

**THE BOOK WAS
DRENCHED**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_212369

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

Gift of
YALE UNIVERSITY



With the aid of the
ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
1949

**CONVERSATIONS
IN EBURY STREET**

**CONVERSATIONS IN
EBURY STREET : BY
GEORGE MOORE**



**PUBLISHED BY BONI AND
LIVERIGHT : NEW YORK : 1924**

Copyright, 1924, by
BONI & LIVERIGHT, INC.

First issued in Carra Edition February, 1924.
Second Printing, September, 1924
Third Printing, January, 1925
Fourth Printing, February, 1928

Printed in the United States of America

**CONVERSATIONS
IN EBURY STREET**

CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

CHAP. I.

A LETTER from an unknown correspondent cozens us strangely, beyond our reason, exciting a curiosity, intellectual or animal, I know not which, only this: that its stimulus is different from any that the mere man or woman could awaken were he or she sitting by us, and the rather if the script be beautiful, for then we are drawn to our writing-tables to tell that our taste inclines to Poe's or Mallarme's and away from Francois Coppée's, his having always seemed to us artificial, hieratic, almost a mock of the fourteenth century. But Mr. Husband's letter is no mock, I said. His script is as natural and as beautiful as theirs; his imposition is perfect—sought for, no doubt, but found easily, it being part of the man's mind: and I returned again and again to his letter, come from the far-famed city of Winnetka, Illinois, for evidence of himself in his choice of words, in the turn of his sentences; even in his punctuation I sought him, and when the letter slipped from my hand I sat looking into the fire, catching glimpses in my thoughts of a young man, for his letter was certainly a young man's letter. But is he rich or poor? I asked myself, firm of purpose or likely to be led away? this last question begetting a scruple lest a casual phrase of mine intimating that a transcription of *The Brook Kerith* on vellum by **him**

would be a beautiful thing in any man's library and later a nation's possession, should beguile him from his own tasks and bring a weighty manuscript to 121, Ebury Street, one which I should not know what to do with, unless, indeed, I presented it to a museum.

I dipped my pen in the ink and sat, pen in hand, a long while, thinking that it were ungracious to tell Mr. Husband that my letter of the eighth implied no more than a passing admiration of his script. Why passing? I asked, and after trying various adjectives reached out for a telegraph form and wrote: Pay no heed to mine of the eighth. But will not this telegram give undue importance to a remark which he will accept as casual and unimportant if I do not draw his attention to it? and this judgment seeming to me sound, I neither wrote nor telegraphed. At last a letter arrived from Winnetka, which I read eagerly for a reference to the transcription of *The Brook Kerith* on vellum, and finding none I began to think of Mr. Husband as a clever man who would not be misled by a few words possibly out of keeping with the tone of my letter. A man of letters, without doubt, I said, and after some pondering the conviction that he was the author of one book at least, if not of many, set my prose flowing over a sheet of notepaper, a novel seeming more likely than a volume of poems, a volume of lyrics more likely than an epic. A tale of travel in Mexico and Colorado is the book Mr. Husband is likely to send me, I said, but the book that came from him was about a mine; and after turning over some pages telling of the different shifts and the long way a miner has to go before he reaches his seam, I laid the book aside and fell to thinking that the literary sting must be deep in a man who seeks a book five hundred feet under the earth. I read of a hair-breadth escape, but keep small memory

of it, or of the letter I wrote thanking Mr. Husband **for** his book, and no memory at all of the letter which it appears he wrote to me from the coast of Ireland, whither he had gone to hunt German submarines.

Some years went by without news of him, and then a letter came from Jermyn Street, and unable to imagine Mr. Husband in Jermyn Street, I sat like one stunned till my parlourmaid reminded me that the messenger was waiting. No matter from whence he comes, I shall learn why he descended into a coal mine after taking his degree at Harvard, I said, and that my curiosity should be satisfied quickly, I scribbled an invitation to him to come to see me about tea-time; and at half-past four I was waiting at the window for the arrival of the young stalwart, withdrawing myself, however, from view, when a taxi left the middle of the street and steered straight for my door. I am now, I said, within a few minutes of the knowledge whether his quest in the mine was a literary one, a derivative of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*, or if— Mr. Husband, sir, said the maid, and in walked Mr. Husband, interrupting my memories of his letters (which were not those of a mere miner), coming forward awed, just as I was the first time I groped my way through the encumbered work-room at Medan and found Zola reading proofs on the sofa, his leg tucked under him. I asked Mr. Husband if he had had a quiet crossing, but no sooner were the words past my lips than I remembered that a rough or quiet crossing were the same to a man who had prowled the Irish coast in winter in an American torpedo boat. As he had not noticed the weather, I turned to his hotel for a subject of conversation, but he had no opinion to offer about London hotels, having only arrived that morning. So his first act was to write to me! and on my inquiring how he **had**

spent his hours in London, he told me that many were spent seeking the church in which Pepys was baptised. It lies behind Mark Lane, he said, and we came round by the British Museum. Ah, I thought the taxi that stopped at my door looked a little tired! But you found the church? and then I learnt that Pepys's bust stands on a bracket and looks down upon the pew in which he and his wife had sat. You have imagined a great many things, Mr. Moore, but I doubt if even you can imagine how much London means to me. All the books I have read, at least three-quarters of them, were about London, or written in London, and now I am in London with a fortnight before me to see as much of it as I can in the time. You will show me your pictures, I hope?

We walked round the dining-room and went upstairs to the drawing-room. So this is the Aubusson carpet! he said. At first the drift of his remark escaped me, but a moment after I remembered that I had introduced the carpet into a book; and having spoken of Manet and Monet, we returned to the dining-room, to talk of my books till Mr. Husband began to feel afraid that he had outstayed his welcome, whereupon I begged him not to think that this was so. He stayed on for another half-hour, talking so well that I forgot the coal mine, and it was not till he stood on my threshold that I remembered it. Mr. Husband, I said, I have often wished to ask you how—it seemed unseemly to put the question in a letter, but face to face there can be no harm in my asking you why you descended five hundred feet to hew coal for ten months. No harm whatever, Mr. Husband replied, and your question is easily answered. I had learnt all I could out of books at Harvard, but they did not seem to bring me nearer to life. If I had lived in Europe, I should **very** likely have gone to Paris, as you did, but being in

America there was nothing else for me to do but go down into a coal mine. An excellent answer this seemed to me to be, and after watching him from my door-step I returned to my study to think the matter out, saying to myself that he could not have given a better answer, for it profits a man but little to have read all the books in the world if he miss life. But he has not missed it and he will find it wherever he goes, to-morrow in Westminster Abbey, the day after in St. Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London; I hope he won't forget to go to Hampton Court. And not a little curious to know how London struck him, I wrote asking him to dinner.

You have had a week of sight-seeing, I said, and I hope London has not disappointed you. Only in two things, he answered. And what has disappointed you? I was disappointed, he replied, in the Elgin marbles and in Sickert's portrait of you in the Tate Gallery. This strange association of images—the Theseus on one hand and Mr. Sickert's portrait on the other—taking me aback, I was moved to speak of Greek humanism, saying that whereas Assyrian and Babylonian sculpture represented oriental despotism, the Greeks had . . . but before I could bring my commonplace apology to a close, Mr. Husband interrupted: Mr. Sickert's portrait misses you altogether; if a portrait is not like the sitter, it is not a portrait. The quality of Sickert's painting, I said, occasionally rivals that of Manet, but he is not primarily a portrait painter inasmuch— A portrait that misses the sitter, Mr. Husband continued, but raising my voice a little I insisted upon being heard: Though Ingres's portraits are often very like his sitters, the absence of what is known in the studios as quality causes us to turn away from them with a feeling of disappointment, but the quality, or shall I say virtue, of Sickert's painting always

detains us. I think a portrait ought to be like, Mr. Husband muttered, causing me a moment's annoyance, from which I escaped by changing the subject of our conversation, which was easy to do, for I was anxious to hear the further adventures of this young man, who, having in ten months tasted all there was of life in a mine, started for Texas, leaving the chasing of cows, this second source of life, for a third—a wife. And certain from the knowledge of his character already gotten that he had found and married the desire of his soul and body, I listened to his praises of her for whom he had forfeited his dear vagrancy and settled into a profitable business. Your business gives you time to pursue your literary career? I inquired, and it was pleasant to hear that he had but one fault to find with his business—it dragged him from his bed at seven in the morning. And nobody enjoys sleep more than I do, said Mr. Husband; and better than sleep is dozing. To turn over, said I, clasping your dreams to your bosom. My dream is my wife and my children, he answered. An answer that I appreciate, I replied, though I never had a wife. One of the charms of London is that I needn't get out of bed till nine, Mr. Husband muttered, addressing himself to himself rather than to me. And what do you dream when you lie awake in London? I asked, anxious to learn Mr. Husband as far as was possible in two visits. I dream, said he, that the next world is as pleasant as this one, and of course if it be, we need not fear death. Another Paul! said I to myself, and aloud: O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? At which Mr. Husband's face was overspread with such a genial light of cheerfulness that he set my thoughts flowing, and in a trice I was lost in a dream of dewy hillsides and a radiant morning, with a young man blowing a fanfare to his comrades, the meaning

of which is: Life is a perfect gift and our duty to enjoy it, for by doing so we help others to enjoy; and if Mr. Husband had left my thoughts to swarm, an idea of a young man might have fixed itself in me, to flourish in due time.

The reader must not, however, draw from these words the thought that Mr. Husband had outstayed his welcome, nor can he be blamed for not having read himself into my mind, for it were folly to find fault with a guest because he is not a soothsayer, and as Mr. Husband had come to hear me talk literature, it was but natural that he should break the silence with an inquiry about the book I was writing, and impossible for me to do else than abandon my dream of him and turn to *In Single Strictness*, saying that the revised sheets had been returned to the printer and passed for Press. A very trite and lack-lustre admission this seemed to me to be, and to enliven it I confessed that whilst writing this new book I seemed to myself to be writing something I had never written before, and for that reason believed it to be as good as any of the books I had offered to the public within the last ten years. And so you took pleasure, Mr. Husband said, in writing this last book. Yes, for the reason I have given and for another reason: I thought it was going to be my last book. But you will always go on writing? I am afraid I have written too much, and the man who writes many books raises his tombstone. But, I continued, if one does not write and has lost the art of reading and never acquired that of fishing or of gardening, the hours go by on leaden wings. For you life extends in endless perspective beyond your own life, but I have nothing to look forward to when my library edition is published but a picture gallery (one in the provinces might be given to me to look after), or the learning of French and the senile temptation of writing a

10 CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

book in that language. But the end has not yet come, Mr. Husband, for on opening *Impressions and Opinions*—— One of your best books, Mr. Husband interjected; I always take it up with pleasure. After reading a few pages, I said, thoughts began to gather in me of another book of essays, one that would not be unworthy to offer to my American readers. And what, asked Mr. Husband, will be the title of your new book? I answered that I was thinking of calling it *A Farley*, or *Parleys and Opinions*, or perhaps *Conversations in Ebury Street*. And its character? he inquired. I shall try to make it more like *Avowals*, sets of conversations between me and my friends. But you will not omit the article about Balzac? Not altogether, I answered; but the original article begins by comparing *The Human Comedy* to a violet city and a traveller standing on the crest of the hill. I once liked that opening, said Mr. Husband. I doubt if you would like it if you were to read it again, I answered, and fell into meditation, from which he awakened me with the question: had I another opening in my mind? I replied that I had, a line from Matthew Arnold, but not the fourteenth line of the sonnet——Beloved, he said, of John Eglinton, one of the stalwarts who still walks daily from Terenure to the National Library determined that, come what may, he will not fail in his duty to see life steadily **and** to see it whole.

Your memory of my people in *Hail and Farewell* does me proud, I answered, and we debated the phrase beloved of journalists till I began to feel that the evening was passing, and to remove thoughts of the clock on the mantelpiece from my guest's mind, I returned for his sake to Arnold, who, after all, is literature, though he wrote words that have led John Eglinton astray, and with him a whole generation: Two things, he says somewhere, are

required for a work of art, the man and the moment; and if Arnold's words be true and the moment be necessary, it seems to me not at all unlikely that we have seen the end of the art age, a theory that will be repugnant to one who is afraid of death only for that the next world may be different from the world he has been called upon to live in. You will answer me——I will venture to suggest, my guest interposed, that the moment Arnold deemed requisite will occur again. According to some there is no death, I replied, but repetition in endless time, and perhaps the moment that called *The Human Comedy* into being may reappear some billions of years hence; or it may be that the dead do not rise again. Moschus believed in eternal sleep for Bion: The sun brings back the mallows in the garden, and they live again, and spring in another year; but we, the great and mighty, or wise, when once we have died, in hollow earth we sleep, gone down into silence; a right long, and endless, and unawakening sleep. A lovely translation from the Greek, beautiful as the mallows themselves, whose beauty concerns us more nearly than the doctrine that everything that has been must of necessity return, return being the law over all things, great and small, stars and mallows alike, everything returning to unity, to spread out again through space and time and again to be collected into unity; and that for ever and ever. A wonderful dream was Poe's, that there is no death and that we are only separated from ourselves by some billions of years.

From Poe we returned to Balzac, for in Balzac there are all things, even Poe. Balzac was of the old world, for it was not until after the Battle of Waterloo that the old world slipped for ever behind us, and to apprehend the distance we have traversed since then we have only to go to Portsmouth and look at Nelson's battleship, or, if

she have been thrown to the ship-breakers, at a picture of her. Her masts and yards will tell us that she is of the kin of the ancient galley; whereas a Dreadnought—I will not labour the point. But although the external world changes, said Mr. Husband, man remains the same. His instincts are the same, no doubt, I replied, but his beliefs in good and evil presences are different in every century, and who shall say that with the death of superstition——

But is superstition dead? my guest asked me, and I answered that the superstitions that peopled the woods with Sileni and fauns, that gave Neptune to the sea and Zeus to the skies, were a more spiritual influence than our superstitions never to sit down thirteen to dinner, and to be sure to turn round three times when we see two magpies. And on these words we spoke of other things, myself holding forth, as it was my duty to do, since Mr. Husband had come to hear me speak, that the cave man drew before he began to worship, not for his pleasure (so do the scientists spit their gall into our cup), but for some belief that the animal drawn was potentially dead, the inference being that the cave men were identical with modern savages; a false derivation, for one of the most notable of prehistoric drawings is a woman with child, showing that the artist was attracted, like Rembrandt, by the strange form of a woman whilst carrying. I see, said Mr. Husband, that you avoid the word beauty, and I answered him that beauty, like much else in life, cannot be defined. Would you admit, he asked, that the beauty perceived by the cave man and by Rembrandt in the child-burdened woman was a sense of moral beauty? God forbid that I should deny to the cave man the sense of the mystery he lives in and dies in, I answered. Tolstoi would not deny it, said Mr. Husband, and without waiting for my reply he asked me which I preferred, *War and*

Peace or *Anna Karenina* . . . A reply to your question, I said, would lead me far away from the first chapter of my new book; and you know, Mr. Husband, you asked me to tell it to you. Mr. Husband acquiesced.

We must not, however, leave Tolstoi too quickly, I continued; I cannot allow him to be swept aside. I am sorry I interrupted you, Mr. Husband interjected; you were going to say that a great man can only be judged by his best work? No, I was not, for it may be fairly contended that a man's work is all of a piece. Tolstoi was always a moralist, plaguing himself and the world about God and morality, and in the end discovering himself to be neither Christian nor Pagan, but a man of genius. One regrets to admit it, for we like to think of a genius as a happy man, so full of admiration for the beautiful things of this world that he must reveal them to those who have not eyes to see and ears to hear. The joy of living was Homer's, Theocritus's, and Virgil's inspiration, Shakespeare's, Balzac's, Wagner's; and if men of genius do not always show a happy face in their portraits, the fault lies with the painters and sculptors. We have, however, a photograph of Tolstoi; the camera does not lie, and it represents him like a wild beast in a cage, raging against the bars, trying to escape from his animality, which is our better part, becoming unbearable to himself and to his family, at last running away, to die in the waiting-room of a roadside station, flying from himself, for though he had known for a long time that nobody could live with him, the knowledge became clearer to him on the day of his death, and so clear that he had to seek expression in an act. He had to run away, from himself, from his wife, from his children, and worse of all, from all he had taught and preached. As he lay in the roadside railway station he must have felt that it

14 CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

would have been better if he had never been born. I am sorry I spoke of him; I never will again. Let us talk of something else.

But before we talk of something else, said Mr. Husband, let us speak about his definition of art. You do not share it? I asked. After consulting all the authorities he decided that art was the means whereby a man communicates his sensations to another. How like Tolstoi, and how disagreeable! a pretext for poking up somebody to do what he doesn't want to do. We suspect at once that a disagreeable doctrine lies at the root of this definition, but we believe it to be the truth; it looks like the truth till we examine it. Tolstoi must have turned it over in his mind, and his mind was so shrewd that he could not have failed to see that his definition was a false one, for were it true any man who treads badly upon another man's toes would be creating a work of art. Turgenev, if he had been asked (and I wish he had been asked for a definition), would have probably answered: The arts are formulae whereby man interprets Nature. I cannot imagine him answering differently; and to develop this definition, to make it plain, he might have added that man being isolated in different communities for several thousand years after the birth of civilization, was able to invent many formulae. Now and then a seed came from overseas, and in a new soil and in a different climate a new flowerage began. Latin literature is derived from the Greek; it is said that Roman statues were the work of Greek sculptors—which may be true; who shall say? Be this as it may, it is certain that, in the third or the fourth century, art vanished from the earth, some theorists giving as a reason the descent of northern barbarians into Italy, others contending that to have art there must **be long** periods without art. What concerns us is not **the**

reason for the disappearance of art from the world, but the fact that it did disappear in the third century—not to reappear again for nearly a thousand years.

May not history repeat itself? Mr. Husband asked, and I answered: History repeats itself when the circumstances are the same, and it would have been strange if art had not returned, the circumstance of the thirteenth century not differing very widely from the fourth. A Christian world not differing very widely from a Pagan, Mr. Husband interposed. The mediaeval world was hardly larger than the ancient world, I replied, only portions of the planet being known to men. But to-day we are without Gods, and in a world no bigger than a band-box, with every man looking over the next man's shoulder: A portrait painted in Christiania is indistinguishable from a portrait painted in Lima. The circumstances of the antique world and the modern were, till a hundred years ago, practically the same. We lived till eighteen hundred and fifty in isolated communities; every town had a society, customs, and a dialect of its own. Till eighteen hundred and fifty many languages were spoken in these islands. I remember the humming of looms in the village street, housewives spinning at cottage doors; and at the end of a passage in my house in Mayo stands a grandfather-clock which came from Castlebar at the end of the eighteenth century; the precise date I cannot vouch for, but it is certain that a grandfather-clock has not been made in Castlebar since eighteen hundred and fifty. It was about that time that beer ceased to be made at Moore Hall; the brew-house still existed in my childhood, but we got our beer from Ballinrobe; now the beer comes to Ballinrobe from Dublin. Moore Hall was built in seventeen hundred and eighty by Mayo builders and carpenters, and few houses in Ireland or England have

withstood a hundred years of wear and neglect better than this hale old house, standing on a hill overlooking some ancient island castles. In my childhood Mayo masons, carpenters, and blacksmiths were little inferior to those who built Moore Hall. I remember one of Mayo's carpenters designing and making a handsome wardrobe; he could not read or write, but it may be doubted if Mayo's newspaper-reading peasantry could show so excellent a craftsman; and of this I am sure, that Mayo is a drearier county, for landlords and peasants alike, in the twentieth century than it was in the first half of the nineteenth.

I looked inquiringly across the hearthrug, and afraid lest this big-framed, even-complexioned, blue-eyed, dark-haired, young American who sat in the armchair opposite me, was wearying of a discourse in which he had begun to lose sight of the man he had discovered in certain books and learnt to appreciate, I bethought myself of an anecdote that would restore his confidence in me; and the day that I had gone to the Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin, in search of Orpen, coming to memory as a charming narrative, I told my visitor of my surprise at finding myself not in a studio with three or four students, or a dozen, or twenty, or thirty (to these numbers I was accustomed), but in a studio numerous as a hive, a hundred or more young men in clerical garb, busy as bees, each bent over lumps of wet clay in which he sought to discover the natural shapes of pears and apples. You must not stir, sir, from the spot where I put you, said the porter, and his advice seeming to me good, I remained like a stock, afraid to advance a step lest I should overturn somebody's modelling stool; and it was whilst wondering if Ireland had turned from theology to sculpture that I caught sight of Orpen wriggling his way through the serried ranks, his face wearing a smile which

told me that he had already guessed the reason of my astonishment. Whence come all these people to learn modelling? I asked. There must be at least a hundred here. And the money that brings them to Dublin—whence comes it? Out of the pockets of the Government, who pay them to come, said Orpen. Pay them to come! And for what reason? To get diplomas, he replied, which will allow them to teach. So men come here not to study art, but to learn to teach art, I said. The teacher has to be taught! Yes, he answered; **and** it is the same everywhere. But tell me, Orpen, why the students dress like clerics. All come from Christian Brothers' Schools, he answered. But what conception, I said, can the people who invented this system have of art? You must ask your friend, Mr. T. P. Gill, about that, Orpen replied; and I heard that a Metropolitan School of Art had been set up in every large town, for according to the newest democracy everybody must get his chance, whether he wants it or not. To admit, Orpen continued, that one man brings a gift into the world and that the next man does not, would amount to an admission that the Liberal party cannot rectify Nature's mistakes. And what would become of the constituencies if such **a** thing were admitted? I am amazed, I said, for I did **not** suspect imbecility in the average man. The average man is not originally imbecile, said Orpen, but if he have **not** genius he cannot react against a system; and so enslaved is he in it that he no longer believes in anything except what is taught in the schools. The contention of **the** Minister of Education would be that it is his business **to look** after mediocrity. He might even say: **Let us create** mediocrity.

Wonderful! thrice wonderful! I replied, **and** began a story that I had from my friend Tonks, **the** Slade pro-

fessor, of how an artist was treated by Mr. Fisher or his department. The man was an artist; he had gained his living by painting; but after the War he fell into difficult circumstances, and applied for the post of teacher at a provincial school; mind you, he was an artist who had gained his living by painting. The headmaster of the school at which he wished to teach had seen his paintings in many various exhibitions, and the artist thought that all was settled; but when he interviewed Mr. Fisher, or his department, I know not which, he was told: Yes, your pictures are well enough—we have photographs of them before us—but you must go to Kensington and pass through a course of pedagogy. Pedagogy—what is that? I asked; I have never heard the word. Tonks explained it to me, and I answered: Well, then, if a school were started to teach young ladies to write novels, and I applied for the post, I should have to learn how I was to teach them to write novels? Most undoubtedly you would! So that is the Fisher formula, Tonks. Mr. Fisher, Tonks continued, will admit that his system is not perfect; he hopes to improve it. But he has critics, I said, and these will dare to say that we are pursuing a false system of teaching; but nobody will admit that all teaching is futile, worse than futile, poisonous, and that the poison will continue generation after generation until there is neither handicraft nor art worth speaking of left in England.

It would seem, Mr. Husband, that every epoch is represented by a word: the thirteenth century by filioque, the Napoleonic empire by organisation, the twentieth century by education, and to bring about a renaissance of illiteracy, upon my word I would welcome a reawakening of theology. The arts flourished in theology, and, if certain questions were not asked, men and women were left to their instincts.

You think, said my guest, that man has not advanced in intelligence? You do not think he has, Mr. Husband, nor does anybody but those without knowledge of the world's history—the history of Greece, for example. Mr. Fisher knows that forcible education was not the law of Athens and that wisdom throve without it, and if he believes in detaining young folk at school till they are sixteen, and brings down Wranglers from Cambridge and Firsts from Oxford to teach them, it is because he does not know how life is made, or that his belief in forcible education springs from money—money hides from learned men many things that the poor know well, and every workman is aware that a boy released from school when he is fourteen is set upon learning a trade, but if he be kept at school till he is sixteen he very likely becomes part of the vagrant class. At sixteen a boy begins to look round, to think, and seeing that there is no future for him in ploughing, mowing, carting hay, reaping corn, or following a flock, he hesitates to return whence he came. If he be a town lad the plumbing trade does not entice him, the slater's still less, for sewers are deep and roofs are high; and if you press him, saying: Well, if you don't enter a trade how do you hope to get a living? Live on the old man, I expect, is the answer you will get. The new system allows boys to be kept at school till they are sixteen, and it permits exceptional boys to be detained till they are eighteen—the exceptional boy, in the eyes of the schoolmaster, being the boy who passes examinations. At one moment of my life I remember being able to count twenty men among my friends and acquaintances who had taken Firsts at Oxford, and looking back upon them now they seem to have been a very sorry squad indeed. Some lived upon their relations; some had small incomes, from two hundred and fifty to three hundred pounds a year, and struggled

20 CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

to make two ends meet in furnished apartments; some turned to journalism and wrote paragraphs and turn-overs for the *Globe* newspaper; some drifted into the *Times* office, others into chambers in the Temple, glad to accept what are known as *soups* at the Old Bailey. I don't remember these old friends as stupid, rather as worn-out men.

Education, said Mr. Husband, must come from within, not from without, and all that is of value is self-education. It is a pity that I did not listen longer, but the impulse of speech was upon me and I continued the conversation in these terms: Our concern is not with the men who go to Universities to wear their brains away learning things they do not want to learn for the sake of their parents, who would like to say: Johnny took a First. Oxford has produced some mental wrecks, men who lacked grit to resist education as resolutely as I did; but my pity is **for** those in the elementary school, who are turned from their natural instincts. The making of round pegs for square holes, Mr. Husband chimed in, and I answered: Yet it should be clear to everybody who gives five minutes' thought to the question that the destiny of the great majority of mankind is to dig the field. An everlasting law that no Government can change, said Mr. Husband, and I replied: The country goes to the town, but the town never returns to the country, and those that do are the jeering-stocks of the peasants. A few months ago a land-girl wrote to a daily paper that she found the scaring of rooks tedious, but was consoled by the thought that the winter's day is short and that she would return at four o'clock to tea and crumpets, to an evening of dancing and music in a comfortable cottage, a letter which set me thinking of the Court of Louis XVI leaving Versailles at undern for the Petit **Trianon** to milk **cows**.

I often wonder if Mr. Fisher, on awakening from his educational dreams, asks himself how the world will get its food when the shepherd no longer goes to the fold, lantern in hand, and the ploughman to the stable. It will not surprise me, said Mr. Husband, if I live to see Europe without vegetables. Beef and corn you may get from abroad, but there will be no asparagus. I laughed at this sally, and continued: It is hard to think that Mr. Fisher ponders his educational schemes without sometimes seeing the peasant at Atlas, and the explanation that he is a Londoner, born and bred, and has never leaned over the stilts, is not enough, for on his holidays he cannot have escaped seeing a man hedging and ditching; but very learned men often have eyes only for print and are unable to appreciate the country until they read of it in books, and it may be that Mr. Fisher is one of these. If he understands what he reads in print, all will be well, said Mr. Husband, for I can see that you are bent on enlightening him. I was moved to reprove Mr. Husband for his facetiousness, but remembering that he was my guest, I said: Though there be no hedging and ditching in America, Mr. Husband, there are certainly coal mines, and you are perhaps the one educated man in the world who has hewn coal of his own free will. So tell me, you who know something of manual labour at first hand—no, I am not punning—tell me if education and manual work are compatible. Mr. Winston Churchill told yesterday in a great speech, said Mr. Husband, how Bolshevism had reduced Russia to a desert where millions are dying of starvation; and millions will die here, if Bolshevism gets a footing in England—his very words. And whilst Mr. Churchill spoke at his meeting, Mr. Fisher was vowing at his that he would keep boys at school till they were sixteen, and those that passed certain examina-

tions till they were eighteen, without it occurring to him that he is—how shall I put it?—making the bed for Lenin.

I was about to start again on the words: The law that is over us, when my guest interrupted, and I listened, nothing loth, having already had my fill of words. It may be well for you to hear, said Mr. Husband—I hope you don't mind? On the contrary, I replied; you can illuminate the question whether forced education——I was going to say, began Mr. Husband, and then stopped suddenly, as if ashamed at having interrupted me. I waited. I was going to say, he repeated, that Aristotle thought it quite natural for men to be born slaves. I have not read Aristotle, I answered, but am willing to believe that a wisdom which has illuminated century after century is looked upon to-day with contempt—out of keeping with the twentieth century. Progress! I continued, looking into Mr. Husband's face. A book might be written indeed about the progress we have made. But however well written, the book would fail to open the eyes of the blind century we live in; and I spoke of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, whose conception of the word slavery is a nigger woman crossing a frozen river with a baby in her arms, jumping from floe to floe, or a nigger being tracked by bloodhounds or tied to a tree and whipped for disobedience. Of course the destiny of the vast majority of men is to dig the field; Nature intended Brown, Jones, and Robinson to dig, and the Minister of Education cannot alter Nature's decree. We have Aristotle on our side and even the Bible: Man shall get his living by the sweat of his brow. How stupid it all is, how stupid! for slavery, in Aristotle's conception of the word, meant that some men are born to manual work, others to intellectual, and he might have added that men are only happy when they

are accomplishing the work that Nature has assigned to them. The worst slavery of all is to be set to perform tasks that are out of our instinct. A hare beating a tambourine in Regent Street is one of the most pathetic of all spectacles. I saw one once, and introduced poor puss—— Into *Evelyn Innes*, said Mr. Husband. Yes; and now I compare the showman to the Minister of Education, who is daily dragging men and women out of their instincts, out of their nature, out of their genius, creating the worst slavery of all, unsuspecting that the Liberal professions cannot absorb everybody. And so it has come to pass that the men whom Nature designed for shepherds are curing the sick, and that those in whom Nature implanted the instinct of the office stool are painting pictures. All humanity suffers, and the greatest sufferer is the poor girl who dreams of her lost happiness in the kitchen whilst measuring heads in the Westminster School of Art.

After a pause, during which Mr. Husband was kind enough to wait for me to collect my thoughts, I said: We have forsworn our hands and invented machines that do badly what the hand did well; and having got so far, we would, by means of enforced education, wipe out original instincts and remake mankind, for it amounts to as much. Everybody in the Education Office knows that he cannot educate himself, but he is convinced that he can educate somebody else. A well-meaning race is the race of man, but incurably stupid, and going from bad to worse. You spoke of Aristotle just now; I wonder what he would think of the modern belief that everybody is a slave who does not go to an office and sit on a high stool and keep accounts, and go to the sea-side with his wife for a fortnight's holiday. I think I can see Aristotle in my thoughts looking at the office stool, and after looking at it for some time his words sound in my ears: But men

are shaped differently; do you not keep different sizes? I think I can hear Mr. Fisher answer: At present the size does not fit every bum, but we hope that the bums will soon begin to fit the stool. A Platonist, surely, Aristotle murmurs; I always dreaded his influence, and now find it predominant after more than two thousand years. How very extraordinary! And then Aristotle might ask: Enforced education, or enforced slavery—which? Why is one meritorious and the other abominable? There are many among the young generation, said Mr. Husband, who dislike, and intensely, the education that is being forced upon them, who, as you would say, Mr. Moore, are inspired by their instincts to avoid it, and would prefer to educate themselves, feeling that they could do it better. But their parents will not hear of anything but Eton or Harrow, I interjected, and after that the boys must go to Oxford or Cambridge, for the parents who have achieved fortunes argue in this way: We were hindered for many years by lack of education; our children shall begin where we ended. How pathetic are human hopes and beliefs, and none of us is free from these. My first publisher, no, not my first, my second, Walter Scott, began life as a mason; he worked on the scaffold and helped to build the railway station at Newcastle. But he did not remain long a mason; he soon became a rich man, a great contractor, who would have undertaken a tunnel under Hyde Park as part of the day's work. But how did he become a publisher? asked Mr. Husband. Some bad debt, I answered, and he thought it might amuse his children; they had been to Oxford or Cambridge and knew more about literature than he did. He ran his publishing business like a grouse moor, as a pleasure; sometimes it paid, and sometimes it didn't, and when it didn't he wiped off the debts. At the end of his life he went to Egypt,

interested in the building of the Pyramids. A big undertaking no doubt it was, he said to me, but one that I would undertake myself; what I would not undertake, however, are the tombs carved out of the rock. But with our modern appliances, surely, carving a tomb out of rock presents fewer difficulties to-day than it did three thousand years ago? No doubt, no doubt, he answered, but the tombs I saw were painted, and they were as fresh as if they'd been done yesterday; and unless the Egyptians had electric light, I don't know how it was done. And the sons who were educated at Oxford or Cambridge? asked Mr. Husband. I answered that I had never seen them, but believed they were just like other English gentlemen.

Tell me, I continued, changing the subject suddenly, passing from philosophy to practical truths, is it true that in America all manual work is done by emigrants? I believe the servant problem is a very pressing one? Our servants come from Ireland, Italy, and Sweden, Mr. Husband replied, and that is why the emigration laws are not more strict; at least seventy per cent, of our manual labour comes from the middle of Europe. The first generation works hard, the second generation works less, the third generation looks upon itself as America and aspires to the Liberal professions, which, as you have said, cannot absorb everybody. I asked him if he had met no Americans hewing coal. About five-and-twenty per cent, in the mine in which I worked were Americans, he answered; and he spoke of some lean hunters who came sometimes from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Maryland. Who, he said, when not hunting or mining are employed in feuds, vendettas, the causes of which are forgotten, so long ago is it since the original shooting. Dick knows that he must shoot Jim when he meets him, and Jim is not

more knowledgeable; enough it is for him to know that he must pull the trigger first. My attention was held by some fine stories of the outlaws of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the women that favoured them—how the mistress of a defiant and resolute robber brought food to her lover's cave month after month undetected, and would have succeeded in helping him to escape from justice if the man had not needed for his flight a pair of boots; it was the purchase of a size either larger or smaller than her husband's that directed the suspicions of the police. She was followed, and the robber captured, but I have forgotten whether he escaped hanging.

But I am wandering from memories of my delightful guest (is not every memory intermittent?), and what I remember next of the evening's conversation is Mr. Husband telling me many stories of the childishness and improvidence of the negroes he had met in the mine. I remember a negro, he said, going to a store with his week's earnings and paying two guineas for a pair of patent leather boots. He wore them on Sunday, and on Monday went down into the mine in them; on Wednesday they were no longer wearable. Not only are the negroes improvident, but they have no exact idea as to the value of money. A negro and his wife look after my offices; I pay him a hundred dollars a month, and he never has a cent by the time his next wages become due. Boss, said he once, I *go* buy motor-car. But, I answered, where will you keep it? You can't keep it in the office. No, no; but build garridge. Boss so-and-so tell me——And he described an outlay of some thousands of dollars, more money than he had ever met or could understand the meaning of. The highest social position that a nigger can fulfil is that of servant on board a mail train. You are **not** afraid, I asked Mr. Husband, that when they out-

number the whites they will revolt? A successful revolt, he answered, implies organisation. And we spoke of Hayti, Mr. Husband telling what every schoolboy knows, but which I did not, that Hayti had belonged to the French, and that the French revolutionaries sent over a deputation conferring freedom upon the negroes, the first result of which was a massacre of the whites and then a massacre of each other. One of these negroes, he said, a half-caste, built a palace (the ruins are still there); but he was massacred in his stronghold; and now the negroes govern themselves with the aid of half a dozen American warships. Very lucky, I answered, it is for you Americans that the negro cannot be raised out of the slavery bestowed upon him by Nature.

Mr. Husband's anecdotes illustrating the childishness of negroes had enlivened our conversation, and unwilling that it should again darken, I asked him if his eyes could distinguish a gleam of light on our horizon. His cheerful optimism did not desert his voice even when he said that the world would continue its breakneck pace till it toppled over into the barbarism of the Middle Ages, just as you have predicted, Mr. Moore, emerging, much reduced by famine, a smaller but more beautiful planet. And it seeming to me that I dared not run the risk of losing the pleasing optimism of Mr. Husband's voice, I refrained from speaking of the desolating tide of children flooding our doorways, and spoke instead of my Parisian life, *Tficole des Beaux-Arts*, Cabanel, Manet, and Montmartre, peopling my anecdotes with those who assembled at Tortoni's during the 'seventies, relating as a *bonne bouche* my last visits to the great tribe of Impressionists, now reduced to two, Monet and Mary Casatt; and Mr. Husband listened, as all Americans listen to tales of Paris, till he began to remember that his days in London were num-

bered and that he must not miss a night of long sleep. **For** heaven only knows when the chance of a ten-hours' sleep will come again, he said; I think I told you that I have to leave my bed at seven? Yes, I remember, I answered, and it is now going on for midnight. But do not leave on account of me; I sleep on in the morning and rise when I am rested. Mr. Husband hesitated, as if he had something still in his mind to say, and I wondered what it could be. We have talked, he said, when I opened the front door for him, about a great many things, without, however, mentioning my handwriting. You see, I am now in business and am afraid it would be rather too long a job to copy out the whole book, but if you would like a chapter of it——My dear Mr. Husband, your letters are enough; and after bidding him good-bye once more, I returned to my Aubusson carpet and my lyre-shapen clock feeling that I would have done better to have talked less and to have drawn Mr. Husband into further confidences about himself. But no further confidences would have helped me to understand him better than his first avowal: that after leaving Harvard University he had gone down into a coal mine in search of——what? The last thing that anybody would suspect——life, primal, fundamental life. I sought, but without finding them, the words in which he said he had gone down into the mine in search of primal life. He said nothing about escaping from conventions and prejudices——what did he say? I asked myself, and stirred the fire without being able to recall his words. The words, however, that I am sure of, are: If I had been in Europe I might have done as you did, gone to France and lived in Montmartre, but being in America there was nothing for me to do but go down into a coal mine. How admirable! How altogether admirable! In these words we see the man from end to

end, we weigh him, we appraise him. And before a dwindling fire I sat for a long time thinking of Mr. Husband's sea voyage, his arrival in New York, pausing after rising from my chair so that I might better consider the question whether he would sleep a night in New York or catch a train to take him to Chicago. The answer came: He is too eager to see his wife again to wait in New York; he will catch the train.

