (1641) (a much better and fuller biography than Roper's) are preparatory works, rather than examples of full achievement in biography. We have already seen ho;v in the seventeenth century the Character-writers were showing a certain grasp of the essentials of dramatic portraiture in semi-fictional form, and this was displayed al\8o in a number of biographical works not otherwise oijf great importance. Particular mention must, however, be made of one biographical compilation belonging ;(to the mid-seventeenth century, namely, IZAAK WALTON'S *Lives* (1670) of John Donne, Henry Wotton, paichard

Hooker, George Herbert and George Sanderson. It will hardly seem to the majority of modern readers that the charm of style which is a source of perennial delight in Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* is matched in his biographical portraits. Nevertheless, these lives are in the direct line of descent from Plutarch to Bos well and Lytton Strachey - with one important difference so far as comparison with Plutarch and Strachey is concerned, for Walton attempts, without complete success, to cover the whole period of the lives of his subjects in the space of some sixty pages each. In his Life of Donne (the metaphysical poet and dean of St. Paul's) there is a certain dullness in the repetition of such phrases as 'about the fourteenth year of his age . . .', 'about the seventeenth year of his age . . .', and so also for the eighteenth and nineteenth; and 'about a year following . . .', and 'not long after his return . . .'; and so on. If Walton had been more skilled as a biographer than he actually was, a good deal of this rather rough scaffolding would have been kept out of the reader's sight. There is a danger, however, that we may expect from Walton a high finish which was scarcely possible to a man who was pioneering in a form of writing then comparatively new in English literature. By us, the *Lives* are most valued, perhaps, for the impression they give of Walton's own character, which somehow percolates through what he is writing of other people; as, for example, when he closes the Life of Donne with this sentence, 'He was earnest and unwearied in the search of knowledge, with which his vigorous soul is now satisfied, and employed in a continuous praise of that God that first breathed it into his active body; that body, which was once a temple of the Holy Ghost, and is now become a small quantity of Christian dust; - But 1 shall see it reanimated.' That sentence has a good deal of the charm and strong simple piety which enter also into *The Compleat Angler.*

Moreover, Walton was writing both of the people and of the seventeenth-century English life he knew, and his book has the value that attaches to any first-hand picture of people and experiences in a remote time.

Outside Boswell nothing need detain us in the eighteenth century so far as biography is concerned. Passing to the nineteenth century, we are faced with a number of books which reproduce scarcely more than one Boswellian feature, namely, that of great length. All but the most enthusiastic admirers of Boswell will probably agree that even his book would have gained rather than lost by being shorter than it is. The suggestion would be regarded as heresy, however, by enthusiasts who claim that the whole as it stands is perfect and could only be injured by compression. The point may be conceded without serious dispute, but in so far as Boswell set the fashion of length in biography, his influence has been less advantageous than in other ways. The sheer bulk and multiplicity of Victorian biographies overwhelm us, and the only means of finding a way through the mass is to indicate a few biographical works written in the nineteenth century (some of them before the Victorian period began) which are outstanding, even if not all of supreme literary merit: Southey's *Life of Nelson,* Lockhart's *Life of Scott,* Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Bronte,* Carlyle's *Life and Letters of Cromwell* and *Life of Frederick the Great,* Froude's *Life of Carlyle,* Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay,* Morley's *Life of Gladstone.* SOUTHEY'S *Nelson* is still the popular work on the great English sailor, a fact to be acknowledged with some regret, since it cannot be pretended that, good though the book undoubtedly is, it sounds the depths of Nelson's character. We still await a biography which will give a fully satisfactory portrait of Nelson the man, who was

at least as fascinating as, if less historically important than, Nelson the naval commander. There are certain phases of Nelson's character, and matters relating to his association with others, which have brought forth a mass of books about the principal figures in his personal circle, but there has been more unworthy exploitation of scandal than sincere endeavour to unravel the involved strands of character. LOCKHART'S *Life of Spott* is almost certainly the greatest English biography after Boswell, but we can only speculate as to how far its popularity has been limited by its inordinate length. Possibly the character of Scott lent itself less to dramatically effective treatment than that of Johnson, for Scott had less of that fascinating human oddity which was so valuable an asset for Johnson's biographer. Lockhart does give full value, however, to those admirable qualities which made Scott, in the best sense, a noble man; while such passages as that which describes the novelist at a lighted upper window, writing, writing, writing, in his endeavour to perform the colossal task which he had set himself, have a highly dramatic quality. Whatever time and patience may be required for the reading of Lockhart's *Life of Scott,* it is certainly a biography which will not be superseded. GEORGE TREVELYAN'S *Life of Macaulay* is as readable as any English biography, and is written with considerable literary attraction and with humour. The book is a pleasure to read purely for its style, and Trevelyan makes Macaulay an always engaging figure even in those passages which deal with his precocious childhood. The pictures of the evangelical household at Clapham and the incidents related of Macaulay's prodigious feats of memory while still a boy, linger in the reader's mind because they are set forth at least as entertainingly as they could be by a novelist; while the story of Macaulay's later achievements is told with no less verve.

The *Life of Charlotte Bronte* touches more debatable

ground, for MRS. GASKELL, though an entirely honest and sincere woman, had not perhaps those qualities of accuracy and intellectual balance required for the practice of biography. After the publication of the first edition, complaints of inaccuracy were brought against her by persons mentioned in the book, and revisions had to be made in a subsequent edition. There can be no doubt about its literary attraction. It tells us more of the life of that almost incredible family of doomed children in their terrible Yorkshire fastness than we can learn from the Bronte novels; while the impression of Charlotte we should naturally receive from *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and *Shirley* is confirmed by what Mrs. Gaskell has to say of her character. At the time of its publication, this *Life of Charlotte Bronte* came as a shock in more ways than one, for it revealed Charlotte as 'an unwomanly woman.' That is to say, she had smolderingly intense emotions and human passions which a woman was not supposed to have, or at least not supposed to acknowledge, in her generation. Mrs. Gaskell's book is an interesting phenomenon in Victorian biography, because it pays less regard to current impressions of human nature than was common among biographers in that period.

FROUDE'S *Life of Carlyle* remains a subject of debate. In his attempt to give a fair and impartial portrait of his friend, Froude was considered to have 'betrayed the memory' of Carlyle. He was also charged with major inaccuracies, but the validity of these charges is still undecided. So far as it is possible to judge from the conflicting evidence, Froude seems to have been guilty of no further offence than a desire to represent Carlyle as he believed him to be, not stressing his weaknesses, but certainly not unduly veiling them. Whenever the later course of English biography is considered, with particular reference to the change of direction given by Lytton Strachey's books, Froude's *Life of Carlyle* should

be kept in mind, because it did at least foreshadow the coming of an intense dissatisfaction with the partial portraits preferred in the nineteenth century.

MORLEY'S *Life of Gladstone* has been mentioned as among the outstanding Victorian biographies, not on the ground of its intrinsic merits but because of the enthusiastic reception which it received at the time of its publication. In a sense it is a landmark in Victorian biography, because it represents at its best the honest, painstaking, well-written, carefully-documented type of biography; but it lacks both inspiration and literary attraction. For one thing, Gladstone was a highly complex personality, and the recesses of his mind were too numerous to be explored in a book written so near to his own time. The objection that may be made to Morley's book is not that it over-estimates Gladstone, but that it deals rather with the externals of the man than with his deeper characteristics. In the circumstances this was probably inevitable. Morley was concerned, essentially, with the statesman more than with the man, and his book should be regarded rather as a mass of material for a later and more illuminating biography than as the last word about one who was undoubtedly a force and a genius in nineteenth-century history. The same might be said of MONYPENNY and BUCKLE'S *Life of Disraeli,* Disraeli literature is already becoming considerable in bulk, but we cannot feel any confidence that he has yet been fully understood. Lytton Strachey (in *Queen Victoria)* presents one aspect of this enigmatic semi-oriental who could flatter in a degree altogether beyond the scope of the English character. In regard to both Gladstone and Disraeli there are still innumerable contradictions to be reconciled, and this task of reconciliation is among the opportunities awaiting future biographers of two statesmen who were so much more than statesmen.

§2 *Autobiography*

Hardly any experience is more fascinating than to hear a great man talking about himself, even if he does it badly, or even if he is pompous and conceited. Of all forms of literature, autobiography is perhaps the most irresistible, at any rate to those who are curious about human nature. The value and degree of interest varies according to the temperament rather than the achievements of the autobiographer, since personality counts for more than action in literary self-portraiture. It may be interesting to read of what a man has done and of the people he has met, but it is more than merely interesting to be enabled to understand what kind of person was really behind the events and circumstances recorded. There could be no justification for attempting to lay down rules, for autobiography is capable of infinite variation and the really brilliant examples are those which differ altogether from any other. Though Pepys' *Diary* is the most enchanting of all autobiographies, it would be foolish to suggest it as a pattern for other writers. A conscious imitation of Pepys' method would be abominable. One might, at a venture, suggest that frank and unselfconscious revelation of personality should be the first aim of the autobiographer, if it were not that frankness might often be antagonistic to unself-consciousness, and unselfconsciousness be destructive of the unabashed egotism necessary to an autobiographer. The only rule that can be stated for anyone who sets out to write an autobiography is that conscious modesty must be thrown to the winds. Modesty may be a virtue in many other directions, but in autobiography it is a vice. We desire to know all that can be known about the author, and the only refuge for a modest person is to refrain from writing autobiography. Two books (named at random) which should have been most intensely

satisfying as autobiographies but which are in fact extremely disappointing, areG. L. JESSOP'S *A Cricketer's Log* and COLONEL LAWRENCE'S *Revolt in the Desert.* Both writers tell us a great deal about interesting happenings and about other people, but neither tells us nearly enough about himself. Jessop refrains on account, apparently, of innate modesty; and Lawrence on account of a strange perversity which, driving him into a persistent endeavour to avoid publicity, succeeds in bringing him only more prominently into the limelight as an enigma. Colonel Lawrence does indeed tell rather more about himself in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* than in the shortened version given in *Revolt in the Desert;* yet even in the *Seven Pillars* the reader does not feel that he is in contact with the real inward nature of Lawrence. As the record of such adventures as have hardly been equalled since Elizabethan times, the *Seven Pillars* is invaluable; as autobiography, it is well-nigh a complete failure, and no doubt deliberately so.

