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TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES :
LITERATURE AND IDEAS IN THE
POST-WAR DECADE
LANDMARKS IN WESTERN LITERATURE
AMERICAN LITERATURE : 1880-1930

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

THE AGE OF INTERROGATION
1901—1925

BY
A. C. WARD

FIFTH EDITION, REVISED



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TO
THE CITY LITERARY CIRCLE
—MY STUDENTS AND FRIENDS—
IN RECOLLECTION OF OUR WEDNESDAYS
1921—1928

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE aim of this book is to outline the literary history of the first quarter of the twentieth century and to provide an introductory commentary upon books and authors.

My purpose was, further : that the book should be compact ; that it should give a general, not a sectional, survey ; and that it should avoid overcrowding. Contemporary valuations in literature are dependent upon personal preferences, and no one can at present say whether Time will or will not justify my exclusions and inclusions.

I wish to express my grateful thanks to Margaret Couling for much generous help.

A. C. WARD

March 1928

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

ON looking through this book five years after it was written I am tempted to revise some of its opinions concerning the experimentalists. But as familiarity breeds a mild tolerance inimical to sound criticism I have preferred to let my judgments remain substantially as they were at first, rather than compel my 1928 self to defer to its 1933 successor. One or two dates have been added and a few sentences relating to writers who have died in the meantime. Readers wishing to survey the more recent tendencies in English and American literature are referred to my later books : *The Nineteen-Twenties* and *American Literature : 1880-1930*.

A. C. W.

February 1933

Across all futures is hung a curtain of mist, on which
is scrawled a question-mark.

Rose Macaulay

The everlasting Why. . . .

E. M. Forster

The thirst to know why this was and that was not. . . .
Why people had to suffer? . . . Why—a thousand
things?

John Galsworthy

Though a great God slay me with fire,
I will shout, till He answer me: Why?

J. E. Flecker

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

VICTORIANISM AND THE AGE OF INTERROGATION

BY literary critics and historians the term Victorian Age is not applied precisely to the years during which Queen Victoria reigned, but to a vaguely defined period when the outlook of English people was determined by that special attitude known as Victorianism. As soon as any attempt is made to determine the essentials of Victorianism, however, it becomes clear that more than one of the great Victorians escapes from the formula. Nevertheless, amid a mass of vital differences and in face of a "limitless variety of interactions," it is possible to observe in many of the Victorians a bearing toward life that was peculiar to the Age and may therefore be said to constitute Victorianism.

In the study of literature few things are more interesting than to consider the periodical changes of outlook which sway the human mind and spirit ; to observe those recurrent fluctuations of "values" which cause the truths and certainties of one generation to appear as superstitions and empty conventions in the eyes of generations following. Young men and young women during the first quarter of the twentieth century looked back upon the Victorian Age with a sceptical lifting of the eyebrows and an ironical grin.

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They regarded that Age as dully hypocritical and "stuffy." They said (and said perhaps too loudly) that Victorian ideals were mean and superficial and stupid. They mocked at Tennyson, yawned over George Eliot, swept through Dickens by leaps a hundred pages long. This insurgent mood was partly the cause and partly the consequence of changes, effected or impending, in the literature of the first quarter of the twentieth century. From 1901 to 1925 English literature was directed by mental attitudes, moral ideals, and spiritual values at almost the opposite extreme from the attitudes, ideals, and values governing Victorian literature. The old certainties were certainties no longer. Everything was held to be open to question: everything—from the nature of the Deity to the construction of verse-forms. While H. G. Wells was revising God, Rupert Brooke was inverting the sonnet and representing Helen of Troy as a withered crone. Standards of artistic craftsmanship and of aesthetic appreciation also changed fundamentally. What the Victorians had considered beautiful their children and grandchildren considered execrable; and the dustbins of the new generation were filled with the treasured bric-a-brac of Victorian mantel-shelves and whatnots.]