CHAP. II.

THE fire was now burning brightly and would do so **for** another hour, and it seeming a shame to allow so beautiful a fire to burn in solitude, I laid myself out in my armchair and abandoned myself to its warmth and to the pleasant belief of having said many interesting things to Mr. Husband, who would carry them overseas, giving attention to them now and then in an article in a newspaper or a review, or by word of mouth, treating me as if I were a flower garden, going round the beds, watering-pot in hand, bringing sweet refreshment to all my flowers, my tulips, forget-me-nots, mignonette, and some London Pride, for a border, of course. He seemed to have understood everything and to have sympathised—but, good heavens! I forgot to speak to him of the English language, abundant in the dictionary, but tenuous in our speech. A sad spectacle indeed is the deathbed of a language, one that drove me out of England twenty years ago in search of a small, primitive language undefiled by journalism. Or was it hatred of the Boer War that drove me to Ireland to assist at the revival of the Irish language, which the Irish people had been able to do nothing with when they had it, whether from lack of talent in the race or some defect in the language itself,

SO CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

I cannot tell, and looking beyond myself I am doubtful if anybody could be found to answer so recondite a question; nor can I tell what was my main motive in leaving my friends, everything I had known and felt and heard and seen, for the Gael, of whom I knew nothing.

I have often been told that I am the most impulsive of men, and I feel this to be true, yet I am a very patient man, as patient with my literature as a woman is with a child. To discover the ineptitude of the Gael in art took me about eighteen months, and I have told elsewhere, I think, how the writing of *The Unfilled Field* (a book written for the purpose of supplying the Gael with some examples of short stories which he would imitate, which his children's children would imitate—for in about a hundred years, I thought, Ireland would be again a Gaelic-speaking country) robbed me of my faith in the Gael. It is not, however, uncommon to find a man practising a religion after he has lost faith in it, and I continued to cry for many years with ever-diminishing voice: Gaelic for the Gael! till one evening, returning home from a visit I had paid to John Eglinton's little house, one of the old coaching inns, now overlooking a convent garden, it occurred to me that Gaelic being dead beyond all hope of resurrection, it might be worth while to preach the revival of Elizabethan English to the Gael, who was without interest in language for its own sake, who desired the Gaelic language only because it would separate him from England. Said I to John Eglinton: The second person singular would be a great help. Even the Gaels could learn to *thou* and *thee* each other; *thou* and *thee* would become a Gaelic banner and afterwards would be adopted by English writers.

Yeats, whose business it is to set people on the wrong track, warned me against the second person singular, **and**

during the first fifty pages of *The Brook Kerith* I tried to stint myself to the miserable *you*, which is not a word but a letter of the alphabet, at least in sound; but to weed out the *yous* means something more than grammatical changes; every sentence has to be recast; the rearrangement of the verbs is difficult sometimes, but of very nearly the same disciplinary advantage as the use of metre. Moreover, I had but to remember the Sussex peasants, whom I knew well at the end of the 'sixties. There was plenty of *thouing* and *theeing* on the Downs in the 'seventies, and no other speech is valuable. Pace, the Editor of *The Spectator*, once wrote to me that he was glad the second person singular was no longer used, for its use betokened class differences. A strangely superficial opinion this seems to me, and I have often wondered if the Editor of *The Spectator's* transcendental world is a universal tribe, eating the same dinners, wearing the same clothes, speaking the same language. I prefer to think that his letter to me was written without thought, and that he has already come to understand that the pleasure of living, if there be any pleasure in living, exists in differences rather than in similarities.

To return to forms of speech that I heard on the Sussex Downs in my youth. Never did anybody on the Downs say *over there*; it was always *over yonder*, and it was a real sorrow to me when a man in the street in which I live, after taking a direction from me that he needed, replied: Yes, *over yonder*, and corrected himself to: *over there*, ashamed lest he had betrayed his country origin. To him I said: Sir, you began in excellent English, but on second thoughts you returned to the flat, worn-out idiom that is written in the newspapers and spoken in drawing-rooms. We are becoming too "nice." *Sich* means *ailing*, but to avoid the good old word *puke* we say *sick*.

How much nobler to say: I *puked* all the way from Calais to Dover. So far as my small power permits me, I have striven hard to accustom the London drawing-room to the word *belly*, being convinced that there is no real morality in substituting *stomach* for *belly*; and invariably I interrupt her who speaks of her dog as a lady—Madam, I suppose you refer to your bitch. My authority is slight, but such as it is I have tried to use it. *Ewe* is an absurd word, and as shepherds always speak of the female sheep as a *yoe*, I have spelt the word throughout *The Brook Kerith* as *y-o~e*; mayhap it would be better spelt with a *w*. We write *q-u-a-y-s*; we say *k-e-y-s*. Why turn an *a* into an *e*? There's much too much *e* in modern English. And of all, why not say *lilac*? I say it whenever I get the chance. Before the word *yaller* I still hesitate, hoping that greater courage will be given to me next time. *Hither* and *thither* are only used in speech in the phrase: going *hither* and *thither*; yet how much prettier it is to say: Come *hither*; go *thither*. Why has *the which* fallen out of use? It is both an elegant and useful locution. Truly, we are losing our words and, worse still, all innocence of thought. A country woman does not say: 111 go upstairs and try to find it; she says: I'll go upstairs and have a look round. She does not say: I'll refrain from looking at so-and-so; she says: I'll keep myself from looking at so-and-so. False images prevail in modern London speech among the upper classes. Society is always being *shaken to the roots*, and it would be interesting and instructive to keep an account of all the solecisms, pleonasms and French words that have crept into the language, overlaying, poisoning our homely English speech at its very spring head, in the market-places, villages and fields.

I wish I had told Mr. Husband how one day whilst

partridge-shooting with a friend in the north of England I began to forget the shooting, and on my friend asking me for the reason of my inattention, I answered: I am thinking of the beautiful English your gamekeeper speaks. But is not your aim in writing, he asked, to write the language of good society? I cried out like a dog whose tail has been trodden on, and told him: Not at all! My object is to separate myself as far as possible from the language spoken in good society. And to explain to him what I meant, I searched among the money in my pocket for an old coin, and finding one almost defaced, I said: This sixpence represents the language that is spoken in society. And my friend, being a man of taste, was converted to the beautiful, idiomatic English spoken by his gamekeeper; and in the evening after dinner he told me of many beautiful locutions he had heard in the fields and woods and had laughed at, thinking them vulgar, but knowing at the bottom of his heart that he was not thinking the truth.

And I might have told Mr. Husband of the many things I said to Mr. Fisher when returning with him after the opera through the Green Park. It is true that during the hustle of the Strand I wasted much of my opportunity, speaking to him of the women we had met in Lady Cunard's box, but under the moon in St. James's Park the impulse was irresistible to tell Mr. Fisher that his scheme for unlimited education would bring about the destruction of the English language. The peasant is the source, I said, whence language comes. The country forms of speech are nearly always beautiful, whereas those that our streets beget are ugly. Mr. Fisher, visibly stirred by admonitions, did not deny that education might reduce manual labour, but he hoped those who were unfitted to apply the education they had received would

return to the mine and the field, and I made show of interest in his defence of his schools, for it does not follow that because a man is a Minister he is a fool; personally he may think with Solon, but his acts are in accordance with public opinion. He is like Charles the Second, who when charged with never having said a foolish thing and never having done a wise one, replied: My words are my own; my acts are my Ministers'. Mr. Fisher knows that the intelligences we bring into the world are not the same; some can take education like certain steel which takes an edge, and these find the education they want instinctively; others are dipped into the pot in vain, and these are the many. Mr. Fisher knows this, but he has public opinion behind him, and being a Minister of Education he could not agree with me when I told him that I would prefer to see him as the Minister of War. For as Minister of War you would not want to set up a barrack in every village, and the Minister who would replace you at the Education Office would not strain your theory that education can develop the brain; he would be content with the old faith, we remain as God made us. After we had passed Buckingham Palace I told him that scholarships and literature did not overlap, that very often scholarships extinguished genius but that a lack of scholarships never stifled it, making good my case over the names of Theocritus and Burns. In the art of painting, too, I said, detaining him at the curb, the uneducated surpass the educated. The two best painters we have are self-taught, Mark Fisher and Wilson Steer. Would you, Mr. Fisher asked, suppress the schools—Kensington and Westminster? and I answered: It is impossible to prevent people from teaching, but I would not have any school of art placed upon the rates, for by doing so you retrograde the natural course of art and produce a serious shortage in

the supply of domestic servants. All art asks for is to be let alone; every attempt to advance art is to discourage art. And I might have spoken with advantage to Mr. Fisher of his curriculum which includes, I believe, some instruction in the French language.

Anything more useless than instruction in French I cannot imagine, for to learn a foreign language is the job of a lifetime, and only those possessed of the gift of a certain linguistic faculty can learn French even imperfectly. A few rare individuals can learn the grammar and apply it, and these are not infrequently without any command over idiom; others who can pick up idiom easily, neglect to study the grammar, and so both are deficient, and the rare man who has learnt French thoroughly can do anything with it; he just knows it and that is all, and we look upon him as we do upon a mummy; he is as useless; he is harmful, for as much knowledge of the French language, enough to enable a man to read a newspaper, is destructive to the English language. At certain seasons locusts fall upon a country and devour it, leaf by leaf, and in the same way French words have within the last few years fallen upon the English language and are eating up the English words. The grey squirrel eats the red, and *resume* has not only eaten but digested *summary*. It is difficult to conjecture why *resume* has replaced the English word, or why a lady should, in speaking of another lady, delight in the expression: *Elle est si raffinee*, or why the journalist writes *petite* instead of *small*, unless, indeed, he imagines that *petite* means *dainty*. I have often thought to collect the French words that are ousting their English equivalents: *nuance* instead of *shade*, *naivete* instead of *innocency*, *camouflage* instead of *disguise*. *Eclat* and *demarche* can be translated by different English words. But everybody is in such a hurry, particularly

those who have got nothing to do, that to save time social speech is no more than tags, English and French. Lord Askwith wrote a letter to *The Daily Mail* of not more than ten lines, into which he introduced the words *compagnon de voyage*, and so pleased was he with his knowledge of French that he could not keep himself from using the phrase again in the same letter; nor could he stay his hand when *camouflage* came under the pen. Forty years ago, when I returned from France, I discovered that *intrigue* was not an English verb, and I never used it in that way again, but to-day nobody can speak for more than five minutes without using *intrigue* as a verb, and would look upon himself as dishonoured if he wrote to the newspapers and omitted to say: It intrigues me to learn. . . . It was not until I wrote in a mood of exasperation to the Editor, telling him that *modiste* was a milliner and not a dressmaker, that the word disappeared from my newspaper; and how many letters, anonymous and signed, did I not write beseeching him to inform his contributors that *wanton* did not mean wicked, and that to write: The wanton destruction of French property by the Germans, instead of: The systematic destruction, was very poor English. *Wanton curls*, *wanton breezes*—but it is all in vain. The newspapers have a language of their own, and it should be enough for me to be allowed to omit French words from my own writings. Why should I wish to keep them out of the newspapers? Because, like another, I am not reasonable; or is it because our language cannot assimilate any more French words without losing its character? Borrowings from the German would seem to me less reprehensible; I would Teutonise the English language.

The fire is sinking, and the French clock, amid its

yellowing marbles and wedgewood plaques, strikes one. It is time for me to go to bed.

CHAP. III.

NOW what is to be done with this wretched article? I said, awaking from my meditation on the qualities of the departed guest; and taking up *Impressions and Opinions* I turned over the leaves, but laid the book aside suddenly, disquieted by the opening: a city seen upon a violet evening, with a traveller striving through suburb after suburb, and arriving at last at *Eugenie Grandet* the certain capital of *La Comedie Humaine*. In former days I thought the capital was *Les Illusions Perdues*, no doubt captivated by Balzac's ordering of Lucien's clothes; but even in my immaturity I was not without the thought that the way for English readers is through the minor pieces rather than through the major. Very likely; but, like the whale, I must vomit this Balzac and swallow another, keeping the translations, which might be worse. . . . And turning the leaves over I came on the place where the article should begin! Here the beginning is inoffensive, and in my circumstance it is enough to avoid always the flagrantly offensive. My thoughts flitted from him whom I had described somewhat irreverently in *Vale* as a great *destrier*, slow to rise out of the dust of the roadway, but who, once on his hooves, could be heard from afar like thunder; by no means an excellent simile, one which I should not think of using in the book which is to replace *Impressions and Opinions*—a simile which I quote without being able to discover any reason in myself for the quotation; one cannot be held responsible for every thought that comes into one's mind, and every memory. . . . And my thoughts still flitting, passed from the great

Touranian to Zola, to the day when I went to call on him at Medan, to the essential hour when I sat by the sofa on which the master rested, satisfied in his glory, whilst I, almost a boy, strove to ingratiate myself, saying everything that I thought would please him and succeeding very well up to a point, but bringing a cloud into the master's face when I agreed with him that his article on Balzac was not altogether a success. So great was my nervousness that I might have told him unwittingly that Henry James's article on Balzac was better, much better, and very likely would have done so had I read Henry James's article. I had not; my ignorance saved me; and before Alexis arrived I had gained a place in the master's esteem.

And returning from long ago to Ebury Street, I began to consider all articles on Balzac as bad, and that it might be wiser to abandon *Impressions and Opinions* for a new story. But no sooner had I begun to take pleasure in my escape from my old book of odds and oddments than I remembered that the library edition must contain a volume of criticism. I had come to loathe the essay, and whilst looking at it I had begun one in my thoughts, a long essay on a serious subject—the vanity of education or some more suitable title, instead of applying myself to my job: to contrive a volume of criticism to replace *Impressions and Opinions*. This must be done, said I to myself, though the tide of enforced education come in **and** overwhelm the natural intelligence of man. This volume of criticism must be forthcoming and quickly, for I have signed for twenty volumes, and whosoever reads me expects to hear me speak about Balzac. Whereupon I began to rue the time I had spent talking about Mr. Fisher; Husband would have been better pleased to hear **me say that** though it is not the lot of **all** critics to be

remembered by what they failed to understand, Sainte-Beuve's failure to appreciate Balzac's genius will assure him of the sneers of many a generation, and *the pot of paint flung in the face of the public* will survive Ruskin's finest prose passage. What should I know of Janin if Zola, in an admittedly inadequate article, had not pointed out that the journalist overlooked the importance of Lucien's daily expenditure in the little grub-shop, and that by stressing it Balzac was introducing a new element into fiction—the value of money.

Balzac is too vast for an article, and that is why it occurred to me to lead the reader by way of the minor pieces into the company of two thousand men and women and children. New faces meet us at every turn; hundreds of human souls float round and round as if in a vortex, the usurer everywhere, governing his own section as he governs it in life. We find all types of men and women: peasants working in fields and drinking in the inns, courtesans in the streets and in palaces, old men preyed upon by unscrupulous women, who in turn are the victims of unscrupulous young men. Balzac was a great harvester and his sheaves were souls: poets who waste their talents in love dreams, diners-out who waste theirs in quips. As we read on, volume after volume, our wonder increases for we come upon allusions full of anticipatory insight into those problems of clairvoyance and hypnotism and auto-suggestion which modern science is classifying within the natural; yes, and in *The Human Comedy* all the incidents of the land war in Ireland—the murder of the bailiff in *Les Paysans* differs barely from the many such murders we have read of in Ireland, and the boycotting of the General might be included with very little alteration in Captain Boycott's memoirs.

It will be asked how Balzac, who went to his bed at **six**

o'clock in the evening and rose from it at twelve o'clock to write till six o'clock the next evening—shifts of eighteen hours—could have found time to experience the life he was describing, to enter into and tell minutely the soul secrets of more than two thousand men and women, and to endure this life not for the space of a week but for months at a time. The question is asked every time a book or an essay on Balzac is published, and whenever Balzac's name is mentioned in literary circles somebody says that he must have donned a footman's livery else he could not have described the salons of the Faubourg St. Germain, to which a better thinker answers that Balzac knew from the beginning how life was made and did not need to observe it. Only in the arts was he at fault; the arts cannot be divined, and let it be confessed that he shows himself often as sciolist, and nowhere more so than in *La Cousine Bette*, a book written in six weeks—shifts of eighteen hours—containing some souls that abide in eternity, reappearing with unimportant, casual modifications in every age and country—le Baron Hulot and his wife, who overhears her husband telling a servant girl that at the death of his wife she might be Madame la Baronne; Madame Marnieff, too, is in this book. The people of *The Human Comedy* are rarely social figments, more or less carefully described, nearly always the clear embodiments of a great visionary. His pen commands; visions fill his brain and are noted in his lonely garret, a cup of black coffee at his elbow. So did he write, for it was possible to write *The Human Comedy* in this way, and if I have told the story for the thousandth time, it is only to make plain my reasons for confining this paper to the minor pieces. Why rush into an essay on Balzac? **for** none can convey to a reader any faintest idea of the unsearchable Grandet—of his wife, his daughter, or his

servant, of the drunken but brave soldier in *Un Menage de Gargon*, of Lucien de Rubempre, of the Pere Goriot, of Canalis, of——

I will begin with *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*: Many aristocratic fortunes dependent on the Court were swept away in the disasters of July, and Madame la Princesse de Cadignan was clever enough to attribute her ruin, which was really due to her extravagances, to these political crises. The Princess, married when she was sixteen to her mother's lover, the Duke de Maufrigneuse—queen of all queens of fashion under her first name, La Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, retired from the world to a small apartment consisting of no more than five rooms, where she devoted herself to her son's education. And when the time comes for the Princess to tell the story of her life to D'Arthez, she speaks thus of the Duchesse d'Uxelles:

I was never angry with the Duchesse for having loved Monsieur de Maufrigneuse better than poor Diana, and this is why. My mother had seen very little of me; she had forgotten me; but she behaved towards me in a way which is wicked between women and can only be described as horrible between mother and daughter. Mothers whose lives are like that of the Duchesse d'Uxelles keep their daughters far from them, and it was not until a fortnight before my marriage that I was introduced into society. You can guess my innocence; I knew nothing; I was without wit to suspect the trap that had been set. I had a fine fortune. Monsieur de Maufrigneuse was overwhelmed with debts, and if I know now what it is to be in debt, my knowledge of life then was too slight for me even to suspect the danger. My fortune enabled the Duke to economise and so to pacify his creditors. He was thirty-eight when I married

him, but these years were like those of military campaigns; they should count double. Ah! he was more than seventy-six. At forty my mother still had pretensions to good looks, and I found myself between two jealousies. What an existence was mine for ten years! Ah! if it were known what this poor, little, suspected woman has suffered, watched by a mother jealous of her daughter! Good heavens, you who write dramas will never invent anything so black, so cruel, as that! Oh, my friend, you men cannot guess what life is with an old man *a bonnes fortunes*, a man accustomed to the adoration of women of the world, and who finds neither incense nor censer at home, dead to everything and jealous for that very reason. I desired when the Duke de Maufrigneuse was wholly mine to be a good woman; but I came into rough contact with an embittered mind, with all the caprices of impotence, with all the puerilities of folly, with all the vanities of self-sufficiency, with a man who was in fine the most tiresome elegy in the world, who treated me like a child, and amused himself by humiliating my self-esteem at every turn, overwhelming me with his experience, and proving me ignorant in all things. So did the Princess coo in the ears of the great man who sat at her feet listening to her as a neophyte in one of the first days of the Christian faith might have listened to the epistle of an apostle.

Understand that the actors in this scene from Parisian life are a princess who has dissipated many fortunes, her own and those of her lovers, who knows all sensations except love, whose drawing-room is her temple, and whose ritual is love-confidences; the other is a man of genius, who knows the world theoretically, as Balzac knew it, and who in practice was as child-like as Balzac himself; and that is why D'Arthez was chosen. Fools

love well sometimes, said the Marquise d'Espard to the Princess when the two friends sat together regretting that they had never loved any one of their many lovers: Fools love well sometimes.

But, replied the Princess, for this (that is to say, to believe in the speakers), even fools would not be sufficiently credulous. You are right, said the Marquise, laughing. And it is neither a fool nor yet a man of talent that we should seek. To solve such a problem a man of genius is necessary. Genius alone has child-like faith, the religion of love, and allows his eyes to be banded. Look at Canalis and the Duchesse de Chau-lieu. If you and I have met geniuses, we were too occupied, too frivolous, too carried away, too taken up with other things. But I would not leave the world without knowing the delights of true love, cried the Princess. It is nothing to inspire it, said Madame d'Espard, the difficulty is to feel it. I see many women who are only pretexts of a passion instead of being at once the cause and the effect.

These creatures of the drawing-room meet in middle age to hold conversations on the nature of love, and out of these the action of the story springs. *Qui a bu, boira*, the Princess grown tired of solitude and motherly duties, yearns for a new emotion, and Daniel d'Arthez is sought; Rastignac and De Trailles are commissioned to draw him from his studies. Genius meets worldly sagacity, and the accomplished charmer is shown spinning her web, her lovely head leaned upon her long white fingers in the lamplight, determined that this is to be no passing caprice; if she gives herself again it will be to a lover who believes her innocent, pure, incapable of untruth. And the man of genius, sceptical when sitting at his writing-table as Mephistopheles, is candid as a

little child sitting at the feet of the Princess. How true this is! The philosopher is a child when he strives to put his knowledge into practice, the man of the world is a child when he strives to put his knowledge into words.

Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan might be entitled: *The Seduction of Genius by Experience*. It is animated by a sublime comprehension of the fascinating perversities of cerebral passion, and the confiding simplicities of a great man, who, wearied like Faust, with learning, desires the repose and consolation of love. *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan* might also be entitled: *The Philosophy of the Drawing-room*. It is the drawing-room in essence. The Princess is a being born of the drawing-room; she has been formed and coloured by the drawing-room as an insect by the chemical qualities and the colour of the plant upon which it lives. Her ideas of love, literature, art, and science are drawing-room ideas of love, literature, art, and science. The intonations of her voice, and every inflection of accent, have been produced by the drawing-room. Her weariness of life is drawing-room weariness of life. She is a creature of the drawing-room as the horse is a creature of the stable, as the eagle is of the cliff.

A book of maxims might be garnered in Balzac's novels, and not a few might be taken from this little story of not more than forty pages. Yes, when we are young we are full of fatuous stupidities; we Tesemble those poor young men who play with a toothpick to make believe that they have dined well. What is to be gained by leaving your husband? In a woman it is an admission of feebleness. One of the glories of society is to have created woman where Nature made a female, to have created a continuity of desire where Nature

thought only of perpetuating the species; in fine, to have invented love.

Adieu is an example of Balzac's romantic manner. The story is introduced by two sportsmen who, having sought game all the morning, wander into the shade of a wood in the hope of finding a house or habitation of some kind; and coming upon a ruined Abbey they stand spell-bound, so great is the desolation and ruin about them. In Balzac's words, a woman passes from a group of walnut trees by an iron gate lightly as the shadow of a cloud, and the men watch her, their surprise passing into amazement when they see her climb an apple tree and seat herself on one of the boughs, seize the fruit, eat, and then let the apples fall half-eaten. And their amazement quickens when descending from the tree she rolls upon the ground as a child might, throwing her feet and hands forward, remaining stretched upon the grass with the abandonment, the grace, and the naturalness of a young cat asleep in the sun. *Adieu*, she cried in a soft, harmonious voice, lacking, however, those notes of human interest which the two men would have welcomed. One of the men suddenly recognises the woman, and the sight of her affects him so violently that he falls to the ground like one dead; and his friend, fearing some terrible heart seizure, points his gun upwards and fires into the air to bring help quickly, the report of the gun clearly awakening in the woman (a moment ago blithe as a butterfly in the sunshine, now running hither and thither like a frightened hare) echoes of some terrible misfortune.

The reader will guess that the man who fell, overwhelmed at the sight of the half-witted woman, is none other than her lover, a soldier in Napoleon's army and

with her when it encamped to kill the horses and eat them on the banks of the frozen Beresina.

I would I had space to give some of the details by which Balzac evokes the very motion, colour, smell, and sound of war; for these the reader must turn to the text itself, getting from me the mere thread of the story, that among the war-stricken fugitives there is a General and his wife, and Philip de Susy, who is striving to save their lives, striving to get them to the bridge before it is destroyed by the troops on the other side. But his last horse has been seized and eaten. He steals, however, horses from the Russian sentries which are tied to the carriages, and they drive over the bodies of sleeping soldiers. You can't make an omelette without breaking the eggs, cries the grenadier, pricking the horses with his sword-point. But the bridge is burnt before they can reach it; a raft is constructed, place is made for the woman, and she cries: Adieu, to Philip. But the husband is thrown from the raft and killed among the ice, and, without a protector, lost in the disaster of the retreat, she follows the track of the army for two years, the plaything of every ruffian. She knows all the misfortunes of war, hunger, cold, and cruelty, to be at last rescued from a madhouse in Germany and brought back to France. And the business of the story is to tell how her lover strives to win her out of her animality, for she is as a charming, wayward animal; and he tries to coax her daintily, until the old uncle finds him one day loading his pistols to shoot her.

Poor little one, cries her uncle, pressing the poor crazy thing to his breast, he would have killed you, egoist that he is; he would kill you because he suffers. He knows not how to love you for yourself, my child. We will forgive him. He is insane, and you are only crazed. Go! God alone should call you to himself. We think

you are unhappy because you can share no longer our miseries—fools that we are! But, said he, placing her on his knees, you are happy, nothing annoys you; you live like the bird, like the hind.

She rushed and caught a young blackbird, crushed it, looked at it, and left it at the foot of a tree without thinking anything more about it.

Come, cried Philip, taking her in his arms, do you not feel my heart beating? I love you always. Philip is not dead. He is here, you lean upon him. You are my Stephanie, and I am your Philip.

Adieu, cried she, adieu!

Balzac carries the story further, but for our purpose it is not necessary to carry it to its exquisite conclusion. Enough it will be to suggest that there is in Ophelia much tender appreciation of the little space that divides the sane from the insane, and the immensity of the responsibility which the transition, slight in itself, involves; but is the haunting question, have we gained in happiness since acquiring the power of looking before and after, so tenderly insinuated?

In these days when our literary ambitions are satisfied by writing nothing that young ladies may not discuss openly in their drawing-rooms, *Sarrasine*, a eunuch, will not find favour. Since Don Juan exclaimed against donning woman's attire, saying that it involved a denial of his sex, and got for answer:

Don it, or I will call

One who will leave you with no sex at all,

the third sex has been barred from our homespun as indelicate, and the report is current that my old friends Mudie and Smith went in search of advice and that they

left the bishops' palace convinced that the Syrian eunuch differs in many little ways from the Roman: as Sarrasine hails from Rome and not from Bagdad the twain had no choice but to exclude him from select circulation—a process of reasoning which will seem less obscure when I tell that he was the leading soprano in the papal choir and the favourite of a cardinal whose wealth he inherited.

But it is in his old age that Balzac shows him to us, his strange beauty gone, a phantom, a ghost, a legend, that his relatives keep hidden away in a great palace where nobody sees him, so ashamed are they of him and anxious to conceal the source of their wealth. It happens, however, that despite their precautions to keep him out of sight, a guest, during the progress of a great ball in the palace, sees him pass through a curtained doorway, and turning to a friend, or to whosoever happens to be by him, asks in terror: Did you see? The other guest knows Sarrasine's story, and the two withdraw to a balcony, one to hear and the other to tell how a young Frenchman, captivated by the voice and the beauty of Sarrasine in his youth, and believing him to be a woman, perished by the hand of an assassin.

In allowing one of the guests to tell Sarrasine's story to another guest, Balzac may have chosen wisely, but an oblique narrative demands more care than Balzac was able to bestow upon it and we cannot but think that *Sarrasine* was one of his hastily improvised stories. It is said that *La Grenadiere* was improvised in eighteen hours; it may have been, and if it were we must assume that his black coffee failed to keep him sufficiently awake. And the same ill-luck, we think, befell *Sarrasine*. Balzac did not lose himself so completely in it as he did in *La Grenadiere*; but if *Sarrasine* be almost negligible as art its importance in the history of prose narrative is great, for

whosoever reads *The Human Comedy* thoughtfully **will** learn from it that the niche we should reserve for the abnormal is a very small one, and that the man of talent should refrain from introducing it into his stories, for though one man can steal the horse, another may not look over the hedge; and of all, let the man of talent not be led away by Terence's noble aphorism: I am a man and may not consider anything in humanity alien from myself.

One word more on the abnormal. It will be better for the industrious compiler of what is known as English fiction to continue to choose an ordinary, every-day story, for in developing it any originality of mind and vision he may possess will appear to advantage. Balzac finds lights that we would not willingly be without in the abnormal, but it cannot be contended that *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or* is worth *Le Cure de Tours*, or that anybody would hesitate if a choice were given him between *Sarrasine* or *Une Vieille Fille*.

Although somewhat lost amid numberless chefs-d'oeuvre, although rarely cited as a striking example of Balzac's genius, *Une Vieille Fille* is one of the first among the minor pieces. It seems to me to epitomise the resources of a mind profound and, at least in the conception of a subject, sensible to art. In *Une Vieille Fille* we meet a certain philosophic criticism peculiar to Balzac, and three characters conceived with imaginative incisiveness and executed with an alertness of thought only to be found in his very best work, and some two or three dramatic moments. The first of these is when at the dinner-hour the fair laundress slips into the Chevalier's room and confesses her trouble to him. He is far too cunning to show that he disbelieves her story.

With phrases in harmony with the traces of prosperous

days that linger about the room—traces of the eighteenth century—he sends her away to lay the charge of seduction at the door of his rival Du Bousquier. The scene with Du Bousquier is equally good, for in it Balzac achieves his intention, which was to portray, and, in portraying, to show how these two old bachelors, who are both intriguing one against the other for the hand and fortune of Mile Cormon, represent the ideas and outward appearance of two distinct epochs—the Chevalier de Valois, the aristocracy and elegance of the eighteenth century, Du Bousquier, the vulgarity and commercialism of the nineteenth. Another exquisite moment is when Mile Cormon hears that the Vicomte de Troisville is a married man, and yet another when the Chevalier comes to ask the hand of Mile Cormon: But this fine gentleman could only be killed in one way; he had lived by the Graces, and it was right that he should die by their hand. Whilst the Chevalier had been putting the finishing hand to his toilette, Du Bousquier entered the drawing-room of the disconsolate maid.

The soul of the story is the desire of Mlle Cormon to be married, and the difficulties which beset her project. Through this simple subject Balzac passes as with a lantern in his hand, showing us how the conscription had affected the marriage market and how the republican spirit persisted, and, notwithstanding the restoration, was beginning to make itself felt in the social life of the remote provinces; we are made to feel too that the monarchy is ephemeral and that republicanism is the abiding force, that its eclipse is more apparent than real.

Yet the machinery of this story, in which so many grave subjects enter, is the very simplest, and it is put in motion by one of Madame Lardot's laundresses, who, as we have seen, thought first of laying a charge of

seduction against the elegant Chevalier, but who was easily persuaded that it would be to her far greater advantage to lay the charge against his rival Du Bousquier. Here are a few extracts from Balzac's description of an elderly gentleman, long, dry, and penniless, the greater part of whose youth had been passed in Paris, where, when he was about thirty, the revolution had surprised him in the midst of his conquests, but who now lived *en province* in two rooms above Madame Lardot's laundry, in the midst of grisettes, whom he looks kindly upon, making them presents of bits of ribbon and slight packets of chocolate creams:

He dined out every day and he played cards every evening. He passed for being a witty man, thanks to a defect which consisted in telling numberless anecdotes concerning the reign of Louis XV. and the beginning of the revolution. When these stories were heard for the first time they were considered to be well told. Though the Chevalier de Valois never ascribed his witticisms to himself, nor spoke of his love affairs, his graces and his smiles were deliciously indiscreet. This good gentleman availed himself of the privilege of an old Voltairean noble not to attend mass, but his irreligion was looked upon indulgently on account of his devotion to the Royal cause. One of his graces, and the most remarked, was his manner, doubtless imitated from De Mole, of taking snuff from an old gold box ornamented with the portrait of the Princess Goritzza, a charming Hungarian, celebrated for her beauty in the reign of Louis XV. Devoted to this illustrious stranger, in his youth he always spoke of her with emotion; and it was on her account that he had fought with Monsieur de Lauzun.

The Chevalier was now fifty-eight, but he never ad-

mitted to more than fifty; and the fib was accepted as truth, for he kept that slimness of figure which, it would seem, is the prerogative of dry and blond men, and among women as well as men, carries into middle age the semblance of youth. Yes, learn that all life, or all elegance, which is the expression of life, exists in the waist. Among the Chevalier's belongings must be numbered the nose which Nature had given him, a nose that divided, and trenchantly, his pale face into two sections that did not match, for one reddened during the labour of digestion. This fact is worthy of remark in a time when physiology occupies so much attention. The incandescence was on the left side.

Although the long, slim legs, the lank body and the pallid complexion of Monsieur de Valois did not proclaim a healthy constitution, he ate like an ogre, and sought to excuse his excessive appetite by pretending to be afflicted with a malady known *en province* as a hot liver. The flushing of his face gave a certain credence to this story. But in a country where meals lengthen into thirty or forty dishes and last for four hours, the stomach of the Chevalier must have seemed a gift from Providence to the town. According to certain doctors the flushing of the left side of the face denotes a prodigal heart. The fast life of the Chevalier confirmed these assertions, happily relieving the historian from all responsibility. Notwithstanding these symptoms, Valois had a nervous constitution, consequently vivacious. If his liver burnt (*ardit*), to use an old expression, his heart did not burn less. If his face was lined, if his hair was silvered, a trained observer would have detected there the stigmas of passion and the furrows of pleasure. *En la patte d'oie caractéristique et les marches du palais se montraient ces elegantes rides si prisees a la cour de Cythere.* In this

spruce Chevalier everything pointed to a ladies' man. He was so minute in his ablutions that his cheeks were a pleasure to look upon; they seemed to have been washed in some miraculous water, and that part of the skull which the hair refused to cover shone like ivory. Constant combing gave a false appearance of youth to his hair and eyebrows. Without using perfume the Chevalier exhaled a perfume of youth that *rafraichissait son air*. His gentlemanly hands, cared for like those of a *petite maitresse*, attracted the eye by their rose-coloured nails carefully trimmed. If it were not for his majestic and superlative *nose* he would have been *poupin*. We must, however, spoil this portrait by an admission of a weakness. The Chevalier put cotton in his ears, and still continued to wear in them two little negroes' heads in diamonds, admirably fashioned, it is true; and he strove to justify these singular appendages by saying that since he had had his ears pierced he no longer suffered from neuralgia. We do not offer the Chevalier as an accomplished man, but should we not forgive old bachelors whose hearts send so much blood to their faces? and their adorable absurdities, are they not founded, perhaps, upon sublime secrets? Besides, the Chevalier made up for the negroes' heads by so many other graces that society considered itself sufficiently indemnified.

I pass over the interview between the enterprising laundress and Du Bousquier, from whom she extorted six hundred francs, going immediately afterwards to lay her distressful case before Madame Granson, the treasurer of La Soeiete Maternelle. It was necessary that Madame Granson should have a son who likewise aspired to the hand of Mlle Cormon; but it is not easy to say why Balzac thought fit to hamper the action of his story, hitherto so simple and direct, by making

Suzanne in love with the melancholy **young** poet. **Indeed the error** is more grave than would appear at first sight. For the suggestion that Suzanne is in love with Athanase turns what would have been a perfect short story into a novel which has accidentally been cut down to the limits of a short story. And if a critic were to urge this reason for assigning a higher place to *he Cure de Tours* than to *Une Vieille Fille*, I should admit that *Le Cure de Tours* is a more perfect story, and would be tempted to say that whereas no critic who has been at the job himself would deny that the long story and the short one are two different things (as distinct as the sheep and the goat, from which two animals, I believe, no mule has ever been obtained), still there are many who think the short story should confine itself to a bare telling of an anecdote, a somewhat journalistic view of literature; anecdotes are very colourless and uninteresting when divorced from the circumstance that produces them, and to make my meaning clear I will say that the mere anecdote is not much more interesting than a drawing in outline, or the melody detached from its harmony. The melodic line interests the musician for the sake of the harmony it leads him into, and the anecdote is sought by the poet for the same reason, for the ideas that it evokes in his mind. His taste and genius are determined by his management of the melody on one hand and the harmony on the other. The painter must model, but he must be careful to keep the portrait in the canvas. It may be argued that sometimes Balzac over-models, over-harmonises, over-writes, but if my memory be not at fault (I have not read *Une Vieille Fille* for thirty years), the charge of over-weighing **the** anecdote cannot be urged against his admirable picture of Mlle Cormon, of her country, her house, **and her history**.

On her famous Thursday evenings we see the *salon* lighted up and the guests arriving, the elegant Chevalier producing his box, gazing for a moment on the features of the Princess Goritzza, and then taking snuff. We see the brutal and arrogant Du Bousquier, and the pale and melancholy poet who loves Mlle Cormon sincerely; we hear the shrewd, poverty-stricken mother, Madame Gran-son, whispering to him: Look at the Chevalier; study him, imitate his manners, see with what ease he presents himself; his air does not seem borrowed, like yours. For goodness' sake, speak; one would think you knew nothing, you, who know Hebrew by heart. There is the Abbe de Sponde, Mlle Cormon's uncle. All these people assemble in the great square reception room; four doors, four windows draped with heavy green curtains, walls wainscoted with grey, painted wood, and an oblong mirror above the chimney-piece. Everything breathes the old and unalterable *province*. And having painted with rare insight her house and her surroundings, Balzac sets to work to paint the portrait of *la vieille fille*, Mlle Cormon: One gave one reason, another gave another, but the poor girl was as pure as an angel, healthy as a child, and full of goodness, for Nature had intended her to receive all the pleasures, all the happiness, and all the labours of maternity.