On May 26, 1703, died a man who was known among his acquaintances as 'a very worthy, industrious and curious person.' He was a retired civil servant, an expert on naval matters, had been Secretary to the Admiralty, Member of Parliament for Harwich, and President of the Royal Society. Dying at the age of seventy, he left a library of three thousand volumes to pass on the death of his heir to one of the colleges of Cambridge University. In 1724 the books were deposited in the library of Magdalen, and four years later, a certain Peter Leicester found among them a six-volume manuscript journal in shorthand. Leicester hesitated to trouble the librarian to allow him to decipher it, and the journal went back on to the shelves to be forgotten for nearly a hundred years. After the publication

of John Evelyn's *Diary,* the journal was examined (in 1819) by the Head of Magdalen. Then John Smith, an undergraduate of St. John's College, spent three years (working from twelve to fourteen hours a day) in decoding it. In 1825, Lord Braybrooke published a selection of extracts, but, in true nineteenth-century fashion, he preferred those pages which deal with important or relatively important matters, and omitted very many of the curious incidents and reflections which have made the book in later and fuller editions an altogether priceless possession of English literature. The man referred to was SAMUEL PEPYS, and the decoded journal is known to us as *Pepys' Diary.* Pepys wrote his journal in a system of shorthand, complicated by the use of a rather ingenuous cypher and by the employment of a medley of foreign terms in French, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek. Evidently the author did not intend it for the public eye, and, in the intervening generations, it has perplexed a good many people who find it difficult to determine why Pepys should have set down so intimate and detailed an account of his daily life for ten years. Some have suggested that he derived from this process of private self-revelation something of the comfort of the confessional, though if that were so it would not be easy to explain why he should have detailed not only his weaknesses and sins but also a whole mass of harmless commonplace matters. It has also been suggested that he was trying to provide in the diary a picture of himself to which he might turn back in his old age. The evidence indicates, however, that he did not read it later, although he lived for many years after he had brought it to an end in a moving passage foreshadowing a catastrophe which was fortunately averted:

And thus ends all that I doubt I shall ever be able to do with my own eyes in the keeping of my Journal, 1 being not

able to do it any longer, having done now so long as to undo my eyes almost every time 1 take a pen in my hand; and therefore whatever come of it I must forbear: and therefore resolve from this time forward to have it kept by my people in long-hand, and must therefore be contented to set down no more than is fit for them and all the world to know; or if there be anything (which cannot be much . . .), I must endeavour to keep a margin in my book open, to add here and there a note in short-hand with my own hand.

And so I betake myself to that course, which is almost as much as to see myself go into my grave; for which, and all the discomforts that will accompany my being blind, the good God prepare me ! S. P.

What Pepys did in fact give in his book was the fullest and most intimate record that we possess of a decade in the reign of Charles I I : a decade of dissoluteness, flagrant and unashamed; of bribery and corruption; of place-hunting and neglect of worthiness. Pepys was observant of all outward propriety, but in his diary he revealed his numerous peccadilloes quite shamelessly. He was terrified of offences against convention, and genuinely disapproved of the dissipated behaviour in Court and society. He hated corruption, yet was susceptible to mild bribery. He was an efficient public servant, devoted to duty and regardful of the responsibilities of State service. When he was appointed Clerk of the Acts at the Navy Office he knew nothing of naval or business affairs, but he laboured to make himself familiar with office routine and also with the technical details of naval affairs both at sea and in the shipyards, so that he was fully qualified to become, some years later, Secretary to the Admiralty. The son of a shiftless English tailor, and fifth of eleven children, he recalls in the diary how he was boarded out with his brother Tom at Goody Lawrence's in Kingsland, a country suburb which is now a poor neighbourhood in north-east

London. He went from St. Paul's School to Magdalen College, Cambridge, where an entry in the college register records that when he was twenty Pepys was solemnly admonished by his tutor for 'having been scandalously overseene in drink ye night before.' Two years later he married the fifteen-year-old daughter of a disinherited French Protestant, Elizabeth St. Michel, a pretty, untidy, feather-headed young person. The household of the young couple is described in the diary in these words (Feb. 25, 1667):

> Lay long *in* bed, talking with pleasure with my poor wife, how she used to make coal fires, and wash my foul clothes with her own hand for me, poor wretch ! in our little room at my Lord Sandwich's; for which I ought for ever to love and admire her, and do; and persuade myself she would do the same thing again if God should reduce us to it.

The diary was begun on January 1, 1660, and brought to an end on May 31, 1669. In later years (following the death of his wife on November 10, 1669 - at the age of twenty-nine, after fifteen years of marriage) Pepys received many honours, but at one time had the unfortunate experience of being committed to the Tower on a charge of treason, which was, however, based on perjured evidence. He died in 1703 after a long and agonizing illness, borne with the fortitude indicated by the Dean of Worcester, who said, 'I never attended any sick or dying person that dyed with so much Christian greatness of mind or a more lively sense of immortality, or so much fortitude and patience.* Pepys* public services and the high honours he received from Trinity House, the Clothworkers' Company, and the Royal Society, need to be kept in mind, in order to correct a too prevalent impression that he was little more than a trifler and a sensualist. The interest of the diary, however, lies in matters altogether aside from the important events in which he

participated or of which he was a spectator. We are fascinated by the diary and its writer because it shows such an insatiable thxc&t for life and unflagging curiosity about people and things. Pepys could not resist anything whatsoever which promised either sensation or an acquaintance with curious byways of human activity. There was hardly anything in which Pepys was not interested, and his diary tells us, with generous variety, of hangings, cock-fights, police-court cases, food, theatres, fashions in the Park, sermons, women, books, clothes, pictures, freaks and monstrosities, kings and lords and their ladies. He was a great playgoer, so much so that he sometimes had twinges of conscience, and at one period determined that he must strictly ration himself in this matter. He made an oath to refrain from the theatre because of its unsettling influence on his mind, and allotted himself a monthly visit. But his appetite for the theatre remained, and the lovable ingenuousness of Pepys is nowhere better shown than in the inimitable casuistry of his self-argument that when he promised himself one visit to the theatre each month, he really meant one visit for himself and one for his wife. And so, if Mrs. Pepys' monthly visit could be avoided, that allowed Mr. Pepys to make a second visit! Mrs. Pepys is one of the immortal characters in literature, and rather miraculously so, because Pepys certainly had no intention of providing any kind of dramatic presentation for her in the diary. He merely tells us from day to day of what Mrs. Pepys said and did, or of how she irritated him - and she irritated him often ! - either by her extravagant and sometimes flamboyant taste in dress, or by her not unnatural disturbance on account of Mr. Pepys' many flirtations. The diarist was himself a lover of fine clothes and of good food, and both these interests claim full attention. He had also a passion for music, and, in addition, was an expert sermon-taster.

He would sometimes spend his Sunday mornings going from church to church, leaving the first place of devotion when the sermon began to bore him (as it commonly did very quickly) and passing on to hear the next preacher. These church peregrinations had other attractions also, for when the preacher was dull Pepys could find solace in the contemplation of a pretty face. Here is one of the most amusing of these incidents:

> ... I walkod towards White Hall, but being wearied turned into St. Dunstan's Church, where 1 heard an able sermon of the minister of the place; and stood by a pretty, modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand and the body but she would not, but got further and further from me. And at last I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I .should touch her again; which seeing I did forbear, and was glad I did spy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid in a pew close to me, and she on me; and I did go about to take her by the hand, which she suffered a little and then withdrew.

Though the personal entries are a source of intense pleasure, the diary is of outstanding historical importance largely on account of Pepys' first-hand descriptions of the Plague and the Fire of London. The entries concerning the Fire naturally cause us to compare Pepys' diary with that of his contemporary, JOHN EVELYN, who describes the same event from his own differing personal angle. *Evelyn's Diary* covers the years from 1641 to 1706, and the fact that it deals with a period more than six times as long as *Pepys' Diary*, gives it a tremendous initial advantage as a mine of facts about the period. But as literature the advantage is all on the side of Pepys, for Evelyn hardly ever draws the veil behind which he hides his own personality. Pepys never troubled to hang up a veil; therefore we feel that we know just what manner of man Samuel Pepys was, whether in his fine attire or in his nightcap, dressing-gown

and slippers. As we have already noted, he was at one and the same time a conscientious and efficient public servant, and a delightful rogue. Evelyn holds us aloof from himself, and we can gather little more about him than that he was an excellent, accomplished and staid gentleman, who (as Pepys said) 'may be excused a little conceitedness.' Each of the two diarists mentions the other from time to time, and in one place Evelyn notes that he dined with Wren and Pepys, 'two extraordinary ingenious and knowing persons.' It is typical of the difference between the two men that whereas Evelyn's description of the Fire of London is a record such as any conscientious contemporary historian might have written, Pepys* account takes note of many minor incidents which give life to the whole story and enable us to catch something of the sensations stirred in London residents by the Fire. In one entry, for example, Pepys describes how on one day, while the fire was raging, he walked along the street and coming upon **a** small crowd, wormed his way, as usual, into their midst and found that the object of interest was a cat which had had all its fur singed off in the fire. We may be perfectly certain that if Evelyn had happened to see that cat, we should have heard nothing whatever about it in his diary. Nevertheless, we can turn to Evelyn for such information as when coffee was first drunk in England, a cure for ague, the foundation of the Bank of England, and Cromwell's death and funeral and later disinterment. It is an indispensable historical document, but not (like Pepys') a book to which we are compelled to return again and again for pure delight.