But however much the insurgents of the younger generation disliked the furnishings of Victorian households, they were even more incensed against the furnishings of Victorian minds. [In the Victorian Age there was a widespread disposition toward unquestioning submission to the Reign of the Expert; the Voice of Authority was accepted in religion, in politics, in literature, in family life. Men and women did unfeignedly desire to accept the pronouncements of the Voice of Authority. When the orthodox Voice was not heeded, it was usually because a rival voice spoke more persuasively to individual ears. To some, the Voice of Darwin speaking in *The Descent of Man* sounded more

(1922) enshrines the English spirit of a passing age. Of no other book written in recent times can literary immortality be prophesied so confidently. With exquisite art the atmosphere and life of a country household in Victorian times is re-created by the author, who, as a child, stayed at Earlham Hall, the Norfolk seat of the Gurneys, an old Quaker family. Percy Lubbock visited the house again in later life, and as he passed through the rooms and the garden and wandered about the countryside, he endeavoured to re-live the memories so vividly stirred. The result is that a rapidly-disappearing phase of English life has been brought imperishably into literature. To read *Earlham* is like passing a long sunny day shielded from hot sunshine in a cool leafy place. The old virtues—modesty, humility, piety, charity, and those others that some in the twentieth century regard as dull and stuffy—are here seen in the guileless beauty of true holiness. Famous figures—Elizabeth Fry, George Borrow—pass across the scene; but in the future these will seem insignificant in comparison with one whom Percy Lubbock has surely made to live for very long—"our grandmother":

She loved the green window-seat and the rustling shadow of the limes. As she grew old and older, she used to sit there in the window for long hours, alone in the summer evening, till the light faded away. She sat without book or work, drinking in the twilight fragrance, communing in her mind—with what?—with the thought of many beloved dead, whom she had lost and mourned, and with the joy of reunion with them that she saw near at hand now, in a very few years. Her mind was *there*, more and more. As the evening darkened she seemed, sitting in the window, to have all but passed already into the light she awaited; it shone in her face, I remember, as she spoke of it. I remember vividly her look as she once exclaimed, in sudden uncontrollable wonder, "*What* will it be?—what will it be like?"

What power have words—or music—to evoke more than the author's faultless delicacy and tact have evoked here, and on a hundred occasions more in *Earlham*?

credible and more authoritative than the Voice of God speaking in the Book of Genesis. It was not the acceptance of any single body of doctrine that distinguished the Victorian, but his insistent *attitude* of acceptance, his persistent belief in the validity of authorities, his innate desire to affirm rather than to question. Whatever weakness underlay the Victorian spirit of acceptance and affirmation was, for the most part, an innocent weakness. It consisted in a tendency to accept phrases at face value without critical examination. Victorian faith and morality may have been unflawed on the surface, but to twentieth-century minds they seemed to be, often, without a core of personally realized conviction—mere secondhand clothing of the mind and spirit.) Was it for this reason that so many Victorians appeared to walk in hourly dread of “losing their faith” (as the phrase went)? Rose Macaulay writes of how “one evening, shortly before Christmas, in the days when our forefathers, being young, possessed the earth—in brief, in the year 1879—Mrs. Garden came briskly into her drawing-room from Mr. Garden’s study and said in her crisp, even voice to her six children, ‘Well, my dears, I have to tell you something. Poor papa has lost his faith again.’”¹ Many prototypes of Mr. Garden existed outside fiction, and Tennyson, aware of their plight, buoyed them up with one of those sweeping generalities which he could compress so skilfully into a phrase :

f. fl. { There lives more faith in honest doubt,
 { Believe me, than in half the creeds.

The Voice of Authority had spoken ; the Doubtful were raised up. (The phrases of the Victorian seers were, for their own generation, as powerful as an oriental spell ; as compelling as the utterances of the Delphian oracle ; and they were received with equal confidence.)