Nevertheless Mlle Cormon did not find in her appearance any aids to her desire. She had no other beauty but that which is improperly called *la beaute du diable*, and which consists in the coarse freshness of youth, which, theologically speaking, the devil could not have, unless we may justify the expression by the constant desire to cool himself. The heiress's feet were large and flat; her leg, which she often showed, but quite unintentionally, when she lifted her dress after rain, and when

she stepped out of St. Leonard, could not be taken for the leg of a woman; it was a sinewy leg, with a small calf, hard and pronounced like a sailor's. A thick, healthy waist, a bosom like a wet nurse's, strong and dimpling arms, red hands. Everything about her harmonised with the rounded form and the fat white beauty of Normandy. Prominent eyes of an undecided colour gave to the face, whose outlines were without nobility, an air of astonishment, of sheep-like simplicity, not unsuitable to an old maid; if Rose had not been innocent, she would have looked as though she were. Her aquiline nose contrasted with the smallness of her forehead, for it is seldom that a nose so shapen does not imply a fine brow; red, thick lips testify to a kind heart, but the brow betokened so little intelligence that it was clear the heart was not ruled by the head. It is possible to be good without being gracious. Virtue must be blameless always, though vice may plead the fault of her qualities. Her light brown hair, so strangely long, lent to her face that beauty which comes of force and of abundance, the two principal characteristics of Rose Cormon. In her best days Rose affected a three-quarter view, so that a very pretty ear might be seen showing between the azured whiteness of her neck and her temples, and the ear was brought into still further evidence by the enormous head-dress. Seen in this way in a ball-dress she might appear to be good-looking. Her protuberant form, her waist, her vigorous health, drew from the officers of the Empire this exclamation: What a fine slip of a girl! But with years the plumpness, increased by a life of virtue and tranquillity, had become so badly distributed over the body that it had destroyed its primitive proportions, and now no pair of stays could find her

waist or her hips, and she appeared to be made in one straight block. . . .

Skippping some few lines of too minute physiological examination, we come upon this passage:

But the poor girl was already over forty! At this moment, after having fought so long to acquire those interests which make a woman's life, but nevertheless, being forced to remain a maid, she fortified her virtue by the most severe religious practices. She had had recourse to religion, that great consolation of carefully guarded virginities. Her confessor for the last three years had foolishly explained the theory of mortification to Mlle Cormon, and had counselled the use of the scourge. These absurd practices had begun to spread a monastic tint over the face of Rose Cormon, and seeing her white skin taking those yellow tones which announce maturity she despaired. The light down which adorned the corners of her upper lip threatened to increase and spread like a whiff of smoke. The temples had begun to look glassy. In fine, decadence had commenced. It was known in Alengon that she suffered from heating of the blood; she took the Chevalier into her confidence, enumerating the number of foot-baths, and consulting him concerning cooling medicines. The sly dog drew forth his snuff-box, and for form of conclusion contemplated the Princess Goritza.

Before proceeding further into our examination of the minor pieces, let us pause to consider what this fine passage foretells. Until the end of the eighteenth century literature and painting were separable arts; literature being occupied exclusively with thoughts, and not concerned with the folds of the dress, their shape, and the tones they took in the shadow, and again the tones they took when the lady bade her lover good-bye, passing

58 CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

as she said the words into the light of the lamp which stood on a small table, and whose pink shade was clearly defined on the rich purple of the window curtains. It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that women began to shriek and sob amid the blue cushions of the sofa, and it was in eighteen hundred and eighty that Angelica stood in her ecstasy looking through the whiteness of the room.

But Balzac's description of Mlle Cormon is something more than Zola's phrase: In ecstasy Angelica looked through the whiteness of the room. For by being quite sincere, that is to say unconscious that he was laying the foundation of a new art, Balzac did not forget that the intention of the old art was to lay bare the soul, and in writing the description of Rose's leg, his intention was to lay bare her soul, believing, as he undoubtedly did believe, that the soul can be read in the face, in the hand, even in the leg. When I came upon the description of her leg the book dropped from my hand, and I cried: The whole of Rose Cormon is in her leg. Yet the leg is but an accent in his portrait; we remember the leg as a wonderful detail, but it does not arrest the reader's attention; he is drawn on to the end of the paragraph, and at the end **of** the paragraph Rose Cormon stands outside of the little drama in which Balzac saw her involved. We see her in many stories of our own invention, as somebody we have known intimately in real life, part and parcel of our kind. And Balzac, possessing as strong a hold over dialogue as he does over description, rarely fails to supply his characters with the right words. For instance, how **admirably** suited to the occasion this is:

Mademoiselle, said he, in great haste, your uncle **has sent** you an express messenger; the son **of** Mother **Gros-mort has arrived with a letter. The fellow started from**

Alencon before daylight, and he has arrived all the same. He ran like Penelope (Penelope is Mlle Cormon's **bay** mare). Shouldn't he have a glass of wine?

What can have happened, Josette? My uncle, could he—

He would not have written, said the lady's-maid, who had guessed her mistress's fears.

Quick! quick! cried Mlle Cormon after having read the first lines. Let Jacquelin harness Penelope at once. And do you, my good girl, see that everything is packed in half an hour. We return to town at once.

Jacquelin! cried Josette, stimulated by the sentiment which Mlle Cormon's face expressed; and instructed by Josette, Jacquelin came forward, saying:

But Penelope is eating her hay!

What does that matter; I want to start at once.

But, Mademoiselle, it is going to rain.

Well, then, we shall get wet.

The house is on fire, cried Josette, a little piqued by her mistress's silence, for after reading her letter she re-read it again and again.

Finish your coffee at least; do not upset yourself; see how red you are.

I am red, Josette, said she, going to a glass whence the quicksilver was peeling, and therefore gave back a distorted reflection of her face. My goodness, thought Mlle Cormon, if I should look ugly.

Her worthy uncle had written to his niece that Monsieur de Troisville, a military officer who had seen service in Russia, the grandson of one of his firmest friends, intended to come and live at Alencon, and had asked for hospitality, whilst reminding him of the friendship which the Abbe' had borne for his grandfather the Vicomte de Troisville, *chef d'escadron* under Louis XIV. The im-

portance of this visit in the life of Mlle Cormon was like that of Waterloo in the life of Napoleon. It behoved Mlle Cormon to rearrange her house. She turned her boudoir into a bedroom; a new bed was bought to suit the room; and the upshot of it all was the fainting of the poor lady in full view of all her guests on hearing the Vicomte reply to a question put to him by the Chevalier, that he has been married for the last fifteen years and has four children.

Rose's marriage disappointments, her desire of children, the entire philosophy of the married life of an old maid who has married an old man, is given with an insight and a power of wide comprehension of life and things that Balzac has never surpassed, because the last pages of *Une Vieille Fille* are unsurpassable.

One excellent reason for believing that the genius of Balzac can be approached through the minor pieces is the existence of the *Cure de Tours*, for unlike many of Balzac's short stories it is not a novel reduced to the limits of a short story—a bundle of events excellently well imagined, but hastily arranged, showing bad cutting and awkwardly sewed seams on every side. It begins at exactly the right point; the development proceeds without long waits; nowhere is there an unnecessary line; and the art it recalls is that of Turgenev. Balzac had many qualities; he was everything in turn, even delicate, and in the *Cure de Tours* the means are even slighter than the dropping of a handkerchief. The Abbe Birotteau returns home, happy at heart, for he has spent a delightful evening at Madame de Listoniere's. His prospects of being made a canon have been discussed, the guests agreeing that he would be appointed. There are other reasons for his feeling singularly content with himself and the world. It is **not** very **long** since the Abbe Chapelaud left him by

will the books and the furniture which the poor Abbe had not coveted, but which had been his *hoc erat in votis* for the last dozen years. The hope of a lifetime, realised only a year ago, and the memory still an active principle in him, and the pleasure of assurance that still further fortune awaited him, combined to render him almost indifferent to the danger of the shower in which he had been caught, and the possible touch of gout it might result in. It seemed to him strange, however, that Marianne should keep him waiting some minutes before she opened the door; and when Marianne, to excuse herself, said she was obeying Mademoiselle's orders, the gentle current of the Abbe's happiness stopped; and on finding his candlestick, left outside his door instead of in the kitchen, according to custom, he entered his room in mute amazement, where another surprise awaited him, for there was no fire; and the time that Marianne took to light one! And all that night in the handsome bed that he had inherited from the Abbe Chapelaud, the Abbe lay, overcome and terrified by the presentiment of immeasurable misfortune, unable to banish from his mind the thought that the delay in opening the door, the removal of the candlestick, and the absence of the fire in his bedroom, could hardly be attributed to accident. At last the poor Abbe fell asleep, hoping that the morning would enlighten him concerning the motives of Mlle Gamard's displeasure. But the secret motives of Mlle Gamard's displeasure were destined to remain for ever unknown to him. Mlle Gamard was an elderly maiden lady who always had priests as boarders. The Abbe Chapelaud had lived with her in the most perfect comfort for over a dozen years—nowhere a grain of dust, beautifully washed linen surplices, and albs smelling of iris, etc. On the ground floor the tall, angular, yellow-tinted Abbe Troubert, liked by nobody and not received

by Madame de Listoniere, lived in a damp, bare apartment. He, too, had his eye on the wide, airy apartment on the first floor, filled with the beautiful furniture that the Abbe Chapelaud had left to the Abbe Birotteau, and he says when the Abbe Birotteau is away spending the evening at Madame de Listoniere's: The Abbe Birotteau does not find us amusing. He is a wit—a *gourmet*! He likes fashionable society, brilliant conversation, and the gossip of the town. It is thus that we hear for the first time of the terrible Abbe Troubert, who afterwards becomes so powerful: His hands in Paris and his elbows on his table in Tours. But a word of explanation is necessary to make clear the terrible significance of the Abbe Troubert's words. It had long been Mlle Gamard's ambition to have an At Home, and when the Abbe Birotteau came to occupy the apartment of the Abbe Chapelaud, he lingered after dinner in Mlle Gamard's drawing-room, played *Boston* with her, and helped her and himself to pass an agreeable evening. The Abbe Birotteau, although quite witless, was good, kind, and amiable, and his presence in Mlle Gamard's drawing-room attracted several other friends, and for a moment it seemed as if Mlle Gamard was about to realise her life's ambition. But the Abbe, although himself a fool, like many another fool could not bear the conversation of fools, and when he took to spending his evenings at Madame Listoniere's, he brought away with him many other guests, and Mlle Gamard was obliged to give up her *soirees*.

It is easy to imagine how this cruel thwarting of her social ambitions engendered in the heart of this old maid a ferocious hatred of the Abbe; it is easy, I say, to imagine this hatred; yes, it is easy to do so as we imagine things; but Balzac's imagination is quite different from ours; and using this simple theme as a loom he weaves a

world of human passion, folly, goodness, **and** fashionable selfishness.

The story is one of pure observation—a great mind directed on what is commonly termed the minutiae of life. But are not things only great and small in proportion as we think of them? Is not the world but man's thought, and in the envelope of Balzac's mind the little folk in the city of Tours rise up at once as large, as mean, and as pathetic as life itself—the little folk who are determined for a moment to defend the dear Abbe in the persecution that is being directed against him, but who, a moment after, are forced to abandon him to protect their own interests, which are being menaced by the terrible Abb6 Troubert.

The story is fortunate in every way. Besides the even more than usually brilliant envelope of thought in which Balzac never failed to enfold all he wrote, the *Cure de Tours* is well written. The composition is balanced within and without, and so evenly that no one of the epigrams that light up the pages starts out of its setting or frets, or for one moment fatigues the eye. Here are a few:

Every fresh choice implies disdain for the object that has been refused.

If great things are simple to understand and easy to explain, little things demand an elaboration of detail.

Morality and political economy are opposed to the individual who consumes without producing, who holds a place without distributing good for evil; for evil is but good, the results of which are not at once visible.

Nevertheless these trifles made up the sum of his entire life; his dear life full of occupations in emptiness, full of emptiness in occupations; a life colourless and grey, and where deep sentiments were **pain, and** the absence of emotion felicity.

Jealousy in Touraine, as is usually the case in provincial life, formed the substance of the language.

Celibates replace sentiments by habits.

If we do not always know where we are going, we always know the fatigues of the journey.

Out of this handful of maxims there are at least four that would hold their own against the best that could be found in La Rochefoucauld, and they were gathered almost at haphazard from a short story written in the space of a couple of nights, printed with others in one of the fifty volumes which form *The Human Comedy*!

After the *Cure de Tours* perhaps the most celebrated among the minor pieces is *Massimilla Doni*. Balzac himself held this story in the highest esteem, but it is disjointed and ill-proportioned; and it may be that the musical criticism enabled him to overlook these faults. On the subject of digression we should be indulgent, if the digression be interesting or valuable. But the eulogy of the *Moses in Egypt* shows no critical discernment, and an innocent notation of his own impressions would have been more interesting than crude technical praise of a work that has not stood the test of time; to be quite plain, only the criticism of the craftsman is valid. A cabinet-maker will always know more about the leg of a table than a tailor or candlestick-maker.

It has been said that Balzac had not time to live; it might be added that he had not time to think. Thoughts came to him intuitively, as the song comes to a bird, and it is not unlikely that one of the vulgarly seductive phrases of the *Moses* haunted his ear, and generated in his mind a scheme for a musical novel—the Israelites languishing in Egyptian captivity. . . . The modern equivalent?—the Venetians under Austrian rule.

Emilio is a young Venetian whose whole fortune does

not consist of more than sixty or seventy pounds a year; he lives in the palace of his ancestors amid precious marbles and works of the highest art, no portion of which he may sell. He is in love with Massimilla Doni as Dante was in love with Beatrice, and one night, after an ecstatic evening, as he returns home in his gondola, he sees his palace decorated and lighted as if for a festival. Thinking that it is some surprise that Massimilla Doni is preparing for him, he asks no questions, but seats himself at the supper table, which he finds spread with rare meats and wines. He eats and drinks so heartily that he immediately afterwards yields to an overpowering somnolence. Soon after a woman enters, a woman that reminded me of a fantastic English engraving invented for a forget-me-not, *une belle assemblée*, or a Book of Beauty. The Prince trembles with pleasure. His soul, his heart, his reason turn from the thought of any infidelity; but the brutal and capricious infidelity dominate his soul. But the woman is not alone; she is followed by a monster—a fearsome duke, Massimilla Doni's husband, a melomaniac, whose last pleasure is music. The lady with him is a great singer, upon whom he expends fortunes so that he may accompany her voice on the violin, for certain harmonics convulse him with delight. But it would be profitless to follow the story into its many circumlocutions, and tell how the great singer is persuaded to yield the young man to Massimilla Doni, and how Massimilla Doni is induced to descend from the palace of reserve and purity. The intrigue surely savours of comic opera. So beautiful a theme—a young man hesitating between the real and the ideal—should have been worked out on the simplest and most natural lines, and that the beauty of the theme survives the vulgarity of the treatment is the highest tribute we can pay to Balzac. *C'est du mauvais roman-*

tisme, but the grip of Balzac is so intense that truth is transferred from reality to art. Balzac describes the monster:

Like that of Neapolitans the costume of the unknown consisted of five colours, if the black of the hat be admissible as a colour; the trousers were olive, the red waistcoat glittered with gilded buttons, the coat verged upon green, and the linen inclined to yellow. This man seemed to have accepted the task of justifying the truth of the Neapolitan that Gerolamo always introduces into his theatre of marionettes. The eyes seemed to be of glass. The nose shaped like an ace of clubs was odiously prominent; and it kindly covered a hole which it would be a libel upon man to call a mouth, and where showed three or four white tusks loose in their sockets, lapping one over the other. The ears drooped by their own weight, giving to this man an odd resemblance to a dog. The complexion, apparently containing several metals infused into the blood according to the prescription of some Hippocrates, verged upon black. The pointed forehead, badly hidden by flat, sparse hairs which fell like filaments of spun glass, crowned with red lumps a grotesquely comic face. Lastly, although thin and of ordinary height, this gentleman had long arms and broad shoulders; but notwithstanding these deformities, and although you would have said he was seventy, he was not without a certain cyclopean majesty; his manners were aristocratic, and he had that air of security which belongs to the rich. For those whose stomachs were sufficiently strong to observe him; his story was written by passions upon a noble clay that had turned to mud. You would have divined the great lord, who, rich in his youth, had sold his body to Debauch at the price of excessive pleasures. Debauch had destroyed a human creature and made another to its purpose; thousands of

bottles had passed beneath the purple arches of that grotesque nose, leaving their lees upon the lips. Long and wasting indigestions had carried away the teeth. The eyes had faded in the light of gaming-tables. The blood was charged with impure principles which had exhausted the nervous system. The play of the digestive forces had absorbed intelligence. Love had scattered the brilliant tresses of the young man. Like a greedy inheritor, every vice had left its mark upon a still living corpse. When we observe Nature, we discover in her jests a very superior irony; Nature had placed toads next to flowers, and in such wise was this duke near to this rose of love.

Le style c'est l'homme is an old saw, one that has been repeated in and out of season, and my excuse for citing it is that perhaps no better exemplification of it could be found than Balzac were all literature ransacked for vindication of its truth. We see the giant in the description of the duke pushing forward in mad haste, crazed with ideas, impetuously fumbling for the right words, and finding expression at last. And to show Balzac as he is, I have translated word for word, preserving, as well as I knew how, every ungainly edge. He wrote well, magnificently when the inspiration was by him; nobody was ever more continuously inspired, and he always had something to say, wherefore he revised to say more, never taking surreptitious pleasure in the art of writing, and his method, like every other, has advantages together with many disadvantages. Note how much better he is in the original French than he is or can ever be in translation, for in the original an association of ideas unites, or rather blends, the words, as an effect of light blends the different parts of a landscape; this enveloping film is, of course, removed in translation, and I have preferred to leave the body naked rather than to weave for it a veil upon my own

loom. This is but subterfuge; far better tell the truth about Balzac's style. It has been said that Balzac had not time to live; it might be added that Balzac had not time to *write*. He lived in ideas; ideas were always about him—ideas on all subjects; and writing was merely the operation of noting them down. In Balzac there is neither question of good style nor of bad style; he simply did not *write*’, he registered his ideas, and his ideas are always so interesting that you read without noticing the ruts of verbal expression he slips into. It is not until we translate Balzac that we fully realise his deficiencies. For instance, the phrase I left untranslated in the description of the Chevalier de Valois, *En la patte d'oie caracteristique et les marches du palais se montraient ces rides elegantes, si prisees a la cour de Cythere. Patte d'oie* I always understood to be the French for crowsfeet; but it is hard to guess what he means by *les marches du palais*] and why in *les marches du palais se montrent ces rides si elegantes, si prisees a la cour de Cythere*. And what I can explain still less is the fact that until we come to translate or to read very, very attentively, the page appears to us to be not only well but splendidly written.

Balzac lived in the midst of the romantic movement, and had his genius not been high and durable it would have succumbed and been lost in the romantic current in which so much genius was lost. But the realistic and critical method of which he was inventor and creator, lived too strongly in him, and the romance that swept about him only tended to purify and ventilate the abundance of his genius; it was the romantic movement that saved him from drifting among the mud-banks and shallow shores of Naturalism. Rembrandt, a romanticist at heart, lived in an age of plain realism, and for many a year strove to reconcile the principle which he individually represented

with the spirit of the time he lived in. I think he failed to do this in *Ronde de Nuit*, and I think he succeeded in that incomparable picture, *The Good Samaritan*, in the Louvre; and in just the same way I think Balzac succeeded in reconciling two discordant principles in *Adieu*, *Seraphita*, *La Peau de Chagrin*, *Sarrasine*, and failed to do so in *Massimilla Doni* and *Une Tenebreuse Affaire*,

The Human Comedy is littered with stories, and every one, with the exception of *La Grenadiere*, contains something noteworthy or wonderful, an incident or a character. The volume which contains *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan* commences with *La Maison Nucingen*, and closes with a short tale, some half a dozen pages, called *Facino Cane*. Facino Cane, a Venetian nobleman, is, when the story opens, a poor blind musician who plays the flageolet at servants' weddings. But he was in his youth the hero of many an adventure. He was imprisoned in a Venice dungeon, whence by the aid of a broken dagger he dug his way through a wall, and all the while he was digging he saw the darkness full of gold and diamonds, for he is, according to his story, gifted by Nature with the faculty of seeing gold. He stops, he says now, before the jewellers' shops, and the yellow of the dear metal flows through the empty orbs to his brain. After many months' t he reached the vaults in which the treasures of the Doges were concealed. Then he entered into a conspiracy with his gaolers, and escaped by the sea, carrying a great part of the treasure with him. I have no faintest notion as to the date of the first publication of *Monte Cristo*, but were I possessed of all the riches of the Doges, I would stake all, yea, and my life to boot, that *Monte Cristo* was published after 1836. That is the date of *Facino Cane*.

To secure great work two things, as Mr. Matthew

Arnold said, are necessary—the man and the moment; in other words, a man is great when all men are great. And Balzac lived when a concurrence of natural causes had combined to render France especially sensible to the reception of ideas. The Revolution had loosened the founts of human thought; Napoleon had passed like a wild dream through Europe; the fields of conventionality were laid waste, religious, political, and literary, and once more the French mind had become a virgin soil ready to receive the seed. And was it not so in our own great literary epoch? The Reformation and the discovery of America enwombed Marlowe and Shakespeare, and the rivalry between Balzac and Shakespeare seems to be between verse and prose rather than between French and English genius. Balzac's empire is wider than Shakespeare's; his subjects are more numerous and his sovereignty not quite so secure. But between him and any other writer in prose fiction there is little comparison. On this point there can be no difference of opinion, and he spoke truly when he said: The world belongs to me because I understand it.

CHAP. IV.

Mesdames, Messieurs,¹

Vous etes venus ici pleins d'indulgence, j'en suis sfir, car vous etes venus sachant que vous alliez entendre parler un barbare, autrement dit un bredouilleur. Vous vous souvenez que le mot grec *βάρβαρος* peut etre traduit en francais par le mot bredouilleur, et vous n'attendez pas autre chose de moi qu'un bredouillage francais, quoique wous sachiez bien que mes ancetres parlaient bien le fran-

¹ This lecture in French was originally printed in "Avowals."

cais jadis, au temps de Guillaume le Conquerant et pendant deux cents ans apres. Ce n'est qu'au XIV^e siecle que nous sommes devenus des barbares. Le fait est incontestable. Il a ete raconte par Chaucer en ces vers que tout le monde connait chez nous;

And French she spoke both fair and fetishly
It was the French of Stratford atte Bowe
For French of Paris was to her unknowe,

Permettez-moi de traduire:

Elle parlait le francais joliment et gentiment
C'etait le francais de Stratford pres de Bowe
Car le francais de Paris lui etait inconnu.

Ce jargon usite a Stratford atte Bowe dont parlait le pere de notre litterature est done fort ancien; mais, malgre son grand age, il n'est pas mort: au contraire il est plus repandu que jamais, surtout parmi les gens qui frequentent les salons de Mayfair. Des qu'un Parisien entre dans un salon a Londres, chacun cherche a placer ses moindres souvenirs de votre langue, et nos meilleurs romanciers ne peuvent se passer des lieux communs francais, croyant allegger ainsi le poids de leurs oeuvres. Cet effort atteint son apogee, quand un auteur de chez nous peut ecrire quelques vers, ou faire une dedicace en francais, et il est vrai que quelques uns de nos auteurs ont hesite entre leur langue maternelle et le jargon. Le premier livre de notre grand ecrivain Gibbon fut ecrit en francais. Swinburne, le grand poete, qui est mort l'annee derniere, a publie de la prose et des vers en francais. Mais il n'y a rien d'extraordinaire qu'il en soit ainsi, car votre langue fut greffee sur Tanglo-saxon au onzieme siecle; la peche greffee sur le prunier produit le brugnnon

que certains preferent a tort aux fruits originaux; **vous voyez** comment la culture de ma langue s'explique gentiment sans trop d'erudition. Et les livres dont je viens de vous parler et la conference que vous etes venus entendre ne sont pas autre chose qu'un retour au passe, les derniers rejets du vieux tronc francais. J'avoue que je ne puis expliquer avec la meme aisance le francos des ecrivains des autres nations, et je cherche encore sans pouvoir le decouvrir le motif pour lequel Frederic de Prusse fit venir Voltaire a Berlin pour corriger ses vers, pourquoi le grand Tourgueneff a traduit lui-meme plusieurs de ses contes, et pourquoi il y a dans les pays les moins civilises des gens qui font des vers dans votre langue. Je suis certain que Ton pourrait envoyer en vain des reporters en Siberie et en Patagonie: les poetes la-bas ne savent pas plus que moi pourquoi ils ecrivent en francos. lis sont poussees par un besoin plus fort que la raison, car ils se rendent tres bien compte qu'ils ne savent pas votre langue et qu'ils ne la sauront jamais. Tout ce qu'on peut faire est d'apprendre une langue, et la langue que nous apprenons ne nous explique point comme la langue que nous connaissons d'instinct! Elle ne devient jamais tout a fait maternelle; elle reste, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi, une maratre—une maratre pas trop terrible. La preuve en est que je suis venu ici, tente par Toccasion de parler francais devant un public d'elite. Songez quelle joie pour un bar bare, et en meme temps quel emoi!

Puisque vous savez maintenant pourquoi je suis ici, il me semble bon de vous dire pourquoi j'ai choisi Balzac et Shakespeare comme sujet de cette conference. L'association de ces deux noms peut vous sembler saugrenue, et sans doute plus d'un d'entre vous s'est deja demande pourquoi j'ai attelé ensemble un romancier et un poete. Assurement deux romanciers auraient mieux valu: Balzac

et Thackeray, Balzac et Dickens, Balzac et Walter Scott. Mais, en reflechissant bien, vous penserez comme moi, j'espere, qu'il est impossible d'associer Faimable caricaturiste qu'est Dickens, le badaud de Piccadilly qu'est Thackeray, et le collectionneur d'antiquites qu'est Walter Scott, avec le grand penseur qu'est Balzac. Il faudrait un equivalent, et les noms de Hardy, Stevenson et Meredith me sont venus. . . . Que faire avec eux? Il n'y en a pas un qui aille a la cheville de Balzac parmi les plus modernes, non plus que parmi les anciens. Alors j'ai renonce a Fidee d'accepter Finvitation de la *Revue Bleue*. Un moment apres, je me suis souvenu que la pensee anglaise se trouve dans la poesie plutot que dans la prose. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron ont beaucoup pense, mais ils sont des poetes lyriques qui n'ont rien de commun avec la *Comedie humaine*, et il me fallait un grand evocateur d'ames. Alors Shakespeare m'est apparu, et je me suis dit qu'il represente FAngleterre comme Balzac represente la France. Je n'ai pas eu a chercher plus loin, ma conference etait trouvee.

Le jour ou ces deux noms se mirent a tinter dans mes oreilles, je me suis dit que si, par hasard, c'etait la destinee de la France d'etre engloutie sous les eaux, le mal ne serait pas si grand, si les oeuvres de Balzac surnageaient, car nous autres Anglais nous aurions un document dans lequel nous pourrions lire la vie et le genie de nos voisins. Si, au contraire, c'etait FAngleterre qui devait disparaitre, et si rien ne restait d'elle que les drames de Shakespeare, vous auriez, vous aussi, un document dans lequel vous pourriez lire notre histoire, et vous auriez un echantillon extraordinaire de notre art, car chaque pays a son art, et Fart de l'Angleterre est la poesie, comme Fart de la Grece est la sculpture. En disant cela, vous ne me prendrez pas, j'espere, pour uia

chauvin litteraire; je tache d'approcher autant que possible de la verite, et certes je n'exagere pas en disant que Balzac et Shakespeare ont mis nos deux pays hors du temps et de la catastrophe. Grace a eux, ils ne seront jamais tout a fait detruits. On y lira et dans le plus bel anglais qui fut jamais ecrit, ce qu'etait l'Angleterre au moment ou elle etait elle-meme et rien qu'elle-meme, et aussi une grande partie de l'histoire de la France, car l'histoire des deux pays a ete curieusement entremee pendant deux cents ans. Notre Henri I I , par son mariage avec Eleonore d'Aquitaine, ajouta enormement a ses possessions francaises: tout Fouest de la France lui appartenait: la Picardie, la Normandie, la Bretagne, tout, jusqu'aux Basses-Pyrenees. Shakespeare commence ses drames historiques avec Jean. Un messenger de Philippe, roi sage et prevoyant, arrive et le but du message est de demander a Jean d'abdiquer en faveur de son neveu Arthur. C'est alors que les guerres entre l'Angleterre et la France commencent dans les plaines d'Angers. Les Anglais sont victorieux, Arthur est fait prisonnier; mais la victoire ne rapporte rien a l'Angleterre a cause du caractere de Jean, si opiniatre et si ombrageux que personne—ni ses nobles, ni Shakespeare—ne reussit a le devider. Aussi, le drame de Shakespeare reste-t-il confus et disparate. Au contraire, avec le caractere vacillant et meditatif de Richard I I , Shakespeare fit un tres beau drame qui a toujours ete reconnu comme une etude preparatoire pour Hamlet. Les evenements y sont purement anglais; mais avec Henri V nous revenons en France, a Azincourt, ou le due d'Orleans fut fait prisonnier. Henri epousa Catherine et devint roi de France. Pendant son regne, la lutte entre les deux nations se corse. Jeanne, la bonne Lorraine, quitte ses brebis pour aller trouver Charles V I I . Elle delivre Orleans et, en peu d'annees, les

Anglais sont chasses de France. La deuxième et la troisième partie des drames de Henri VI nous racontent la guerre des Roses; c'est-à-dire la guerre entre York et Lancaster, et ces guerres civiles prirent fin sur le champ de bataille de Bosworth par la mort de Richard **III**. Shakespeare n'a rien écrit sur le règne d'Henri VII, mais il écrivit un très beau drame sur Henri VIII, comme s'il eut voulu montrer le dernier lien qui existait. . . . entre vous et moi. Vous avez failli devenir protestants; seulement Henri de Navarre crut que Paris valait bien une messe, et pour un baiser d'Anne Boleyn, Henri VIII se décida à passer outre.

L'histoire de la France ne se trouve pas d'une façon aussi complète et aussi déterminée dans l'œuvre de Balzac. Le romancier a toujours été obsédé par son époque, mais tout de même il l'a quittée pour écrire sa belle étude sur Catherine de Médicis; la lutte entre votre religion et la mienne l'a tentée, et la grande et subtile Florentine **qui** passait, avec les éclairs cruels de la Renaissance dans ses yeux, et l'énergie de son époque dans sa démarche. Il n'y a rien peut-être de plus poignant dans la *Comédie humaine* que la scène où Catherine se trouve en face de Thomme qui est mis à la torture. On demande à la reine s'il faut faire encore tourner la roue, et, sachant que la victime a la force de résister à la souffrance, elle répond; oui, encore un tour, ce n'est qu'un hérétique. La scène autour du dauphin mourant est aussi belle. Souvent je me suis demandé pourquoi un auteur dramatique ne l'a pas utilisée. Peut-être faudrait-il Shakespeare pour la mettre en scène. Je voudrais la citer; et le portrait de Calvin, un des plus extraordinaires qui existe sur papier imprimé, ou toile peinte, évoque en moi le souvenir des plus **beaux portraits** de l'école française—le **portrait** de M. Bertin **qui est au Louvre peint par Ingres, et les portraits de**

David et de Prudhon. Car, malgre le romantisme de F6poque de 1830, son ceuvre n'a rien perdu de son caractere essentiellement francais, meme traditionnel, tenant bien plus au classique qu'on ne le croit generalement. La forme de Corneille, Moliere et Racine est differente, on peut dire tout juste Foppose; mais lorsque Ton va au fond des idees, on voit que Balzac n'est pas moins francais qu'eux. Autant qu'eux il reste—puis-je dire?—un urbain, se servant de la nature seulement pour y mettre des scenes d'amour et de galanterie et ne se souciant que tres peu de la beaute des arbres, ne sachant probablement pas distinguer un bouleau d'un meleze, et passant, je suis sur, pres d'une primevere au bord de Feau sans meme la regarder. L'horizon bleuatre Fennuie, et il detourne les yeux pour chercher une ville, ne s'interessant qu'aux hommes et aux villes qu'ils batissent. Je me souviens dans *Ferragus* de plusieurs pages sur les rues de Paris; la rue de la Paix il Fadmire, mais, pour certaines raisons, il ne peut lui accorder toute son admiration; la rue du Faubourg Montmartre commence bien, mais elle finit en queue de poisson; la Place de la Bourse au clair de lune est un reve de Fancienne Grece. Dans *Catherine de Medicis* il lui a fallu toute la ville et il nous raconte les changements qui se sont produits dans Paris depuis le X V P siecle avec tous les details, comment une rue qui allait a droite et a, gauche ne se trouve plus sur la carte, etc., etc.

S'il n'avait pas ete merveilleux romancier, il aurait ete architecte ou historien. Laissons de cote Farchitecte et occupons-nous de Fhistorien. Dans ce livre Catherine et les personnes qui Fentourent sont aussi vivantes que celles qui se meuvent dans la *Comedie humaine*. Il a obtenu cette intensite de vie en employant le dialogue. Je sais que cette maniere de traiter Fhistoire n'est pas

tres scientifique; elle est regardee de travers **aujourd'hui**; mais **je** crois tout de meme que tous ceux qui ne **sont** pas des historiens de profession trouveront leur plaisir dans *Catherine de Medicts*; l'histoire vivante, meme **si** elle est fausse, vaut mieux que l'histoire morte, meme **si** elle est vraie. Et en fermant le livre ils regretteront que ce soit son seul essai historique. L'historien etait toujours latent sous le romancier; dans tous ses recits il y a une preoccupation historique. Au milieu de son roman, *Un Menage de Gargons*, il s'arrete pour decrire un village tel qu'il a existe au XVP siecle, sous pretexte que c'est la que son heroine a vu le jour, ou pour tout autre pretexte aussi frivole. Un autre exemple flagrant **se** trouve dans *Les Paysans*. Voulant decrire le pare et le chateau, il commence par les sept portes, car il y a sept portes a ce pare, et il assure le lecteur que pour comprendre le roman il est necessaire que les sept portes soient decrites.

Son but dans ce roman etait de prouver que la loi etait insuffisante pour sauvegarder les interets des proprietaires contre une combinaison de paysans; et, avec une clairvoyance extraordinaire, il a prevu tous les evenements qui sont arrives en Irlande depuis vingt-cinq ans. La victoire des fermiers a la fin du roman n'est que le tableau exact de ce qui se passe en Irlande aujourd'hui.

Dans *Les Chouans* Balzac a raconte les miseres et Fheroi'sme des paysans qui n'ont pas voulu accepter la Republique, et, pour le plaisir de decrire la retraite de Russie, il a compose le conte qui porte le nom *Adieu*. Vous vous souvenez de ces descriptions du passage **de** la Beresina. C'est la ou la pauvre femme dit adieu a **son** mari. Adieu est le seul mot dont elle se souvient sa folie. Ce conte prouve que Balzac a su s'interesser **aux grands** evenements historiques, mais *son* epoque **l'obsedait**.

Il se peut qu'on ecrive de meilleurs romans sur le present que sur le passe; il se peut, aussi, que le passe fournisse de meilleurs sujets pour le theatre. En tous cas Shakespeare a bati son theatre dans le passe, mais etant un artiste de la Renaissance il ne craignait pas d'introduire les moeurs de son epoque dans les drames historiques. Lisez la premiere partie de Henri IV et vous y trouverez la vie des tavernes de Eastcheap racontee avec le meme naturalisme que Balzac a mis a raconter le quartier Latin dans *Les Illusions perdues*. Nous nous souvenons du petit cabaret ou Lucien fit la connaissance de Lousteau, lorsque nous parlons de la taverne ou Falstaff dispute ses comptes avec Mistress Quickly. Des souvenirs de Doll Tearsheet et les soudards de Fleet Street se melent avec nos souvenirs de Coralie et de Florine et des journalistes des boulevards. Les deux actrices sont esquissees avec une main legere comme celle de Shakespeare, lorsqu'il jetait sur le papier quelques traits feminins. L'amour de Coralie s'exhale de sa bouche comme le parfum d'une fleur, et sur le coin de sa table Lucien ecrit un article tellement joli, que personne n'aurait pu Fecrire sauf Balzac. Qui aurait pu faire parler les journalistes pendant le grand souper, excepte Shakespeare et rhomme qui les a fait parler? Les pages succedent aux pages, l'esprit de Balzac nous entraine comme une mer profonde: des aphorismes clapotent autour de nous comme des lames; nous subissons le sentiment de Finfini; et le seul juste reproche qu'on puisse faire a ce souper est qu'il n'y a pas un seul convive qui symbolise la Rive gauche comme Falstaff la Tete du Sanglier en Eastcheap. Je crois que nous avons tous rencontre sur le boulevard des journalistes qui ont plus d'allure que Lousteau, et qui incarnent une humanite plus riche. Mais si Balzac a echoue* avec Lousteau, il a pleinement r6ussi avec Lucien. J'ose dire

que j'aime mieux le *Romeo* de la comédie que celui de la tragédie. Lucien est bien moins abstrait, et Balzac a trouvé la phrase qui résume les ambitions d'un jeune homme, lorsque Lucien répond à Vautrin: je voudrais être célèbre et aimé.