Later than Pepys and Evelyn, there is a mass of autobiographical literature to which only summary reference **can** be made. To the Quaker movement is due the

Journal of GEORGE FOX, invaluable as a spiritual autobiography, as is also CARDINAL NEWMAN'S (much later) *Apologia pro Vita Sua.* Fox on the one hand, and Newman on the other, enable us to appreciate that differences of religious dogma are unimportant in com* parison with the fundamentals of human nature.

Autobiographical literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consists largely in the collections of letters to which reference has been made in a previous chapter, though, in addition, there are the autobiographies of Gibbon and BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, the latter giving admirable pictures of both English and American life in the eighteenth century.

GIBBON'S *Autobiography* (1796) is most interesting as[1] a pendant to *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* and is especially attractive on account of the eloquent and moving passages in which he describes his emotions on beginning that great work and also on completing it. In addition, there are many interesting glimpses into the character of Gibbon as a young man.

Autobiography of an entirely different order is provided in the *Journals* (1798 onward) of DOROTHY WORDSWORTH, William Wordsworth's sister. Her material was the ordinary everyday experience of living, set down in plain undecorated prose. Dorothy was not a literary artist, if that term implies a self-conscious worker in words; yet she is a magician. Her prose is formed of the raw material of poetry; but the gold is there in profusion. She was so lavishly endowed with the material of poetry that she seems almost unaware of her riches. The gold falls round her feet; it is heaped up about her; but she never troubles to take up any piece to polish or shape it. Yet even when she is dealing with entirely non-poetic episodes in their quiet daily life, she

sheds a curiously entrancing halo of significance about plain facts: 'We drank tea by candlelight'; 'I broiled Coleridge a mutton chop, which he ate in bed'; 'I drank a little brandy and water, and was in heaven'; 'William and Mary walked to Ambleside to buy mouse-traps'; 'in the afternoon Mary and I ironed.' All these and many more entries in her journals are the smallest of life's small change - except that she was probably the only one who had the opportunity to feed Coleridge with mutton chops in bed - yet it all takes on the attraction of her own exquisite personality. Wordsworth made poetry, but Dorothy Wordsworth made a poet, for it was of her that her brother wrote:

> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart the fountain of sweet tears,
> And love and thought and joy.

Passing over the autobiographies of Leigh Hunt, John Stuart Mill, Anthony Trollope, and others in the early part and middle of the nineteenth century, we may note, also, the autobiographical interest of the collections of letters belonging to that period.

At the commencement of the twentieth century three notable autobiographies appeared, OSCAR WILDE'S *De Profundis* (1905), GEORGE GISSING'S *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), and EDMUND GOSSE'S *Father and Son* (1907). Despite the difficulty of escaping from the impression that *De Profundis* lacks the fundamental sincerity~necessary to a confession, the attraction of Wilde's prose style is to some extent a compensation. Gissing's projection of himself into fictional guise as Ryecroft enabled him to describe personal experiences with more frankness and ease of manner than might have been possible if he had written in more directly

autobiographical form. *The Private Papers of Henry Eyecroft* is the only one of Gissing's books to which the word 'lovable* might be applied. The style is much more luminous and serene than in any of his novels and enables us to do much greater justice to his own character than would otherwise be possible. Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* is not only admirably written, but is also valuable both for the light it sheds upon the unfolding consciousness of an active-minded child and for the apposition of two conflicting sets of spiritual principles. Edmund Gosse's parents were devout members of the Plymouth Brethren sect, and although their son gives a most sympathetic portrait of the father and mother, his own tendencies moved, from early years, in an altogether different direction. *Father and Son* is a document possessing considerable psychological value in addition to its literary attraction.

In a different way, the most remarkable autobiography that has so far appeared in the twentieth century is *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* by W. N. P. BARBELLION. The author of this book was a young scientist, who for some years before his early death was afflicted by an incurable disease. His journal is very largely a record of the sensations of an acutely sensitive mind in the throes of almost continuous pain. But it is the sensitiveness more than the suffering which is uppermost in the journal. We cannot help agonizing with the writer as we read his book, yet we cannot begrudge this mild reflection of his suffering, because our own perceptions and sensibilities seem to be sharpened as we read, in conformity with his. Barbell ion was not obsessed by his own pain. Music, literature, the countryside, geology - all these things claimed his intense interest. His temperament and state of mind are so closely akin to those of Marie Bashkirtseff that it is the more remarkable that he was unaware of the Russian girl's journal until

his own had been in progress for a considerable number of years. *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* began on January 3, 1903, but it is not until October 14, 1914, that he says:

> Some time ago I noticed a quotation from one Marie Bashkirtseff in a book on Strindberg, and was struck with the likeness to a sentiment of my own. Who *are* you ? I wondered.
>
> This evening went to the Library and read about her in Mathilde Blind's introductory essay to her Journal. I am simply astounded. It would be difficult in all the world's history to discover any two persons with temperaments so alike. She is the 'very spit of me' ! I devoured Mathilde Blind's pages more and more astonished. We are identical ! Oh, Marie Bashkirtseff ! how we should have hated one another ! She feels as I feel. We have the same self-absorption, the same vanity and corroding ambition. She is impressionable, volatile, passionate - ill ! So am I. Her journal is my journal. All mine is stale reading now. She has written down all my thoughts and forestalled me ! Already I have found some heart-rending parallels. To think I am only a replica: how humiliating for a human being to find himself merely a duplicate of another. Is there anything in the transmigration of souls ? She died in 1886. I was born in 1889.

Other twentieth-century autobiographies to which attention should certainly be called are W. H. DA VIES' *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp,* the *Journal* of KATHERINE MANSFIELD, the *Autobiography* of LORD HALDANE, and *Earlham* by PERCY LUBBOCK.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ADVENTURE AND DISCOVERY

BETWEEN the territories of truth and fiction lies a No-ManVLand which is jokingly allocated as the special province of fishermen, golfers and travellers. Adventure and stirring exploits in which a person has himself participated, tend to take on a romantic glamour as time passes, and when it falls to his lot to recount his adventures, fancy and exaggeration appear to become almost inevitable. The majority of people know from experience that a small episode is likely to grow more encrusted with romantic verbal embroidery each time it is described to listeners. Though we have a scrupulous regard for truth, we find extraordinary difficulty in keeping always close to the skeleton of actual truth, and a time ultimately arrives when fact has become so closely intermingled with later fancy that even those who themselves experienced the adventures narrated find it hard to remember where actuality ends and invention begins. In books of travel, adventure and discovery, writers have from early times exemplified the difficulty of making a rigid distinction between fact and fiction. We should not too hastily condemn the early travellers - or even later ones - on this account, nor charge them with culpable dishonesty. After all, where *does* fact end and fiction begin in connection with our own adventures ? An event which happens in the physical world has all manner of remote consequences which bring imagination and emotion into play. The same event happening to two persons of differing temperament may have in the

mind of one an altogether different appearance from that presented to the other. And it is only when the individual factor is strongly emphasized that books of travel and personal adventure become permanently readable. Those who visit Egypt nowadays would be ill-advised to write books descriptive of the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The appearance of these monuments and the legends associated therewith have already been described with all necessary detail and particularity. If we require descriptive writing of this kind, we can turn to Baedeker or some other guide-book. But are we therefore to assume that nothing more need be written about the Sphinx and the Pyramids ? By no means. Travellers may continue to write about their personal impressions of these things to the end of time without tiring us - but only on one condition: that what they set down in their writings shall be so strongly tinged with the personality of the writer that what is actually given is not a description of great monuments but a record of the operations of the individual mind and spirit contemplating these things. If the traveller has an original mind, the Sphinx and the Pyramids or whatever he may contemplate will set up inside himself certain reactions that cannot fail to be of interest to all readers who are curious about humanity and the workings of the human mind. Even a hundred years ago very much had been written about the monuments in the Egyptian desert, but after Alexander Kinglake travelled in the Near East in the middle of the nineteenth century, he came back and wrote his *Eothen,* the greatest travel-book in the English language. And this is what he had to say of the Sphinx:

And near the Pyramids, more wondrous and more awful than all else in the land of Egypt, there sits the lonely Sphynx. Comely the creature is, but the comeliness is not of this world: the once worshipped beast is a deformity and a monster to this generation; and yet you can see that those

lips, so thick and heavy, were fashioned according to some ancient mould of beauty - some mould of beauty now forgotten - forgotten because that Greece drew forth Cytherea from the flashing foam of the Ægean, and in her image created new forms of beauty, and made it a law among men that the short and proudly-wreathed lip should stand for the sign and the main condition of loveliness through all generations to come. Yet still there lives on the race of those who were beautiful in the fashion of the elder world; and Christian girls of Coptic blood will look on you with the sad, serious gaze, and kiss you your charitable hand with the big pouting lips of the very Sphynx.

Laugh and mock if you will at the worship of stone idols; but mark ye this, ye breakers of images, that in one regard, the stone idol bears awful semblance of Deity - unchangefulness *in* the midst of change - the same seeming will and intent for ever and ever inexorable ! Upon ancient dynasties of Ethiopian and Egyptian kings - upon Greek and Roman, upon Arab and Ottoman conquerors - upon Napoleon dreaming of an Eastern empire - upon battle and pestilence - upon the ceaseless misery of the Egyptian race - upon keen-eyed travellers - Herodotus yesterday, and Warburton to-day - upon all and more this unworldly Sphynx has watched, and watched like a Providence with the same earnest eyes, and the same sad, tranquil mien. And we, we shall die, and Islam will wither away; and the Englishman, straining far over to hold his loved India, will plant a firm foot on the banks of the Nile and sit in the seats of the Faithful, and still that sleepless rock will lie watching and watching the works of the new busy race, with those same sad earnest eyes, and the same tranquil mien everlasting. You dare not mock at the Sphynx.