¹ *Told by an Idiot.*

travelled in far corners of the world, and became richly stored with wanderer's lore. Yet Hudson wrote some of his most entrancing books about life in the English counties, and Cunninghame Graham about his native Scotland. Many autobiographical glimpses were given by Hudson, but in *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918) he entered upon a detailed picture of his early years. He does not mention dates, however, and his biographer, Morley Roberts, found it difficult to determine the few that are relevant. Hudson's birthplace was the farm of the Twenty-five Ombú Trees on the grasslands of Argentina, about ten miles from Buenos Aires. Though his grandfather was an Englishman, born in Exeter, his father and mother were both from the United States. They migrated to the Argentine before the birth of their children, of whom William Henry Hudson was the third—born in 1841. He came to England a year or two before he was thirty; was naturalized in this country thirty years later (1900); and died in London, 1922. Though not English either by parentage or birthplace, Hudson was a faithful and devoted lover of England, its soil and people, and he liked to be regarded as a native.

The picture of his childhood on the pampas, in *Far Away and Long Ago*, is more than a plain autobiographical record. It abounds in remembered beauties and wise reflections on life. He was an old man when he wrote this book, and the play of memory upon the remote years produced "a wonderfully clear and continuous vision of the past." Hudson was a man of wide and deep experience, as well as a reader and thinker; he was a "full man", with a natural sense of what should be said and what left unsaid. Though he cannot perhaps be described as a natural stylist, his work has a clear naturalness—so much so, that the same hasty conclusion is sometimes made about Hudson as about even better prose writers than he: namely, that he had *no* style. That is a point not worth debating, when it is considered

the birds of London. His ability as an observer, and the amazing sharpness of his perceptions, can be gathered from the statement that he was able to recognize, by their songs alone, over one hundred and fifty different varieties of South American birds. He collaborated in a book on *Argentine Ornithology* (1889), the standard work on that subject; and in his last years wrote a number of excellent pamphlets for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham is a more romantic figure than W. H. Hudson. He was born in Scotland in 1852, the eldest son of a Scottish laird who married the sister of Baron Elphinstone. Cunninghame Graham was educated at Harrow, and subsequently became a Member of Parliament, a Deputy Lieutenant, and a Justice of the Peace for three counties. Yet he was also, at one time, a prominent anarchist, and a leader in the great Dock Strike in London in 1887, when on "Bloody Sunday" he fought the police in Trafalgar Square and went to prison. He has also peered into many of the world's remote holes and corners, and his books record out-of-the-way experiences in out-of-the-way places. Like Hudson, he spent some time in South America, and returned to that country during the World War to buy horses on behalf of the British Army. One of the best things written about him is the sketch by Bernard Shaw appended to *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Referring to Graham's *Mogreb-el-Aksa* (Morocco the Most Holy) (1898), Shaw says he was "intelligent enough" to steal from that book the local colour he wanted for his play: "its scenery, its surroundings, its atmosphere, its geography, its knowledge of the East, its fascinating Cadis and Kroo-boys and Sheikhs and mud castles." There follows a vivid and amusing description of Cunninghame Graham's character and personality.

In his books the several Cunninghame Grahams come into sight: the Scottish laird and the Spanish *hidalgo*, the

It was this willing submission to oracular voices, without adequate examination, that caused the Victorians to be misunderstood by their successors. But the lure of the phrase is hard to resist ; and—heedless of Carlyle's counsel, "Be not the slave of words"—very few of the Victorians desired to resist it. In its resounding emptiness, Swinburne's

[Glory to Man in the highest ! for Man is the master of things]

is as Victorian as any of Tennyson's high astounding phrases or Ruskin's sugared sweetnesses. Ruskin told his audiences that they "must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring themselves of their meaning, syllable by syllable—nay, letter by letter." The advice was sound, but it was very little followed, and the popular acceptance of himself as an oracle depended to some extent upon uncritical delight in the lulling music of harmonious prose : "A true wife, in her husband's house, is his servant ; it is in his heart that she is queen" ; "The path of a good woman is indeed strewn with flowers ; but they rise behind her steps, not before them." Yet, however distasteful might be this glad endurance of the tyranny of the phrase, to describe it as a symptom of "Victorian hypocrisy" is to go too far. At the worst it was mental inertia ; at the best, a conscious exercise of the attitude of acceptance and of the impulse toward reverence.