En poursuivant les analogies qui lient ensemble ces deux maîtres de la pensée humaine, il faut oublier les petits traits qui sont sans importance, pour regarder en face ce qu'ils ont d'essentiel en commun. Ils sont tous deux pour nous les plus grands évocateurs d'âmes qui aient jamais existé. Sous ce rapport, on ne trouverait pas leur égal en Allemagne, en Espagne, en Italie, et si Ton retournait vers Tancienne Grèce, on trouverait un goût plus parfait, mais non l'abondance de Balzac et de Shakespeare. Ils sont abondants comme la vie même. Rappelons-nous d'abord les créations du poète, seulement les noms qui viennent à l'esprit de tout le monde dès qu'on parle de Shakespeare: Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Antoine, Brutus, Cassius, Falstaff et les Richard II et III. Et sans songer aux personnages des comédies qui ne sont nécessairement que des aspects extérieurs: Benedict, Petrucchio, Malvolio, etc., prononçons les noms qui représentent le mieux la *Comédie humaine*; le Père Goriot, le Baron Hulot, Philippe Rubempre, César Birotteau, le curé de Tours—qui encore? Eugénie Grandet. Je m'arrête, mais il est injuste pour Balzac. Son talent ne se résume pas entièrement dans ses caractères; ses descriptions, ses commentaires philosophiques comptent pour beaucoup dans son œuvre. Pour comprendre l'énormité du Tourangeau, il faut connaître les 50 volumes qu'il a écrits de sa propre main en une vingtaine d'années. Quoique très grands, ses personnages n'ont pas l'éternelle allure de Lear, d'Othello, de Macbeth et d'Hamlet, ni de Don Quichotte ni de Sancho. Balzac n'avait pas le sentiment

de Mieroioue. Mais Shakespeare Favait, et c'est justement ce sentiment de Theroique qui Fa sauve bien des fois du naufrage, par exemple dans le *Roi Lear* que Swinburne, le grand poete anglais, prefere a *Hamlet*. Les poetes comme les dieux ne donnent pas leurs raisons, mais les romanciers en donnent et Fannee derniere, Tolstoi, debout sur un rocher de la steppe, a declare avec la vehemence d'un Jeremie que ce qui manque a la tragedie, c'est le bon sens. Si le bon sens a jamais manqu6 a quelqu'un, je ne saurais dire s'il a le plus manque a Jeremie ou a Tolstoi.

Emporte par la folie de la haine, Tolstoi' a pris a partie la poesie, la musique, Tart tout entier, la vie elle-meme. J'aime mieux la folie de l'amour, quoiqu'elle ait pousse Swinburne a mettre des fleurs a la boutonniere de tous les petits poetes du temps d'Elisabeth, et malgre qu'elle Fait incite, dans un dernier delire, a tresser une telle couronne de lauriers pour le roi Lear, que le pauvre vieux n'en peut plus relever la tete. Il faut lire ce livre de louanges et d'imprecations. . . . Enfin, il trouve un petit defaut, la disparition du fou, le compagnon du roi Lear jusqu'a la fin du troisieme acte, et il dit qu'aucune conjecture audacieuse ou subtile ne peut Texpliquer. Je la regrette autant que lui; le fou est certainement Tetre le plus raisonnable de la tragedie, et apres sa disparition la tragedie n'est rien qu'orage, desespoir, terreur, delire; des scenes de cruaute se suivent les unes apres les autres. La piece est comme un navire qui, portant trop de voiles, est toujours pret a chavirer. Le gouvernail est brise, les mats tombent, personne n'est debout, sauf le vieillard qui continue ses lamentations jusqu'a la fin et qui meurt avec sa fille morte dans ses bras.

La disparition du fou n'est pas la seule chose **etrange** dans cette piece; tout y est inexplicable, meme le **genie**

de Shakespeare, si Ton n'admet pas que la piece n'est qu'un brouillon qui n'a pas ete assez travaille. En tous cas on ne prend plaisir a sa lecture que lorsque Lear d6clame, ou que le fou nous entretient avec sa grande sagesse. Le role d'Edmond est fait d'une hypocrisie assez plate; Edgar, son frere, est incomprehensible. On devine dans son role une idee que l'auteur a cherehee sans la trouver. L'action flotte entre une epoque tres lointaine et le Moyen-Age. Les trois filles de Lear sont a peine plus indiquees que les trois soeurs dans le conte de Cendrillon. Je raconte la piece telle qu'elle apparait a la lecture, mais elle acquiert une grandeur surnaturelle lorsqu'on la voit representee.—II faut voir Shakespeare! La parade lui est necessaire, et surtout il faut l'entendre, car il s'adresse bien plus a l'ouïe qu'a l'oeil.

Le *Roi Lear* est la plus belle esquisse qu'un poete ait jamais lailsee, mais il ne faut pas oublier qu'en litterature l'esquisse ne vaut pas l'oeuvre achevee. J'ai choisi Lear plutot que Hamlet, Othello, et j'en ai parle en detail pour une raison que vous avez deja devinee. Vous savez que prendre le sujet d'autrui, c'est le droit de tout grand artiste. Rubens Ta fait quand il a apport6 d'Italie la composition de *La Descente de Croix*, La tache de Balzac a ete plus difficile que celle de Rubens; le grand Flamand a honore un peintre quelconque en lui prenant son bien, tandis que Balzac est entre en lutte avec le plus grand poete du monde et il en est sorti triomphant avec un chef-d'oeuvre a la hauteur de roriginal. II est vraiment a Thonneur de la France qu'un Fran5ais ait pu refaire le *Roi Lear* de fond en comble et avec la meme aisance dont la nature elle-meme transforme les choses. Ayant un jour rencontre le *Roi Lear* dans la lande desolee, l'idee est venue a Balzac de le prendre par la main, de l'habiller a la mode de Louis-

Philippe et de la conduire dans la maison Vauquer, et là il en a fait un bourgeois silencieux et timide au milieu d'un petit monde dechu,—le detritus de la grande ville. Et il a pu faire ce changement sans que le sujet perdît rien de ce qu'il avait d'essentiel. Maintenant le père qui se sacrifie pour ses filles et qui est ensuite abandonné* par elles, parle en prose; quand il parle, ses paroles sont aussi rares que les paroles du roi étaient abondantes, mais les petites phrases débitées par lui nous revelent une humanité que les vers avaient été incapables d'exprimer. Il est impossible, je crois, de lire la mort du père Goriot sans comprendre qu'elle est aussi réelle que la mort de Lear; seulement elle est moins hautaine. Nous sommes loin de la tragédie cyclopeenne où les vers tonnent et luisent, mais il y a ceci de commun entre les deux morts que la dernière est aussi indemne que la première de toute sentimentalité; la joie que nous éprouvons en lisant le roman aussi bien qu'en lisant la tragédie est une joie d'art, une joie qui ne fait pas couler de larmes. Il n'y a pas une larme dans Shakespeare et je ne me souviens d'aucune en Balzac.

La table d'hôte de Mme. Vauquer est d'une admirable vérité et je ne crois pas qu'il y ait dans l'œuvre de Balzac une plus belle page. Mais puisque Swinburne a trouvé un défaut dans le *Roi Lear*, il faut bien que j'en trouve un dans le *Père Goriot*. Il a regretté l'absence du fou; moi, je regrette la présence de Vautrin. Les discours sur la société moderne qu'il tient avec Rastignac me semblent aussi insipides que les pires pages de la tragédie, et on n'est pas critique pour un sou, si l'on ne remarque que les filles de Goriot sont à peine plus indignées que celles de Lear. Si elles nous semblent plus réelles, c'est que nous les voyons dans les salons et que nous les savons amoureuses de jeunes gens qui leur

empruntent de Targent et qui portent des souliers vernis. Mais il ne faut pas se laisser duper par les dehors; a vrai dire il n'y a guere plus d'humanite dans Anastasie de Restaud et Delphine de Nucingen que dans Goneril, Regan, et Cordelia, un peu plus, parce qu'elles sont nees deux cents ans plus tard, dans un siecle ou la femme avait acquis une certaine position et une certaine autorite.

Je n'ai pas la pretention d'avoir fouille la litterature de la Renaissance a fond, mais on se rend tres bien compte de ce qu'il y a dans une litterature sans Favorir lue d'un bout a l'autre. On devine le caractere d'une litterature comme on devine le caractere de Thomme qui vous parle: a premiere vue on sait son age, sa race, a, quelle classe il appartient et cinq minutes apres de quoi il est capable et un grand nombre de ses idees. Il en est de meme avec une literature. Apres avoir lu deux sonnets de Petrarque on sait que Laure n'etait pour lui qu'une exhortation litteraire; on ouvre la *Divine Comedie* a la page ou Dante entrevoit Beatrice dans les cieux et on sait tout de suite qu'il va faire d'elle une seraphique theologienne. Et Boccace? Sans lire une seule ligne de lui, on sait qu'il n'a jamais songe a autre chose qu'a la jolie chair de ses maitresses et au bon fricot qu'il pouvait cuisiner. Il est inutile que je passe en Espagne pour vous parle* de Dulcinee, la bonne amie de Don Quichotte: vous savez* tres bien que Cervantes se servait d'elle pour en faire la parodie des grandes amours du moyen age. Je pourrais vous conduire en France pour vous parler de Rabelais et de Montaigne; et puis vous amener en Angleterre pour vous lire les contes de Chaucer: mais il faudrait beaucoup de temps pour toutes ces lectures; et il sera plus simple de vous inviter a venir avec moi au Louvre; il ne faut pas autant de temps pour voir des tableaux que pour lire **des** livres; ils vous renseignent sur les idees qui ont prevalu

a leur époque et on peut dire en toute sécurité qu'aucun art n'est moins indiscret qu'un autre. Ce qui n'est pas dans la peinture n'est pas dans l'âme du peintre. Celles de Botticelli et de Mantegna nous apprennent qu'ils ont beaucoup réfléchi sur les draperies flottantes et qu'ils ont trouvé comment on peut tirer parti du corps de la femme dans les panneaux décoratifs.

A leur époque Pompei était encore ensevelie, mais l'esprit de l'antiquité qui couvait sous les cendres leur a fait entrevoir de très beaux plis qu'ils n'auraient jamais pu dessiner, s'ils s'étaient apitoyés sur le sort humain et s'ils s'étaient inquiétés des souffrances et des mélancolies féminines. Je ne crois pas que vous trouviez dans les yeux des madones que Botticelli peignait pour ses patrons les ecclésiastiques plus de douleur que dans les yeux des femmes qui dansaient en chlamydes autour des vases grecs. Dans les femmes de Michel-Ange y a-t-il seulement un sexe? Le sexe de la femme lui repugnait et il a fait d'elle un être mixte, viril et musclé. L'histoire nous apprend que Raphaël a beaucoup aimé sa maîtresse la Fornarina et ses tableaux prouvent qu'il n'a dû être parfaitement heureux que lorsqu'il se trouvait seul avec elle dans son atelier, cherchant une attitude plus noble, plus douce que toutes celles qu'elle avait déjà prises et qui lui avaient inspiré pourtant des chefs-d'œuvre. Il dut être content, quand elle donna ce beau mouvement de bras avec lequel elle attire un enfant vers un autre dans *La Belle Jardinière*, ou quand, avec un mouvement de bras aussi beau, elle soulève le voile qui couvre le nouveau-né. Phidias aurait compris Raphaël. Leur point de vue est le même. Ils n'ont cherché que la beauté pure. Titien a laissé voir toute son âme sensuelle dans la belle exaltation du mouvement de la femme nue assise au bord du puits; elle semble adresser la parole à une femme riche-

ment habillée qui ne l'écoute pas; un pale chevalier chevauche dans le fond ombreux; et vous vous souvenez aussi de F autre tableau oii un corps de femme, alourdi par la chaleur d'un apres-midi roux et silencieux, se traine a la fontaine pour y puiser de l'eau, et comment le murmure de Ye, u entrant dans la jarre se mele au chant du guitariste. Celle-ci et toutes les femmes de Titien nous apprennent que le peintre n'a pas cherche autre chose en elles que des creatures de plaisir qui n'ont jamais pense ni reve. Il ne pouvait oublier l'odalisque, meme quand il peignait sa fille; vous vous souvenez comment elle s'en va les yeux regardant en arriere. Si aucun portrait d'homme n'existait de sa main, on dirait que Titien, de tous les peintres, etait le moins psychologue. Mais nous avons des portraits de lui qui racontent la vie entiere des princes, des senateurs et des nobles jeunes gens.

Leonard da Vinci a verse une mysticite paienne qui lui est personnelle dans les yeux de tous ses modeles. Rubens a fait couler quelques larmes conventionnelles sur les joues de ses madones, mais ses belles Flamandes sont encore plus depourvues de mentalite que les Italiennes dont nous venons de parler. Ni Isabelle Brandt ni Helene Fourment ne lui ont inspire une pensee intime; elles ne furent pour lui que des fleurs vivantes et il peignait leurs portraits exactement comme il aurait peint des pivoines et des coquelicots. Van Dyck et Jordaens ne se souciaient pas davantage de ce qui nous interesse tant: Tame feminine. Vous pouvez scruter tous les tableaux, feuilleter tous les livres de la Renaissance, vous n'en trouverez aucune trace; pas plus dans Shakespeare que parmi les autres: voila ou je voulais en venir.

Je sais que les femmes de Shakespeare ont ete louees par des critiques eminents et, parmi la foule des admira-

teurs, se trouve Taine, un critique tres subtil, qui voyait clair, mais qui pourtant ne s'est jamais demande d'une fa9on decisive, si Shakespeare decrivait mieux les hommes que les femmes, ou le contraire, ni s'il decrivait les princes et les aristocrates mieux que les gens du peuple. A Tentendre, on dirait que Shakespeare etait un auteur sans parti-pris qui faisait tout 6galement bien. Cet exemple d'impartialite a ete suivi par d'autres critiques moins 6minents et moins subtils qui se contentent de crier: tout est beau, tout est sublime dans cet auteur sans pareil. Tous les six mois, un nouveau livre parait sur Shakespeare, aussi vide et declamatoire que le livre precedent; on n'y trouve jamais un effort de la part de Tauteur pour comprendre; il semble suffisant d'elever la voix et de ne sortir jamais de la louange banale; on evite, autant que possible, d'indiquer ses preferences, si Ton en a; tout est beau, tout est sublime; nous sommes 6tourdis par la vaste clameur de cette adoration. On dirait une reunion de negres m6thodistes dans une chapelle; chacun s'epoumonne a crier plus fort que son voisin, afin d'attirer l'attention du bon Dieu. Peut-etre les critiques croient-ils que Shakespeare les entend? En tous cas, la folie s'accroit chaque jour, et je ne serais pas etonne, si le culte de Iahveh venait a chanceler en Angleterre, qu'on se hatat de mettre Shakespeare a sa place au haut des cieux. Dans le tumulte de ces voix on entend la voix de Swinburne au-dessus de toutes les autres; du fond de sa tombe il crie: tout ce qu'on peut savoir de la vie de l'homme, de la vie de la femme et de la vie de l'enfant, Shakespeare le savait mieux que tout homme qui soit jamais ne. Et cette phrase, que je viens de citer, doit vous faire comprendre oii nous en sommes; Shakespeare a tres peu parle d'enfants; impossible d'en parler aussi peu, a moins de ne pas en parler du tout. Neanmoins Swinburne n'h6site pas a

dire que Shakespeare les connait mieux que tout homme qui soit jamais ne. Le malheur est que des eloges si factices et si exagères empêchent toute vraie appréciation du poète. On perd la tête et les traits les plus caractéristiques de son génie passent inaperçus. On lit Shakespeare aujourd'hui comme les prophètes ont été lus autrefois, avec une arrière-pensée: il s'agit de prouver que c'est le comédien et non pas Lord Bacon qui est l'auteur des drames; ou bien il s'agit de faire des livres qui conduiront leurs auteurs aux chaires bien payées de l'Université, ou bien il y a des raisons patriotiques.

I/Angleterre a produit Shakespeare, Shakespeare a décrit l'Angleterre. Donc, il faut louer Shakespeare dès qu'on parle de littérature, et puis il faut faire des livres sur Shakespeare, pour prouver qu'on a lu le poète. Il y a un proverbe français qui dit que les arbres nous empêchent de voir la forêt; eh bien! en Angleterre, ce sont les professeurs qui nous empêchent de voir Shakespeare. Et tous les jours l'ombre devient plus complète. Que faire? Rien. On ne peut empêcher ces messieurs d'écrire ou de parler, et, si on le pouvait, on ne le voudrait pas, car ce sont des hommes excellents qui travaillent de leur mieux, et je suis sûr que chacun d'eux croit qu'il contribue . . . je ne sais à quoi il contribue, mais c'est déjà bien, de croire qu'on contribue à quelque chose. Leur patience est admirable; il paraît qu'ils passent dix-huit heures par jour à lire les œuvres du grand maître, faisant toute espèce de calculs, comptant les mots, les lettres, les majuscules, les virgules, tout, ils ont fait des livres sur les plantes, les fruits, les fleurs et les animaux dont parle Shakespeare. Ils ont appris tout ce qu'on peut apprendre, mais il paraît qu'il y a bien des gens qui apprennent sans comprendre; c'est le cas de nos professeurs. Tout de même, je me demande

comment, en fermant le folio, apres leurs dix-huit heures de lecture, l'idee ne leur est jamais venue que le poete n'a fait autre chose que peindre une serie de portraits d'hommes en pied, les plus parfaits qui aient jamais ete realises, et esquisser seulement quelques silhouettes de femmes, de ci, de la, en bas, dans les coins, ces silhouettes vraiment delicieuses qui se nomment Ophelie, Desdémone, Cordelie. Meme le fait que les roles de femme etaient joues, au temps de Shakespeare, par de jeunes gar^ns n'a pas revele a messieurs les professeurs, que Shakespeare n'ecrivit que les roles qui pouvaient etre distribues, et c'est, en effet, ce qu'il a fait. Il y a peu de roles dans son oeuvre qui demandent le corps et la grace de la femme. Un jeune homme comprendrait bien Tesprit changeant de Beatrice et il pourrait le representee

En creant Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare a evite, on peut dire avec soin, de demontrer la domination qu'elle avait sur son mari. Messieurs les professeurs me diront que la puissance qu'elle exercait est exclusivement intellectuelle. Oui, mais pourquoi? Parce que Shakespeare savait que le role serait joue par un jeune homme. Catherine, dans *La Megere apprivoisee*, pourrait tres bien etre jouée de meme; le role est si simple: une femme qui rage. Portia ne nous interesse que lorsqu'elle se deguise en avocat de la cour. Dans *La nuit des Rois*^ Shakespeare cherche encore une fois a fuir la femme. Viola se deguise en gargon pour etre aupres du due qu'elle aime, et de nos jours, le role a ete joue par un jeune homme. La peinture et la musique ont tellement insiste sur la feminite de Juliette, que je n'ose en parler, mais tout de meme, si Ton s'adresse au texte, on y voit que Shakespeare n*a jamais cherché a mettre une difference entre Tamour de Romeo pour Juliette et Tamour de Juliette pour Romeo. La personnalite de Desdemone est encore **plus vague**;

une petite obeissance, pas davantage; nSanmoins, un professeur eminent lui a consacre plusieurs pages d'un livre intitule *Les Femmes de Shakespeare*, et il poursuit ce joli fantome—peut-etre l'un des plus jolis de la litterature—et d'autres jolis fantomes a peine moins jolis, en les parant de subtilites qu'ils n'ont pas et dont leur createur ne voudrait pas. Pauvre professeur! Il n'a jamais compris que, si Shakespeare avait approfondi ses personnages feminins, son ceuvre serait moins parfaite, qu'une oeuvre d'art ne peut etre toute en cimes, qu'il faut des plaines et des vallees. De tous les livres sur Shakespeare c'est celui peut-etre que je regrette le plus, car, pour penetrer dans l'esprit du poete et de son epoque, on doit se rendre compte que, pour des raisons a la fois historiques et pratiques, et peut-etre aussi affaire de temperament, les femmes de Shakespeare sont d'un interet tout a fait secondaire. Mais voila! admettre cela, ce serait admettre que Tart de Shakespeare ne fut pas Tart complet, Tart supreme. Il y a des gens a qui Phidias et Michel-Ange ne suffisent pas; ils voudraient—je crois qu'ils appellent cela idealiser—n'en faire qu'un avec les deux. Le produit serait un monstre dont nous nous detournerions avec horreur; et je me detournerais avec horreur de ce Shakespeare que la critique anglaise a cree durant ces vingt-cinq dernieres annees; je voudrais sauver Shakespeare de Tempyr[^]e niais ou Ton pretend Tinstaller. Il est si int6ressant comme Anglais ayant vecu a la fin du XVI⁰ siecle, que c'est une piti6 de le hisser dans la solitude de ces hauteurs. L'homme a assez de genie pour que ses admirateurs n'aient pas besoin d'en faire un dieu sachant tout le pass6 et jetant un regard perçant dans Favenir, devinant meme Tame feminine, qui ne fait son apparition dans Tart que cinquante ans plus tard, au milieu du XVII⁶ siecle, et non pas dans la litterature, mais dans la peinture.

Selon moi, c'est Rembrandt qui fut le premier a concevoir que la femme avait une existence personnelle, qu'aussi bien que l'homme elle pensait, revait, se demandait si la vie etait un grand malheur que seulement la mort pourrait apaiser, ou bien une promenade delicieuse dont il fallait remercier le Seigneur, comme Renan l'a enseigne. On voit la femme pour la premiere fois dans les tableaux de Rembrandt. Celle qui se fait laver les pieds au Louvre, je ne me rappelle plus le nom du tableau, en est un exemple. Cette femme est triste comme une femme peutetre triste. Le portrait de la femme de Rembrandt dans la Salle Carree est un exemple encore plus frappant. Mon Dieu! comme on lit son ame dans ses yeux! Elle se rend compte de sa faiblesse et de sa dependance; et d'une facon presque inconsciente, elle songe qu'elle n'est que le satellite d'un homme de genie. Si Rembrandt revenait au monde (on ne fait heureusement pas revenir les morts pour si peu de chose, je conçois) ; mais si, pour des raisons serieuses, il revenait et qu'on lui montrat les lignes que je viens d'ecrire, je crois savoir ce qu'il dirait: eh bien! il est possible que le monsieur ait raison, mais je n'y ai pas pense. Si Rembrandt y avait pense, il n'aurait pas entrevu Tame feminine avec une telle clairvoyance. II Fa peinte inconsciemment et il est probable que pas plus que lui, nul de ses contemporains n'a vu ce qui flottait sur les toiles. II ne faut pas oublier que ce que nous appelons la verite n'existe pas dans les choses, mais dans les yeux qui les regardent. Tout ce qui est femme, nous le voyons mieux qu'on ne le voyait il y a 250 ans. Cependant, il est rare qu'un homme ait une vision sans qu'un autre ne l'ait aussi, et il parait qu'a l'epoque ou Rembrandt peignait, quelques annSes plus tard, un Francais a entendu l'ame feminine comme le murmure d'une eau douce. Racine, parait-il, a non

seulement conçu de grands rôles de femme, mais il y a versé toute l'intimité de la femme jusqu'aux secrets les plus profonds de son cœur. Je dis paraît-il, parce que des amis me l'ont dit et je m'en fie à leur jugement. Il n'y a pas moyen de faire autrement, car la lecture ne m'apprend rien, pas plus que la représentation. C'est avec regret que je confesse que la littérature de ce que vous appelez votre Grand Siècle m'est complètement fermée, surtout les tragédies de Racine et de Corneille. Je dis que je le regrette, car l'absence d'un sens est toujours regrettable. Mais, comme le malheur ne porte que sur moi, on ne me demandera pas de répandre des cendres sur ma tête, de déchirer mes vêtements. Il serait tout à fait suffisant, pour arriver à une entente cordiale, que je dise que l'hémistiche et la rime empêchent la psychologie des personnages de venir jusqu'à moi. Le vers rime me semble délicieux, pourvu que le sujet soit léger et fantaisiste. Mais je m'aperçois que je rentre dans la voie des explications, et je m'arrête. En tous cas, les femmes de Racine étaient toutes des princesses, des femmes nobles, éloignées des tristesses humbles et quotidiennes, et vivant dans l'émotion abstraite et, quand je pense à la femme, c'est à l'être qui reste au logis, triste et résignée, comme Eugénie Grandet, qui, une fois dans sa vie, a eu un amour: je ne me rappelle plus pour le moment quelles circonstances lui ont fait perdre son bonheur; je me souviens d'elle comme d'une créature échouée. Rembrandt a bien deviné la mélancolie de la femme qui n'est pas aimée, qui est seule dans la vie; et Balzac, puisqu'il a tout deviné, l'a devinée aussi. L'odalisque existe encore dans notre littérature, mais dans la mauvaise; nous la voyons aussi au Salon, mais toujours dans la mauvaise peinture, et, je crois que vous êtes de mon avis: lorsque nous avons fait quelque chose d'un peu mieux que d'habitude, c'est k

Eugenie Grandet que nous songeons. Elle est la settle femme qui se trouve parmi les personnages qui viennent a l'esprit, quand on pense a la *Comedie humaine*. Il y en a d'autres, mais je ne me souviens pas du nom de la vieille fille, ni de la charmante creature dans *Les Parents Pauvres*; ce dernier oubli est impardonnable: ce nom est-il Pierrette? Qu'importe? Il n'y a pas beaucoup plus de femmes en Balzac qu'en Shakespeare et Balzac est le dernier ecrivain qui s'interessait suffisamment a l'eternel masculin pour en faire le fond de son ceuvre. Depuis, l'eternel feminin est partout, absorbant les arts et les metiers, cherchant maintenant a s'emparer de la politique et gagnant la couronne du martyre, c'est-a-dire un, deux, ou trois mois de prison, comme les journaux d'octobre dernier nous l'ont appris.

La foi de Shakespeare et de Balzac dans l'eternel masculin relie le grand genie de votre pays a celui du mien. Il y a d'autres liens encore. Shakespeare a compris, comme Balzac, qu'un ecrivain trouve son affaire dans le monde des humbles plutot que dans l'haute, parmi les d'elasses de toutes sortes, les soudards, les chemineaux, les souteneurs, les filles de joie et leurs patronnes.

Cela me fait de la peine d'etre du meme avis que Tolstoi; pourtant je le suis, quand il dit que Falstaff est ce qu'il y a de plus universel et de plus original dans l'oeuvre de Shakespeare; mais pas du tout quand il dit que Falstaff est le seul caractere dans l'oeuvre de Shakespeare, parlant toujours une langue qui lui soit propre et dont les actions et les paroles soient en accord. Cette critique est Tolstoi tout entier; Tidee fausse bien de-guisee; car, sans contredit Hamlet est la pensee secrete de tous les hommes, de Tolstoi peut-etre plus souvent que de tous les autres. Aussitot que rintelligence se revele dans un homme, il est pret a se croire Hamlet.

Hamlet est l'hieroglyphe et le symbole de l'intelligence; Falstaff est le symbole et l'arabesque de la chair. Mais la chair de Falstaff est pénétrée de l'intelligence d'Hamlet. La chair de Falstaff jase, et sa jaserie est douce et gentille, comme celle des oiseaux qui se reveillent le matin; elle est à moitié consciente, car Falstaff aime son gros ventre, sachant que c'est son ventre qui le relie avec le monde en dessous et au-dessus de lui. Son ventre le rend un peu pantheïste, car le ventre est ce que nous avons tous en commun; le ventre est la base de l'existence chez les animaux aussi bien que chez les hommes. Les oiseaux ont des ailes, les poissons ont des nageoires: mais tout ce qui vit a un ventre; donc Falstaff, qui est ventre, et rien que ventre, est l'image de l'existence terrestre. Les anciens avaient Silène, mais Silène ne parlait pas, tandis que Falstaff parle avec abondance; et Shakespeare a eu soin que son langage fût aussi matérialiste que l'organe qu'il représente si bien. Il y avait grand danger qu'il devint un symbole vide, mais le génie de Shakespeare a sauvegardé sa personnalité jusqu'à sa mort. La muse lyrique de Shakespeare, qui se cachait de Falstaff, est sortie au moment où le gros homme allait mourir et elle a mis dans sa bouche de nobles phrases. Mais tout de même, jusqu'au dernier soupir, Falstaff est resté Falstaff. Hamlet est le centre d'une pièce; Falstaff se montre dans plusieurs; le perdre serait un malheur qui ne pourrait jamais être réparé, et s'il fallait choisir entre les deux, hésiter, même si l'hésitation ne durait **qu'un moment**, serait impardonnable.

Après avoir chanté les cimes et les forêts **Wagner** a composé *Les Maîtres Chanteurs*, parce **qu'il fallait chanter** aussi le foyer. Il me semble que Shakespeare a dû éprouver le besoin de décrire l'intelligence **après avoir décrit** cette matérialité. Mon Dieu, comme **il a fallu**

etre poete pour decrire cette masse de chair f alote! Dans les scenes comiques et extravagantes on ne peut se passer du poete une minute; il faut qu'il soit la a chaque mot et il faut qu'on soit Shakespeare ou Aristophane, quand le langage est grossier. Il a fallu plus de genie pour ecrire la scene des fossoyeurs dans *Hamlet*, que le celebre monologue etre ou ne pas etre. Jamais Shakespeare ne fut si grand poete, que lorsqu'il peignit des personnages comiques, tel que Touchstone, le pitre qui a suivi les amoureux dans la foret d'Arden. Je ne sais si un peu du charme de la scene entre Touchstone et les bergers transpire dans la traduction francaise. Je Tespere, mais je ne me souviens pas d'un seul poete capable de la faire passer dans la langue francaise, sauf Banville peut-etre. Le caprice de cette scene aurait captive Tesprit si capricieux de votre poete, et le mariage du bouffon avec Taffreuse paysanne Audrey l'aurait ravi. Touchstone se rend completamente compte combien Audrey est rebutante et sottre, mais cela va a son humeur ironique de Tepouser. Apres avoir epuise Tironie dans les paroles il la cherche maintenant dans la vie reelle, et la pauvre folle le suit charmee par la musique de ses grelots. On se souvient de *La Douzieme Nuit* ou Malvolio le fat, pour faire plaisir aux femmes, endosse des deguisements ridicules, et oil les trois bonshommes—Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek et le clown—se posent des questions. Dans ces comedies, nous sommes a peine sortis du folk-lore, et Banville aurait du les traduire car, seul parmi vous, il savait mettre la logique a la porte. *La Megere apprivoisee* se passe dans la meme atmosphere de reve; il aurait respire a pleins poumons; et dans les *Joycuses Commeres de Windsor* (comme cela fait plaisir decrire ces beaux titres), le delieux poete aurait rencontr6

Falstaff chez Mistress Ford, et il est facile d'imaginer la joie qu'il anrait éprouvée à lui serrer la main.

Vous me direz que rien de tout cela ne se trouve dans Balzac. Je ne suis pas de votre avis; il y a plus d'invention et de fantaisie dans la *Comédie humaine* que dans les œuvres de tout autre auteur. N'a-t-il pas, dans les Contes Drolatiques, fait revivre le XVI^e siècle dans son esprit et dans sa langue? Et n'est-il pas presque le seul parmi vous qui ait su écrire le boniment? Le *boniment*! Qu'est-ce donc que le boniment? Le dictionnaire me dit qu'on appelle ainsi: Fannonce charlatanesque que le pitre fait dans sa parade. Eh, bien, il faut étendre la signification du mot; le boniment, c'est *l'inspiration originale*. Possède par les mots, le pitre se dépouille de la réalité* quotidienne, et, dans son extase, il devient le frère, au moins le cousin germain, du *prophète* et du *poète*. Tous les trois parlent sans souci de ce qu'ils vont dire, tandis que l'homme de talent le sait fort bien. Au lieu d'être l'esclave de la pensée, le *verbe* devient le maître et il l'entraîne en la forçant à faire des culbutes dans l'herbe, et des sauts vertigineux vers les étoiles. Prophète, pitre ou poète, le verbe est ton guide, et tu te rejoyis du tumulte des mots et des images, sans savoir ni comment ni d'où ils viennent. Le reste est raison, logique, talent. Le boniment, c'est la couronne, le manteau, la besace et le bourdon des maîtres d'autrefois, et le fard, la perruque et la canne à pommeau d'or des maîtres d'aujourd'hui. Peut-être y a-t-il plus de boniment dans la littérature anglaise que dans la votre. Mon Dieu! qu'est-ce que je dis? Rabelais, le grand maître du boniment, vivait un siècle avant Shakespeare. Quel oubli! Mais parmi vos auteurs modernes je ne me souviens pas d'un seul. Si, Victor Hugo! Un si grand maître de la langue n'aurait pas su s'en passer; mais il me semble—je tâche d'éviter

tout ce qui touche a la polemique—il me semble tout de meme, que Ton peut tout trouver chez Hugo, tout,—sauf la saveur de la vie, qui, aussi bien que celle de la langue, est essentielle. Mais je me souviens des *Choses vues*. Comme il a bien fait parler Mlle George qui est venue chez lui, vieille et dechue, pour lui dire que Rachel manquait d'egards envers elle!

Il vaut mieux laisser Victor Hugo de cote, autrement je n'en sortirais pas. Il s'agit de Balzac. J'aurais voulu ouvrir un roman de Balzac et vous lire certains passages; mais les questions artistiques ne se decident pas avec des textes; Tart s'adresse a notre sensibilite plutot qu'a notre raison. Notre sensibilite change de jour en jour et elle depend des circonstances. Les memes passages de Balzac qui, autrefois, m'avaient fait penser a Shakespeare, lus a haute voix aujourd'hui, pourraient me sembler tout differents. Pourtant je ne voudrais pas rester sur une simple affirmation et vous trouveriez la plaisanterie mauvaise, si je vous conseillais de vous enfermer chez vous pour lire Shakespeare et Balzac. La *Comedie humaine* a cinquante volumes; Shakespeare a laisse trente-sept drames; des annees et des annees passeraient et vous seriez encore la cherchant des textes que j'ai trouves pas hasard, et il y a bien longtemps. Je vais tout avouer. Une nuit, je lisais Shakespeare, et une scene entre charretiers et palefreniers m'a tellement plu que, pendant des jours, je ne songeais qu'a la beaute du dialogue, a cette langue erudite et populaciere. A la fin de la semaine, par un hasard litte*raire, j'ouvris *Cesar Birotteau* a la page ou le parfumeur va a l'halle acheter des noisettes pour fabriquer sa fameuse huile. Au lieu de se contenter de raconter, comme tout autre l'aurait fait, qu'apres avoir marchande il finit par acheter quelques milliers de francs de noisettes, Balzac decrit toute la scene avec la marchande. Remarquez bien

que la marchande n'est pas un caractere dans le roman: on ne la revoit plus. C'est donc uniquement pour le plaisir d'entendre son boniment que Balzac Fa fait parler. Shakespeare, me suis-je dit, a fait parler le palefrenier et le charretier pour la meme raison. Quelques pages plus loin, Balzac conduit son lecteur chez l'illustre Gaudissart, le commis-voyageur de genie, et il fait d6biter tout son metier dans un jargon epouvantable et charmant. Ce n'est pas de la stenographic, mais une reconstitution litte'raire penetree de Fesprit de Balzac. Veuillez lire les passages indiqu6s et s'ils ne vous satisfont pas entiere-ment, tournez les feuilles d'un autre roman et vous trouverez, j'en suis sur, des passages qui r6ussiront mieux a vous convaincre, peut-etre bien parce que c'est vous qui les aurez trouves et non pas moi.

Vous savez tous que Shakespeare a beaucoup ecrit en prose et que sa prose est aussi belle que ses vers; les vers de Shakespeare sont rarement rim6s; il passe avec aisance de la prose aux vers et des vers a la prose. Comme versificateur, il fut aussi fort que Balzac 6tait faible. Dans son etude sur le grand romancier, Gautier releve un vers tout a fait extraordinaire, car dans les douze syllabes Balzac a trouve moyen de faire trois fautes de prosodie. Dans *Les Illusions perdues*, Balzac attribue a Lucien de Rubempre trois sonnets Merits dans les styles les plus differents. La Tulipe est de Gautier, La Marguerite est de Mme de Girardin; je ne crois pas qu'on sache qui a ecrit la troisieme. De tous les hommes au monde, il etait, peut-etre, le plus insensible a la beaute des vers, et, comme il vivait a une 6poque ou tout le monde aimait la poesie, excepte lui, il est probable que sa haine—car il fallait bien qu'il ha't les vers, autrement il n'aurait pas decrit Canalis—a beaucoup aide* a creer la legende que Balzac ne savait pas 6crire **le fran-**

c.ais. Il suffit de peu de chose pour creer une legende. Balzac ecrivait avec abondance, il ecrivait, avec une grande facilite, il a ecrit de sa main *La cousine Bette* en quarante nuits. Il y a des negligences de style, meme des incorrections; il y en a aussi dans Shakespeare; Fincorrection est toujours regrettable, mais elle ne prouve pas qu'un auteur ne soit pas un ecrivain de souche. Pire que Fincorrection est Feffort; des Finstant ou le critique remarque que Fauteur fait un effort, il a presque toujours raison de conclure que le livre n'est pas ecrit par un grand ecrivain. Autrefois je croyais que le talent consistait dans la recherche de Fepithete rare, mais je ne le crois plus; je sais maintenant ou cela conduit. Voulez-vous que je vous cite un exemple? Dans les premieres pages de *Salmmbo*, Flaubert fait des efforts desesperes pour représenter les sons des differentes langues qu'on entend chez les mercenaires. Il dit qu'on entendait a cote du lourd patois dorien retentir les syllabes celtiques bruissantes comme des chars de bataille, et les terminaisons ioniennes s'heurtaient aux consonnes du desert, apres comme des cris de chacal. Je ne crois plus au clair de lune qui, dans la grande scene d'amour de Mme Bovary, se reflète dans le fleuve, d'abord comme un candelabre et puis comme un serpent aux ecailles d'argent. Et, si possible, je crois encore moins aux lacets du corset de Mme Bovary qui sifflaient comme des serpents, quand elle se deshabilait a Fauberge.