If we had never seen a picture of the Sphinx, nor read a detailed description, we could not gather from this chapter anything whatever of what the Sphinx looks like. Kinglake knew that it was no part of his business to repeat what his readers might easily find already set down by other pens. What he gives is a record of his

own emotional experience and of the way in which his mind travelled back along the pageant of history which had passed before the unseeing vision of the lonely Sphinx. And what he gives us, also, is a moving and exalted passage of English prose, which stirs the blood and the imagination and arouses such sensations as we can only otherwise receive from listening to great music. Kinglake, in short, throughout *Eothen,* observes the Golden Rule which is implicitly laid upon all writers of books of this type, namely, that they should set down not what a thousand people might *see* in similar circumstances, but what one person only could *experience.* There is here a lesson not only for writers but for everyone who ventures beyond the threshold of his own home - that we should trust to our individual vision and not go about the world determined to see just what others have seen. The world - that is to say, the streets of our own village or town, and whatever remoter places we may chance to visit - is a different world for everyone; and so long as we keep in mind the fact of this important difference of individual vision, we shall be in less danger of boring our friends when we relate the experiences that befall us.

All this, however, is not really an apology for the fact that books of travel and adventure and discovery have in the past contained a large element of fiction. It would be a highly dangerous and reprehensible idea to assume that the wayfarer in our own or other lands is exempt from that general observance of truth which is necessary if human relationships are to be bearable. Civilization could not endure if we were unable to assume that, on the whole, the majority of people will prefer truth to lying. Yet so far as the particular form of writing we are now considering is concerned, the

tradition of skilled and attractive lying is well established. From SIR JOHN MAUNDEVILLE in the fourteenth century to De Rougemont in the twentieth, the temptation to dilute truth with an element of fiction has proved irresistible. When we read *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Maundeville, Kt.,* it seems incredible that anybody could have believed the wonders of which he writes. But perhaps we need not marvel long; because even in the present day there seems to be no limit to human credulity. No matter what fantastic tale a person may tell, there will always be someone ready to beHeve. If, however, we concede that it may have been possible in the Middle Ages for Maundeville's amazing stories to be readily believed, what of the man who set down those stories ? Did *he* believe them, or was he deliberately trading upon human gullibility ? The question is less simple to answer than might at first appear, since it is easy not only to deceive others but also to deceive oneself and to believe whatever one desires to believe. Nevertheless, Sir John Maundeville may better be regarded as a soldier of fortune and an engaging rogue than as a man either deluded by others or self-deluded. It is not within our scope here to inquire too closely as to who Maundeville was. Though he is supposed to have been born at St. Alban's early in the fourteenth century, other scholars have identified him differently. His travels are largely connected with the Holy Land and the countries adjacent thereto, and amid the thrilling succession of marvellous incidents he relotes, there is an obvious attempt to keep to his primary purpose of providing a guide-book for pilgrims. Maundeville was pious and devout even if not strictly truthful. His narrative breaks from time to time into religious ejaculations which are in themselves inspired by an eloquence still capable of moving readers to an appreciation of Maundeville's own devotion. The book was

first written in Latin and arrived in English some years later, possibly by way of an intermediate French translation. Whether the translation was by Maundeville, as he claimed, is in doubt, but whoever the translator may have been, the version which has come down to us is vigorous, eloquent and fascinating in style; and, among medieval travel-books, only *The Voyages of Marco Polo* can be ranked on the same level. The perennial charm of Maundeville's book lies in its sustained ingenuousness and also in the amusing manner in which Maundeville is continuously straying from the straight path which he again and again reminds himself that he must follow. There is no bypath he refrains from investigating, nor any curious belief he omits to mention. He passes from matters of religious ritual to the wildest fantasies. Having told us that the Greek Christians declare 'we sin deadly in shaving our beards: for the beard is token of a man, and the gift of our Lord,' he comes in a few lines back to the stated purpose of his book by saying, 'Now return 1 again to explain to you the way from Constantinople to Jerusalem. He that will proceed through Turkey, goes towards the city of Nice,' a vague direction characteristic of Maundeville. Within a paragraph or two he is again among his marvels, saying:

And then we pass through the isles of Colos and of Lango, of the which isles Ypocras was lord; and some men say, that in the isle of Lango is still the daughter of Ypocras, in form and likeness of a great dragon, which is a hundred fathoms in length, as they say, for I have not seen her. And they of the isles call her lady of the land. And she lies in an old castle, in a cave, and appears twice or thrice in the year; and she doth no harm to any man unless he do her harm. She was thus changed and transformed from a fair damsel into the likeness of a dragon by a goddess named Diana; and they say that she shall remain in that form until the time that a knight come, who shall be so bold that he dare

come to her and kiss her on the mouth; and then she shall turn again to her own nature, and be a woman again; but after that she shall not live long. And it is not long since a knight of Rhodes, who was bold and doughty in arms, said that he would kiss her; when he was upon his courser and went to the castle, and entered into the cave, the dragon lifted up her head towards him, and when the knight saw her in that form, so hideous and horrible, he fled away. But the dragon carried the knight upon a rock, and from thence she cast him into the sea, and so was lost both horse and man.

We hear much more about that dragon and of the fate which befell the knight who loved the damsel. Maundeville tells also of 'the bird called phoenix,' of Cathay, of Prester John, and of other alluring matters such as the 'devil's head in the perilous valley' which 'looks at every man so sharply with dreadful eyes, that are ever moving and sparkling like fire, and changes and stirs so often in divers manners, with so horrible a countenance, that no man dare approach towards him.' At length Maundeville came home in spite of himself to rest, 'for rheumatic gouts, that distress me, fix the end of my labour against my will (God knoweth).' He concludes with what was perhaps, in the circumstances, a necessary request: 'Wherefore I pray to all the readers and hearers of this book, if it please them, that they would pray to God for me,' adding the promise, 'I shall pray for them.'

Maundeville's *Travels* is irresistible, yet it can hardly be regarded as more than an amusing trifle - a priceless trifle, however, which enriches English literature. RICHARD HAKLUYT'S *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589) is on a different plane. If there is any single work which could be regarded as the book of the English nation, Hakluyt's work would have a definite claim to that title. He was

not himself a voyager; probably he went no further abroad than Paris, where he was for a time chaplain to the English Embassy. From his Oxford graduate days he had been closely interested in geography, and he was a pioneer in the improvement of maps, globes and spheres. Beginning before the age of thirty, he began to write about the discovery of America and to collect accounts of the voyages of the English seamen, and his work in this direction grew in bulk until it filled the three folio volumes wherein he enlarged the material used in the 1589 volume. Hakluyt gathered the personal records of a large number of English sea-captains whose adventures would otherwise, most probably, have been unknown to us. Even the titles alone of some of the documents preserved by Hakluyt serve to stir the blood of the modern reader, as, for example, 'The Voyage Made to Tripolis in Barbary' and 'A True Report of a Worthy Fight, performed in the voyage from Turkey by five ships of London, against eleven galleys and two frigates of the King of Spain's, at Pantalarea, within the Straits, Anno 1586.' In this latter adventure, written by Philip Jones, the vessels were tall and stout ships and one, the *Merchant Royal,* was a 'very brave and goodly ship and of great report.' Another adventure, by Master John Hawkins, describes 'the unfortunate voyage made with the *Jesus,* the *Minion,* and four other ships' to New Guinea and the West Indies in 1567 and 1568. The *Jesus* and the *Minion* encountered the Spanish fleet off the coast of the Indies and a great battle ensued in which the Spaniards' land-battery also took part, in a way, says Hawkins, 'which did us so great annoyance that it cut all the masts and the yards of the *Jesus* in such sort that there was no hope to carry her away.' And then:

suddenly the Spaniards had fired two great ships which were coming directly to us, and having no means to avoid

the fire, it bred among our men a marvellous fear, so that some said, 'Let us depart with the *Minion,"* others said, 'Let us see whether the wind will carry the fire from us.' But to be short, the *Minion's* men, which had always their sails in a readiness, thought to make sure work, and so without either consent of the captain or master, cut their sail, so that very hardly I was received into the *Minion.*

The most part of the men that were left alive in the *Jesus* made shift and followed the *Minion* in a small boat, the rest, which the little boat was not able to receive, were enforced to abide the mercy of the Spaniards (which I doubt was very little); so with the *Minion* only, and the *Judith* (a small barque of fifty tons) we escaped, which barque the same night forsook us in our great misery. We were now removed with the *Minion* from the Spanish two bow-shots, and there rode all that night. The next morning we recovered an island a mile from the Spaniards, where there took us a north wind, and being left only with two anchors and two cables (for *in* this conflict we lost three cables and two anchors), we thought always upon death, which ever was present, but God preserved us to a longer time.

The weather waxed reasonable, and the Saturday we set sail, and having a great number of men and little victual, our hope of life waxed less and less. Some desired to yield to the Spaniards, some rather desired to obtain a place where they might give themselves to the infidels; and some had rather abide, with a little pittance, the mercy of God at sea. So thus, with many sorrowful hearts, we wandered in an unknown sea by the space of fourteen days, till hunger enforced us to seek the land; for hides were thought very good meat; rats, cats, mice, and dogs, none escaped that might be gotten; parrots and monkeys, that were had in great prize, were thought there very profitable if they served the turn of one dinner.

If ever we are inclined to forget what true patriotism and love of country really implies, we shall do well to turn back to Hakluyt and the unpretentious records of

the English Elizabethan seamen, who lived in an age when adventure was truly adventure, when perils might be encountered not only on the high seas but also in those parts of the New World which they from time to time visited. We do not find any spirit of national vainglory nor anything related to the flag-waving which in quieter days passes too often for patriotic devotion. The vision we receive from Hakluyt is of a little island set down in the midst of the world, and of groups of little ships making, as it were, a thread-like passage in divers directions, partly that they might extend the honour and glory of England, but more, perhaps, because the Elizabethan seamen were in love with adventure for its own sake and were dominated by that undying restlessness which, from the beginning, has made the English nation a race of wanderers. And yet we English are not wanderers only, but settlers and organizers and consolidators. Not only have we been among the foremost in discovering new lands - the initial step towards colonization; but we have also established in those places, for what it may be worth, a progressive civilization. It is particularly a tonic, and it may be a source of inspiration, to turn back to Hakluyt in the twentieth century, when we hear that Englishmen are less ready than they once were to seek adventure in other lands. We are told that hosts of young Englishmen are now content to stagnate in penury and idleness, even though other lands are clamouring for man-power. If the pessimists can be believed, those other lands are ceasing to prefer (as they did formerly) *British* man-power, because it is alleged that we have lost our traditional spirit of adventure. If that is true, then indeed a death-blow has been dealt to the English race. But if we know not what lies ahead of us, or what we may become, Hakluyt's *Voyages* stands for all time as a record of what we were.