A further feature of Victorianism was its impassioned belief in the permanence of nineteenth-century institutions, both temporal and spiritual. The Victorians seemed to themselves to be living in a house built on unshakable foundations and established in perpetuity. Whatever they did was done as in the light of eternity. The Home, the Constitution, the Empire, the Christian religion—each of these, in its respective form and degree, was accepted as a final revelation. It was not allowable to suggest that, in

the natural processes of change, any or all of these institutions might be displaced by alternative institutions.} And in this respect some of the rebel Victorians were probably more Victorian than rebel. They would have been completely happy in the Victorian household if they had been permitted to make one or two minor alterations. Swinburne was indignant that "The House of God" should be written up on the gatepost; but if, without hindrance, he could have painted out the old lettering and inscribed, in its place, "The Devil's Kitchen," he would have gone contentedly indoors and lived respectably ever after. Morris wanted to improve the domestic arrangements and change the pattern of the wallpaper; yet, for all his strong discontent, he would not have proposed to pull down the house, nor would he have agreed that it was too flimsy for permanent occupation.

{Among twentieth-century writers, the Victorian idea of the Permanence of Institutions has been displaced by the sense of a universal lack of fixity. H. G. Wells speaks of "the flow of things."¹ In another book he describes a company of people as "haunted by the idea that embodies itself in the word 'Meanwhile.'"} He goes on to write: "In the measure in which one saw life plainly the world ceased to be a home and became the mere site of a home. On which we camped. Unable as yet to live fully and completely." Later, he speaks of "all this world of ours being no more than the prelude to a real civilization."²

{If the cost of seeing life plainly is that the world no longer appears to be a home but only the site of a home, the Victorians would have listened with composure to the charge that they did not see life plainly. [The change of outlook brought about in the twentieth century was due to the growth of a restless desire to probe and to question. Bernard Shaw, foremost among the heralds of change, attacked with

¹ *The World of William Gladstone.*

² *Meanwhile.*

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vigour the "old superstition" of religion and the "new superstition" of science, not because he was antagonistic to either religion or science, as such, but because, in his view, every dogma is a superstition unless it has been personally examined and consciously accepted by the individual believer. *Question! Examine! Test!*—these were the watchwords of his creed. He let slip no opportunity to challenge the Voice of Authority and the Reign of the Expert. With equal assurance he interrogated economists, artists, doctors, educationists, politicians, scientists, religionists; and the effect of his writings was to spread abroad the interrogative habit of mind. Thousands who had been brought up to regard religion and morality as subjects to be spoken of with reverently lowered voices, heard, as though it were a trumpet-call, Andrew Under-shaft's declaration in Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*: "That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions." The effect of this proclamation was invigorating to some; but many others might have expressed their sensations in the words of Barbara herself, "I stood on the rock I thought eternal; and without a word it reeled and crumbled under me."

It has rarely, if ever, happened that all the writers in a given period can be covered by a single formula. Though for the purposes of this book the years from 1901 to 1925 are regarded as *The Age of Interrogation* in English literature, it is not pretended that the phrase fits all the writers, or all the works of any of the writers. But it does at least suggest the direction in which the current was flowing, during a period marked by a bewildering flux of ideas and technical experimentation in literature. The spirit of the Age of Interrogation is seen in the questioning of the

accepted form of the novel, by James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and others; in the verse experiments of the Sitwells; in the biographical method of Lytton Strachey—as much as in the challenging ideas of Shaw and Wells.