Mais il me semble que je m'eloigne de mon sujet; les angoisses que Flaubert eprouvait en ecrivant seraient le sujet d'une autre conference. J'espere qu'elle sera ecrite bientot; j'aurai beaucoup de plaisir a Fecouter. La mienne, sur Balzac et Shakespeare, est finie; mais avant de nous separer, je voudrais vous remercier de la grande complaisance que vous avez mise a ecouter la parole **d'un**

barbare. Ce n'est pas la première fois que j'essaie d'écrire dans votre langue; j'avais déjà quelques flirts dans mon passe, des strophes, des rondeaux, des ballades . . . en somme des amours courtes et sans importance. Mais cette conférence a duré bien trop longtemps; elle constitue une véritable infidélité à ma langue maternelle; une liaison d'un mois qui m'a fait beaucoup souffrir. Et le résultat de cette liaison est si médiocre, que je me suis décidé à rompre et à ne plus recommencer.

CHAP. V.

MAID. Mr. Freeman, sir

FREEMAN. I am afraid I am interrupting.

MOORE. YOU are welcome to interrupt my reading. I am always willing to lay aside a book to talk.

FREEMAN. TO anybody?

MOORE I prefer a man of wit; but since I am confessing myself I will disclose all. I would lay aside the wisest book to talk to a stupid woman.

FREEMAN. Or man?

MOORE. Yes; or man, for I have lost my taste for reading, and there are few greater misfortunes. We cannot always be talking, we cannot always be at the theatre, we cannot always be listening to music or visiting exhibitions of pictures; and to lose one's taste for reading is really like losing one's taste for bread.

FREEMAN. But I find you reading.

MOORE. Reading with a purpose, which is a very different thing from reading for pleasure. I am reading one of George Eliot's novels.

FREEMAN. Reading George Eliot, and for a purpose! I should not have been surprised if I had found you reading Jane Austen or the Brontës, but *Daniel Deronda*!

MOORE. *Silas Marner*, the story I am reading, is less purposeful. Ah, if she had been less purposeful!

FREEMAN. Yet in spite of her purposes, which are manifold, you find something to admire?

MOORE. The book has only just come from the library. I am in the first pages and am surprised to find that she has a better conception of what a story should be than most English writers. Her first book, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, had one story in it that has haunted me ever since.

FREEMAN. YOU do not intend to write something like it?

MOORE. My dear Mr. Freeman!

FREEMAN. Forgive me. You intend to write an essay about her?

MOORE. An essay I must write about somebody, for I am short of copy. You remember that I withdrew *Impressions and Opinions* from the list of books that Liveright is publishing in America.

FREEMAN. Yes, and almost regretted your decision. Mr. Arthur Symons, your first critic, speaks of *Impressions and Opinions* as your best book.

MOORE. Arthur Symons speaks out of vague memories. If he were to open the book again he would see at once that it lacked unity of subject and language.

FREEMAN. Pater's definition of style: unity of subject, language, and something else. I have forgotten.

MOORE. SO have I. In the 'eighties I collected much that I had written for various newspapers, for it seemed enough to flaunt ideas on all subjects.

FREEMAN. SO the new book which will replace *Impressions and Opinions* will be a unity?

MOORE. To have made my meaning clear I should have said that if we are artists we must spend our lives in a

continual striving after perfection, though in so doing we lose something we have already won. You asked me if I am writing an essay. No; I am weary of essays, and I don't write them well; perhaps that's the reason why I am weary of them.

FREEMAN. And the name of the new book?

MOORE. *Conversations in Ebury Street.*

FREEMAN. Ah, I like the title. But why in Ebury Street? Why not simply *Conversations*? Too Landorian, and you would discriminate. Since Landor nobody has attempted conversations, and after the long interval it has come to you to revive a form in which criticism can be conducted more agreeably than in the essay.

MOORE. My admiration for Landor is without limit; I place him above Shakespeare, and to imitate him would be honour enough for me. But it was not Landor that prompted me to go and do likewise; the form rose out of what I had to say quite naturally. I was tempted, I know not why, but I was tempted to examine the novels that had come down to us from Defoe one after the other, to compare them to our poetry and to find them deficient in seriousness. This I could not do in an essay; the constant change of subject would have been irksome: to me at least it would have been. Of course, I might not have thought of the dialogue if I had not known Landor; and perhaps Landor would not have thought of the dialogue if he had not read Plato.

FREEMAN. Who is your interlocutor in the present instance?

MOORE. YOU are, as the manuscript on the table tells:

MAID. *Mr. Freeman, sir.* FREEMAN. *I am afraid I am interrupting——*

FREEMAN. SO you have begun the conversation?

MOORE. Yes; I have sketched some pages.

FREEMAN. Pray read them to me.

MOORE. The sheets on the table are only a beginning. I am at the stage of feeling my way into the subject, and the conversation may have already taken a wrong turn.

FREEMAN. SO we discuss George Eliot together?

MOORE. George Eliot and Mr. Thomas Hardy are contrasted, or will be, in the dialogue that I am meditating.

FREEMAN. They are contrasted in the *Confessions*, and very violently.

MOORE. Has it come to be held as a crime to do else than to voice public opinion? to strike up with the little boy going down the street whistling gleefully in defiance of time and tune?

FREEMAN. Public opinion changes slowly, but it changes. Lord Byron and George Eliot are examples of how public opinion sees black where it once saw white, and to find an example in our own time we have only to remember Tennyson. No doubt public opinion will change regarding Thomas Hardy, but I doubt the wisdom of treating the public like a whistling boy——

MOORE. Ordering his breeches to be taken down and you to hoist him? Of course, if you don't like the subject I shall abandon it at once; but will you tell me why?

FREEMAN. It seems to me that I have already given a reason. But if you want another, here it is. You have just told me that you are willing always to lay aside a book to talk, a thing which you are doing now, forgetful that George Eliot is a voluminous writer, and of the length of *Middlemarch*, which I think you will find difficult to finish before the winter. And then there is *Romola*, another long book.

MOORE. A book that I read at a time when I considered seriously the claims of Lord Leighton to be a great painter.

FREEMAN. He supplied the illustrations.

MOORE. And a better choice of an illustrator could not have been made. Both were workers in wax. *Daniel Deronda* I have never opened, and I shudder at the name of *Felix Holt*, a very leaden book that I stopped in the middle of long, long ago. You are quite right; I shall not be able to re-read all George Eliot. But that is not a reason why I should abandon my subject. I have read George Eliot, and if I send the book on the table back to the library at once I shall be able to speak to you out of my memories of her, which will be more agreeable than to read *Felix Holt* and ask you to dinner to argue about a defunct literature in which neither of us is in the least interested. So true is this that I am beginning to regret having opened the book on the table; my mind is already taking a bias.

FREEMAN. In her favour?

MOORE. Somewhat. You were going to ask me?

FREEMAN. It was certainly in my mind to ask you if your memories of George Eliot are enough for the dialogue you propose to write.

MOORE. YOU have come from her writings later than I have. Be my examiner.

FREEMAN. Tell me about *Silas Marner*.

MOORE. *Silas Marner* is an old man, a miser, who discovers a foundling at his door, boy or girl, I have forgotten which. He must have heard the child cry and risen from his bed, for he found the child by the light of a lantern. I am sure of that; I remember the lantern. Or am I inventing?

FREEMAN. I see that you still keep some faint memory of the story.

MOORE. I can speak more precisely of some of the others.

FREEMAN. Of *Middlemarch* ?

MOORE. Of *Middlemarch* I remember the delight with which I read each volume, and there were six or eight in the edition that I came upon in my grandfather's library in Moore Hall when I was twelve or thirteen, mayhap fourteen. You may have caught sight of the portrait of an old gentleman on the wall of the lobby as you came upstairs—my grandfather, the historian who in his preface to his history of the French Revolution (I give the preface in *Ave*)> speaks with delightful resignation and humility of his failure to obtain recognition.

FREEMAN. Whosoever sees the portrait cannot but be attracted. A more characteristic portrait I have never seen.

MOORE. The portrait may be accepted as a commentary on the little confession which his pen ran into without his knowing that he was telling his secret—wherefore an admirable confession. He stops short almost in the middle of a sentence, and I can see him in my thoughts staring at the lake, associating it in some dim way with his own loneliness.

FREEMAN. Was the manuscript lost?

MOORE. Nothing was saved.

FREEMAN. I am sorry I did not see Moore Hall before I wrote my book.

MOORE. For no reason, at least for none that we can discover, some places are fixed deeper in our memories than others and become with time more real than the realities we live among. My grandfather's library is one of these spiritual realities, and with what strange intensity do I see the old gentleman's portrait over the chimney-piece, the wire-netted book-cases, the round table, the telescope, the view of the lake winding sadly mile after mile by low shores. And the hours that I spent reading

Mtddlemarch can be recalled at will, and none more easily than the moment of disappointment when I returned the book to the shelves.

FREEMAN. Every man remembers his first intimations that life is not permanent. You read *Mtddlemarch*——

MOORE. My memories of *Adam Bede* are more explicit, and I can still hear the tone of the young squire's words when the parson tries to dissuade him—from what, I have forgotten; probably from walking out with Hetty; and I can recall how the story lost its humanity for me when the dairy-maid was taken by the police and tried for murder of her child, for the story of a crime is never a good story. Some years ago I read *The Mill on the Floss*, a well-modulated narrative, with the aunts of Maggie Tulliver, each in her house, and her habits, and Maggie Tulliver going to meet a cripple or a hunchback in a pine wood. A delightful, intellectual companionship this was, one that George Eliot's readers thought should continue and end in marriage; but George Eliot knew better **than** her readers how life is made, and she chose that Maggie's bodily instincts should be awakened by a commonplace young man, who takes her away somewhere in a boat or a barge; I have forgotten which, but remember very well my delight when the young man seized Maggie's bare arm and kissed it, a very natural act, one which a girl would expect who was eloping with a young man, and my stifled disappointment when Maggie returned home despite the young man's apologies, tears and promises of amendment.

FREEMAN. YOU remember the flood, with Maggie **and** Tom Tulliver in a boat?

MOORE. Yes, and I have nothing to say against **the** end; it's harmless, it's almost good. But I am thinking now of the passing of all this literature, as well built as the mill itself, for George Eliot constructed well **afld**

solidly; her prose is rich and well balanced. But these qualities were not enough to save her from the whirling, bubbling, flood of Time; her books have gone down like the mill. Lighter things have floated; hers have sunk out of sight; and I would see a reason for the sudden overthrow of one who in her day was looked upon as almost Shakespeare's equal.

FREEMAN. YOU have known more old Victorians than I have, but I doubt——

MOORE. Doubt not, for I heard Professor Tyrrel, a great scholar, whose Latin and Greek verse was as perfect as such things can be, speak the words that you have just heard me speak: Almost Shakespeare's equal!

FREEMAN. Whereby we may deduce the moral that learning is insufficient.

MOORE. We may, indeed. But I would look into the soul and see why this woman's mind has passed into a dust hardly less anonymous than her body's.

FREEMAN. The bent of her mind was towards philosophy rather than imaginative literature.

MOORE. And it was George Henry Lewes who drew her attention to prose narrative as an outlet for her genius. Even genius is dependent on accident. The accident is always going by; talent misses it, but genius avails itself of it instantly, and George Eliot availed herself of her chance. But that is a side issue; we are seeking the reason why she should have passed into such sudden oblivion whilst others, the Brontes, should remain.

FREEMAN. YOU admit that her prose is rich and well balanced, and I agree with you. But there is no pleasure in it.

MOORE. YOU are quite right; there is very little pleasure in it. But why is there no pleasure in it?

FREEMAN. Something in her character, perhaps.

MOORE. Let us then seek her failure in her character. I know she met George Henry Lewes and that is about all I do know of her. Whence came she? Was she a townswoman or a countrywoman? Did she come from the north or the south or the east or the west? Whom did she know before she met Lewes? Was he her **first** lover, her second, her third? Tell me all you know about her.

FREEMAN. Her name was Marian Evans, and she came from Warwickshire.

MOORE. From the middle of England, like Shakespeare. Balzac, too, came from the middle of France.

FREEMAN. Her father was a land agent to Mr. Francis Newdigate, a Warwickshire squire.

MOORE. And she was sent to school. But to what school?

FREEMAN. That I can't tell you, but without doubt to some school *in* the neighbourhood, perhaps *in* Warwick. Do you know Warwick?

MOORE. Yes. In my boyhood Warwick was a lovely old English town full of gardens and gables, and associated with the Middle Ages—Warwick Castle, with a bad picture of a man in a cave shown to travelling folk, the very town in which there would be a fine, large, handsome school for young ladies. Birmingham is over the border, but not more than twenty miles away, and she may have been educated in Birmingham.

FREEMAN. I can but tell you that at her mother's death she was recalled from school to look after her father's house. I have always heard that the change was welcomed by her, for even in her teens she resented direction in her studies. At Arbury Farm she applied herself to the French and Italian languages, **and I think** music **was a** hobby of hers.

MOORE. I shouldn't have suspected music from her writing. But Nature is ever capricious. Tell me more.

FREEMAN. At Arbury Farm she refused to go to church and nearly quarrelled with her father, and afterwards she began to write for the *Westminster Review*.

MOORE. I am beginning to understand. And after the publication of two or three articles the editor wrote asking her to call at the office when she came to London; and in London she made the acquaintance of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, the inevitable Harriet Martineau and the desirable George Henry. Can you give me the date when she left Arbury Farm?

FREEMAN. I will inquire the matter out in the library.

MOORE. I am beginning to understand. She came up to London to participate in the discovery that pleasure was a mistake, almost a vulgarity, and to hear the beautiful eighteenth century spoken of as the mischievous and shameful century. We have always been under the domination of France, spiritually, and having worshipped beauty must needs follow France into ugliness. I would tell you who began the new cult if I could; there must have been somebody before Courbet, who spoke about truth of effect and local colour. Be this as it may, he was committed to it, and Troyon still more so, and these were followed by Millet, who took it upon himself to explain the miserable lot of the peasant; and whosoever saw it, remembers *L'Homme a la Houe*, a detestable object, but which so stirred the loose bowels of compassion that the very world was certain something must be done to relieve the monotony of the peasant's lot. Philanthropy and realism entered into art arm in arm; and it is believed that Rosa Bonheur never wore a crinoline, preferring to walk about in breeches and a blouse. She wore clogs and led a life more laborious than that of the cart-horses she

painted. Rosa Bonheur—how well the names goes with her pictures! The syllables tramp just like the great grey cart-horse that the peasant rides into the middle of the fair. Rosa Bonheur—was there ever a more cynical name? She only just escaped Rose. Rose Bonheur—a woman in whose life a rose never flourished, and who repudiated happiness! Do tell me, and quickly, when Marian Evans changed her name to *George Eliot*.

FREEMAN. But you do not believe that the character of a human being is modified by a name, inherited or assumed? You said just now that Rosa Bonheur's name was in direct contradiction to her character.

MOORE. The name tramps like a cart-horse, and I cannot believe she would have painted the same pictures if her name had been plain Rose. But Rosa Bonheur is a side issue; we are speaking of George Eliot. Tell me when she changed the name of Marian Evans, a splendid name, and how well it goes with Arbury Farm! I can see myself in my imagination directing an envelope: Miss Marian Evans, Arbury Farm, Warwickshire. Can you tell me when she changed her name?

FREEMAN. I have no exact information. Have you an encyclopaedia?

MOORE. An encyclopaedia in this house! No.

FREEMAN. We may assume for the moment that her first book, the translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, was published under the name of *George Eliot*.

MOORE. Why should we assume that?

FREEMAN. I have told you that her father **was much** distressed by her refusal to *go to church*——

MOORE. Had I been her father, I should have said: Marian, I will allow you to omit church if in return you will choose some other name than *George Eliot*.

FREEMAN. What name would you suggest to her?

MOORE. *Oliver Brunskill.*

FREEMAN. There's not much beauty in that name.

MOORE. We mustn't seek beauty in names—character. Do you think my writings would have been the same if I had adopted *Annie Grey* as my pseudonym? George Henry Lewes, her guide and bugle-call (it was he who first suggested that she should turn her hand to fiction), should have said, when they were debating the pseudonym necessary for *Scenes from Clerical Life*: I do not urge you, Marian, to choose *Annie Grey*—indeed, I urge you not to choose it; and we can imagine Marian answering: But why, dear George, are you averse from the name *George Eliot*? It is so uncompromising.

FREEMAN. And what answer would you set down for George Henry Lewes?

MOORE. A name too faintly genteel for you, Marian. The phrase might have risen up in his mind *as genteel as an omnibus*, but he would not have spoken it, and continued: Hardly a man's name, hardly a woman's, without any sex on it. The word sex would have frightened Marian, and she would have answered that the name was chosen before she knew him as a suitable name to go on the title page of a translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. But why continue it? George Henry would have interposed. *Scenes from Clerical Life*, by Marian Evans, to which Marian would have answered drily: I have to consider my father.

FREEMAN. I do not know if the translation was made at Arbury Farm or when she went to London.

MOORE. It can't be helped. In London she adopted the morality of her circle: morality without God, a fantastic theory if ever there was one. Even with God's help men and women stray into the primrose path; how then can we expect them to remain in the strait and

narrow way if there be no promise of reward or punishment? an altogether impracticable morality, as is proved indeed by Marian herself, who went to live with a married man and wrote under his roof *Scenes from Clerical Life* and other admonitory works, thereby hanging herself out like a banner from the roof on which is inscribed the magic word: *Excelsior!*

FREEMAN. Lewes was her single transgression from the moral law.

MOORE. Our information on the subject is too slight to warrant literary investigation, and further transgressions, could they be proved against her, would weaken my argument.

FREEMAN. You think then that the foundations of her style are to be discovered in Lewes?

MOORE. Not in Lewes's writing, but in the double life she was leading.

FREEMAN. You trace George Eliot's style to a conflict between theory and conduct, and I think you are on surer ground now than you were in that fantastic theory that the name we bring into the world or that we assume is accountable for all our acts and thoughts.

MOORE. Encouraged by your sympathy I will venture a little further into a theology which some will regard as casuistical, saying that if she had transgressed oftener her style would no longer be the same. You see, she may have gone to live with Lewes for doctrinal reasons (indeed, it almost looks as if she had), false reasons, of course. But if further transgressions could be urged against her we might assume that she was pursuing happiness, and happiness being in her mind would have found an outlet in her works. You see, my dear Mr. Freeman, a woman who transgresses frequently, escapes the Christian conscience, and we acquit her of the sin

against the Holy Ghost, a sin that the Pagan and the Christian world look upon with equal detestation. I flatter myself that I stand shoulder to shoulder with Canterbury in all that concerns this sin, except its unforgivable nature.

FREEMAN. If a man or a woman cannot accept Christian doctrine you would advocate that he or she should lead a licentious life, escaping thereby from setting a bad example?

MOORE. I would not have you fall into the makeshift argument of the preacher, who would have us look upon Antiquity as a degrading past of which the least said the better.

FREEMAN. Antiquity affords the highest instances of morality.

MOORE. As I have said, Antiquity and Christianity hold one sin in equal detestation, and I think I am guilty of no paradox if I say that her style is the outcome of the moral conflict in which she found herself involved; but redeemed by Paganism or by Christianity (if there be redemption in the Christian creed for the soul guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost), she might have written—well it's impossible to say how she might have written, but certainly more delightfully than she has written.

FREEMAN. YOU would distinguish between a moral man and a moralist, and I think you are right. And I would add that the moralist is seldom happy.

MOORE. If she had been a happy woman her happiness would have crept into her writings, as I have said, for what is in the mind finds its way on to the page, an almost needless amplification of your criticism that the moralist is seldom happy. Indeed, an essay might be written by some philosopher, poet, painter and critic, who would discern in Velasquez an icy spirit who saw

no more in his fellows than subjects for portraits or pictures. The critic of whom I am thinking would cry, on turning from Velasquez to Rubens: A happy man! His paintings tell the tale. He meditated no doctrine, and to be free accepted Catholicism outwardly, thereby getting his freedom to wander among nymphs and satyrs without receiving reproofs from Spain. Among modern writers your enemy Stevenson——

FREEMAN. My enemy? No. If, as some people think, I have criticised Stevenson harshly it is because he seems to be taking a place in public estimation higher than he deserves, getting a great deal that was due to Pater. Moreover, the happiness that he expressed seems to me a very superficial kind of happiness; the cudgelling of a little donkey in the Cevennes!

MOORE. At once you bring in a morality which casts a gloom upon the radiant pages of *Travels with a Donkey*,

FREEMAN. He did not keep religion out of his writings; he remained a sour Protestant. He could not visit the monks without commenting, and adversely, on the mode of life they chose to adopt, and in the *Inland Voyage* he is also ready to advance the claims of Protestantism against those of Rome; and in his essay on Villon he never ceases to thank God that he was not himself like Villon. No; I think you would have done better to have left Stevenson out of this argument. Morris would have supplied you with a better example, for men fight and love and wander in his poems as they do in Homer.

MOORE. The visible world was enough for the Greek and the English poet, and all that you say in praise of Morris I will applaud, hat in hand. A greater poet than Stevenson, I grant you; still——Let us not wrangle, however, but agree that ancient literature **was happier than** modern. Homer's fighting, though heavy-handed,

is always light-hearted. The wanderings of Odysseus are untouched by melancholy, and Virgil, too, and Horace are free from this bane.

FREEMAN. Your chronicle runs too fast, for we have come to imperial Rome, overlooking Sicily.

MOORE. Yes: you are quite right. I had forgotten Sicily, and thank you for reminding me. How the very name of Theocritus brings up before our eyes sunny hill-sides, with shepherds gathered under tamarisk trees, and for single ornament a torrent dashing over the face of the high rock. More real, more true are these than George Eliot's Norfolk hinds. The shepherds and shepherdesses have come down to us from more than two thousand years, gaining in every generation, it would seem, a new and more intense life. Battus is clearer to us now than he was, perhaps, to his creator, certainly more real than Tom Tulliver is to me, or his sister Maggie. And the incident of the thorn that Cory don plucked from Battus* s foot under the ankle we would not exchange for the story of the flood.

FREEMAN. I would certainly not give up Amaryllis for Maggie Tulliver.

MOORE. All her walks with the cripple in the pine wood are not worth the verses in which we read that Battus goes to Amaryllis's cave to plead his love, saying that if she refuses him he will die at her feet. He says some lovely things to her: *Lo, ten apples I bring thee, plucked from that very place where thou didst bid me pluck them, and others to-morrow I will bring thee. Ah, regard my heart*s deep sorrow! ah, would I were that humming bee, and to thy cave might come dipping beneath the fern that hides thee, and the ivy leaves!*

FREEMAN. In such words as these we reach immortality.

MOORE. *Ah, lovely as thou art to look upon, ah heart of stone, ah dark-browed maiden, embrace me, thy true goatherd, that I may hiss thee, and even in empty hisses there is a sweet delight!* In the simple words even in empty kisses there is a sweet delight, he reaches to the very heart of the sensual instinct. The unfortunate goatherd continues to plead, but for the moment I am at the end of my memories.

FREEMAN. Theocritus records not the answers of Amaryllis; not a word do we hear her speak. And in the next Idyl Battus and Corydon, two neatherds, meet, and after some random banter their talk turns on the death of Amaryllis.

MOORE. *Ah, gracious Amaryllis! Thee alone even in death will we ne'er forget. Dear to me as my goats wert thou, and thou art dead! Alas, too cruel a spirit hath my lot in his keeping.* That is all we know of Amaryllis, and the scene of this great love grief is described in an anecdote—the plucking out of a thorn that has run into Battus's foot under the ankle. Battus's sighs for Amaryllis were the first, but they were not the last. The world has continued ever since to sigh for Amaryllis. Is it her name that has given her an immortality that has endured for more than two thousand years? and given immortality to a hind like Battus? for we like him when he says: *I will sing no more, but dead will I lie where I fall, and here may the wolves devour me.* This rough goatherd was a true lover. Why are these hinds and shepherdesses immortal, Mr. Freeman? Why are they real? Why are they enough? Because his Idyls tell of happy days and men and women who lead happy lives, following their flocks and their instincts. It would be hard to find an unhappy day in his pages, not even when two fishermen wake up in their broken hut with

nothing before them but another toilsome day in search of food, two old men at the end of their lives who will soon be unable to put forth again. Theocritus brings into his story a dream. Tell me, says one old man, the vision of the night; nay, tell all to thy friend. And the fisherman tells of the dream in which he hooked a fish with golden scales, and the great difficulty he had to bring it on shore. You remember?

FREEMAN. Yes; and the answer to forget the dream and *seek the fish of flesh, lest thou die of famine with all thy dreams of gold!*

MOORE. Even the genius of Wordsworth could not redeem him from the curse of morality, and had we to choose between *The Leech-gatherer* and the fisherman, we should choose the earlier story.

FREEMAN. YOU can usually give reasons for your preferences.

MOORE. Happy days are remembered always; moralities are doleful. I had a subject——But you were going to say?

FREEMAN. I was going to remind you of a story in verse by George Eliot of a girl who loved a king, and who for the king's sake refused to marry her lover; but the king, hearing of her broken faith, sent for her and kept her in his court till she began to perceive that he was only a man like another——

MOORE. And the Victorian returns the poor girl to her betrothed, attired in all the prejudices and conventions of 1860. How very admirable!

FREEMAN. YOU don't think that the intimacy of the king would have checked the girl's admiration of him and turned it back to its source, the young man she had discarded?

MOORE. Not unless the king had possessed himself of

the girl's affections and wearied of them; then, of course, she might have picked up the thread she had dropped.

FREEMAN. Is not your view very cynical?

MOORE. George Eliot's view is the cynical: the robbing a girl of her illusions and the imposition instead of Christian conventions. Ah! here is Mabel bringing in the tea. You'll stay and have a cup with me, won't you?

CHAP. VI.

MOORE. YOU will have another cup?

FREEMAN. NO, thank you.

MOORE. A cigar?

FREEMAN. NO, thank you; I don't smoke.

MOORE. Not even a cigarette?

FREEMAN. NO, thank you.

MOORE. SO you like Mr. Hardy's poems better than his novels?

FREEMAN. Yes; I think he writes verse better than prose, occasionally somewhat awkwardly; but in both, in verse and prose, he has helped the ordinary man to realise pessimism as a theory of life.

MOORE. But pessimism as a theory is as old as the world. To go no further back than *Ecclesiastes*, we find not a few admirable phrases depicting the worthlessness of life; and in Shakespeare we find phrases even more beautiful. If you had said that Mr. Hardy popularised pessimism and coaxed his readers into drinking from an old tin pot a beverage that had hitherto only been offered to them in golden and jewelled goblets, I should have agreed with you. You were speaking just now of Mr. Hardy's stories in verse. I have read one of these, **and** as an example of how to make pessimism seem **trivial** I think **it** would be difficult **to find a better story than**

the one telling of a dead woman's dog that cannot be persuaded to leave her grave, and how disappointed all the family are when they discover that he is not trying to scratch up his dead mistress but a bone that he has buried.

FREEMAN. YOU have not chosen a happy example of Mr. Hardy's art. I could show you some poems that I think even you would find some merit in. I remember that in speaking of a certain Irish writer you say he is sufficiently a poet to become a great prose writer.

MOORE. The best prose is usually written by poets—Shakespeare wrote the best seventeenth century, and Shelley the best nineteenth; and I do not think I am going too far when I say that Mr. Hardy has written the worst. I will hear your protest afterwards. Allow me to read:

The persistent torrent from the gargoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave. The rich tawny mould was stirred into motion, and boiled like chocolate. The water accumulated and washed deeper down, and the roar of the pool thus formed spread into the night as the head and chief among other noises of the kind created by the deluging rain. The flowers so carefully planted by Fanny's repentant lover began to move and writhe in their beds. The winter violets turned slowly upside down and became a mere mat of mud. Soon the snow-drop and other bulbs danced in the boiling mass like ingredients in a cauldron. Plants of the tufted species were loosened, rose to the surface, and floated off.

. . . The pool upon the grave had soaked away into the ground, and in its place was a hollow. The disturbed earth was washed away over the grass and pathway in the guise of the brown mud he had already seen, and it spotted the marble tombstone with the same stains.

Nearly all the flowers were washed clean out of the ground, and they lay, roots upwards, on the spots whither they had been splashed by the stream.

FREEMAN. From what book are you reading?

MOORE. *Far from the Madding Crowd,*

FREEMAN. One of his best books!

MOORE. Then I have done him no injustice in quoting from it. The gargoyle may direct its vengeance, but not the torrent.

FREEMAN. Would you mind reading the sentence again?

MOORE. *The persistent torrent from the gargoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave.*

FREEMAN. I suppose you are right.

MOORE. *The rich tawny mould was stirred into motion, and boiled like chocolate.* Can that image be defended?

FREEMAN. Nobody seeks to defend it.

MOORE. A pool does not roar, and flowers do not writhe and when Mr. Hardy tells us that the violets turned slowly upside down, my thoughts are directed to ducks in a pond, despite the fact that ducks turn quickly upside down. *Soon the snowdrop and other bulbs danced in the boiling mass like ingredients in a cauldron.* Is a cauldron the image that would rise up in the mind of a poet, and would he use the word *ingredients*? *Nearly all the flowers were washed clean (sic) out of the ground, and they lay, roots upwards, on the spots whither they had been splashed by the stream.* You appreciate the whither, I hope?

FREEMAN. An ill-managed phrase, truly.

MOORE. Good writers do not usually botch and bungle up every line, and of all, when they are attempting a purple passage.

FREEMAN. Do you think that he chose Fanny Robin's grave as suitable for fine writing?

MOORE. Had there not been purple in his eye, he would have written: The pour of water from the gargoyle washed away the grave-mound. A simple statement was all that was needed, and perhaps the very first among our literary instincts is the one that tells us the theme that may be developed and the theme that offers no opportunities for development.

FREEMAN. It would be difficult to say more with advantage than that the rain water pouring from the gargoyle's jaws washed away the grave-mound. But if you wish to exhibit Mr. Hardy's novels as no better than the novels the Press has for many years singled out as subjects for ridicule, you will have to show something more than that Mr. Hardy is no master of words, which is pretty generally admitted, I think, in the daily and weekly Press.

MOORE. Our critics have been on many occasions nearly fluttered out of their enthusiasms by Mr. Hardy's lack of style, but they have always neglected to tell us the qualities that led them astray.

FREEMAN. If you do not like *Far from the Madding Crowd* I am afraid you will not like *The Trumpet Major*, and I doubt if your patience will bear you to the end of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It begins well, but half-way through——

MOORE. I do not propose to read *Daniel Deronda*, and neither do I propose to read all Mr. Hardy's novels, for has it not been said that to have eaten a crust of bread is to have tasted of all the stars? I have read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and my doubts began when Alec came riding by and called her to jump up behind him. We are told that he rode into a wood. Now, a wood may

be large or small; it may wander hither and thither, or grow in patches. A wood may be dense, dark, solemn, forbidding, or it may be blithe, enticing, with delightful interspaces; it may be overgrown with scrub, littered with uncouth rocks, or it may be smooth. A wood may have the wet, close smell of an ancient marsh, or it may be fragrant as a garden.

FREEMAN. It was not the wood that mattered, but Tess, and a long description——

MOORE. A wood may be described in two words. When Scott wrote: *Land of brown heath and scraggy wood*, we are in Scotland. But the woods and fields that Mr. Hardy speaks of are never before our eyes. I think he tells us that Alec rode some distance into the wood and made a couch for Tess in the dead leaves. He buttons his overcoat round her shoulders and goes away for a little while, and returns to find her asleep. The situation is one which seems to Mr. Hardy opportune for a meditation, wherefore he begins:

But some might say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked. Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive—a sentence, Mr. Freeman, which as a poet you cannot but admire. The French have a good word for this kind of story: *coco*, and *coco* may be translated into English as *Mother Goose*. After the incident in the wood Tess returns to her home, and about a year afterwards we read of her in a cornfield with a baby, who is taken ill and whom she baptises herself in the middle

of the night. When the baby dies Tess continues to work in her parents' house, and then becomes a dairy-maid; and in the dairy she meets Angel Clare, whom she marries, without, however, telling him that she has had a baby. But on the night of the wedding she makes up her mind to confess everything to him, and is glad when Angel Clare confides to her the fact that he had once *plunged into eight and forty hours' dissipation with a stranger*, and that he has *never repeated the offence*. You will see, Mr. Freeman, that the interest of the story concentrates not so much on Tess's confession but on the character the author gives to the confession, for, like a wood, a confession can take every kind of shape. George Eliot would have said to herself: Angel Clare may persuade her to confess; he may *be* anxious to know the truth for pure motives, or he may be anxious to know the truth for impure motives; he may be willing to hear, and then unwilling to hear. George Eliot's more fertile imagination would certainly have chosen one of these motives to develop, and if Mr. Hardy shrank from the essential we can but conclude that it was lack of invention, brain paralysis, something of the sort, that caused his abrupt retreat into the past indefinite:

And pressing her forehead against his temple she entered on the story of her acquaintance with Alec D'Urberville and its results, murmuring the words without flinching, and with her eyelids drooping down.

FREEMAN. YOU are of the kind opinion, Mr. Moore, that if a man loves a woman he would just ask her: Is it all over? And if she told him that it was, he would say: Well, don't let's speak about this any more. You have repented of your sin, and I have repented of mine.

Mo ORE. I should prefer even that to the past indefinite at the very moment when soul-revealing words

were needed. I am sure that any of the writers about whom the Press is so constantly contemptuous would have devised something better than: *Pressing her forehead against his temple she entered on the story of her acquaintance with Alec D'Urberville and its results.*

Angel Clare is given to walking in his sleep, **and** one night picking Tess out of her bed he carries her quite a long way—if my memory does not trip me, several hundred yards, crossing the river by means of a narrow plank. What I am going to say seems incredible, but I remember certainly something about an Abbey and a stone coffin, in which he lays Tess. I have forgotten for how long she lies in the coffin, but remember that she takes her sleep-walking husband by the arm and leads him home. As I read how they approached the house, I said to myself: We are coming to something more original than a wedding-night parting due to a confession. He will put Tess into his own bed, and on awakening he will take her into his arms—a daring piece of craftsmanship! and my mind softened towards Mr. Hardy. But only for a moment, alas, for Tess persuades Angel Clare to lie down on his bed and retires to her own room. The episode, therefore, means nothing, for next morning they drive a little way together and part, and henceforth we see her getting her living as best she can in the fields.

FREEMAN. YOU admit that we do see Tess at work in the turnip fields.

MOORE. A solitary figure in a turnip field is a distinct feature in the landscape, and Mr. Hardy did not miss it; indeed, we could almost wish that he had, so often have we seen this figure in pictures, as often, or very nearly as often, as we have seen harvesters returning with a dancing

step from the fields, scythes over their shoulders and a moon three times too big behind their heads.

FREEMAN. YOU are thinking, surely, of George Mason's picture of harvesters?

MOORE. Perhaps I am; it would not surprise me if the picture you speak of got mixed up in my memories of *Tess*, so entirely in keeping are the dancing harvesters and the moon three times too big with the seducer, who returns in clerical garb and disappears from the story, returning again for *Tess* to murder him with a carving knife and the blood to soak through the ceiling, and for *Tess* to be hanged later on, after spending a splendid honeymoon among the monoliths of *Stonhenge*, with *Angel Clare* waiting outside the prison to see the black flag run up.

FREEMAN. Have you ever seen any plays by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones?

MOORE. Yes; I have seen a good many.

FREEMAN. YOU know what Oscar Wilde's advice to dramatists was? He said that there were three rules to be observed; the first rule was not to write like Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.

MOORE. And what were the second and third rules?

FREEMAN. They were the same as the first. And if you were called upon to give advice to young novelists, you would adopt Oscar Wilde's formula.

MOORE. The two men are curiously alike, and the physical likeness is as striking as the mental. William Archer once asked me if I had ever seen Mr. Hardy. I said that I hadn't, and he answered: Well, you'd be surprised at the likeness, the physical likeness: same height, same build, same type of face, same complexion. And it so happened that a few days afterwards Mr. Hardy was pointed out to me going round the pictures with

his wife, and I said: Archer is right; the two men are very like each other.

FREEMAN. The subject of your charge is that Mr. Hardy is often melodramatic; but I don't think any of his admirers would deny that he does, on occasion, avail himself of exaggeration, and in his defence they would speak of the three witches in *Macbeth*, of the two murders interrupted by the comic porter, of Banquo's ghost, and many other melodramatic scenes. Nor would their inquiry be limited to *Macbeth*. *Hamlet* rises frequently into melodrama, or, as you would put it, lapses frequently into melodrama. It seems to me that you are bringing into this criticism a great deal of your own temperament. You don't like melodrama, and you are right not to like it, for whenever you get an effect it is by understatement rather than by overstatement; but that is not a reason why you should condemn a method which is employed by both Mr. Hardy and Shakespeare.