We may pass over with no more than brief mention CAPTAIN COOK'S *Voyages and Discoveries,* since that book belongs to a similar category to Hakluyt's, though it is a personal record and not a compilation. By the nineteenth century, almost all the sea-routes of the ocean were known, there were no new habitable continents to discover, and the thoughts of adventurous-minded people became concentrated upon two places on the world-map where great vacant territories were marked. There were, first, the North and South Poles; and, second, the Dark Continent, Africa. The attractions of these places were different in kind, for in the Arctic region and in Antarctica the lure was mainly that of penetrating into the unknown and of the desire to be, for patriotic reasons, first at the Poles. Incidentally, there was much scientific work waiting to be done in these two areas. So far as Africa was concerned, the lure was a different one. There was the call of religion, and there was the call of commerce. The spiritual welfare of Africa's millions was laid as a burden on the hearts of Christian people, and the opening-up of inland Africa stands to the credit of missionary enterprise. Livingstone's dominating personality overshadowed most others who were instrumental in the exploration of Africa, and it is not easy to decide whether Livingstone was chiefly great as a missionary or as an adventurer (using that word in its best sense). At any rate, Livingstone was of the stuff of which discoverers are made, and a discoverer he would most probably have been even if the urge had not manifested itself through a desire to spread Christianity. His adventures and those of Stanley, who was sent out to find Livingstone when the missionary appeared to be lost, account for the major chapter in African adventure and discovery in the nineteenth century, though it can hardly be considered that these things have been recorded in a manner which is adequate

for literature. As an offshoot of African adventure in the nineteenth century, there was the desire to follow the Nile to its then unknown source and that has added one notable book to this branch of literature - Speke's *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile.*

Besides Africa, there remained another little-known territory to which the unresting interest of travellers was drawn in the later nineteenth century. 'In the autumn of 1852' SIR RICHARD BURTON 'offered his services to the Royal Geographical Society of London, for the purpose of removing that opprobrium to modern adventure, the huge white blot which in our maps still notes the Eastern and the Central regions of Arabia,' With those words Burton began the account of *A Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccahy* a journey he started at Yambu, on the Red Sea (after a voyage down from Suez on a pilgrim ship) and finished farther southward on the Arabian coast at Jiddah. Though his book is invaluable as a record of pioneer experiences, Burton was too curiously interested in minute details of Moslem life to permit of his exercising that selective faculty required for the production of travel-literature of the best kind. His style is uniformly undistinguished and devoid of charm, and he is consequently to be read for knowledge rather than for delight. This Arabian journey was followed by an exploration of Somaliland from the coast to the capital, Harar, a walled city with five gates, described by Burton in *First Footsteps in East Africa.*

In his desert wanderings, Burton preceded an even more remarkable traveller, CHARLES DOUGHTY, whose *Arabia Deserta* might almost be described as the Domesday book of the Arab tribes. Late in 187G Doughty attached himself to a pilgrim caravan leaving Damascus, but before long he left his temporary companions and struck off into the desert, where for many months thereafter he lived and moved about with the nomad tribes.

After perils and adventures such as few other men have encountered, Doughty also concluded his journey at Jiddah, where he arrived in August 1878. He devoted ten years to the compilation of his book, and spent the rest of his life in retirement in England writing epic poetry. *Arabia Deserta* is the strangest of all literary masterpieces, because Doughty deliberately wrote in a pseudo-Elizabethan prose which is nearly always gristly and indigestible and very rarely attractive. Yet it would be as foolish to deny the greatness of the book as to pretend that it is readable by the average person. There can be no doubt that everyone who cares for English literature and is responsive to great adventure should consider it a duty to read *Arabia Deserta,* for there is no other book in which spirit and substance achieve such an astounding triumph over difficulties of form and style. Whatever was to be known about the desert Arabs, Doughty learned and told. Consequently, when the World War spread to that region, the British military authorities used *Arabia Deserta* almost as a manual for the intelligence department in the desert campaign. This fact is significant, inasmuch as Doughty's work might be described as a glorified and glorious Blue Book that has compelled a place to be found for it in literature. The extract which follows is from one of the less-gristly pages:

The summer's night at end, the sun stands up as a crown of hostile flames from that huge covert of inhospitable sandstone bergs; the desert day dawns not little and little, but it is noontide in an hour. The sun, entering as a tyrant upon the waste landscape, darts upon us a torment of fiery beams, not to be remitted till the far-off evening. . . . No matins here of birds; not a rock partridge-cock, calling with blithesome chuckle over the extreme waterless desolation. Grave is that giddy heat upon the crown of the head; the ears tingle with a flickering shrillness, a subtle

crepitation it seems, in the glassiness of this sun-stricken nature: the hot sand-blink is in the eyes, and there is little refreshment to find in the tents' shelter; the worsted booths leak to this fiery rain of sunny light. Mountains looming like dry bones through the thin air, stand far around about us: the savage flank of Ybba Moghrair, the high spire and ruinous stacks, of el-Jebal, Chebod, the coast of Helwan. Herds of the weak nomad camels waver dispersedly, seeking pasture in the midst of this hollow fainting country where, but lately the swarming locusts have fretted every green thing.

The Near East has called other adventurers of both sexes in recent times - DAVID HOGARTH, T. E. LAWRENCE, GERTRUDE BELL. AS one of the few women who have ventured alone in the desert as a serious explorer and student of peoples and monuments, Gertrude Bell has a sure place in the history of English travel. She was also a skilful writer with an exceptionally attractive style - as she proved in *The Desert and the Sown* (exploration in Syria) and *Amurath to Amurath* (in the Euphrates and Tigris zone). Perhaps of all her writings the collection of letters published (1927) after her death is likely to be longest remembered.

North Africa, concerning which he wrote *Mogreb-el-Acksa,* is only one of the many places into which R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM penetrated in quest of those adventures recounted in his several books of travel, which are among the best of their kind. A word only can be added in reference to W. H. HUDSON, whose writings were always stirred by the spirit of adventure and wonder, whether he was dealing with the South American pampas or with the London parks; and to NORMAN DOUGLAS, who has written entertainingly (and often with satirical subtlety) of Capri and Sorrento, Calabria, and Tunisia *(Siren Land, Old Calabria, Fountains in the Sand).*

We may go back, however, to KINGLAKE'S *Eothen.* All other modern travel-books leave us dissatisfied, on account of an impression that, however interesting the adventures recorded, the ultimate attraction of personality is missing. We can conceive of the adventures of Livingstone, Stanley, Speke and the rest being written equally well if the material had been placed in the hands of others. Kinglake's triumph is that no one else could possibly have written his book: it is entirely personal and unique. The passage already quoted concerning the Sphinx is Kinglake at his most eloquent; but not Kinglake at his best and most human. If *Eothen* had been, throughout, on the same level as the Sphinx chapter, we should most certainly admire the book, but we should hardly love and delight in it as we do, once we fall under its spell. Kinglake's secret is that he sets down a score of revealing trivialities which distinguish his view of the East from every other. He has, moreover, an entirely personal sense of humour which enables him to laugh at his own people as well as at those among whom he found himself. The conversation in chapter i between the Pasha and the traveller, with the aid of the interpreter, is not only brilliantly funny, but also pleasantly satirical. Kinglake pokes fun both at the inflated language of the Oriental and at the self-conceit of the English traveller. Thus:

Pasha. - The Englishman is welcome; most blessed among hours is this, the hour of his coming.

Dragoman (to the Traveller). - The Pasha pays you his compliments.

Traveller. - Give him my best compliments in return, and say I'm delighted to have the honour of seeing him.

Dragoman (to the Pasha). - His Lordship, this Englishman, Lord of London, Scorner of Ireland, Suppressor of France, has quitted his governments, and left his enemies to breathe for a moment, and has crossed the broad waters

in strict disguise, with a small but eternally faithful retinue of followers, in order that he might look upon the bright countenance of the Pasha among Pashas - the Pasha of the everlasting Pashalik of Karagholookoldour.

Traveller (to his Dragoman). - What on earth have you been saying about London ? The Pasha will be taking me for a mere cockney. Have I not told you *always* to say, that I am from a branch of the family of Mudcombe Park, and that I am to be a magistrate for the county of Bedfordshire, only I've not qualified: and that I should have been a deputy-lieutenant, if it had not been for the extraordinary conduct of Lord Mountpromise; and that I was a candidate for 3oughton-Soldborough at the last election, and that I should have won easy if my committee had not been bribed. I wish to heaven that if you *do* say anything about me, you'd tell the simple truth.

Even such passages as this would not keep *Eolhen* alive without those other sections in which Kinglake writes (again through an intensely personal vision) of such varying matters as Greek mariners, the pilgrims to the Holy City, camels, things to eat, marriage customs, and, more delightfully than all, of fleas. It would hardly be unwarranted to say that his paragraphs on the fleas of various nations constitute one of the great passages of English prose.