The anti-Victorian tendency could be detected faintly here and there even in the middle years of Victorianism. As early as 1869 Meredith was writing in one of his letters, "Isn't there a scent of damned hypocrisy in all this lipping and vowelled purity of the *Idylls* [of Tennyson]?" Hardy, simultaneously, was murmuring in his earliest poems against the "purblind doomsters" whose "crass Casualty" seemed to him to hold the universe in purposeless and automatic bondage. And by 1872 Samuel Butler was beginning, in *Erewhon*, that attack on Victorianism which he was to conduct with vehemence and delighted boyish malice for the remainder of the nineteenth century. In the eighteen-nineties the gravity of the Victorians was further shaken by the so-called Decadents, impatient "to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world."¹ Victorianism outlived the Decadents; but then, with the turn of the new century, came a succession of writers with powerfully sceptical minds untouched by reverence for custom or the established order. These writers had grown up during the 'nineties, but they had not conformed to the current doctrine of "art for art's sake." They questioned Decadence as thoroughly as they questioned Victorianism. The Age of Interrogation had begun.

¹ Oscar Wilde: *De Profundis*.

CHAPTER II

NOVELISTS

§ 1.—*H. G. Wells*

WITHOUT the Marshalsea prison and the blacking factory there would have been no Dickens. Without the underground kitchen, the broken boots, and "the valley of the shadow of education," there would have been no H. G. Wells. If Dickens had been born in Belgrave Square he might still have written novels; but would they not have been less remarkable? If H. G. Wells as a child had worn the beautiful suits of little Lord Fauntleroy and gone to the best of preparatory schools, his inquiring mind might still have probed uncomfortably into the consciousness of his generation; but would he have set out to refashion the world in a manner so comprehensive as to catch the attention of two hemispheres?

Herbert George Wells, born in 1866, at a little "general shop"¹ in Bromley, Kent, was the son of a professional

¹ The term "general shop" may be obscure to some readers, though many Londoners and others are familiar with the atmosphere and stock-in-trade of these tiny forerunners of the modern "universal stores." I do not know what H. G. Wells' father sold, but general shops were usually crammed to the ceiling with bread, butter, cheese, pickles, candles, firewood, unpretentious medicines, brooms and brushes, lamp-oil, bootlaces, cheap confectionery, kitchen hardware, and so on. They were often situate in dismal back-streets, and no one who has childhood memories of these shops can ever forget the dark interiors, or the heavy composite odour that arose from the wares. The general shop was a social institution inseparable from the lives of poorer people in English cities in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the earlier years of the twentieth; and I sometimes think that the soul of H. G. Wells' *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly* can only be fully revealed to those who have some faint far-off memory of the general shop—and especially of its smell.—*A. C. W.*

cricketer in the Kent county team. His mother, the daughter of an innkeeper, was a lady's-maid, and it is possible that the early chapters of *Tono-Bungay* embody some of the novelist's memories of her. H. G. Wells spent his childhood in a period when basement-rooms were a feature of domestic architecture in England, and in a glimpse of his early life he is seen as a dweller in the underground :

A very considerable part of my childhood was spent in an underground kitchen ; the window opened upon a bricked-in space, surmounted by a grating before my father's shop window. So that, when I looked out of the window, instead of seeing—as children of a higher upbringing would do—the heads and bodies of people, I saw their underside. I got acquainted indeed with all sorts of social types as boots simply, indeed, as the soles of boots ; and only subsequently and with care, have I fitted heads, bodies, and legs to these pediments.¹

In the further course of this essay—which develops by natural progression into a passionate socialist tract—indications are given that the child H. G. Wells suffered many of those disabilities that fall upon the family of a small tradesman whose business is drifting into bankruptcy. He tells of sore feet due to over-darned socks ; of the knots of broken laces ; of over-trodden heels ; of split and flapping soles. If that represents the state of young Wells' boots, it seems a safe inference that the rest of his circumstances were in similar disrepair. The English parent at that time had a profound regard for the social implications of good boots, and broken footwear customarily followed and did not precede outworn clothing and inadequate food.