MOORE. The charge is often brought against the critic that his admonitions are no more than a reflection of his own temperament. Of course, since all he sees, hears, feels, and knows, is but a reflection of his temperament. Like his author, he speaks out of himself. But I think my best answer to your defence of melodrama is that there is melodrama that rises into the empyrean, and melodrama unredeemed by poetry. The first walks with divine gait, in silken raiment and with stars in her hair, whilst the other proceeds with shambling gait from ale-house to ale-house, shouting stories in broken English out of her husky throat of murder, arson, robbery, rape, and vengeance. Shakespeare appeals to all the senses, it is true, but he never fails to appeal to the mind. *Macbeth's* deeds and *Hamlet's* are transported into **art, and**

are therefore only understood by the few, though they may be undoubtedly relished by the many.

FREEMAN. YOU remind me now of Don Quixote charging the windmills, mills that only exist in his imagination. Nobody compares *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure* with *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*,

MOORE. Oh, yes, they do! Several articles have appeared in which analogies are discovered between *Jude the Obscure* and *Prometheus Bound*, and I would not advise any critic who valued the world's opinions to challenge these appreciations.

FREEMAN. I certainly hope that you do not speak to others as openly as you do to me.

MOORE. YOU would not like, then, truth to prevail?

FREEMAN. Like Pilate, I ask you: What is truth? Your judgment is at variance with opinions that proceed from the highest to the lowest. Everybody believes——

MOORE. The entire Press believes, and would shed the last drop of its ink in defence of the literary opinions of the many.

FREEMAN. YOU would then set aside the literary opinions of the many? Even that of your friend, Mr. Edmund Gosse, who salutes Mr. Hardy as *the poet who is, without dispute, the head of the literary profession, and so I believe the first of living men of letters in the world?*

MOORE. Mr. Gosse speaks out of his lights, and I speak out of mine, and I do not think that anything would be gained by my decrying his as a false light and mine as a true. A great deal of what I am saying, Mr. Freeman, will appear in print as soon as Mr. Hardy steps on board Charon's boat.

FREEMAN. YOU think that others share your opinions

and are probably at this moment anxious to utter them, but refrain. . . .

MOORE. Lest truth should appear to many as bad taste. But I would think only of how he may be saved from invidious familiarity when he advances to meet our God, for never having known him on earth he may, when he steps from Charon's boat, ask the God to point out his (Mr. Hardy's) seat to him; or it may be that he will seek his seat himself, and not finding it next to Shakespeare or Æschylus, he will return and complain to Apollo, who will ask: Who is this one? A messenger will answer: This is Hardy, the author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. And the author of these absurd works, the God will reply, would place himself next to Æschylus and Shakespeare! The messenger will answer: he has listened long to the quackers that beset the shallows of mortality. All the same, let him be hurled into the hollows we have reserved for—and the God will quote three names which I am not called upon to transcribe.

CHAP. VII.

ANY crude emotion will do if it be vague, loud, **and** sprawling; restraint, once the watchword, repels, and the night that Mr. Desmond MacCarthy came to me with a copy of *Avowals* under his arm, I checked the question: How do you reconcile your appreciations of my writings with your worship of Mr. Hardy? and listened in silence till he came to two brief passages so very Landorian that for a moment I thought they must be altered. But Mr. MacCarthy prayed me to retain them, saying: They will bear witness to your worship of the Master, and being of one mind on this subject,

we fell to talking of *Pericles and Aspasia*, agreeing, of course, that it must be looked upon as the noblest work in the English language. I gave all my attention, but whilst praising Landor I did not fail to notice that his fingers played with a book unrecognisable as a volume of the *Imaginary Conversations*, and it seeming to me that his thoughts were straying from Landor, I was moved at last to ask for the name of the book under his hand. He answered: *A Group of Noble Dames*, by Thomas Hardy. My face certainly clouded, but undismayed he said he had brought the volume for me to read and in the conviction that it would convert me. Would I read one story? One would be enough, he assured me, and his solicitude for my literary welfare was so touching that I agreed to read the story which he had been kind enough to mark. And as it appeared to me even stranger in style and composition than the novels, I wrote to ask if he was putting a joke upon me, and received in reply a long, pathetic letter, the contents of which have completely passed out of my mind.

The next thing I heard about Mr. Hardy was from Mr. Freeman, who wrote to tell me that he had talked my doubts over with Mr. De La Mare, and that he and Mr. De La Mare would be pleased to dine with me any day next week that suited my convenience. To explain my obtuseness to me, I said, and wrote mentioning Tuesday; and satisfied that on Tuesday night the great mystery would be solved, I fell to thinking on what I should give them to eat: for the fare must not be spoilt by a wrangle in the drawing-room before dinner, nor in the dining-room whilst we are eating and drinking. A lighter conversation than Mr. Hardy's grammar must be insisted upon, and when my guests arrived I drew their attention to the pictures on the walls, and when we went downstairs to

the dining-room I tried to interest them in the differences between shad and bass, saying how sorry I was not to be able to offer them a shad, or bass, or grey mullet, all these fishes being kept out of the market maliciously by the fishmongers.

A salmon trout followed the soup, and it was then that I began to notice that Mr. De La Mare's attention was not fixed on his plate. He is thinking, I said to myself, of Mr. Hardy. The atmosphere of my dining-room is already Dorset; the name will be spoken in a moment. It was, and to such purpose that my guests ate and drank without tasting; an excellent Barsac was, speaking figuratively, turned to water by *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* **and** *Jude the Obscure*. We will have coffee in the drawing-room, I said, and followed them upstairs a little disheartened, feeling that facts are of no avail against established reputations. Wherefore as soon as the coffee cups were taken from the room, I said: I think I'd like to tell you a story, and they agreeing, I began:

Once on a time there was a young man called Lord Uplandtowers. Uplandtowers! repeated one of my guests (I think it was Mr. Freeman), who asked if I had made up my mind that the retention of so strange a name was essential to the story. Lord Uplandtowers, I answered testily, as if the story were my own, was brooding a marriage with Barbara, the daughter of his neighbour, Sir John Grebe, of Chene Manor, and so beset was he with thoughts of her that he confided his design one night to a guest, but the guest could not encourage his lordship's hopes. We shall see, returned Lord Uplandtowers impassively, and it suddenly occurring to him that **Sir John** was giving a ball that very night, he ordered the **horses** to **be** harnessed and drove away, but only **to find Barbara** **in no humour** to listen to him, **his regret, however, being**

allayed by the fact that she was in no humour to speak to anybody. She disappeared very soon from the ball, and Lord Uplandtowers said to himself in the carriage as he returned home: Well, if she doesn't like me, she doesn't like anybody else. The next morning, before his lordship had left his bed, Sir John called to ask Lord Uplandtowers what he had done with Barbara. His lordship answered him that he knew nothing of her, whereupon Sir John replied that she must have run away with——Sir John refused to pronounce with whom; Lord Uplandtowers accompanied Sir John to Chene, and it was there that Sir John was persuaded to tell him that he feared his daughter had gone off with Edmond Willowes, a widow-woman's son, whose father or grandfather was the last of the old glass painters in that place. By G—, that's bad——, mighty bad! said Lord Uplandtowers, throwing himself back in the chaise in frigid despair. About six weeks afterwards a letter came from the flighty daughter begging forgiveness, which was granted, on the condition, however, that the young man should travel abroad for a year with a tutor, who would instruct him and bring him back, Venice and Rome and Florence having done all they could to redeem the young man from all traces of his lowly descent. Barbara is broken-hearted, for she is not certain that she will love the young man a year hence as well as she does to-day, despite the fact that Mr. Willowes is of such extraordinary beauty that a Florentine sculptor begs of him to sit for him; and, inspired by the beauty of the young Englishman, he carves a statue of almost antique beauty, which Mr. Willowes would have taken back to England if an accident in a fire in a Venetian theatre had not befallen him.

Willowes had **already dragged out of reach of the**

flames several, women and children probably, and it was in returning for the seventh that a beam crashed across him, burning and tearing his face so frightfully that science could do nothing to remedy the mischief. And feeling that he was an object that none could look upon with pleasure, he wrote to his beloved, telling her of his accident, saying that he must henceforth wear a mask, and though she pitied him much, she could not quell her curiosity to see his mutilated face. But when he had removed his mask at her request, she was unable to look upon him long and sank to the floor. You cannot look at me! he groaned in a hopeless way. I am too terrible an object even for you to bear. His unhappy wife pulled herself together for a desperate strain! He was her Edmond; he had done her no wrong; he had suffered. A momentary devotion to him helped her, and lifting her eyes as bidden she regarded this human remnant, this *ecorche*, a second time. But the sight was too much. She again involuntarily looked aside and shuddered. Do you think you can get used to this? he said. Yes or no! Can you bear such a thing of the charnel-house near you? Judge for yourself, Barbara. Your Adonis, your matchless man, has come to this! The unfortunate man creeps away, and when he dies it occurs to Barbara that perhaps after all she was mistaken in her rejection of Lord Uplandtowers, and he, nothing loth, began his suit again; and she married him, though he could never get her to own that she loved him as she had loved Willowses. But he found her cold and indifferent, and when a letter came from Italy from the sculptor, asking to be paid for his statue of the matchless man, her Adonis, Lord Uplandtowers was a little scared. But he could not refuse the statue, which, when it **had** been unpacked in a back room of the house, was found to

be a full-length figure, in the purest Carrara marble, representing Willowes in all his original beauty, a specimen of manhood almost perfect in line and contour. Phoebus-Apollo, sure, said the Earl of Uplandtowers, who had never seen Willowes, real or represented, till now. But notwithstanding his admiration for the statue, he did not wish it to remain under his roof, and he was relieved to find that it had been removed when he returned after an absence of a few days. His suspicions were not altogether allayed, however, for his wife's face wore: A sort of silent ecstasy, a reserved beatitude. And growing more and more curious, he looked here and looked there for the statue, till thinking of his wife's private room, he went towards it. After knocking he heard the shutting of a door and the click of a key; but when he entered his wife was sitting at work, on what was in those days called knotting. Lord Uplandtowers's eye fell upon the newly-painted door where the recess had formerly been. You have been carpentering in *my* absence, then, Barbara, he said carelessly. Yes, Uplandtowers, she answered, and he began to question her. Why did you go putting up such a tasteless enclosure as that—spoiling the handsome arch of the alcove? I wanted more closet-room, she said, and I thought that as this was my own apartment——Of course, he returned. Lord Uplandtowers knew now where the statue of young Willowes was, and it was not long before Lord Uplandtowers missed the Countess from his side——

The story told by you, said Mr. De La Mare, and the story told by Mr. Hardy, are two different things. The delightful dialogue, I answered, you have just heard is Mr. Hardy's, and lest I should be doing him an injustice I will read from the book:

One night, or rather in the smallest hours of the morn-

ing, he missed the Countess from his side. Not being a man of nervous imaginings he fell asleep again before he had much considered the matter, and the next morning had forgotten the incident. But a few nights later the same circumstance occurred. This time he fully roused himself; but before he had moved to search for her, she entered the chamber in her dressing-gown, carrying a candle, which she extinguished as she approached, deeming him asleep. He could discover from her breathing that she was strangely moved; but not on this occasion either did he reveal that he had seen her. Presently, when she had lain down, affecting to wake, he asked her some trivial question. Yes, *Edmond*, she replied absently.

Lord Uplandtowers became convinced that she was in the habit of leaving the chamber in this queer way more frequently than he had observed, and he determined to watch. The next midnight he feigned deep sleep, and shortly after perceived her stealthily rise and let herself out of the room in the dark. He slipped *on* some clothing and followed. At the farther end of the corridor, where the clash of flint and steel would be out of the hearing of one in the bed-chamber, she struck a light. He stepped aside into an empty room till she had lit a taper and had passed on to her boudoir. In a minute or two he followed. Arrived at the door of the boudoir, he beheld the door of the private recess open, and Barbara within it, standing with her arms clasped tightly round the neck of her Edmond, and her mouth on his. The shawl which she had thrown round her nightclothes had slipped from her shoulders, and her long white robe and pale face lent her the blanched appearance of a second statue embracing the first. Between her kisses, she apostrophised it in a low murmur **of** infantine **tenderness:**

My only love—how could I be so cruel to you, my perfect one—so good and true—I am ever faithful to you, despite my seeming infidelity! I always think of you—dream of you—during the long hours of the day, and in the night-watches! O Edmond, I am always yours! Such words as these, intermingled with sobs, and streaming tears, and dishevelled hair, testified to an intensity of feeling in his wife which Lord Uplandtowers had not dreamed of her possessing.

Ha, ha! says he to himself. This is where we evaporate—this is where my hopes of a successor in the title dissolve—ha, ha! This must be seen to, verily!

Lord Uplandtowers was a subtle man when once he set himself to strategy; though in the present instance he never thought of the simple stratagem of constant tenderness. Nor did he enter the room and surprise his wife as a blunderer would have done, but went back to his chamber as silently as he had left it. When the Countess returned thither, shaken by spent sobs and sighs, he appeared to be soundly sleeping as usual. The next day he began his countermoves by making inquiries as to the whereabouts of the tutor who had travelled with his wife's first husband; this gentleman, he found, was now master of a grammar-school at no great distance from Knollingwood. At the first convenient moment Lord Uplandtowers went thither and obtained an interview with the said gentleman. The schoolmaster was much gratified by a visit from such an influential neighbour, and was ready to communicate anything that his lordship desired to know.

After some general conversation on the school and its progress, the visitor observed that he believed the schoolmaster had once travelled a good deal with the unfortunate Mr. Willowes, and had been with him on the

occasion of his accident. He, Lord Uplandtowers, was interested in knowing what had really happened at that time, and had often thought of inquiring. And then the Earl not only heard by word of mouth as much as he wished to know, but, their chat becoming more intimate, the schoolmaster drew upon paper a sketch of the disfigured head, explaining with bated breath various details in the representation.

It was very strange and terrible! said Lord Uplandtowers, taking the sketch in his hand. Neither nose nor ears!

A poor man in the town nearest to Knollingwood Hall, who combined the art of sign-painting with ingenious mechanical occupation, was sent for by Lord Uplandtowers to come to the Hall on a day in that week when the Countess had gone on a short visit to her parents. His employer made the man understand that the business in which his assistance was demanded was to be considered private, and money ensured the observation of this request. The lock of the cupboard was picked, and the ingenious mechanic and painter, assisted by the schoolmaster's sketch, which Lord Uplandtowers had put in his pocket, set to work upon the god-like countenance of the statue under my lord's direction. What the fire had maimed in the original the chisel maimed in the copy. It was a fiendish disfigurement, ruthlessly carried out, and was rendered still more shocking by being tinted to the hues of life, as life had been after the wreck.

Six hours after, when the workman was gone, Lord Uplandtowers looked upon the result, and smiled grimly, and said:

A statue should represent a man as he appeared in life, **and** that's as he appeared. **Ha! ha! But 'tis done to good purpose, and not idly.**

He locked the door of the closet with a skeleton key, and went his way to fetch the Countess home.

That night she slept, but he kept awake. According to the tale, she murmured soft words in her dream; and he knew that the tender converse of her imaginings was held with one whom he had supplanted but in name. At the end of her dream the Countess of Uplandtowers awoke and arose, and then the enactment of former nights was repeated. Her husband remained still and listened. Two strokes sounded from the clock in the pediment without, when, leaving the chamber-door ajar, she passed along the corridor to the other end, where, as usual, she obtained a light. So deep was the silence that he could even from his bed hear her softly blowing the tinder to a glow after striking the steel. She moved on into the boudoir, and he heard, or fancied he heard, the turning of the key in the closet-door. The next moment there came from that direction a loud and prolonged shriek, which resounded to the farthest corners of the house. It was repeated, and there was the noise of a heavy fall.

Lord Uplandtowers sprang out of bed. He hastened along the dark corridor to the door of the boudoir, which stood ajar, and, by the light of the candle within, saw his poor young Countess lying in a heap in her nightdress on the floor of the closet. When he reached her side he found that she had fainted, much to the relief of his fears that matters were worse. He quickly shut up and locked in the hated image which had done the mischief, and lifted his wife in his arms, where in a few instants she opened her eyes. Pressing her face to his without saying a word, he carried her back to her room, endeavouring as he went to disperse her terrors by a laugh

in her ear, oddly compounded of causticity, **predilection**, and brutality.

Ho—ho—ho! says he. Frightened, **dear one**, hey? What a baby 'tis! Only a joke, sure, **Barbara**—a splendid joke! But a baby should not go to closets at midnight to look for the ghost of the **dear** departed! If it do, it must expect to be terrified **at** his aspect—ho—ho—ho!

When she was in her bed-chamber, and had quite come to herself, though her nerves were still much shaken, he spoke to her more sternly: Now, my lady, answer me: do you love him—eh?

No—no! she faltered, shuddering, with her expanded eyes fixed on her husband. He is too terrible—no, no!

You are sure?

Quite sure! replied the poor broken-spirited Countess.

But her natural elasticity asserted itself. Next morning he again inquired of her: Do you love him now? She quailed under his gaze, but did not reply.

That means that you do still, by G——! he continued.

It means that I will not tell an untruth, and do not wish to incense my lord, she answered, with dignity.

Then suppose we go and have another look at him? As he spoke, he suddenly took her by the wrist, and turned as if to lead her towards the ghastly closet.

No—no! Oh—no! she cried, and her desperate wriggle out of his hand revealed that the fright of the night had left more impression upon her delicate soul than superficially appeared.

Another dose or two, and she will be cured, he said to himself. It was now so generally known that the Earl **and** Countess were not in accord, that he took no great

trouble to disguise his deeds in relation to this matter. During the day he ordered four men with ropes and rollers to attend him in the boudoir. When they arrived, the closet was open, and the upper part of the statue tied up in canvas. He had it taken to the sleeping-chamber. What followed is more or less matter of conjecture.

I suppose you would like to hear the conjectures, Mr. De La Mare? I think we might skip them, he answered. Instead of reading the entire text, I said, I will remind you of what happened, though I should like you to have heard it in Mr. Hardy's own words, for the story will lose in mine. When husband and wife retired to their chamber for the night, Lady Uplandtowers saw at the foot of the bed a tall wardrobe which she did not recognise as part of the furniture of the room, but she asked no questions. Lord Uplandtowers, however, was in no humour to be baffled by her silence, and he told her that a playful little thought had come into his mind. Her ladyship, not wishing to seem morose, asked what this could be, and learnt that his whim had been to erect a little shrine; and on these words he offered to show her what it contained. And without waiting for her answer he thrust out his leg, pressing a spring with his toe which caused the doors of the wardrobe to open slowly. And what do you think, Mr. De La Mare, and what do you think, Mr. Freeman, the wardrobe contained? I think, said Mr. De La Mare, that you are misquoting Mr. Hardy. Lord Uplandtowers did not press a spring with his toe; he pulled a cord. Which is, of course, I interjected, much more like Æschylus than if he had pressed a spring with his toe! I noticed, too, said Mr. De La Mare, that you accentuated the phrase: he slipped on some clothing. I stumbled over the phrase, I answered, be-

cause I thought he had fallen over the clothing, but apparently he had only pulled on his trousers and buttoned himself into a loose coat. I think, said Mr. De La Mare, that you lay too much stress upon trifles.

As the conversation seemed to be getting strained, Mr. Freeman began to speak of the *Prometheus Unbound*, and, forgetful of Mr. Hardy, the poets diverged into praise of Shelley, myself quoting sparingly from the great antiphonal outburst in the fourth act, for I had already spoken a great deal, and it was pleasant for me to listen to two poets reciting the passages that had become fixed in their memories.

From the Indian deep
The flying-fish leap
And mix with the sea-birds half asleep.

Was it Mr. De La Mare who uttered the lines? My **poor** memory! my poor memory! as a former conversationalist would say. I can discourse, cried I, on the flight of the eagle, of the wild dove, of the hawk, of the swallow, of the king-fisher, even of the flying-fish from the Indian deep, but not of the barndoor fowl. My readers have read *L'Education Sentimentale*, and remember Flaubert's artifices to escape from the difficulty of dialogue: *En recontrant Pellerin sur le boulevard Armani lui dit: Bonjour, alors Us parlent de choses indifferentes*. And we too, Mr. Freeman, Mr. De La Mare, and myself, spoke on the night in question of different things: of the spiritual death of all the great pictures in the National Gallery, upon a paper with a wriggly pattern, suited to a billiard room, sometimes purple and sometimes grey, and of the strange appearance of Lord Ribblesdale in more hunting breeches and crop than ever existed since the time of

Nimrod, a grey thing very like oilcloth, placed between two flamboyant Turners, mischievously placed, we thought. And then we talked of the future that awaited the National Gallery when all the Sargent portraits bequeathed to it arrive in vans, stopping in front of the perturbed director on the steps, now thinking how the housing of nine Palestinian refugees and the majority of our generals can be managed. From one van half a dozen generals will emerge in top boots, from another a dozen, and, alas! a third van arrives with a dozen and a half. Twelve threes are thirty-six, twice thirty-six are seventy-two—seventy-two top boots, and how many medals! A new wing will have to be built for the splendid exhibition of all these icy effigies; and we imagined the abashed director retiring to his office to consider the increased prices of building materials, saying to himself: Perhaps fifty thousand pounds will be required to build a new wing, but the tax-payer will not feel the money drifting from his pockets, so great is his admiration for photography and for pictures that remind him of his favourite art. But conversation on painting is not easily carried on among poets, and when Mr. De La Mare began to speak his admiration of Hardy's description of a certain heath, I went to the bookcase and returned with the book, saying: I shall be surprised if it contains anything differing in kind from Fanny's grave, for a man's writings differ in quality, but not in kind. The description of the heath is at the beginning of the book, said Mr. De La Mare, and thanking him for coming to my assistance, I began to read:

The most thorough-going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon; he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours **and**

beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests and mists. Then Egdon was avowed to reciprocity: for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms: and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognised original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like them. It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame: but like man, slighted and enduring: and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.

I read this admired passage with alarm, saying to myself: They have read and kept a memory of *Alastor* and *The Leech-gatherer*, and they cannot have forgotten Landor, or Pater, or Mr. Kipling; any page of *Kim* provides a sample of English that will enable them to appraise Mr. Hardy's prose. And not wishing to embarrass my guests, I did not wait for their surrender, but began to speak at once, protesting that I would retract all I had said and burn all I was moved to write if they could point to one ardent sentence in the page they had themselves chosen for my edification. The description of the heath, I said, is not so absurd as the description of Fanny's grave, but it is as blind: Wild regions of ob-

scurity! We must not be afraid of the word *weak*, for it is the word that calls Mr. Hardy into the dock, and the village schoolmaster should be able to write more correctly than: *Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests and mists.* Bad grammar flourishes in weak minds, and were the weed *more usually* removed, the sentence would not read any better; indeed, I prefer it as it stands, accepting *more usually* if not as an apology, at least as in keeping with the rest of Mr. Hardy's mind. Alas, we cannot overcome our natural deficiencies, but we may discover them, and Mr. Hardy should have discovered, in the course of a long life, that as his sense of grammar did not allow him to rise to purple passages, it were well to eschew these altogether. Listen, ye admirers of Mr. Hardy:

Then it (the heath) became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognised original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like them. But what purpose, asked Mr. De La Mare, will be served by this critical examination of Mr. Hardy's English? We are three men of letters, I answered, and it is our business to inquire why the public should have selected for their special adoration ill-constructed melodramas, feebly written in bad grammar, and why this mistake should have happened in the country of Shakespeare. It is true that an artist is never judged impartially by his contemporaries. Shelley believed Byron to be one of England's great poets; Goethe agreed with him; yet to-day everybody is a better judge of Byron's poetry than were Shelley

and Goethe, without, however, any very conspicuous advance having been made in criticism; indeed, it would seem that criticism is retrograde, and that of late the newspapers are, shall we say, *almost* too feverishly interested in immortality.

CHAP. VIII.

IT was at that moment that the door opened, and Mabel seemed to appear with the delightful *surtout* that, alas, I did not bring back last year from Paris, the mirror a little dim and worn in places, but the rich gilding of the chased frame in fine condition. But seeing it in my thoughts laden with heavy, cut-glass decanters and thick, stumpy glasses, I began to lament that the promptings of an unessential economy had prevented me from purchasing it, and then to ask why I had wished to possess it—to prove to my guests that I was a man of taste? If so, all my pictures were acquired for the same end, or——But why seek to peer into our hearts, for we shall never apprehend our instincts; enough it is to know that our instincts are our own and that our reason was picked up at random. Steer, the most instinctive of us, is instigated by a love of beautiful things, so pure that he would collect Chelsea figures and Greek coins though he knew of a certainty that no eyes but his own would see them; and whilst listening to my present guests I came to thinking that brief portraits of the men among whom my life has been passed would be appreciated by the readers of *Conversations in Ebury Street*—portraits of Steer, Tonks, M'Coll, Harrison and Sickert. But how may these be presented? I asked myself, certain that nothing is more interesting in literature than a portrait. But I must see them **as portraits. Can I?** Steer, for instance, whom I **had the**

wit to pick out as the only painter in London who could fill the blank that Manet's death had made in my life.

Mr. Freeman and Mr. De La Mare carried on an animated conversation, to which I gave a semblance of attention, till they reminded me that if they were to catch their train . . . etc.; and having seen them off I returned, seeing Steer in my thoughts, fat and sleek, in his arm-chair, his hands crossed piously over his belly's slope, his cat curled in an armchair on the other side of the fireplace, both carefully screened from the danger of draughts. The improved cat likes a quiet existence; his home guarantees absence of change; he never breaks or soils; he likes to be fed, to sleep; and when he awakes he cleanses himself and walks out alone. Never did two different animals partake more closely of the same nature. All the same, there are differences. The cat, it is true, is without friends, but he recognises those who frequent 109, Cheyne Walk. He will bask occasionally on Tonks's knees, but he soon wearies of strange knees and leaves the room with dignity; and Steer, like his cat, is only familiar with those he has known for twenty or thirty years, ladies excepted. Sir William Eden fidgeted him, and Sir William's presents of game embarrassed him.

Steer's annual outing, from June to the middle of October (he is a landscape painter), begins to torment him at the beginning of May, and if I were to go to spend a May evening with him it would be needless to ask for the reason of his dejected mien. The answer I would get would be the same as I got the year before: I think that people go mad about this time of year; here is a letter from a woman inviting me to dinner! But, Steer, you never go away till June. You need not begin to pack for the next three or four weeks, and your servants are old friends. But many arrangements have to be made, he

answers, and falls back into meditations, his eyes fixed on his cat, who, happily, is unaware of the impending change.

Once Steer is settled in the county he has chosen for his summer occupation, every hour is devoted to his work. When he is not painting he is considering if the boats in the foreground might not be taken out with advantage. Do they attract the eye? Are they necessary to fill a blank in the composition? He goes away with one or two painters, whose great honour it is to accompany him; once they were Brown and Coles. Brown paints but little nowadays, and Coles—I have forgotten what has happened to him. Their places have been secured by others. The three meet at dinner and the evenings are sometimes wearisome to Steer, for he must talk to his friends and his mind is away among his tones. But though his friends may weary him, he would not encourage me to come down to break the monotony of his evenings, for his thoughts are fixed on the next morning. If the weather be fine he will go in search of a motive; if it rains he will work in a barn, transferring a water-colour on a canvas, with modifications, of course. So a rainy day is welcome, for Steer dreads getting wet even as his cat, and he dreads draughts; draughts prevail even in sheltered nooks, and draughts are like wild beasts, always on the watch for whom they may devour. The four or five months in which it is possible to paint landscapes in England are the prime of Steer's life, and woe to him who would seek to disturb it! In an ill-advised moment Tonks once wrote to him insisting that it was his duty to come to town to judge a painting competition at the Slade. And for a long time Tonks never spoke of Steer's arrival in London without quoting Homer:

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heav'nly goddess, sing.

And from these observations, made during a period of some thirty or more years and carefully noted, a real man should begin to emerge. Indeed the reader should have begun to see and to appreciate, but in Nature there are always discrepancies, which the writer must remove lest they jar. But I will be daring; nothing shall be excluded, and on my reader I must rely to harmonise what I am about to say with what I have already said. None would guess that this rather fat, lazy man was once fond of dancing, and that his life was illuminated by a love story. We pitied his suffering when the lady married. Tonks and Brown, Harrison and M'Coll, urged him to hasten after the fugitive, and overtake her before it was too late. I think that we should have all liked to have seen Steer married. He was so happy unmarried that it was only natural we should wish to put his fortitude to the test. There is only one thing that a man cares to do always—his own words, and I discover in them the whole man, body and soul.

We all strive towards oneness, but only Steer has attained it, and his followers are almost as numerous as St. Paul's. We find among them a Timothy, an Apollos, an Aquila, a Priscilla, a Lydia, a Eunice. Brown and Coles and Tonks and Grey and Wheatley have worshipped as fondly as their predecessors did, shall we say in A. D. 57? Coles, like Barnabas, disappeared suddenly. I discover likenesses to Peter in Brown, and were I to give thought to it, I should discover a modern Titus, Gaius, Erastus, and many others. But a portrait should not be overladen with detail; suffice it to say here that the **places** of Brown and Coles have been taken by **Ronald Grey**

and Wheatley, and these bring an abundance of love and admiration somewhat disquieting to the master, whose genius it is to continue to paint for himself, encouraged by a quiet sympathy such as he gets from his cat, who never bounds about him or bursts into praise at his approach. If it were given to him to choose, he would prefer a more quiet applause than he receives. Ici le document me fait défaut absolument, as my friend Goncourt used to say. Steer rarely writes letters and seldom expresses hard opinions, but in the recesses of his mind I cannot help thinking that if not a thought, at least a feeling is in process of incubation that perhaps Ronald Grey's appreciations lack contrast, the humblest sketch being hailed in almost the same words as the masterpiece that has taken months to achieve. Wheatley bounds and barks somewhat, and perhaps Steer has felt that Wheatley would do well to notice the dignity of the cat, how he approaches his master, how he prowls about him and retires to the armchair, having fully expressed himself in a single purr; and Steer thinks, I am convinced, that purring is preferable to any other mode of expression.

For a complete portrait of Steer I shall have to tell of his shrewdness in securing a house perfectly suited to his needs and in harmony with himself; and this he has done so well that every reader will feel that he might have guessed from what has gone before that Steer would be certain to find a house that overlooked an admirable reach of river, and that his painting would be accomplished in a drawing-room rather than in a vast, empty studio with nothing but easels and a lay figure in it—in a word, a room in which a cat would not be able to endure his life. Nor need I tell the reader that there are many beautiful pieces of furniture in Steer's house and some choice pictures, collections of coins, Chelsea china, Japa-

nese prints, brass Persian salvers, beautifully engraved. The brass trays, or salvers, he brought home not long ago from some obscure rag-and-bone shop. Tonks and I admired them, envy burning in our hearts that we had not done so much, and shame stifling us, for we both knew we might have passed them over without perceiving their rarity. We sigh and regret that we have not spent as much time as Steer in hunting up rag-and-bone shops within a radius of many miles. Steer is acquainted with them all and with many odd corners where wine and cigars can be purchased at trifling cost.

But to show Steer in all his shrewdness would be to stray from essential into subordinate lines of portraiture, and the reader will perhaps perceive Steer more clearly if I leave details which, though they are true, might be easily true of any other man, and tell of his devotion to his old servant, now about eighty-five or six, whom he remembers as having bathed him in his childhood. His portrait of the old lady, as he calls her, represents many months of labour and anxiety. I think I have heard him say that she sat for the portrait some fifty or sixty times, and when we came to admire, the picture was looked upon by all as a miracle, by Grey, Tonks, and some others whose names have fallen out of my memory. And the awe occasioned by the picture did not pass away quickly; the disciples and followers left 109 overcome, whereas we, Tonks and myself, being old friends, waited for the return of the master. I was among the most perfervid admirers of the portrait, yet critical, for when we stood alone in front of it I summoned enough courage to ask Tonks if the blue vase on the shelf did not seem a trifle out of tone. His face led me to expect a reproof, and I judged myself to have escaped lightly when he said in an awed voice: It will go down, and begged me not to

mention my suspicion of out of tone to Steer when he returned from his front door. Of course not! I replied, and if I tell the story now it is for the sake of chronicling how Steer reviews his work day by day, straining away after perfection even as I do, for the next time he showed me the portrait the blue vase did not jar the harmony of the picture. I cannot tell at what moment I was proudest of my friend—when I noticed that he had lowered the tone of the blue vase, or when I learnt incidentally that he had spent the summer painting in a county that did not suit him because of a train service that would bring him to London in a couple of hours if a telegram should summon him to the old lady's bedside. But what help could you bring? I may have asked, and if I did, he did not answer: I should not like her to go away without my bidding her good-bye. Steer would not have answered so tritely. I know the thought that was in his mind better than the words which he could not find or did not dare to speak; but since I must interpret his emotive dumbness, I will say: We have lived together so long in life that it would be a pity to be separated when the passing comes. So did I understand him one night whilst bidding him good-bye at the corner of Vale Avenue, and my pride in my friend's nobility made short the way to Ebury Street. In Sloane Square I stopped to ask myself if I would leave a book I was writing to sit by a dying woman, giving to her the only gift that I could of value, a touch of the hand, the sound of my voice, and she eighty-six years old? I pursued my way through Eaton Square downcast and yet pleased to find a self in me, an ultimate self, I said, and this is why I can do nothing **if** disinclined, being wholly and irreparably given to art. We cannot repudiate ourselves; even the saints **failed to regret their**

past sins, and they did well, for without sin there is no repentance and we are as the beasts of the field.

My pen has tricked me into theological subtleties altogether out of keeping with my sitter, who is as free from abstract thinking as his cat is. He never rages against the Academy, as Brown does, nor does he look on it as the original of all the evil that art is heir to. He is too lazy to consider whether the Academy is altogether reprobate; it would be fatiguing and do no good, and so his thoughts return with serenity to the rag-and-bone shops, and when the tempter whispers around the doorposts of Cheyne Walk he turns a deaf ear, feeling among other things that he could not manage any further acquaintances, and that for him to join the Academy would be to leave his friends in the lurch. It cannot be that the thought has not dawned upon him that he is too big a man for an Academy; he can have hardly missed it, but it is not brooded; it comes and goes like a dream.

Here endeth the first portrait,

CHAP. IX.

IN private conversation Tonks has relegated Steer to the yeoman class and himself to the professional or the mercantile and I have no fault to find with this classification of himself and his friend; indeed, I avail myself of it gladly, for is it not a sort of preliminary summoning of my friends before a tribunal of select readers?

Before he was a painter Tonks was a surgeon, of what repute among his fellow-workers in the hospital I cannot tell; but my ignorance is of no moment in this portrait, for we need not have information of a man's whole life to write or paint his portrait; knowledge in art is often a bane, robbing us of our innocence, and whosoever knows

the human body by heart has to **unlearn a great deal** before he dares to entrust his career to his eyes. **And** to forget his anatomy, or to put it behind him, was the A.B.C. of Tonks's initiation; to throw out is harder than to take in, and the desire of art must have been strong in Tonks, for it obliged him to abandon the career he had chosen and in which he was successful, for another in which he might have been a failure. I remember my own suffering in a like dilemma, and Tonks must have hesitated till every moment of his life became a burden to him, almost an agony. He had been practising art in spare moments, but a doctor's spare moments are apt to seem commonplace, even silly, when transferred from his consulting-room to the New English Art Club. . . . A man who leaves his profession faces the world naked and ashamed—ashamed because to leave the road he has chosen to walk in is a confession of failure, naked because he has to put off the old man (exact knowledge), and live henceforth amid ecstasies, dreams, aspirations; humble aspirations, mayhap, but aspirations after all. Think, reader, what a shock it is for a man to leave one self without knowing that he can acquire another self. I shed tears, and the bitterest. Did Tonks shed tears? I do not know, but I do know that he has never regretted the step he took.

The first picture he exhibited in the New English **was** much admired, and Brown, who was then Slade Professor, appointed him soon after teacher of drawing at the Slade; **and** Tonks taught drawing whilst learning **to draw**. Teaching and learning are right and left hand, for there is no such thing as having learnt to write or to **draw**. We are always learning, and never was **a** man more anxious to learn and to teach than Tonks. He read everything **that was written about drawing**; he listened to **all that**

his friends had to say; he thought about drawing, and he practised drawing, praying that the secret might be vouchsafed to him, for art has become Tonks's religion. We all have a religion concealed somewhere about us, he says, and it would be hard to imagine this tall, gaunt man without a faith of some kind. Saint or schoolmaster, which is he? Certainly no gay hedonist, the most casual observer would say on meeting him in the street. A schoolmaster, perhaps, would be the choice of the passer-by, or a doctor, for none puts off the livery he has once worn, not entirely. A schoolmaster! There is nothing to be ashamed of. Was not Arnold a schoolmaster, yet he was a beautiful English poet. And the value that Tonks's enthusiasm for art has been to the Slade would be acknowledged by Brown, by Steer, by all those who worked with him and who are now working under him; for when Brown retired, his place was taken by Tonks, and the Slade has thriven, overtopping the Academy schools in results and popularity. Could it be else? Hatred of the Academy was Brown's thought, but Tonks forgets the Academy as the saint in heaven forgets the sinner in the world.