No discussion of books of travel and adventure could pretend to be complete without some reference to GEORGE BORROW. Though Borrow was an agent of the Bible Society (a circumstance which produced his book *The Bible in Spain,* 1843), he was probably the most unmissionarylike person that ever lived. No other writer is like Borrow, but if a comparison needed to be made, it would be best to set him side by side with Defoe, although in truth these two writers had greater differences than resemblances. Yet there is a somewhat

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similar air of vagabondage about the two of them, and, more importantly, the same extraordinary capacity for writing in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for readers, or even close students, to mark any distinction between the fictional and the factual parts of their books. Borrow, however, had a much more turbulent style than Defoe, and irritating literary mannerisms from which Defoe is free. And, again, whereas Defoe was often consciously using fiction and deliberately dressing it up to look like fact - the whole endeavour being no more than a literary device - Borrow, on the other hand, was probably as frequently deceived by his own lying as his readers well may be. It might be permissible to say that Borrow was a cheaper edition of Byron; more harmless, perhaps, but certainly less elegant and more crudely violent. Byron was an aristocrat by temperament as well as by social position; Borrow was much more like a buccaneer, a highwayman, a pirate, or any kind of loud, devil-may-care soldier of fortune that can be imagined. These comparisons would seem to suggest that the advantage lay with Byron; yet, in fact, many will feel that it must have been much more pleasant to know Borrow than Byron. Borrow was almost certainly a humbug; but he lacked that sinister and fundamental insincerity which makes Byron so unattractive a figure to the modern intelligence. Though *The Bible in Spain* is one of the few great English travel-books, there are good reasons for preferring two other books by Borrow which are extremely difficult to classify. No one can say with certainty whether *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye* are to be described as fiction, autobiography, or travel. But, by courtesy, we may speak of them in this present section, since they contain some of the most fascinating passages concerning travel in England. Certain aspects of robustious, open-air life have never been better described than by Borrow in

these books. The gipsy characters whom he introduces are unique in English literature, and his account of the fight with the Flaming Tinman is one of the few great descriptions of fisticuffs. But Borrow insists too long upon a dark glowering ominousness and such 'grim forebodings' - to use his own phrase - as persistently afflicted him. Yet, with all his mannerisms and his infinite capacity for irritating the reader, what a man Borrow was ! And what an impression he gives of the England of his time ! Nowhere else can we feel so definitely that we are breathing the open air of England. Partly in *Lavengro* and partly in *Romany Rye,* Borrow has also incorporated one of the greatest, even if the most exasperating, of love-stories. It is also perhaps the cruellest. The gipsy girl, Isopel Berners, is a triumphant piece of character-drawing, presented with tragic intensity and penetrating understanding which makes the portrait terribly cruel. Borrow not only shows us a deeply wounded woman, but seems to delight in deliberately turning the knife in the wound. And yet who shall say that the end does not justify the means ? To have known Isopel is to have looked deeper into the bared emotions of a human creature, to have sharpened our sensibilities, and to have enlarged our sympathies and experience. However far Borrow may have been acquainted with Isopel in fact, his presentation of her character in this book is a triumph of creative artistry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HUMOUR AND PARODY

§1 *Humour*

THE first difficulty in the way of a consideration of Humour in literature is the absence of any clear definition of the word. When we talk of Tragedy as a form of literature, we are always clear, within a little, as to what we mean. We know, for example, that tragedy in the literary sense is not the same as tragedy in the newspaper-placard sense. We know that, although a catastrophe is essential to tragedy, not every catastrophe is in itself tragic: a murder or a suicide is only tragic, in the exact sense, if it is the culmination of a sequence of incidents or experiences which in themselves arouse pity or terror. Though this by no means covers the whole of tragedy, it does at least limit it in such a way as to give precise meaning to the word. When we consider the opposite word to tragedy, however, we can say little more than that any form of creative and imaginative literature which does not come under the heading of Tragedy belongs to the category of Comedy. But this is all too vague; some more precise definition must be attempted.

In this section we are thinking particularly, in the first place, of the Literature of Laughter, which includes Comedy, Wit, Humour, Burlesque, Travesty, Farce and other subdivisions which might, in a more exact analysis, be specified. Obviously, we must limit the field to be surveyed. Even George Meredith, in his *Essay on*

Comedy (the finest thing written on the topic in any language) does not distinguish as clearly as might be desired between three totally different kinds of writing: Comedy, Wit, Humour; and there is the further complication that though these three are different in kind, they may co-exist in one and the same work. But these three all move toward the same end, namely, to provoke laughter. Laughter may be provoked either by legitimate or by illegitimate means. It is legitimate to make readers laugh through the media of Comedy, Wit, Humour, Farce. It is illegitimate to seek to provoke laughter by the use of facetiousness, which includes practical joking, a good deal of punning and all cheap and obvious kinds of deliberate 'funniness.' There is no means of enumerating all the illegitimate forms of humour, because the whole question depends so much upon the cultivation of fine taste in the individual person, that what may seem intensely funny to one may appear silly or even offensive to another. The degree of culture to which any person has attained may be largely estimated by his standard of taste in this connection. One of the chief benefits of a study of humorous literature is that it helps considerably to develop the good taste and sense of fitness which are the best safeguards against the feeble, tedious, irritating behaviour which goes with facetiousness.

There will be general agreement with a Russian novelist's assertion that 'JUfe is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel,' But it does not follow, by any means, that there is always a clear association between comedy and thought. On the contrary, among people who are on a comparatively low intellectual plane, laughter is nearly always associated with some misfortune of a physical kind. This is a point worth making, because laughter, although universally regarded as expressive of good-nature, often

has something cruel at its roots. Even now, in spite of increased refinement, we more often laugh *at* and *against* people than we laugh *with* them. More people laugh out of a sense of superiority than out of sympathy; but it may be doubted whether man will be fully civilized and completely removed from savagery until he ceases to laugh out of superiority and antipathy and laughs only out of sympathy with others and with <a full consciousness of his own absurdity. We may find comfort, however, in the reflection that the original savagery of laughter has by slow degrees been mitigated by the gentler and more cultured faculty of smiling. Loud laughter is physical in its origins; but a smile comes from the mind and is the symbol of a flowering civilization. Yet that civilizing process has not gone on progressively nor without interruption in English literature. There has been a repeated ebb and flow, crude laughter being replaced by the thoughtful smile, and the thoughtful smile again by loud guffawing. As we survey the pageant of English literature we find the emphasis changing from the rough robust humour of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1575) to the highest point of beauty and delicacy in *Twelfth Night;* from *Twelfth Night* back to Ben Jonson's rude *Bartholomew Fair;* from that to the piercing, highly cultured wit of Congreve's *The Way of the World,* and thence again to the noisier humours of Fielding and Smollett. From Smollett to Jane Austen; from her to Dickens; from Dickens to Meredith; and so on. On the one hand, exquisite sensibility and sympathy; on the other, riotous laughter, horseplay and ridicule. There is room for both, and it is possible to enjoy both; but undoubtedly (and this is the hopeful sign) an increasing number of people now take greater pleasure in subtle humour than in that which depends upon delight in the discomfiture of others.

The word Comedy as used by the Greeks meant a

village revejl, a celebration accompanied, no doubt, by a good deal of noise. In the Middle Ages, Comedy came to mean any poetic composition with a happy ending: Dante called his great work *The Divine Comedy* because 'in the conclusion, it is prosperous, pleasant and desirable.' The fact that the second cycle of John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Chronicles* is called *A Modern Comedy* is an indication of how far the use of the word 'comedy' has travelled since the Middle Ages, and makes it clear that, for our present purpose some working distinction must be established between Comedy, and such other forms as Wit and Humour.

To what literary category does Congreve's *The Way of the World* belong ? We may say that it is a comedy. But Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is also a comedy. Is there no difference, then, between a play which centres around Millamant and Mirabel, and a play which has Viola and Feste among its chief characters ? Undoubtedly there are important differences. Without, in this discussion, pursuing the whole matter to its roots, we may lay it down that *Twelfth Night* is an example of *pure comedy. The Way of the World* is something wholly different: different in conception and execution; altogether different in its effects on the audience. Congreve shows us the dazzling surface of certain exceptionally brilliant minds (as Shakespeare also does in *Much Ado about Nothing* and elsewhere); but in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare does much more: he touches some chord never sounded by Congreve. At the same time that Shakespeare makes us laugh, he makes us sensible also of the infinite pity of human life. Just how he does it, is his own secret miracle. We may, then, call Congreve's lay *a comedy of wit,* as contrasted with the p*ure comedy of Twelfth Night.*

Following George Meredith's definition, Comedy can be described as that kind of literature which 'provokes

thoughtful laughter.' In thoughtful laughter there is an element of sympathy, even of pity. But Wit appeals predominantly to the brain; it is not necessarily heartless, though usually it is so. It deals more largely with mental standards than with human values; it is frequently malicious; it often wounds, but rarely attempts to heal. It aims at brilliance almost wholly for the sake of brilliance. Comedy in literature may be a gentle corrective of human faults and follies; but wit, existing chiefly for its own sake, is a dazzling firework and not a healing light. These two kinds of writing are seen in contrast if we consider the essential qualities of J. M. Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows,* and compare our conclusions with those reached after reading, let us say, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest,* or, better still, his dialogue, *The Critic as Artist.* So far as subject-matter is concerned, there is little basis for comparison between the works of these two writers; but it is at least possible to see that their respective attitudes toward life are governed by entirely different feelings for humanity in general.

Among the main sub-divisions of the literature of laughter, we are now left with the kind to which the word Humour may be applied. Comedy appeals to the emotions; Wit to the mind; while Humour aims to produce laughter without any further purpose. The humorous writer creates situations which are incongruous and inharmonious; he places men and women in circumstances which undermine the dignity to which humanity aspires. Humour trades upon the misfortunes of others, and it has some of that primitive cruelty which is at the bottom of unrestrained laughter. A brilliant example of humorous writing of this kind is H. G. Wells' short story, *The Truth about Pyecraft,* which deals with the misadventures of an exceedingly fat man who persistently bores his acquaintances by expressing the wish to find

some means of 'losing weight.' One of his most bored acquaintances recommends a potion of Eastern origin which, literally, produces the effect requested by Pyecraft. He loses weight without losing bulk; becomes lighter than air; soars to the ceiling of his room, and spends considerable time meandering around the ceiling like an incredibly large and exceedingly unpleasant human fly. It is almost impossible not to laugh uproariously at Pyecraft as he grasps a heavy volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and uses it as ballast to bring him back to floor level. But though it is funny for us, it was extremely unpleasant for Mr. Pyecraft, and the humour we derive from the situation is based upon a somewhat cruel attitude toward his misfortunes. The case of Pyecraft is typical of innumerable instances which impress us as humorous. They seem humorous because the victim is in an unfortunate situation, while we ourselves are (or appear to be) normal. We may say then, finally, that Humour is the kind of writing which appeals to our sense of the ridiculous and aims only to provoke laughter for laughter's sake without any particular intellectual or emotional purpose.