Mental clothing, however, is more important than a well-preserved suit, and the misery of boots was not the final blow. The first chapter of *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) contains what it may not be fantastic to regard as a description of the author's early schooling. When he

¹ *This Misery of Boots*, a Fabian Society tract (1905). Reprinted in *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets (World's Classics)*.

emerged at fourteen from what he calls "the valley of the shadow of education," there followed the purgatory of "the drapery." He was apprenticed to a draper in Windsor and, later, to another in Southsea. From recollections of those years, came several of Wells' best novels. When current problems of sociology, of international relationships and of religion (discussed at length in Wells' later books) have become insignificant in the face of newer problems, there will remain the joyous misadventures of Mr. Kipps, of Mr. Polly, and of Mr. Hoopdriver¹ with their rich laughter tempered by quiet pathos.

At the age of sixteen, when he had already augmented his early schooling sufficiently to become a teacher at Midhurst Grammar School, he broke his indentures and fled from the drapery for ever. In building-up a composite picture of H. G. Wells as a young man, some characteristics of the hero of *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900) are of interest. Mr. Lewisham is eighteen, an assistant schoolmaster in Sussex, earning forty pounds a year, and "called 'Mr.' to distinguish him from the bigger boys."

He wore ready-made clothes, his black jacket of rigid line was dusted about the front and sleeves with scholastic chalk, and his face was downy and his moustache incipient. He was a passable-looking youngster of eighteen, fair-haired, indifferently barbered, and with a quite unnecessary pair of glasses on his fairly prominent nose—he wore these to make himself look older, that discipline might be maintained.

Mr. Lewisham is an ambitious young man. On his bedroom wall hung a time-table mapping out his intended progress through life, and among his aims was a London University degree with "hons. in all subjects"! His creator did less well. After gaining a scholarship at the old Normal School of Science, South Kensington, H. G. Wells graduated as B.Sc. with first-class honours in zoology, and

¹ In *The Wheels of Chance* (1896).

later went as assistant-master to Henley House School, St. John's Wood, in north-west London. Subsequent experience as tutor, lecturer, and demonstrator—with incursions into journalism—preceded a serious illness which took him out of the sphere of formal education. In 1893 he turned definitely to journalism and authorship, and two years later published his first novel, *The Time Machine*, a book of striking originality, marked by power of vision and a command of clear and vigorous English.

In the following thirty years Wells wrote more than fifty books—a plain statement that is in itself a damning piece of criticism. His career might be described as "The Tragedy of a Novelist," with Over-production as the villain. The list of his books includes treatises upon love and marriage, science and religion, peace and war; sociology, biology, politics; angels and mermaids, astronomy and world-history; the old world and new worlds to come; and even children's games. No human being can successfully emulate Atlas and take the weight of all this unintelligible world upon his shoulders; yet it is purposeless criticism merely to bewail Wells' apparently wasteful dispersion of energy. Literature is undoubtedly poorer because the later Wells is unlike his former self; and it is probably true that *The History of Mr. Polly* will still be read with delight when *The World of William Clissold* (1926) has become an undisturbed anchorage for librarycobwebs. The annual duplication of Kippes and Pollys, however, would not have made Wells the significant figure that he is in twentieth-century England. His eager, restless, inquiring mind unsettled him for orthodox fiction as the years went on. Though it is possible to believe that there is as much sound social criticism in the dyspepsia of Alfred Polly as in the diatribes of Clissold, it would be a mistake to conclude that the change in Wells' literary manner after 1910 was produced by a decay of creative energy. The change was in fact due to a deliberate

departure from methods that had previously satisfied him ; it was as definite an act of renunciation as that of any medieval knight who determined to forsake life's pleasures for the rigours of a holy crusade.