Tall, gaunt, angular, long-necked, small-headed, long-lipped, with nose high-bridged and vision concentrated on some lofty and distant horizon, Tonks proceeds, camel-like, with swinging gait and upright head. The camel is sober, obstinate, and given to little rages. After a long day's march he is content to browse on a few bushes, and after a long day's teaching at the Slade Tonks browses in his studio, departing a little from his camel-like nature; for whereas the camel will eat almost anything, Tonks will not sit down to New Zealand lamb, affirming that he can tell it at once from English lamb. But the pleasure he once took in a saddle of lamb in my house which was certainly New Zealand, allows me to attribute his **par-**

tiality to doctrine rather than to gluttony. He refers with much complacency to his judgment of cheese—English cheese, of course, but I have confidence only in his judgment of wine. But mayhap, being no bibber, preferring beer to any wine, liking *vin ordinaire* better than fine vintages, I am looked upon by Tonks coateemptuously whilst he smacks his long, wide lips over a glass of Pommard, for of love of good wine he has not been able to break himself; pleasure in wine exceeds his pleasure in renunciations. Once he smoked cigarettes without counting; now he has reduced himself to two after each meal, not one—two, not three—two. Of late years puddings and sweets he holds forbidden to him, without, however, being able to give a reason for his abstinences. He is therefore abstemious like the camel because it is his nature to be so. I doubt, however, if he will ever come to denying himself a glass of wine. M'Evoy thinks differently, averring that he will abandon wine for water, oil-painting for water-colour, water-colour for pastel, and will end, perhaps, as a painter in *tempera*, a mural painter, whose life is spent upon scaffolds, going up ladders, an English Puvis de Chavannes. M'Evoy's foretelling is a full measure of exaggeration, but Tonks has added a fine painting to be done of the London University, his finest work, without question. It is said that no man has been able to spy a rutting camel in the act, and Tonks is as modest in his, painting his pictures in the midst of desperate secrecy and answering me when I ask him what he is painting: You shall see some day. Whatever might be the work he was engaged on it was not being done clearly in the studio, and I tried to draw Steer into confidences; but my joke about the rutting camel, the great silhouette that the modesty of the beast enables him to hide even when the moon is full, did not unseal his lips.

He had clearly sworn not to tell, and he answered: A picture is an accident in our lives, but in Tonks's it is an event. What inference could I draw from such an answer? I meditated plans for the beguilement of Tonks, but he turned a deaf ear to my honied compliments, answering me: I paint, and I am interested in my painting more than in anything else, but. . . . The end of the sentence conveys the sense of a disappointed man, and as Steer and I go up the street together I murmur my sympathy, and Steer assures me that the disappointment I perceived is no more than a passing mood: He used to show us his pictures, but since that unfortunate evening. . . . After all, he admitted I was right, and acted on my advice.

Tonks had gotten a commission to paint the portraits of a man and wife who had lived in Victorian times, and he had imagined the twain in conversation in their parlour amid the fashion of the period. With a gesture he indicated to us the chimney-piece he had had built up in his studio, and we admired the crystal lustres and thought how sentiment had raised a veil between him and the long, ugly, wedge-like drops. We were glad that he had been lucky enough to discover the replica of a hearth-rug that his father used to stand on. He showed us the photographs that had been given to him to paint from, the beautiful daguerreotypes of the 'fifties, precise, explicit as heads by Van Eyck. The man, he said, will stand with his back to the fire, whiskers, braided coat, peg-top trousers; and his wife, reading a letter, will sit on the right, her crinoline filling the little rep sofa. She shall wear a gold locket. . . . His heart brimmed and overflowed, and he showed us the composition he had been seeking for the last two months, and I cried out without warning: Why, your man is ten feet high! An awful silence filled the studio. Tonks began to explain, saying

that though it might look wrong, the perspective was right; whereupon I turned to Steer and begged for his support, which Steer granted unwillingly, admitting, however, that the lady's head did seem too small. There's two months' work gone, utterly ruined, scrapped! cried Tonks, and it's all my own fault. Why do I show these things? Have I not had warnings enough before of the folly of it? It is as Steer says, Tonks; the woman's head is too small; no more than that. No; the whole thing is done for! I shall have to begin another composition! Why *do* I show these things? A picture that has been shown has no longer any interest for me. But we see Steer's pictures as he paints them, Tonks, and——Everybody is not the same, Tonks answered; my pictures should never be looked upon except by me till they are finished. But the model, Tonks! The models never look at pictures, never show interest in them. If the picture is a success and talked about and they look well in it, they like to hear about it, but in the picture itself they have no interest. I shall have to begin a new composition! There's nothing else to do—I shall have to begin a new composition! And seeing how distressed Tonks was, I became distressed even as he, perhaps more so, and begged him not to abandon his composition but to enlarge the lady's head. No; the picture would no longer be mine. I don't blame you, Moore; it's my own fault for having shown it to you. But you should be glad of having shown it, Tonks, if you insist upon making a new composition. To this Tonks did not answer, but towards the end of the evening he thanked me, saying: You did quite right to say what you thought. I should have found the mistake out within the next three or four days, if not, in the next week or two. You have saved me a lot of trouble, and we saw and heard no more of the picture till it was finished.

Readers of these pages will fall to thinking that henceforth Tonks welcomed criticism, criticism having saved him from much conjecturing and the delays thereof. But our characters *do* not change, or if they change they change slowly, and to discover why Tonks is more than ever shy to show his pictures whilst he is working on them, we have to suppose that his conscience is against allowing anything into his pictures that is not his own, a folly which nobody knows better than Tonks; for what is our own? Was it not Goethe who said that we cease to be original the moment we come into the world? an aphorism which I have never been able to accept, perhaps because I do not know the context. It may be that Goethe said that an artist, after having borrowed from everybody, past and present, endows all his borrowings with the colour of his own mind. Colour does not seem enough, and I will turn to the kitchen and ask the reader to think of the difference between the chicken plucked or half plucked hanging in the larder and the delightful fowl on the dish, brown and luscious with gravy and adorned with slices of bacon or sausage. The substance is the same in either case, but how different the appearance and the relish! So it is in art. Shakespeare took Orestes and created Hamlet; the same substance transformed in the cooking. Why should we be afraid of the words: in the cooking? We cannot degrade art; that is impossible. Moreover, we are only seeking to explain art in these pages as art has often been explained in Tonks's studio. He says: I think others are right to borrow, but I cannot; to do so would be against my conscience. I cannot tell you why, but it is so. The greatest painters have borrowed, I answered, Rembrandt, Michael Angelo; and Shakespeare. I know, I know, he cries, but I am different. And he is interested to hear from me that Landor was

more anxious about the purity of his work than Milton. But how, Tonks, did you get this conscience? Did you bring it into the world? You come from the professional or mercantile class. Now, tell me if the prejudices and conventions of your class, which were a help to you whilst you were a surgeon, are now no more than hitches and hindrances, from which you would escape if you could? Tonks answers: I do not think that any man can wish himself otherwise than as he is, and on my admitting this to be a truth, he vows that if I were to look sincerely into my own life I, too, would find scruples, not his scruples but other restraining influences, in a word, that I am not freer than he is. And from these remarks the question emerges how much of ourselves we inherit, how much is accidental, and how much we owe to circumstance.

Tonks, who has a taste for philosophy, is easily drawn into an argument that began with our kind and will be debated as long as our kind exists on earth, an interesting disputation, during which Steer, sheltered by several screens from draughts, meditates on the rarity of the gilding of a Thibetan idol that he saw that afternoon in some rag-and-bone shop in Bayswater. He does not hear Tonks say that if we do not feel comfortable or at home in the society of worldlings, it is because we have a religion and they have none, but wander from one amusement to another without getting any honey out of the flowers, like bees in a honeyless garden. The saints of old time must have been the same when the laity sought them out in their hermitages, or when the saints were called into the town. Your words recall, I interrupt, a page in the writings of Saint Teresa. She tells that the visits of the worldlings to the convent did not please the nuns and that all the conversation, which might easily be supposed to be a welcome variety, was no variety at all but a vex-

ation. We listen to our relatives, the saint says, when they come to see us; we try to seem pleased or displeased at their tidings; but their tidings seem to us irrelevant, futile, and we are glad when they leave us and our thoughts return to God and the eternal. A little later Steer is awakened, or nearly awakened, from his meditation on the Thibetan idol when Tonks denounces all ladies in society for not spending some part of their income on pictures, and the immorality of artists in gratifying with their wit and learning a society that is without art patrons. We may be in a season of scarcity, I interrupt, I don't say we aren't; but I don't see how anything we can do can bring about a season of plenty. Yes, cries Tonks, we can. Art is always latent in mankind and it only requires encouragement to bring it forth. If there was a response, there would be art, but there is no response. Whereupon we talk about the disappearance of the handicrafts and perhaps of the deleterious effect on education which is contemporaneous with the disappearance of beautiful things, and at last I say: Tonks, are you in favour of a tax that everybody whose income is above so much should purchase one work of art, good or bad, every year? And Tonks answers: I think I am!

Here endeth the second portrait,

CHAP. X.

IT **was** whilst thinking of Sickert, and how I might see him as a portrait, that I dropped into a sort of dream, from which I awoke suddenly asking myself by what associations of thought I had come upon Thersites in one of the galleys sailing for Troy; and whilst seeking the ways by which my mind had wandered as far back as three thousand years, I again dropped into dream, this

time awakened from my dream by Bixiou, who discovered in Henri Monnier and was added to *The Human Comedy*. And Sickert, I cried to myself, shall be added to the Comedy of the New English Art Club, if I live to do it, for like these, he, too, is a scoffer, like and unlike his ancestors in literature, more subtle but not less cruel than they. My mind continued to unfold, and very soon it began to reveal an assembly of the New English Art Club: Steer and Tonks and Brown (whom I am afraid I shall think of for evermore as the wise Ulysses, the dauntless Achilles, and the doughty Ajax), in front of a picture by the late Mr. Shannon. Steer, Brown and Tonks raised approving hands; the residue followed suit; and the carpenters, thinking the picture had been received unanimously, were about to mark it A (*A* stands for *Accepted*, and guarantees the picture against the accidents of space and reconsidered opinions). Sickert was, however, in time. *Je m'y oppose!* he cried. The carpenters' faces took looks of amazement, and the jury, understanding somewhat better, wondered at this sudden employment of the French language, and the appearance which Sickert had begun to put on: the lithe body, the round head, the sheathing and unsheathing of the claws. A great deal of his magical word-play has vanished, for I am reading from a palimpsest, but eked out with conjectures here it is:

I have ventured to call back a picture that would have been passed unanimously by a show of hands if I had not kept mine in my pockets. I kept them there somewhat ostentatiously, as I should not have done if the picture before the jury were some small thing done by a harmless lady on her holiday, worthy of an odd corner. But Mr. Shannon's portrait strikes a death-blow at our very club, which I have always understood was founded as a protest

against the false art the Academy favours. Am I right in this? I put it to you, Steer, to you, Brown, to you, Tonks; and to you all, gentlemen of the jury, I appeal for a decision on this very vital point. Is the club for or against the Academy? Sickert waited for a moment for the members of the New English to reply. Brown, you are the oldest member present; I appeal to you. A bull downed his head at the sight of a red flag, and this quest adroitly put by Sickert brought Brown over to his side: This club is certainly against the Academy! And when Steer and Tonks and the residue acquiesced in Brown's definition of the club's aims, Sickert continued: Now that we are agreed that the mission of the New English is not to uphold the Academy, will you—Steer, Brown, and Tonks (do not all speak together, for I should not be able to catch your words), tell me in what way the portrait that has just been brought back differs from the portraits that Mr. Shannon exhibits yearly in the Academy? I see the same background, hard, disagreeable, and as gritty as pumice-stone, and upon it, in a material still harder than pumice-stone, a sort of tin duchess, with highly-coloured cheeks and lips and rose-tinted fingers. Pumice-stone and tin is what I see. Now, if you see anything else, and can explain to me why my seeing is wrong, I stand condemned as a person not fit to sit on the jury of the New English Art Club. And if you can't tell me in what way this picture differs from other Shannons, all of which are in pumice-stone and coloured tin, you will, I hope, not jeopardise the existence of our club by exhibiting the picture, and oblige me to resign. Look into the background, gentlemen; look into the face and hands.

Shannon is always hung in the Academy, said Brown; why does he want to send his pictures here? And to this

somebody answered: Why, indeed. He sends his best things to the Academy. And these arguments and many others seeming good to the jury, it was decided that anything were better than that a schism should arise in the New English Art Club, especially as the cause of the schism would be described in the Press of a certainty as a division of opinion, some members being desirous of following the traditions enforced by the Academy, whilst others wished to break away from it. We know Master Sickert, cried the dauntless Achilles, and that is how he will put it. And after a little more conference, the canvas that had been marked A as *Accepted* was now marked R. Somebody asked if the luncheon hour had not come and gone. We shall meet in another hour, said Brown, and the jury dispersed, Sickert reminding me as he went out of a friend of mine, a leopard called John, whom I used to scratch through the bars of his cage for his pleasure; and doing this once with the point of my umbrella, the ribs got entangled in the bars so that I could not draw it back, and John, quickly seizing his opportunity, possessed himself of my umbrella and slowly tore it to pieces before my eyes, highly amused at my discomfiture. And just like John, Sickert seemed to be amused.

I did not altogether enjoy John's triumph, but I appreciated Sickert's perhaps more than any member of the jury; and being a bit of a Thersites myself, I could not suppress a record of it in my article in *The Speaker*, thereby bringing Brown down the gallery on the night of the annual supper of the New English Art Club to tell me that Shannon wished to make my acquaintance! For why? I asked Brown, who answered me that Shannon's grievance against me was not that I spoke unfavourably of his work, but because I revealed the secrets of the hanging committee. But why did you undertake to carry

his message? Brown, I think you acted very unwisely! And I appealed to the wise Ulysses, who was of opinion that I would do better to confine myself to the discussion of pictures that were hung and resist the beguilement of those that were not hung. But Brown—why did he come from Shannon with a proposal to introduce me? Did he wish to see a fight? But there was no fight, said the wise Ulysses; and the matter was forgotten by him and Brown and Tonks, and would have remained forgotten had I not announced a year or two later that having written enough articles for a book I had sent in my resignation to *The Speaker*, advising the Editor to appoint Sickert in my place. The silence that fell alarmed me. We are sorry you are not going to write any more about art; we think it a pity, said Steer. We hope, said Tonks, that though you cease to be a regular contributor, you will keep the flag flying. Sickert writes very cleverly, but one never knows what he is going to say, or what view he will take on any subject. We know Master Sickert, he continued, better than he knows himself; and his course is always so zig-zag that when I hear he is writing an article I seek the most incongruous opinion I can think of as being the very one he will be most likely to uphold. But, Tonks, outside of his painting an artist may frivol, I answered. If he write about art he should write seriously or not at all; art is my religion. And Tonks continued: Is Sickert's admiration of Poynter's cast-iron serious? I answered that Sickert would like to have Poynter's gift, to employ it differently. Moreover, I've heard you, Tonks, talking kindly about a certain early Poynter: a woman arranging her hair before a mahogany Victorian glass. That is different; I can forgive him all his articles about Poynter, but I can't forgive him his article in praise of the man who does the portraits in the *Entr'acte*.

I suppose you **know that the *Entr'acte* man works from photographs?**

The Speaker was published on Saturday, but private subscribers received it on Friday evening, and every Friday evening we opened the paper with trembling hands, expecting to read an attack on Rembrandt or Titian, or both. But an attack on either would be too obvious a way of setting Chelsea by the ears, and whatever else may be said against Master Sickert, he cannot be called obvious, spoke the fiery Achilles. So long as he keeps off the Slade, all will be well, I answered; and every week we looked down his columns for the **word Slade**, and never finding it began to look upon the omission of the attack on Brown's teaching as a piece of almost flagrant originality. He seems absorbed, I said to myself, in upholding the claims of the music-hall as a source **of** inspiration and his talk turns on the Sisters Lima. Brown and Steer and Tonks would prefer talks about Turner, Constable, and Gainsborough; and M'Coll must be feeling lonesome, for not once has Stevens's name appeared **in** Sickert's articles. What! cried I to myself, another article on the Sisters? This is really too much! But so long as the Slade is overlooked. . . . And after all, Degas did discover a divine art in the *café chantant*. Sickert cannot for the present get away from Whistler, who hated England and continued the French tradition, said Steer. But Sickert is never anything for long, and Whistler **will** be repudiated by and by.

And so did Chelsea live a-top of the toe of expectation, certain that things could not go on as they were **going** on, expecting an outbreak every week. An outbreak **for** sure, but what will it be like? Questions of this kind we put to ourselves **and** to each other, till Sickert, **wearying** suddenly of the Sisters, began **to write about the use of**

transfer paper in lithography, declaring the practice to be fraudulent—if not those words, words which allowed an action for libel to be brought against him and the paper he was writing for. He had for some reason left *The Speaker* and was publishing his opinions in *The Saturday Review*. How the change had come about the historians will ultimately discover, but in this little paper we need chronicle no more than that soon after the libel action Sickert took a studio in Paris; and though we were glad to hear that the French dealers appreciated his painting, and that exhibitions of his work were held every year or more in some gallery, we longed to have him back. We loved him, with all his faults; our dinner parties fell languid on our lives, and the names of Turner, Constable, and Gainsborough no longer inspired us, for he was no longer by to set our preferences at naught in witty articles. Steer and Brown and Coles went to the country and brought back pictures, and Tonks pondered the pre-Raphaelites; and all the aftermath, 1850, was collected at the Tate. We read what Conody and Rutter had to say, but their words were as dust and ashes, for we were wondering what Sickert would have had to say about Windus and Sands and Hughes. We lived in recollections of him, and our best talks were those in which was related news of the enviable repute he was winning on the *boulevards*. We railed at his limitations and lauded the luscious painting of his Dieppe streets, and heard without jealousy that his river banks were inquired for in a rising market. We were glad to hear these things, for we wished Sickert well, and desired to see him at our dinner tables, but knew we should not get him back till his French fortune began to fail him. Unless indeed his own natural wantonness brings him back to us, we said; and whilst the words were on our lips he was wearying of French studios, French

food, the French language, and of his friend Jacques Blanche.

Our next tidings were that he had been seen in London, at which we rejoiced greatly, for we needed his pen; none other could write down the terrible heresies that had arisen amongst us. So said the fiery Achilles, and we all felt with Tonks that Sickert had come back to scotch the head of Post-Impressionism, an evil thing that had seduced the most gifted of the Slade students, those very ones that Tonks had relied upon to continue the tradition of Turner and Gainsborough and Constable, with a thought now and then for those of Millais and Holman Hunt. And it was about this time that burly Wyndham Lewis began to stalk the land with a fat book under his arm called *Blast*, gaining for himself the name of the new Beelzebub in Chelsea. And there was Roger Fry, too, who on his return from France began to lecture about some pictures he had seen in a town called Aix; disciples flocked, all the old figures reappearing: Timothy, Apollos, Eunice, Lydia, for the world was weary of representative art, and the people went about crying: Cezanna! Cezanna! The mind creates; the substance is but a fable, and no longer shall we paint the poor poppy of the field or garden but the archetypal poppy which is in heaven. And this doctrine seeming to threaten the very existence of the Slade, the New English Art Club, its adjunct, began to consider if it would not be better to save some of its skin rather than lose the whole of it, which might well befall if the works of the reformers were withheld any longer from the public. But Steer and Brown and Tonks could not act on a Committee whose first business was to find place on the line for canvases which they believed to be sins against the truth, against Apollo. All credit would they lose for themselves and for their art,

and to make matters easier for the Committee they **went** into exile, as the ancient Gods did in the third or fourth century.

There is perhaps nothing sadder in this world than Gods, in exile, and I do not think I shall forget the sadness of the evenings we spent in 109, Cheyne Walk, and in Vale Avenue, sitting together asking ourselves if Sickert would come to play St. George and the dragon for us, writing about the forthcoming exhibition of pictures at the New English, mingling the old faith with the new; only he could do this with authority because of his numerous following. Would he take sides? To side with Wyndham Lewis would be to decry his own beautiful painting, and we did not believe that Sickert would do this even for the sake of setting people by the ears, a pleasure which he abstains from with difficulty. We asked ourselves if he would attempt to discern the virtues and the vices of Cubism and Post-Impressionism. An article on the two schools would set Chelsea talking. But what had become of Sickert? We had not seen or heard of him for many months. Our last news of him was that he **had** a studio in Venice, and possibly he still kept it on; he had **had** another in Dieppe—had he relinquished that one? **And** the studio in Fitzroy Street and the two studios in Charlotte Street? At any one of these he might be **found**; if he were not there himself his address would **be known to** the caretaker, and excursions to these **north-ern streets** were meditated. But I do not think anybody **went** in search of Sickert; each pleaded the fullness of **his** own life; **and** it was not till **a few weeks later that we heard that** Sickert had gone **to live in Camden Town, where he had many pupils, men and women, all working under his direction.** A little later we heard that Sickert had **been elected Professor of Drawing at the Westminster**

School. We were not prepared for such activities as these, and gazed at each other bewildered. Sickert came to visit us, and after one delightful evening, an echo of old time, we saw him no more. Again he had deserted us, and as there seemed but small hope that he would return to Chelsea, we resumed our old conversations in Cheyne Walk and in Vale Avenue: Constable, Gainsborough, and Sir John Millais's drawings in *Punch*; or we went to Hampstead and listened to M'Coll, who talked to us about Stevens's pictures and sculpture. We listened to his wisdom and enjoyed it, but Sickert was always at the back of our minds; it is the way of men to seek reasons and we could not yet understand why Sickert needed a studio in Venice, a studio in Paris, a studio in Dieppe, and three or four in London. A rumour was going about Chelsea that he received private pupils at Camden Town and dispensed instruction in drawing every evening at the Westminster School of Art. He seems to have resigned himself altogether to teaching, somebody said, and that evening or the next evening another rumour reached us that Goupil was making arrangements for an exhibition of his works on a large scale. The different rumours that reach us cannot all be true! cried Tonks. He cannot paint or draw and teach all day! an aphorism which neither Brown nor Steer nor I were in the humour to contest. In brief, the spirit of Sickert was over us; we could not get away from it. An imminency had come into our lives; we were like cattle in a field lowing at the approach of a thunderstorm. At last the crash came: Sickert had brought back a method of painting from France invented by himself, by means of which any intelligent pupil could be taught how to paint, not a great work destined for an eternity of admirations, but a picture that no reasonable jury would be found to reject. I am

afraid we shall lose half our students, said Tonks. The object of going to a school of art is to learn enough about painting and drawing to get a picture into an exhibition, said Brown, a doleful remark, which none of us dared to contest; and feeling that he had again been indiscreet, he added: The course of art will not be ultimately affected, but. . . . What do you think, Tonks? and without waiting for Tonks's answer he continued: If you should find yourselves able to accept some of Sickert's method of painting, there will be no desertions. But we shall be teaching a method in which we don't believe, cried the fiery Achilles. I shall resign!

No one spoke, and forgetful for a moment of the Gods in exile, I will take upon myself to explain to the reader Sickert's great discovery: how a pupil can attain quality—the gift that genius brings into the world, as such it had always been considered. Already I have overstated the case; Sickert never claimed that his method made over his genius to his pupils. His contention did not go further than to claim that his method enabled the pupil to escape from a quality not easily distinguishable from linoleum. The reader asks: But what is the quality easily distinguished from linoleum? and to help him I can do no more than to tell that every woman knows the difference in quality between silk at three or four shillings a yard and silk at five-and-twenty shillings a yard; but only painters know that Manet and Whistler's quality is more beautiful than any to be found in silk or satin, ivory or gold. But how did they do it? the reader asks, and I answer: Beauty of touch is easily recognisable on the piano or fiddle; but if I go further and say that touch is recognisable even on the printed page, the reader will give up hope, saying: I shall never be able to distinguish quality. But I would not have him lose hope, and to save

him from despair I will return without delay to Sickert, who in his meditations on how he might teach his pupils to avoid the quality so flagrantly expressed in linoleum, must often have murmured: The linoleum quality comes with the second painting, and until a method of teaching is discovered whereby the pupil can get—I will not say quality (quality is a gift from the Gods), but something that will seem like quality, teaching is vain. And on this much Sickert fell into still deeper meditations, out of which he roused with these words in his mind if not on his lips: Why shouldn't the paint be put on in dots? A face painted in that way may look as if the sitter had the smallpox, but the linoleum look at least will be avoided. But how is the difficulty of drawing to be overcome? Drawing has been the besetting difficulty of Ingres's life and of mine, and it is in correcting the drawing that the paint becomes linoleum. How then can the pupil. . . . He sighed, leaving the sentence unfinished, and the problem seemed insoluble till one day he jumped out of his chair crying: I have got it! Drawing, after all, is more or less a question of subject. If we leave out the hands of a woman playing the piano and cover them up with her cuffs, a great part of the hardship disappears. And a man standing on a hearthrug need not lean on the mantelpiece; he may stand on both legs, exactly like a post, and he may hold his hands behind his back. Moreover, the pupils need not trouble themselves about hands, nor faces, nor is their concern with figures. What we are after is quality, or something that will pass for quality. A gable-end with a sweep of pavement is enough for our purpose. Nor need the pupils trouble about values; tone—yes, but a picture may have quality without having values. Values were a sixteenth-century invention, and we will leave them to Steer. Sky: ultra-

marine broken with vermillion. A gable-end: brown broken with light-red. An excellent short-cut to gold, one which will come in useful should a music-hall inspire the pupil: Shadows: raw umber. Half-lights: yellow ochre. High-lights: Naples yellow; rather drawing-mastery, but the drawing-master knows the A.B.C. of teaching, and what we have to do is not to deride the drawing-master but to improve his methods, that is bring him up to date. The beautiful smooth quality, with the little ridge of paint when the round brush turns over, cannot be taught, but by the tap, tap, tap method the pupil will avoid linoleum, confining it to its place: back passages.

The young ladies who were attracted by Sickert's delightful manners and what remained of his original beauty (for Sickert as a young man—but of that anon), packed their trunks and in groups of twos and threes and single figures journeyed all over Europe painting gable-ends. A little later chimneypieces with glass ornaments all a-row became popular, and the end of it all was a multitudinous exhibition of pictures, held in the Albert Hall, I think, and the assembling of the Slade Professors to consider the new situation. Brown, who was looking forward to his retirement, walked across the studio *in* thought, and returning abruptly asked me to devote an article to the question. *Of* course, I answered, I am in your hands, but I doubt if there's any cause for gloom, rather for the throwing up of caps and crying: The age of Cinabuo has returned! The question is not how to stop a leakage, for there is no leakage; the Slade is crowded; you may begin to refuse pupils any day, the newspapers devote more space to the art of painting than ever and——The question, said Tonks, is: shall we adopt Sickert's method of teaching in the Slade?

If we don't, shall we be able to compete with Westminster? That is the question. But, my dear Tonks, there is no reason why you should modify your teaching; there is room for both schools, and for Cubism. My dear Moore, you're untroubled with a conscience, and will never understand a certain side of life. I cannot teach what I don't believe in. I shall resign if this talk about Cubism does not cease; it is killing me. And pleasantly conscious that I held my audience in the hollow of my hand, I said: Sickert has fallen in love with one of his pupils. I have forgotten her name, but she has the most wonderful cream neck. And you think, said Tonks, that a man in love has not time for anything but love? Not if he be truly in love, I answered. So, said Steer, the attractions of the lady will save the Slade from the trick of laying on the paint in dots! Beauty coming to the aid of art, I answered. But you have heard only a part of the story. The lady, though flattered by Sickert's courtship, is not certain that a younger man——How like a woman! cried Tonks. Will she be the first to refuse a man who, though fifty, is still one of the handsomest of men, and certainly the most winning? Youth triumphs over genius, I answered, but if she had seen Sickert. . . . Why do you stop? Tonks asked me.

My thoughts had gone back, I said, to some twenty years ago. I had come over from London to spend a week with Jacques Blanche at Dieppe, and was talking in the dining-room with him and his mother about the tapestry they were lucky to come upon in some old shop. How precise and strangely vague memory is! I can see the colour, every shade of the green, but nothing of the design; and the table, too, already laid, the napery, glass and silver catching the light, is part of my impression of Sickert coming in at the moment of sunset, his

paint-box slung over his shoulders, his mouth full of words and laughter, his body at exquisite poise, and himself unconscious of himself as a bird on a branch. No, I don't think that anybody was ever as young as Sickert was that day at Dieppe. A few months afterwards in London he shaved his moustache, a frizzle of gold—God only knows why! and ever since has sought new disfigurements: cropping his hair, growing a beard. All you know of him to-day is that which neither he nor Time can undo, the beauty of the line of the head and face, and what he cannot suppress or curtail, his wit. It flows always through his speech, and if we are captured by it, how much more easily will a woman be? Or do I exaggerate? Tonks, you are saying nothing. There's a good deal of truth in what you say, and I hope the young woman will appreciate her luck, answered swift-footed Achilles. And my eyes roving from him and falling upon the wise Ulysses, I asked: And you, Steer, what do you think? Whether her choice will fall on genius or youth? I think, said Ulysses, that old Jarvis, the furniture dealer at Hammersmith, once spoke words of wisdom to you: I don't say that when young girls marry men of fifty they don't love them, but when a girl has been bedded she begins to look after younger men. And you must not forget that Sickert's wife will see him every day, and I don't think he is a man one should see every day. You know the old story of the clown's wife, who said: Yes, my husband is talkative enough in the circus, but at home he is as silent and as melancholy as a cockroach. We will hope, said Brown, our doughty Ajax, that the lady is a young woman of such good sense that she will keep Sickert from the vice of Post-Impressionism. And the word rousing the fleet-footed Achilles, the rest of the evening was spent in our usual denuncia-

tions of it and other kindred heresies, parting as usual soon after eleven as men part who have lived their lives together united by an idea.

I know not which Saturday it was after the Saturday I have just related that brought to Vale Avenue the news that Sickert had at last succeeded in persuading the young woman to take him for better or for worse, the call of genius having proved in the end stronger than that of youth. We must give them a dinner, said I; and it was agreed that as Sickert's oldest friend I should be host. We must wear evening clothes, said Steer, in deference to the bride; and Tonks reminded me that a wedding feast would seem trite and commonplace if I were to forget the flowers, some floral wreaths for the table; and himself charged himself to bring a great posy to hand to Mrs. Sickert when she arrived. Or would it be better, I asked, to withhold the posy till the moment of their departure? Now, what fish would you like, Tonks? I might get a bass from Devon——Never mind the fish, but let there be champagne, for nothing makes a dinner *go* like champagne. And as you don't like writing letters, I'll write to tell them that we shall expect them at eight. So be it, I answered; all shall be as you wish it—champagne and flowers. We parted with restrained speech and furtive faces, and when we assembled on the balcony, our eyes set on the Victoria Street end, for they would come that way, the evening became more and more memorable, till, unable to bear the tension any further, I said: If they delay much longer my dinner will be spoilt. The ominous clock struck the half hour, and Steer asked how long we should *give* them, and I replied that it would indeed be disgraceful if they arrived and found us sitting at table; and Tonks, who always looks distressed if Steer's faintest

suggestion is not immediately acted upon, agreed that we should wait till nine. The cabs continued to go by, and it was not till the hands of the clock pointed to the quarter that Tonks cried: Look! This driver is seeking for a number over the way, and not finding it he crosses over. He is coming towards us! He is bringing them to us! The cab stopped, and I said: Now for the pretty shoes, the silk stockings, the grey silk dress. Grey, not white, it will be; registry office brides are wedded in grey. And intense was the moment when Sickert stepped out of the cab; intenser still the next moment, for the bride did not follow him. Why has he not brought her? Where is she? I cried, leaving the balcony and running down to meet him. You shall hear presently, said Sickert, speaking almost inaudibly. She is not dead? I could not check the words. No, she is not dead, he answered; and in mournful silence and dejected mien I led my old friend into my house and up the staircase into the presence of Tonks and Steer, who had come in from the balcony. She married the other fellow! was all he could say, and we sat staring at each other, unable to find words, and he as dumfounded as ourselves.

Dinner is served, sir. I'll tell you all about it after dinner, he whispered on the staircase, and our curiosity leaving us no peace we felt that we would have almost bartered the dinner for the story that was to come after dinner; and lest Sickert should change his mind and not tell it, I plied him with wine till the thought came to me that if he were to get tipsy we should not hear it, and the same thought must have been in the minds of Steer and Tonks, for the third time wine was offered to them they refused it. No more wine is needed, Mabel; well have coffee in the drawing-room, I said. But Mabel seemed

unable to bring herself to close the drawer of the side-board, and as I dared not ask her to leave we sat exasperated, till at last the closing of the door brought Sickert to his story. He began it in a low, stricken voice: She was always pleading for the morrow, saying that if I gave her time to get accustomed to the thought of marriage she would wed me. At last, coming to the end of my patience and unable to think of any other way out of the difficulty, I pressed her into a cab, saying: All your doubts will vanish at the sight of the registry office. The Camden Town registry office, Sickert continued, is not situated in a noble street, but she needn't have noticed it. She did, however, and guessing that it seemed paltry in her eyes, I said: We shall never see the street again. If you had any of the real affection you speak of for me, you wouldn't have asked me to marry you in so mean a street. I really would not like my people to know I was married in Camden Town. It was once a very pretty village, I replied, and with various arguments, all of them good and honest, I persuaded her to come upstairs, but she barely crossed the threshold when her courage seemed to fail her: There are no pictures on the walls! and seeing that nothing would satisfy her but her own parish, I said: You, haven't given notice. She answered that she had. But we shall not get to Pimlico before the registry office closes. Why do you want to be married to-day? she asked, turning suddenly, and feeling that I could not say the right thing in any circumstance, we got into the taxi and went for a drive. Anywhere, no matter where, so long as the drive be long, I cried; and the taxi-driver, seeming to understand, took us over Hampstead Heath, and the same things were said over and over again all the way to Barnet.

Did you go as far? I asked, unable to restrain my

curiosity. We were within a couple of miles of Barnet before she noticed that we were in the country, and taking fright at the fields and hedgerows, she said: We must go back, and I called to the taxi-driver to return, but he was running out of petrol and said we must go on to Barnet. At Barnet there was a long delay, for the taxi-driver had not had his dinner, and it was in the middle of Hampstead Heath that the taxi broke down. I spoke of my friends, mentioning Mr. Hammersley, but the taxi-man would not leave his machine, and she proposed that he should come inside and play gooseberry. And the three of you spent the night in the cab! I interjected. Did you sleep? No, he went off to sleep and snored, and she dozed a little on my shoulder, and when the heath began to lengthen out I asked her to come for a walk, and she answered: The taxi-man will think we want to leave without paying him; so we didn't go many yards. At eight o'clock the taxi-man began to push his machine, and as we couldn't let him push it by himself we all helped; but we couldn't get it very far, and I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't met another taxi, who took us in tow. Hammersley came down in his dressing-gown, and he heard from me that I wasn't married yet, Edith not liking to be married in Camden Town. Hammersley gave us breakfast, and by the time the taxi-man returned, his taxi mended, she told me her mind was made up. But on arriving at the registry office, she said: Look! look! There's Ernest! and she pointed to a tall fellow in a blue suit and a grey hat leaning on his cane at the door of the office. Are you going to marry him or me? I asked: and she replied: I don't know what I'm going to do now. You had better settle it between you. We agreed to leave it to her, but she said: You must settle it between you. As you can't make up your

mind to marry me, I said, I suppose you had better marry him. I can't wait any longer. And I left her with Ernest, whom she married, no doubt, in the Camberwell registry office.

Sickert, said I, you have had a wonderful escape; she'll make that other fellow as miserable as she has made you. I'd liefer be miserable with her than happy with anybody else, he answered, and we admired the depths of feeling that inspired the words and were ashamed that we had looked upon him as a Thersites or a Bixiou. It may be that Steer and Tonks were not as contrite as I was, and attributed the words which we all remember to histrionics, to Sickert's self-consciousness of the situation in which he found himself involved, to a desire to find the right words to express himself and it. We are never altogether natural; the educated cannot be. Even dogs are actors; only cats are themselves and nothing but themselves. So it may be that Sickert was still Sickert, unabsolved from self even in his grief, a plain story understandable by all as I have told it, but when I look back on that evening I fail to discover the cause of the quarrel that began suddenly to rage between Sickert and Tonks; about a question of drawing, it could not be else; mayhap the Slade was at the bottom of it. But at such a moment! I can recall no more than the image of a man overwhelmed and unable to defend himself.

The anger that had been roused died quickly. Our talk went back to the jilt. The word is mine; I put it down, for never once did it pass Sickert's lips. He was true to his own words all that evening: I'd liefer be miserable with her than happy with anybody else, and as he stood looking round the room, a little stupefied in his grief, he became slowly aware that the picture he had

given me was not on the wall: I see you have not hung up the picture. There is not sufficient light to exhibit it on my walls, I said; the figures in the auditorium are all so small and so lost in brown shadows that the picture is merely a dark spot. If that be so, he answered, may I have the picture back? Certainly; and my heart misgave me whilst seeking it out lest Tonks and Steer should pass some criticism upon it. But they said nothing, and we watched the painter from the balcony proceeding with grave and sad steps, his music-hall in his hand, up the long, desolate street of Ebury towards Victoria, where he would take the bus.

Here endeth the third portrait.

CHAP. XI.

IN the early 'eighties I was living in the Temple and I think it was Sickert who took me round to the Cock Inn, saying that he had arranged for Steer to be there to meet me, and we came upon him in one of the compartments or pens in which six diners, three on either side, found scanty room for their elbows whilst taking their dinner adown the narrow table; and the places opposite being vacant we sat with him. A quiet, sympathetic young man he seemed to me to be, and I was glad to visit his studio and to accept a picture from him. We continued to see each other; our friendship increased year after year till the great break came when I fled from London, horrified by the Boer War. Of the New English Art Club I had heard nothing whilst I was away, and when I returned a new and important member of the club was introduced to me at Steer's round table: Peter Harrison, a tall, handsome man, handsome as Sickert but more frank of face, with blond hair, blond beard, high

nose, white skin and blue eyes, and the appearance and nobility of a stag—a many-antlered intelligence I soon perceived his to be. And assuming that the reader has acquainted himself with the volumes entitled *Hail and Farewell*, it is only necessary to say that the occasion of the dinner was to welcome me on my return from Ireland. The ear of memory still retains the ring of Tonks's voice in the words: How pleasant it is to have him back among us, criticising our pictures. But we are talking now of Harrison, and puzzled by his knowledge of painting I drew nigh to Steer, who murmured to me: He exhibits with us; and I learnt as we went upstairs that Harrison was an amateur.