Until the middle of the seventeenth century, humorous writing in England was almost wholly confined to poetry and drama, and is therefore outside the scope of our present survey. In non-dramatic prose, Pepys is among the first of those whom we regard as humorists, though he hardly comes within the category, since the humour of *Pepys' Diary* exists purely in our modern view of Pepys and his delicious but unselfconscious absurdities. A similar comment would apply also to Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*. Except that Walton must almost always have had a twinkle in his gentle eye, there is nothing deliberately humorous about his most famous

book. It is amusing to us, however, to read the old man's recipes for the cooking of fish, in which the subsidiary ingredients are so rich and numerous that if the fish were omitted, little would be lost. And again, although one would imagine that it could not ever be pleasant for a fish to be caught - particularly with rod and line and hook - Walton shows commendable concern about the finer feelings of the unfortunate captives. Artless and ingenuous he most certainly is, but these qualities, humorous in our view, were not suspected by the author and therefore in their origins had no humorous intention.

Many writers whose work might be included with the literature of laughter, have already been mentioned in other sections of this book - the satirists, Dryden and Swift; the urbane eighteenth-century humorists, Steele, Addison and others; the eighteenth-century novelists; and Jane Austen, Charles Lamb, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot. We come by a process of elimination, therefore, to that particular division of nineteenth-century literature in which humour began to be deliberately pursued for its own sake. In the writers just enumerated the humour is usually incidental and secondary to some other purpose. Rather curiously, deliberate cultivation of humour in English literature began as an activity subordinate to humorous art. In the early part of the nineteenth century, English literature was becoming increasingly refined, and human experience has shown that refinement, when carried to excess, becomes bloodless in proportion as it becomes more and more intellectualized. There need be no limit to our admiration of such writers as Jane Austen and Charles Lamb; but whatever our enthusiasm, we may at least see that between these two and Dickens there is a world of difference. Comedy needs to reinvigorate itself from time to time by turning aside from refinement and

intellect in order to concern itself anew either with the more physical side of laughter, or with a more robust enjoyment of the heartier pleasures of life. The sense of comedy by which Jane Austen and Charles Lamb and George Meredith were dominated (each in a rather different way) is too tenuous, too bodiless, to propagate its type with continuous strength. We can have one Jane Austen, one Elia, one Meredith; but we cannot have (or, at least, we do not get) a succession of such writers. If Jane Austen and Charles Lamb be taken as representing one type and period of the literature of laughter, and (looking half a century ahead) DICKENS be taken as the embodiment of the opposite type, we shall see something of the processes of change which have been, and are still, continuously at work in the shaping of the literature of laughter in England. Between Lamb and Dickens lay a backwater of English humour which was also a spring of new life. Dickens was a great comic originator, but not *altogether* an originator; he was, also, the product of other men's originating genius, and to that extent was an inheritor, even an imitator. He was, however, more an originator than an inheritor or an imitator. If we think of a great river as representing the torrential comic genius of Dickens, we shall realize that since Dickens' time the torrent has divided again into a large number of small thin streams, as his genius has fertilized other men's minds. Let us assume (what is in some instances certain, and in others probable) that Dickens influenced George Gissing, H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, W. W. Jacobs, Pett Ridge, Arnold Bennett. We shall be conscious that in these writers the Dickens stream of influence has thinned out until it becomes merely a narrow trickle, finally lost in a literary marshland. English literature is again to-day in much the same position as it was a century ago; its humour is

becoming intellectualized and bloodless. There is no writer of undoubted genius who indulges in full-blooded and hearty laughter. Laughter has passed to the essayists - A. P. Herberts JRobert Lynd and others - and in them it is either a faint polite laughter or a more or less mild form of satire. We badly need in contemporary literature someone who will perform for our time a similar service to that which Dickens performed in the last century. This is not to say that we need a second-hand Dickens; but we do need a great original force pouring a new stream of life-blood into the somewhat anaemic veins of present-day literature. But such energizing geniuses do not appear with miraculous suddenness. Dickens had predecessors and a background; the background was a grimy one and the predecessors were not always respectable; but they were none the less important. In any circumstances Dickens would most probably have been a great novelist and a great humorist; but, as the young author of *-Pickwick TUjpers,* Dickens was brought in by the publishers of the book as an afterthought. The first idea of such a book was not Dickens' own: he was commissioned to write a series of incidents to serve as letterpress to sporting pictures by Robert Seymour. And since caricature plays so large a part in Dickens' books, it is proper that we should not overlook the close relationship which existed in the early part of the nineteenth century between pictorial caricature and verbal caricature. Pictorial caricature began in England during the reign of James II, and received a strong fillip in the turmoil following the South Sea Bubble in 1720. Later Hogarth brought caricature to the level of an art and almost of a great moral force. He pictured life of the coarsest and basest type, yet avoided the indecency in which most other pictorial satirists of his day indulged. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, caricature had not only become a popular and regular form of

political criticism, but it had also become a flourishing trade. We cannot here follow in detail the process by which caricature became more and more closely associated with literature, nor do more than refer in passing to such famous caricaturists as Thomas Rowlandson, whose pictures provided the originating impulse for William Combe's narrative poems dealing with the adventures of Dr. Syntax and his horse Grizzle. The general tendency of these several influences was to give extraordinary popularity to pictures dealing with country sports, among which at that time prize-fighting was one. There was also in the first half of the nineteenth century a great deal of sporting literature, all of it vigorous and much of it extremely crude until it was civilized by ROBERT SURTEES in *Mr. Jorrocks' Jaunts and Jollities* and other books. These were warmly praised on their appearance, and they have never since entirely lost their popularity. Surtees' style is bustling and somewhat slangy, but its healthy outdoor strength and high spirits qualify his works to be what they actually became, source-books for other writers. In Surtees we get back at least an echo of the full-blooded open-air humour of Fielding and Smollett, and in relating Dickens (as we often and properly do) to those eighteenth-century writers, we should not overlook his debt to the pictorial caricaturists and the sporting writers.

By doing so much as he did to civilize and make respectable a hitherto scurrilous kind of book, Surtees also helped to create a demand for comic writing of a reputable standard; and by 1841, when the first number of *Punch* appeared, there was a public ready for humour of a more cultured type than had been common for years previously. The ancestral tree of *Punch* was rooted in such forms of writing as the adventures of Dr. Syntax, in the illustrated comedies of sport, in political and social caricature, and in books of anecdote and jest.

Almost from the beginning, *Punch* combined humour with serious comment on current affairs, and no journal has been more conservative in its development. Inasmuch as its function is to reflect the times, it inevitably changes with the times; but, in essence, *Punch* still remains much like what it was in 1841, though it has mellowed, and is now free from that political vindictiveness which was a commonplace of the age a century ago. From 1841 onward, the history of consciously humorous writing in this country is to a large extent identical with the history of *Punch*. Its contributors have included a great number of the foremost makers of the literature of laughter: Thackeray, Douglas Jerrold, Thomas Hood, Sir Francis Burnand, Fred Anstey, Sir Owen Seaman and many others. Much of the best humorous writing in the nineteenth century, apart from what is incidental in the novels, was in verse form, otherwise Hood, Edward Lear and W. S. Gilbert would all require some detailed reference. EDWARD LEAR was the originator in this country of nonsense writing, of which there are also some brilliant examples in LEWIS CARROLL'S *Alice in Wonderland*. Pure inconsequent nonsense, absolute meaninglessness, has a humorous value of its own, because it is in contrast with the purposive tendency of the human mind. We are always ready to laugh at anything entirely different from ourselves and our own standards. Life to most of us is a serious affair, and we are all the while searching for the meaning and significance which we are sure is hidden in life. When Edward Lear invents incredible creatures doing incredible things, and having experiences entirely and gloriously meaningless and nonsensical, we feel released from our normal habit of seriousness and are able, for the time being, to believe it conceivable that everything means nothing and nothing may mean anything. Both Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll evade critical analysis, because it is almost

impossible to know exactly why their absurdities are so beautifully funny, unless it is to be accounted for by the entirely unsatisfactory suggestion that the secret lies in sheer unusualness. The difficulty of analysis in connection with *Alice in Wonderland* is that the book is at least two books. It is one thing to children and an entirely different but not less delightful thing to grown-ups. For children, the attraction of the Cheshire cat and Alice's conversation with the cat most probably lies in the strangeness of the animal; but to grown-ups the chief pleasure lies in pure funniness and absolute illogicality. It is indeed a most serviceable relief to be allowed to enter into a state of being where things may happen anyhow and no longer in the way we can more or less predetermine in the daily events of the actual world. But even though we cannot decide in our minds why *Alice in Wonderland* is a masterpiece (and it is no doubt quite proper that we should not be able to do so), we feel quite certain in our blood and bones and all the non-intellectual parts of ourselves that it is a work of unique genius.