Turgenev was a wealthy landowner and so was Landor, and each increased the volume of English and Russian literature. Neither Swinburne nor Shelley wrote for money, yet who would call them amateurs? Wagner was poor, but instead of writing for money he asked his friends to give him money, and his borrowings have enabled his biographers to reveal him to us in all his little humanities. I would write pages about these and Mathilde and her husband; once the pen has written the fatal letters the pen assumes control; but I will not be governed by my pen but by my subject, which is Peter Harrison, who has not painted a masterpiece comparable to *The Ring*, wherefore Wagner's name has been inexcusably dragged in. By the way, his name is Harrison but not Peter Harrison. Peter is but a nickname; how it was acquired I don't know. And now I am free to continue my story of the dinner-party, to tell that Sickert was not present, to say that though his absence is always regretted, on this occasion he was forgotten. He always is, more or less, when Harrison is present, for Peter Harrison's face is as pleasant to

look upon and his talk is as entertaining, less sparkling, perhaps, but not less agreeable, a more solid fare. Shall I convey anything to the reader if I say that Peter Harrison's talk is more like Manet's, and Sickert's like Whistler's? Now I come to think of it, Harrison's colouring and his manner recall Manet. Manet, too, was a man of wealth, and in the Nouvelle Athenes his appearance and indeed his manner of speech separated him from those who lived by painting. And no doubt Landor's appearance also distinguished him from—shall we say Southey, his boon companion, his yoke-fellow in some conversations. And Harrison, though he was with us a great deal, always seemed a stranger among us, one who had strayed into our society; and his pictures, too, though in many ways as accomplished as those of other exhibitors, seemed to have strayed into the New English, lacking something hard to define, habit, perhaps. We hoped and the Press hoped, but our hopes were dashed, for without warning, Peter Harrison sent no more pictures to our exhibitions. I write *our*, for I would identify myself with this artistic movement; indeed, even if I wished to, I could not dissociate myself from it, having been from the beginning its critic and the literary expositor of its ideas. However, there it is; I have written it: Our exhibitions! For some time we were sorry to miss him from the walls, and hoped that the next exhibition would bring him back to us; but it went by without a picture from Harrison, and so did the next and the next, and when we dined at his house we were not shown any pictures. Some three or four that he had painted in former days were allowed to remain on the walls, but no new work was shown; and when we asked for the reason, he said he had ceased to paint, qualifying the admission with the words: I have ceased to paint for exhibition.

And I remember him saying: I am not a fool; I know what good painting is and don't want anybody to tell me. And from that day to this nobody has seen a canvas by Peter Harrison.

Art is not with us always; we know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes. The Muse was with us when we were poor and unhappy, and when we were rich she deserted us. Many instances could be given, and against these other instances could be set in which the Muse demanded easy and comfortable circumstances and refused to follow the artist to the garret. Nor is the Muse faithful to young men; she visits them and leaves them helpless before half their lives have worn away. She comes to men in their old age and inspires one work, and henceforth they are stranded in commonplace. Yet there must be a law. Our pens write easily the word *must* ! Why must there be a law? That there is a mystery is certain, and one that artists ponder, the afflicted and the unafflicted alike. Why is it that the poet sits down in the morning and writes a poem, sometimes two or three? And why is it that six months pass without a stanza? He is in good health; he sleeps well and eats well, and his lady loves him; yet the poet is sterile as the cat in the armchair. And sometimes intellectual sterility is a sort of creeping paralysis, the artist producing less and less each year, till he reaches a moment when he produces nothing. Yet he is as intelligent as he was before, very often more intelligent, and very often his health is better. He can walk twenty miles without fatigue, he can do everything he **could do** when he was a young man, except paint.

Harrison's health is not that of a policeman, **nor** is his strength, yet I am disposed to believe that in the words: I have ceased to paint for exhibition; **I am not a fool**;

I know what good painting is, he has given the true reason for his abstention. Somebody in the eighteenth century told the same story, saying that when he looked through some books he had published he was not altogether displeased with the writing of them; but seeing clearly that they were not first-rate, in other words, that they did not lift him into English literature, he preferred to lead the amiable and useful life of a country gentleman without troubling literature any further, and I think Harrison thinks in the same way. And yet there is another side to the question. A French painter who had risen almost to the front rank, earning an income of twenty thousand francs a year by painting shall we say twenty pictures a year, was approached by a picture dealer, who said: Why not paint only five pictures twice the size of those that you are painting, and charge three times as much? The time spent on small canvases is almost the same as that spent on large. To which the painter gave a reply, the philosophy of which recommends itself to me and will, no doubt, to my readers: But what should I do with the rest of my time? If the painter have a place in the country, and dogs, and perhaps a farm, if he plans an avenue or lays out a few gardens and adds to the gardens little by little, buys a few books on iron-work and enters into a correspondence with French firms for the supply of an old gateway, his time passes quite agreeably. A little nap between breakfast and luncheon; luncheon comes—a pleasant break in the day, and after luncheon a walk round his big or little property. There is shooting, there is fishing, and when he is too old for shooting, well—another little nap after luncheon. The wife is reading a novel *on* the sofa; friends come in. Tea-time approaches; the friends leave, and then there is dinner to look forward to. In view of his old age,

gluttony should be encouraged, and a taste for wine. Dear me! it is time to go to bed; and the day has passed without his knowing it.

We are all travelling towards the happy days when ambition no longer frets like a hair shirt, and the insensate desire to add to English literature or art has ceased. Harrison is there; we are not. Wherefore our pity and our regrets are wasted when we dine with him in his beautiful house, filled with collections of exquisite Chelsea and Dresden, water-colours by Turner and pictures by Steer. Under our feet is a lovely Aubusson, about which I hesitated many years ago; but he who hesitates about an Aubusson, loses it, alas! alas! The beauty of that Aubusson was a suffering to me, but that suffering has been removed, for Harrison asks me no longer to his annual dinners at which Steer and Tonks and myself were the company. The dinners continue, Tonks on the right hand, Steer on the left, but my place is filled by—whom? Or is it left empty? These are matters on which I need information, for my absence from Harrison's dinners has caused me to doubt myself. I am no longer the same self as I was, or perhaps I should say no longer the same self in my own eyes, which is much more important. My enforced absence from these dinner parties has brought my conception of myself, formed through long years, to naught. I had looked upon myself as caviare to the general and a delectable dish for the few. And he that has acquired a taste for caviare never loses it; and he that has swallowed an oyster is faithful to the oyster to the end of his life; and as the lovers of caviare and oyster are faithful, so were my friends to me, but now, all of a sudden, things are different; for the first time somebody who once liked my company likes it no more.

I am wrong; there was another—a woman, but she need not be named here.

Here endeth the fourth portrait.

CHAP. XII.

WHEN I said that I was for some years the critic of the New English Art Club and the exponent of its views, I was led astray. I should have said that I shared that honour with D. S. M'Coll, a man of many parts, a Scotsman, as his name tells (let us be thankful he is not Irish), a Presbyterian (let us be thankful he is not a Roman Catholic), an escaped one from the kirk (for that we also must be thankful), who was destined for the kirk, educated at its expense at some first-rate school and then at Oxford, where he took honours of all kinds, a brilliant Greek and Latin scholar, a winner of the Newdigate, and a painter of charming water-colours, a man of whom anything might be expected, some friends expecting pictures, others poems, a few so greedy for his fame that they hoped for both; and the kirk, the greediest of all, asking to be repaid the money it had spent upon him, M'Coll, the most honourable of men, set himself out to repay it. He succeeded with his pen and pencil, God may know how he did it—I don't; an inconceivable task that would have borne me down into suicide or some silly illness that would have carried me out of this world of debts and theologies. A most remarkable man, as the reader has already guessed, and what appearance, I wonder, would the reader give him if I were not at his elbow to tell that M'Coll is tall and lean, long-legged and small-headed, hooked-nosed, with small, wise eyes, calling to mind a stork. A stork is long-legged, long-billed, and his wise eyes are small and deep-set. Though he is a bird

from the south, the stork wears an air of Celtic melancholy, and when it rains he wraps himself in his wings as in a cassock and looks like a Scotsman immersed in the doctrine of original sin or predestination. And I think it must have been M'ColFs seriousness at private views that provoked Conder to draw attention to or to invent the buttoning of the jacket whenever ladies collected about the critic; at which we all laughed and envied M'Coll exceedingly.

M'Coll began his literary life in *The Spectator*, introduced, probably, by some poems he sent to the Editor, and the poems led to art criticism. He wrote for many years, practising painting in his holidays and producing many pictures that Steer admired, detecting, however, in them a somewhat too scrupulous taste, thinking, if he did not say it, that M'Coll, like Whistler, was frightened of failure, holding to the belief that sins of the flesh were nothing, however numerous, compared to a sin against taste. Theology again plays its part, for is it not held by all sects that however great the number of a man's venial sins, they do not equal in their muster one mortal sin. M'Coll, though seemingly divided between the arts of painting and literature, has given himself more willingly to painting than writing, and perhaps it was to escape from writing and to have more time for painting that he became curator of the Tate Gallery. But a man does not come of a long Presbyterian ancestry for nothing, and M'Coll's conscience is always spying out new duties. How many men have lost themselves in striving to follow that will o' the wisp, duty? But, let us not be led into moralising; to reprove others is enough for us. Afterwards M'Coll was given the Wallace Collection to look after, and pursued by a sense of duty he spent much time on a catalogue which nobody had asked **him** to compile.

Steer and Tonks and I, who admire his pictures **and** drawings, despaired, but M'Coll pursued his somewhat sombre way undeterred, cultivating duty and taste to excess, till Tonks and Steer began to speak of M'Coll's articles in *The Saturday Review* (he had left *The Spectator* for *The Saturday*) as the encyclical letters of the pope of Hampstead. Tonks and Steer, though derisive, never lost their admiration. Steer writhes a little, so harsh are M'Coll's judgments sometimes, and Tonks is lashed into fury and seeks relief in recalling an accidental meeting of Steer and M'Coll in the gardens of Hampton Court, Steer having gone thither to enjoy the flowers, M'Coll to verify some doubts that had arisen in his mind regarding Nature's genius in the disposal of her colours.

M'Coll had arrived before Steer, and after many hours of close scrutiny and meditation, he walked convinced of many false shades in the peonies; some few roses might be allowed to pass, but the too florid abundance of the Gloire de Dijon clouded his brow, and feeling, no doubt, that Steer's unconsidered admiration of the parterres and the urns might provoke a remark that would jar their friendship, he bade his friend good-bye. But Steer, unable to hide his surprise at this sudden dismissal, clung to the critic, and the critic, feeling perhaps that it would not be right to leave the great painter in ignorance of the vulgarities he had discerned, took him round the beds and urns, Steer giving his whole mind to the disquisition, losing, however, many points which he regretted losing, so he explained to us one night. There is always something in what M'Coll says, though it is difficult to get at it; all the same— And then his sense of humour coming to the rescue, he admitted with sweet, unemphatised voice that he was willing to hear all M'Coll had to

say against the Greek vases, but thought the flowers might be allowed to pass without reproof.

One of M'Coll's works is a large book on Greek vases, written in conjunction with a lady. Of the wealth of information displayed in this book and of the subtlety of the writing, I have no doubt, and very little that the Greek potters were plucked as clean as the parrot that fell into the monkey's hands; and that were the graves opened and the dust allowed to speak, the potters would cry, like the parrot: He's given us a hell of a time! Ah! these Scotch fellows; it is very hard to come to terms with them. I understand Englishmen and Frenchmen, but the Scotsman bewilders me, and of all, William Archer, who looks upon Pinero's play, *Mid-Channel*, as a remorseless (*sic*) masterpiece. And one night as I was sitting in a theatre listening to it, I bethought myself of Thomas, the sculptor, who was afflicted with a tape. It is not exactly pain, he would answer when we questioned about his guest: Rather a feeling of great discomfort. Fellow-sufferers, I said, and my thoughts returned to Archer, who answered me long years ago when I consulted him about the Independent Theatre: There is a fund of congenital commonplace in Pinero, that he will never be able to overcome. Did the writing of this remorseless masterpiece rid Sir Arthur of his congenital commonplace? or have Archer's perceptions grown a little blunted? Two men cannot be more different than M'Coll and Archer, and yet—and yet, are they not akin? Extremes are said to meet. I will tell a story.

Steer buys Greek coins; the fact has already been mentioned in his portrait, but perhaps I have forgotten to say that he buys for the pleasure he takes in their beauty, without thought of acquiring personal distinction thereby. He even neglects to speak of the coins **until**

he meets somebody to whom he knows their beauty will appeal, and it is not long ago that he drew from his waistcoat pocket a gold piece the size of a raspberry, minted in the reign of Philip of Macedon, and of such beauty that I was transported. But why do you carry it in your pocket? I asked. He did not answer, and- it was not till the next day, mayhap some days later, that I learnt why he carried the coin in his pocket: because he was unwilling to separate himself at once from his treasure. It was his as long as it was in his pocket, to be enjoyed when he was alone, to be enjoyed in company *if* he judged his company to be capable of enjoying the treasure, for when coins go into their little drawers they become abstractions, thoughts, rather than personal friends. A watch on the counter is not the same as a Watch in our fob. I am afraid I am labouring a very obvious point, and had better get on with my story, saying that not many weeks later in the very room over my head, in my drawing-room, the conversation took a turn that recalled Steer's coin to my mind. *Tonks and M'Coll were present; neither had seen it, and I broke into regrets, which were interrupted by Steer. I have the coin in my pocket, he said, handing it to me. A dream of old Greece, I answered, passing the coin on to Tonks, and whilst he sat lost in admiration of Steer's taste, M'Coll's brow clouded; and when the coin was passed on to him he told us in solemn tones that he looked upon the chariot and charioteer as good on the whole, but that the design overfilled the coin, a mistake that would not have been made if the mintage had occurred a hundred years earlier. The head on the obverse of the coin was dismissed as commonplace, and we were glad that the remark was made when the hands of the clock pointed to eleven. Tonks mentioned that a heavy day's

work awaited him; and I judged it fortunate that Tonks and Steer's way was not M'Coll's, for Tonks might not have been able to subdue himself. M'Coll might have received a severe reproof, might even have been asked: By what right do you call Steer's taste into question? An outrage it certainly was that Steer's taste should have been called into question, but a minor outrage. The major outrage, in my opinion, was the calling of the taste of Greece into question, Macedonian Greece, it is true, but still Greece. Yet M'Coll got a first at Oxford, likewise the Newdigate; his water-colours are not lacking in taste, and the worst that can be said is that sometimes his taste is a little overdone. The word taste brought up the whole bitterness again, and until I fell asleep I pondered a long correspondence in which M'Coll and some other Scotsman, possibly William Archer, should debate the question of rhythm in composition till the Editor is discovered dead in his chair.

Here endeth the fifth portrait.

CHAP. XIII.

THE saints of the Middle Ages speak of their sufferings when Jesus withdrew himself from them, and when we follow art too closely, too greedily, forgetting all things for art's sake, Apollo in his wisdom deserts us. It was so in the hot month of August last year. Theocritus and Landor were laid aside and I said: It would seem that we must not seek relief in our own art but in a sister art; and I fell to thinking how, to escape from myself, I had left my house a quarter of a century ago to attend a performance of *Lohengrin*, which despite its mediocrity sent me home exultant all the way from the Shaftesbury Theatre through the Park to Victoria Street. And Apollo having

190 CONVERSATIONS IN EBURY STREET

again withdrawn himself during my exile in Dublin, I said: Why sit staring at the lamp till midnight? Some amateurs are performing *The Doll's House*. Why not go to see the mess they'll make of it? And faults there were to find, no doubt, but I keep no memory of them, only of the exultant happiness in which I returned home, walking as if on air past Merrion Square to Ely Place. **If** I were a king I would keep a company of singers and players rehearsed sufficiently to go on at a moment's notice; but I am a poor composer in Ebury Street, with **no** refuge but sleep from those terrible moments when the God withdraws himself. And on the hot Sunday I am telling, an August afternoon last year, I laid myself out in my armchair and slept fitfully, roused towards six o'clock by the clock striking or by some half dream, half thought, I know not which. In an hour, I said, Clara will come to lay the cloth. Mabel has gone for her holidays. . . . And whilst waiting for the clock to strike the half hour, I fell asleep again, and from this second sleep I was awakened by the clinking of spoons and forks in the passage. Clara asked me if I were not feeling well. I answered: Although in good health and strength, I am conscious that life is ebbing from me. Clara made no answer, and to break the silence that fell, I asked what dinner she had devised. Some fried cod, sir. Clara, I could not eat cod this evening. Boiled—she began. Speak not of it, Clara; and what comes after the . . .? Cutlets, sir. Clara, I have been feeling tired all the afternoon, **and** would like to dine at a restaurant. Well, sir, the cutlets will keep till to-morrow. To-morrow must **look after** itself, I said, and now **if I** could find my **hat**. **With** Clara's assistance the hat was found, and **I walked rapidly** to Sloane Square, thinking that perhaps in **the Queen's Restaurant I might meet the familiar mummers**

from the theatre; but none was at the reserved table, and whilst regretting their absence I allowed myself to be enticed by the bill of fare. Mulligatawny was chosen, for I needed something tasty, and it was barely eaten when a picturesque figure, a cross between a Scottish laird and a Spanish hidalgo, in fine, a shadow of Don Quixote thrown across the screen of this modern world, entered.

Cunninghame Graham! I said, and was about to ask him to sit at my table when he proposed to do so, which was better than if he had acceded to my request; for his wish to sit with me relieved me of my doubts lest I should prove a wearisome companion, a vain fear, for no one wearies in his company. He ordered soup, but which? *Croute au potl* it was certainly *croute au pot*; but I do not recall the fish he ate, remembering, however, and distinctly, that I asked him if the lamb was worth eating. Barely, he answered, and taking the hint I did not follow him into lamb, but ordered a grilled sole and *une omelette Lyonnaise*, after which I had some strawberries, and these I did not dilute with cream, according to the English custom, but poured a little claret upon. *Un souvenir de Montmartre*, he said. And as we approached the coffee a plan began to mature in my mind: I would invite him to 121, Ebury Street, and enjoy for an hour the soul of a hidalgo. He consented; and so sensible was I of conversing with old Spain that it vexed me to remember on our way to Ebury Street that I had only cigars to offer a man who, as all the world knows, speaks Spanish like Don Quixote and has lived most of his life amid tribes, retaining, in spite of many various idioms and languages, a firm hold of the English language. A real Scottish grip he has of it, as anybody can see for himself who—but more of that anon.

Cunninghame Graham has lived with the gauchos, and

to see him was enough to stress in imagination the cows, steers, bulls, even the fleet llamas, brought to earth with the whirling bolus or the encircling lasso; and the surety with which he speaks of these facts leaves no doubt in our minds that they were performed by him and will be performed again when the occasion calls for them. And from Sloane Square to Ebury Street, he continued to sit in my imagination with one leg round the pommel, half asleep—that is how the gauchos always sleep, themselves and their nags. And it was, I swear it, with no other purpose but to encourage him to tell me stories that would make a boy of me again, that I related my poor little experience of Arab horses that cannot trot, and the consequent fatigue of the journey from Jerusalem, and how, after a long search for a suitable monastery, we encamped in the arid desert which lies along the eastern coast of the Dead Sea. You know, Cunninghame Graham, what it is to awaken out of the shallow sleep of the bivouac and to ask whence you have come and whither you are going, or if it be your destiny to die among the sand-hills that the wind created yesterday and will uncreate to-morrow. You know the feeling? Do I know the feeling! he answered, and he spoke instantly of sitting round a blaze of dry bushes gathered by gauchos, of the bird-like forms of grey llamas browsing in the moonlight, of rifles, pistols, and the whirling of boluses at a hand gallop, and that himself would match himself to bring down a cow at sixty yards with a bolus, or to lasso a wild horse at—the exact distance at which he could lasso a wild horse I did not learn that evening, for my guest relinquished his tale of wild horses for an amusing story of a man in Hyde Park, who, after seeing Cunninghame Graham catch a horse with a lasso, said: I defy you to catch me by the feet. My guest begged

the man to believe that if he lassoed him he would get a heavy fall, but the man persisted, saying he could escape the noose. The lasso was thrown, and the man turned a summersault and looked round dazed, like a man who receives an upper-cut in a prize fight.

But even such stories come to an end, and our thoughts turned to the weather, and from it sprang the mental suffering that hot days bring to the civilised man who dozes in his armchair with a chapter of a book in his mind that he cannot compose. Alas, I was back at the source of my torment; and, too feeble of mind to return to the size of the three balls, I told him I was writing a book to replace *Impressions and Opinions*. Would you mind being made use of? I said. I have to write to-morrow, and to tell you how I propose to treat the subject will be a great help. You won't object, he answered, to my breaking in occasionally to add something if something should occur to me? On the contrary, I said; and you can count upon my gratitude for anything you may be able to say about Verlaine and Rimbaud; any impression you have gotten from their poetry I shall be able to develop. All I want is a hint, something from the outside; within I am wasted and weary of their names. I shall run the hint that you let drop like a hound a scent, but I really cannot bring myself to write again that Verlaine's verses flow like a wistful brook, and that Rimbaud's sound like a clarion heard in the aspiring woods of Ville D'Avray. The suppressed book is full of that kind of thing. In these circumstances, said Cunninghame Graham, you cannot do better than omit the articles. I cannot omit the articles for it was I who introduced these poets to England and very nearly to France. If I do not get a hint from the outside I shall produce another article that might be published in a review, and for title: *Certain Aspects of the*

Geni of Verlaine and Rimbaud will do. So many aspects of Henry James's genius have been published that the Editor will welcome the title again, and the rather if I say nothing in twelve pages. It is astonishing how many young men there are of this generation all wanting to write about the arts, and who go on writing about them without finding out that they have nothing to say. More extraordinary still, said Cunninghame Graham, are the men who produce a masterpiece between twenty and thirty and live for half a century in the fading glories of it. Rimbaud was just such a one, I answered. He produced a masterpiece at eighteen, and then retired to Abyssinia to drive camels. Books are read in modern times not for what is in them but for the sake of the author's sexual eccentricities, said the subtle hidalgo, and after listening to me for some time he asked me how I connected Rimbaud's literary sterility with Verlaine, who continued to write beautiful poems to the end of his life. I answered that Verlaine's and Rimbaud's names are linked together by their attachment for each other, physically and intellectually; and we spoke of the shooting affray in Brussels, and Verlaine's imprisonment for attempted murder. And then we talked at random till Cunninghame Graham remembered Rimbaud's enlistment under the banner of Don Carlos, and his immediate desertion with the money he had received; but he could not recall the circumstance in which he had enlisted under the Dutch flag for service in Java, merely the fact that no sooner had the ship touched port than he deserted again. We were agreed that he had worked his passage to England as an interpreter; we lost and we picked up the scent again when he sailed for Alexandria; and seeing him in our imagination in Egypt on a camel on his way to Abyssinia, Cunninghame Graham said: If

you had chosen to write a novel about Rimbaud you would have had to travel in Abyssinia in search of local colour. It seems to me, my dear Cunninghame Graham, that if I were to follow Rimbaud into Abyssinia I should be going over old ground instead of breaking new. Rimbaud did not write any account of his travels, Cunninghame Graham answered, and if you are not going to discuss Verlaine's poetry, nor his relations with Rimbaud and with Lucien Letinois, your narrative will perforce be restricted to an account of Verlaine's religious emotions and experiences. You will attribute his conversion and *Sagesse* to his imprisonment in Mons, but will this be the truth? I doubt if Verlaine was ever converted, certainly not to theology. You feel, Cunninghame Graham, that there was nothing Scotch in Verlaine, and though he would have liked your grey skies and rainy days, he would have wilted in argument whether the Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son or from the Father alone. His attachment, said Cunninghame Graham, to religion was stunted to stained-glass windows and the Pope's Indulgences, and these, strangely enough, did not prevent his robbing his mother of money to give to Lucien Letinois—rushing at her, knife in hand. To my mind, Verlaine's claim to distinction among immoralists is neither Arthur nor Lucien but his remarkable exemption from any moral instincts whatsoever.

You forget, Cunninghame Graham, that there are as many moralities as there are creeds. I beg your pardon, answered my hidalgo: moral instincts. Forgetting, I answered, that beauty is a morality, and that Verlaine never deviated from the only morality he was aware of. Of how many poets can you say as much? And is it certain that poems as beautiful as Verlaine's are a less potent influence for good than sleepy sermons and the

administration of the common law? His vices were his own and died with him. You asked me, said Cunningham Graham, to raise objections and I have raised one, which you have answered. I am glad you think I have. I will raise another, for you have encouraged me. If Verlaine's sense of beauty could not save him from vice I fail to see why it should save others. Because beauty is in the end a more powerful influence than evil. The theologian hidden in every Scotsman begins to appear, I answered, but I think I can give a better reason. Few men are divided into halves. Verlaine is an exception, one that you will find hard to match; and I think you will agree with me that if Verlaine be judged by his mind only, the judgment will be nearer the truth than if he were judged by his acts. My dear Moore, do you think you can show Verlaine's daily life to be wholly absent from his poems? Verlaine, I replied, did not deviate from his morality; no matter the theme, the morality is the same always:

A.

Ame, te souvient-il, au fond du paradis,
De la gare d'Auteuil et des trains de jadis
T'amenant chaque jour, venus de La Chapelle,

and ending with the strange enchantment of the line:

Mon pauvre enfant, ta voix dans le Bois de Boulogne!

And there is the sonnet to Parsifal, written when he was lying ill in the Cour Saint-Francois, 6 Hotel du Midi, rue Moreau, whither I went with Dujardin, who was then editing the *Revue Wagnerienne*; and had I not gone I should have missed the hint that inspired this paper—a paper not one word of which is written, and which may

never be written. I am not certain that what I have in mind is realisable. Do you never, Cunninghame Graham, find yourself in the end deluded?

Gods and men, we are all deluded thus.

We pursue a maiden, and clasp a reed.

How does it go on? But cease to trouble your memory. I shall never be able to put this double life upon paper. I would tell how the discrepancies came together, to live and to die together, inseparable and yet for ever divided. Will you have a cigar, Cunninghame Graham? No, thank you; I never smoke cigars. Ah! I had forgotten. Of course, a Spaniard never did, never will, never could. What were we talking about? You were telling me about going forth with a man called Dujardin to seek Verlaine, who was lying ill. Ah, yes, in search of the sonnet to Parsifal which Verlaine had promised Dujardin, and which appeared in the *Revue Wagnerienne*, of that I am sure. So it must have been in the early 'eighties, 'eighty-four or 'eighty-five, that Dujardin said to me: The sonnet has not arrived, and we are going to Press the day after to-morrow. But stay, Dujardin; you have told me that he lives in the Quartier du Temple, and I don't think I care——You will rue your scruples when he is dead, Dujardin interrupted, and believing this to be true I followed him into an omnibus, and when we came to the terminus into a tram; a little later we changed trams, and the second took us past factories and canals. Are we going to take the boat? I asked; my friend laughed, and stopped to ask the bargemen if they knew the rue Moreau. The answers they gave did not help us, and for a long time we were lost in a tangle of noisy streets, in musty and clamorous courtyards, asking every passer-by

to direct us to the Hotel du Midi, which, when found, did not avail us much, for number six was as hard to discover as the hotel itself. We mounted many staircases, knocked at different doors, received new instructions; and so wearied were we with climbing that we could hardly believe our eyes when number six confronted us.

A boy with a face so rosy that he reminded me of a butcher-boy, opened to us, and among some dirty bedclothes we came upon Verlaine. His sinister eyes seemed to reflect the stony silence of the prison cell and yard, and his bald, prominent forehead, his shaggy eyebrows, frightened me; and Dujardin, too, was frightened when Verlaine offered to show us his leg, which he said was better but still gave him so much pain that he might have to return to the hospital. And he would have shown us his leg if he had not remembered as he was about to lift the bedclothes that his duty as a host was to offer us some wine. The butcher-boy went for a *litre*, and whilst we drank wine at sixteen *sous* the *litre* Verlaine watched us, amused by his joke, thinking it a better one on the whole than the first that had occurred to him—the turning of our stomachs by the exhibition of his leg. We were young and enthusiastic and hoped, luck having favoured us so far, that by drinking the wine we should persuade him to recite his sonnet to us. But the cat is not to be caught by mice, and Verlaine played with us, telling us that he would not deprive us of the pleasure of reading the sonnet by reciting it to us. We were glad to hear him say this, for the Revue needed something that all its readers would enjoy and approve. He spoke of a certain hiatus which appealed to his ear and a certain music outside the ordinary rhythm that our ears were doubtless weary of. We answered that his ear would allow no jarring note; we were sure of that and refrained from

expressing our doubts regarding the subject of the sonnet, for when he began to tell the subject he turned to the butcher-boy and described women as trash. And then he spoke of his son, whom he had not brought up as a *garcon de cafe*, though what trade, avouched Verlaine, was more advantage to a young man than that of a *garcon de cafe*? Truly, no trade could have reduced a human being lower than Verlaine seemed to us at that moment, and unable to bear his society and that of the butcher-boy any longer, we departed, saying to ourselves: We shall not be able to publish the sonnet.

Here it is, said Dujardin to me the next day; here is the sonnet which you have heard Verlaine speak of as autobiographical. You cannot publish it! I cried. Listen, said Dujardin, and now to you, Cunninghame Graham, I say the same; Listen;

Parsifal a vaincu les Filles, leur gentil
 Babil et la luxure amusante—et sa pente
 Vers la chair de garcon vierge que cela tente
 D'aimer les seins legers et ce gentil babil.

II a vaincu la Femme belle, an coeur subtil,
 fitalant ses bras frais et sa gorge excitante;
 II a vaicu TEnfer et rentre sous la tente
 Avec un lourd trophée a son bras pueril
 Avec la lance qui perca le Flanc supreme!
 II a gueri le roi, le voici roi lui-meme
 Et pretre du tres saint Tresor essentiel,

En robe d'or il adore, gloire et symbole,
 Le vase pur ou resplendit le sang reel.
 —Et, o ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole!

The music of this poem lay dormant for centuries in the French language, so long that it seems archaic in modern speech. Did you never see Verlaine again? Cunninghame Graham asked. Yes; in *Memoirs of My Dead Life* I tell of another meeting, and there was a third. My book, *Confessions of a Young Man*, was published in the *Revue Independante*, and Dujardin gave a luncheon. My old friend Mallarme was present, and Verlaine, too, was there. Huysmans I do not remember, yet Dujardin could hardly have left him out. No one is a better host than Dujardin; he provides for everybody. Mary Laurent, of whom I speak in *Memoirs of My Dead Life* as *toute la lyre*, was present, and from the other end of the table she sent me messages with her eyes that the intrigue that had ravelled years ago in Manet's studio was not forgotten and might be smoothed out and tied into a pretty bow at last; and nothing loth for her to tie it, I encouraged her with glances when I was not listening to Verlaine, in whose humble voice I could discover no trace of personal pride, yet he must have known even then that he was a great poet. In his conversation, as in his books, he was like the old woman in Villon's ballade, a poor Christian devoid of riches and all distinction, who believes and hopes to find grace hereafter with her Sovereign Lord and Master. Verlaine's name will always be linked with Villon's, and were Villon unknown to us who is there that would not swear that the refrain of the ballade:

Dans cette foie je veux vivre et mourir,

was a line of Verlaine's **and** to be found in *Sagessei*

CHAP. XIV.

I TRIED to detain Cunninghame Graham, **for** I had not said half of what I had to say, but seeing at that moment that his eyes were heavy with sleep, I said: Since you must go, go without hearing the rest. Whereupon he spoke of exchanging books, he promising his travels in Morocco and I a copy of *The Brook Kerith*, which should be sent to him to-morrow. A moment after he disappeared in the moon haze, and sleep being still far from me, I laid myself out on the sofa in the drawing-room so that I might think more clearly; but having no subject in mind I listened to the ticking of my pretty Louis seize clock and remembered that my aunt had bought it for me in Bond Street twenty years ago for twelve pounds; one of my best bargains. After leaving the shop I was lucky enough to spy on the other side of the street two candelabra to match for sixteen pounds; to be more truthful, it was my aunt who—but the story of these acquisitions is surely to be found in one of my autobiographical works, so I will not risk repeating it here, but will content myself with saying that every time the bell of the clock rings I look up, to think, and not infrequently of my dear aunt. One never wearies of pretty things, and if it had not been for all this writing I might have cultivated my taste and made a collection that would fetch a large sum of money at Christie's at my death. But literature absorbed me, and mayhap I got as much from it as I should have from a collection of Chelsea china and Louis seize clocks. I should have collected principally the eighteenth-century, for the genius of that century governs me throughout, except in poetry. Eighteenth-century poetry is trite, but triteness is preferable to free verse, for it would seem that free

verse, having freed itself from rhyme and metre, finds itself, like many other anarchies, without anything to say, another claim of our world to ingenious paradox, freedom being obtainable only through remissions of freedom. . . . When next I go to France I shall perplex Dujardin and his little confraternity with the aphorism: Man must be enslaved, else he is impotent. They cannot do else than admire Verlaine, for he loosened the conventions of French verse, establishing, in conjunction with Banville, the right of the poet to two caesuras:

Il a vaincu la Femme belle, au cœur subtil,
and the still more audacious line:

En robe d'or il adore, gloire et symbole,
ending with a hiatus:

—Et, o ces voix d'enf ants chantant dans la coupole!

But why should they admire Rimbaud, whose verses are as orthodox as Hugo's, the Comte de l'Isle's, or Heradia's? Nor can their admiration for this poet be attributed to incoherency, for Rimbaud is as lucid as Gosse. Gosse makes fun of the title *Le Bateau Ivre*, but a title may be ludicrous in English and admirable in French. We speak of a lurching boat and a lurching drunkard, and to speak of *Le Bateau Ivre* as *The Topsy Boat* may be funny: but it is not good criticism, and Gosse would have done better to forgo his joke for the sake of the wonderful lines in which the poet recalls the savagery of the sea. I understand that Dujardin and his tribe should admire Laforgue more than Verlaine, for it was the genius of Laforgue that gave currency to free verse. But it is his prose that endears him to me:

Jamais, jamais, jamais cette petite ville d'eaux ne s'en

douta, avec son inculte Conseil municipal delegue par des montagnards rapaces et nullement opera-comique malgre leur costume.

Ah! que tout n'est-il opera-comique! . . . Que tout n'evolue-t-il en mesure sur cette valse anglaise, *Myosotis*, qu'on entendait cette annee-la (moi navre dans les coins, comme on pense) au Casino, valse si decemment melancolique, si irreparablement derniers, derniers beaux jours! . . . (Cette valse, oh! si je pouvais vous en inoculer d'un mot le sentiment avant de vous laisser entrer en cette histoire!

O gants jamais rajeunis par les benzines! O brillant et melancolique va-et-vient de ces existences! O apparances de bonheur si pardonnables! O beautes qui vieilliront dans les dentelles noires, au coin du feu, sans comprendre la conduite des iils viveurs et muscles qu'elles mirent au monde avec une si chaste melancolie! . . .

Petite ville, petite ville de mon coeur.

Les Moralites Legendaires comes to me by right for translation, for am I not of his generation, or almost? his contemporary, certainly. We read each other in the *Revue Independante*, the organ of the symbolists in the 'eighties. Moreover, there is a little of Laforgue in me; in *The Lovers of Orelay* I am near to Laforgue in his story of Ruth, dying amid tea-roses, the blood-red having been forbidden to her and to her poet, whose end was the same as hers, nearer than any other. He would have chosen me to translate him, wherefore why not? For never do I open *Les Moralites Legendaires* without a thrill. Ruth is unique in literature and I identify **her** with his wife, whom he met in Berlin skating, I am **sure**, for have I not written of the spell of her waist, of **the** flowing boa, and the feet lifted beneath the dark skirt, **and** how when the spell of these fell upon him he **re-**

signed his place as reader to the Empress, married, and brought his wife to Paris in the hope that literature would yield them a living. Dujardin published him; nobody else would. Jules caught the sickness from his wife, and the English girl passed between the rooms with *tisanes*. And many thanks are due to the few friends who climbed to see them on Thursday evenings. Needless to say that Dujardin was among them, and that he published *Les Moralites Legendaires*, the volume Jules left in his desk. Ruth did not survive her husband many months, and where she is buried nobody knows; nor shall I try to inquire out the facts but continue to cherish *L'imitation de Notre Dame la Lune* and *Des Fleurs de bonne Volonte*. But whilst paying homage to Laforgue, Dujardin and his sodality pay equal homage to Baudelaire, whose aestheticism seems to have been formed in a street which, had I the naming of it, would not be called Rivoli but *rue Baudelaire*, so invincibly do its hookahs, long pipes with amber mouthpieces, pierced brass lamps, Turkey carpets, burning pastilles, amber beads and ivory, even the fez that the shopman wears, remind us of *Les Fleurs du Mal*; or I might name the street, if its renaming were left to me, *rue de la Camelote*, for all is false in the rue de Rivoli. And having made these changes in the locality, I would rename Baudelaire's volume *Fleurs de Camelote*, for is it not all rue de Rivoli—hookahs, pastilles, amber beads—more Turkish than Jerome and falsier than he is even in his sculpture? It is true that when we were young men we purchased Turkish lamps made in Paris, and since those days we have lived in dread of the reproaches of the younger generation, pointing fingers at us and crying: Baudelaire! Hookah! Turkish lamp! Hookah! But instead of making jeering-stocks of us as they might