In the twentieth century, P. G. WODEHOUSE has carried nonsense writing into a different sphere from that in which Lear and Carroll left it, and has demonstrated that the very simplest materials are adequate for humorous writing. He has created in Bertie Wooster perhaps the first example of pure idiocy in English literature. Bertie Wooster is not so much a man as a human void, and he is endowed with a marvellous gift of using language in an original way. Although the stories in which Bertie appears are associated with the name of Jeeves, his 'gentleman's personal gentleman,' Wooster is the genius, not Jeeves. Jeeves represents the efficient, normal world; Bertie Wooster lives **in a** world **of abaolute**

fantasy, or, what is even better, of absolute inanity. He always does the most obvious things, but they never have the obvious consequences. His mind (or what passes for a mind) has not a single idea in the world beyond a few elementary practical jokes, which should be intensely irritating to read about, but are, in fact, sublime. The material used by Wodehouse is as familiar as the stage-tricks of a tenth-rate music-hall comedian, but what grows from that material is as ever-new as the gambols of a divinely-inspired clown. It is not possible to guess at what posterity will think of Wodehouse's books, but it seems probable that they will not long outlast our own generation. Their rich attraction lies in the use of extremely femry language, which has always a faint and absurd relation to normal language: it is a marvellous grotesque echo. But when present-day colloquialisms have been replaced by the colloquialisms of to-morrow and the day after, the echo will seem meaningless to those who are no longer familiar with the thing echoed. Outside the Jeeves books, however, P. G. Wodehouse has written several stories in which perennially comic situations are developed, and extremely well-drawn characters introduced. The Earl of Emsworth, for example, who appears in *Something Fresh* and other books, is a solidly-drawn character with lovable human qualities in addition to his infinite capacity to amuse. We cannot do more than speculate as to what will be thought of the comic situations in the future, though it is difficult to believe that a time is likely to come when unregenerate humanity will be too stiff-necked to laugh when a pompous young man falls downstairs in the darkness and comes inexplicably into chilly bloodcurdling contact with a cold tongue. It is unfortunate that Wodehouse almost entirely disproves what was said earlier in this chapter on the question of facetiousness. He has, in fact, raised facetiousness to the level of a fine art, thus fulfilling one

of the functions of true genius - for a genius is a man who can work brilliantly in material which others cannot touch without disaster. In humorous writing of this kind only W. W. JACOB? has matched P. G. Wodehouse in the twentieth century. Jacobs, too, has handled facetiousness with real genius, and he also produces almost limitless fun out of commonplace situations. His characters have not the verbal resource and felicity of a Bertie Wooster, but they occupy a niche of their own, and Jacobs has (one may venture to believe) immortalized the longshoreman and the people who go down to the sea in barges. Here also is a succession of practical jokes of which we do not tire, though we knew them all in advance. Jacobs shows, moreover, a mastery of cockney dialogue which has hardly been equalled. And if it should be asserted after analysis that the speech used by his characters is in fact very little like the conversation heard from the lips of cockney people, it nevertheless remains true that Jacobs does create the illusion that we are listening to cockney speech, and the creation of illusion is all that can be demanded of an artist. From among the many other humorous writers who might be mentioned, comment must here be confined to two others. First, to the stories of E. (E. SOMERVILLE and MARTIN ROSS, two Irish women who have written with knowledge and humorous insight of their own people. *The Iriah R.M.* [Resident-Magistrate], with its amusing sketches of rural life in Ireland, is at least a minor classic, and although fox-hunting plays a large part in the book, an interest in this sport is by no means necessary for full appreciation and enjoyment of the stories. The remaining humorous writer for whom a little space must be spared, is THE AUTHOR OF *Elizabeth and her German Garden?* a pseudonym used for all her books by Countess Russell (formerly Countess von Arnim). Elizabeth (as we may call her for short) has

the distinction of. combining wit, humour and a sense of comedy; she has also written books where tragedy is dominant (as in *Vera).* She resembles another twentieth-century writer, Rose Macaulay, in appearing to have no illusions whatsoever about life and humanity; but if she has no illusions, she yet has, what is rare in such instances, a full measure of sympathy with most men and women. Her wit is brilliant, her comic situations admirably contrived and managed, and, in addition, she has a sharp sense of natural beauty, as is shown in such books as *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and *The Enchanted April* and elsewhere. The babies in the German garden are delicious - almost the only really nice babies in literature, or out of it. If babies could be encouraged to be more like the April baby, the world would be a happier, better and a much more amusing place.

§2 *Parody*

An almost accidental association has brought parody into relation with humour, though there is no essential reason why they should be so associated. The dictionary tells us that parody is 'an imitation of a poem, in which its words and ideas are so far changed as to produce a ridiculous effect'; but that is only a rough-and-ready definition which will hardly bear critical examination, and it is necessary to refine and sharpen it considerably. In the first place, however, we may accept as a loose statement that parody is imitation. But not every imitation is a parody, because there can be very widely differing degrees of faithfulness to the original. First, there is the kind of imitation practised by Robert Louis Stevenson when he was learning to write: the precise imitation of an author's style, wherein the imitator attempts only a close representation of the original.

For this kind of imitative writing the word 'pastiche' should be employed. The value of pastiche is, mainly, as a literary exercise for the person who produces it, though it has a further value in enabling a skilful writer to reproduce events and customs in the phraseology of a past age, and often in that way to give them a heightened interest. Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* may be regarded as a masterpiece in pastiche, because it is an extended record of eighteenth-century life written with marvellous fidelity to the style of eighteenth-century authors. It is not until we appreciate that *Henry Esmond* is, as it were, a piece of the eighteenth century devised by a nineteenth-century writer that we are able to realize the fullness of Thackeray's achievement in that book.

Nearest to the original, therefore, in forms of literary imitation, is pastiche. Next is parody; after parody, verbal caricature; then burlesque; finally travesty. Travesty is a deliberate distortidri of the original which it professes to imitate, and it does not hesitate to debase things which were originally beautiful. Burlesque may be no more than simple clowning. It is without malice, but it concerns itself only with the ridiculous features of the original, emphasizing and enlarging these without reference to finer elements. The aim of burlesque is to provoke what Meredith calls in another connection the 'broad grin.' But if burlesque is without malice, it is also without reverence, and its main effect is to produce a kind of genial distortion. On the next higher rung is verbal caricature; and, with slight differences, caricature is to parody what parody is to original creative literature, but it is a trifle more malicious than parody: it is barbed even when it is not poisoned; personal peculiarities are magnified and mocked. By a process of elimination, therefore, we come back to parody - which is not exact imitation, nor malicious distortion, nor irreverent clowning, nor stinging mockery. This narrows the field, and

enables us to see that the dictionary definition from which we started is too rough-and-ready. Parody (in a more precise definition) is that form of imitation which, while keeping close to the shape of its original in the main points, serves also as a piece of illuminating criticism of the original by giving a dexterous twist to peculiarities of thought or expression. When we examine a piece of literature with our own eyes, we may see only a uniform texture in the style, or perhaps a fairly regular pattern. But the accomplished parodist sees that what distinguishes one writer from all others is a slight eccentricity of style or word-pattern recurring more or less frequently. One of the main aims of literary criticism is to distinguish such recurring marks of individuality. Ordinary critics of literature may say to the student, 'You see that extraordinary little mannerism of style: there it is, and again and again.' And the baffled and bewildered student usually does not see. But the parodist says nothing in the way of direct demonstration of his original's peculiarities of style: he sets to work and makes a new thing, somewhat like the original before him but with differences. The texture is similar, but the eccentricities are a little emphasized and a little more brightly coloured.

The development of parody in the present century has done much toward cancelling the old impression that parody is without serious interest or value. That false impression was developed in the minds of English readers not because parody is in itself unworthy, but because the more popular parodists were unworthy practitioners of their art. There are some things which should not be parodied: certainly passages from the Bible should not be, nor beautiful lyrical poems. Sublimity and beauty are not fit material for the parodist, who should limit his activities either to the work of solemnly pretentious writers or, more importantly, to such writings as he can illumine in a critical sense by

throwing into relief their essential features and helping a reader to fuller appreciation of the works parodied.

If anything at all need be said to establish the respectability of parody, it is sufficient to recall that the fourth greatest among the Greek dramatists, Aristophanes, was himself a parodist of genius, who (in *The Frogs)* makes fun of contemporary tragic playwrights and helps us not only to a fuller insight into their works but also permits us to see, more clearly than we otherwise could, the attitude taken toward them in their own time. In England there have been many parodists, but only two or three of real quality. The most famous collection of parodies is *Rejected Addresses* (1812), by JAMES and HORACE SMITH, but these are chiefly in verse and need not detain us. LEWIS CARROLL also incorporated one or two delightful examples of verse-parody in his books. But it is really to the twentieth century that we turn in order to see prose-parody at its best; and one contemporary writer, MAX BEERBOHM, has so far outdistanced other parodists in subtlety and delicacy of touch, that comment may be confined to his work, and in particular to *A Christinas Garland* (1912). This book, unrivalled in English prose-parody, consists of seventeen pieces, each dealing with the topic of Christmas and each written in the style of some one modern writer. *A Christmas Garland* is in itself interesting and extremely amusing, even for a reader who is not particularly concerned with the critical appreciation of the authors parodied. But the true value of Max Beerbohm's book lies in the fact that it produces, in a few pages each, compendious revelations of the peculiarities of outlook and literary style inherent in the work of the seventeen writers imitated. For example: Joseph Conrad at first found some difficulty in familiarizing himself with the syntax of the English language, and Max Beerbohm illustrates Conrad's un-English inversion of nouns and

adjectives in such phrases as 'the silence murmurous and unquiet,' 'nis lean body black and immobile,' 'agony private and eternal,' 'tendrils venomous, frantic and faint.' Max Beerbohm has also caught the exotic opulence of imagery by means of which Conrad created his atmospheric effects of dank tropical forests; but the parodist's most useful achievement lies in the skill with which he compresses into four pages the subtle irony which was continuously characteristic of Conrad, though it is otherwise extremely difficult for any inexpert reader to distinguish the exact means by which Corlfad achieves his ironical force. Those who have read Conrad hitherto as in a glass darkly, may, with Max Beerbohm's aid, see a flood of light suddenly break into the darkness of tropical forests because of the critical insight which the parodist so brilliantly brings to the reader's service.

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