Wells' manifesto of change (his essay on *The Contemporary Novel*¹) proclaimed the intention to abandon the "Weary Giant theory" that the novel is wholly and solely a means of relaxation, a harmless opiate for vacant hours and vacant minds ; and it also expressed dissent from the theory that the novel has any established form, in the sense in which a sonnet has form. The parade of ideas in this essay is so significant in relation to Wells' later novels that it might usefully have been printed as a preface to each of these, in order to forestall the repeated complaint that his novels were not of the regular type—a type he had explicitly abandoned. It is allowable to dissent from his theories and to dislike intensely the resultant product, but, before judgment, the theories should at least be considered. The main principles laid down in this manifesto of the New Fiction were : (a) That the novel is a discursive thing, a woven tapestry of interests ; (b) That it should be made sufficiently elastic in form to take the whole of life within its compass—"business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and undecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold, clear air of our elucidations" ; (c) That it should be, not a new sort of pulpit, but "the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of fruitful self-questioning," the great central platform for discussion and for the examination of human conduct.

To reply in terms of what the nineteenth century thought about the novel is useless. The kind of writing preferred by the later Wells is not, indeed, "THE Novel" ; but it is *his*

¹ First printed in the *Fortnightly Review* (Nov. 1911) ; afterwards included in *An Englishman Looks at the World* (1914).

Idea of the Novel—and he claims, as the master of this discursive school, Laurence Sterne, “the subtlest and greatest artist,” he says, “that Great Britain has ever produced in all that is essentially the novel.”

The essay on *The Contemporary Novel* is important also for its comments upon the change of outlook between the Victorians and Wells' own generation. He instances the passing away of the old “feeling of certitude about moral values and standards of conduct,” the old conviction that “your sect, whichever sect you belonged to, knew the whole of truth and included all the nice people.” In place of these certitudes and convictions had come “a penetrating and pervading element of doubt and curiosity and charity,” an assertion of initiative against organization, of freedom against discipline. The insistence laid upon the need for a nation-wide spirit of inquiry and experiment, makes this essay noteworthy as a spontaneous expression of the state of mind which dominated the Age of Interrogation.

But before any definite formulation of literary principles was undertaken by H. G. Wells, he had for some years been reaching out toward a new method. His fiction (apart from short stories) may be divided into (i) *fantastic and imaginative romances*; (ii) *novels of character and humour*; and (iii) *discussion novels*. Group (i) belongs mainly to the period between 1895 and 1908, and it was usual, at one time, to liken these imaginative romances to the stories of Jules Verne, though (as can now be seen) there was very little likeness. Whereas fantastic adventurousness counts for everything in Jules Verne, in Wells it is little more than a peg upon which to hang speculation and social inquiry. He endeavours, as it were, to step away from life and look at it from such a distance as makes possible a clear and proportionate view in perspective. He seems to suggest in these books that we—being inside ourselves and all too close to our neighbours—are no more able to see the effect of

life's whole picture than if we stood with our eyes only half an inch away from the surface of a Post-Impressionist painting. The first step toward the cure of social muddles and disabilities is to see civilization in the mass and not in disjointed fragments. Equipped with an alert and rich imagination, H. G. Wells has continuously striven to see life from an appropriate distance. And so, in his fantastic romances, he established his viewpoint (by turns) in the moon, in the past, in the future, in the air; he looked at life through the eyes of a mermaid, of an angel, of giants: by these and similar devices labouring to get outside common human limitations, and see mankind and its works clearly in the complete round. *The Wonderful Visit* (1895) provides opportunity for comprehensive questioning through the lips of the wounded angel, who asks questions about orthodox habits and observances which are so familiar to us as to seem beyond question—yet so fantastic to a citizen of heaven as to suggest a wild and incredible madness among men. The angel (a precursor of the Age of Interrogation!) demands to know the why and wherefore; but his host, the vicar of Siddermorton, finds that there is no discoverable why or wherefore; that he and his people are obeying customs and conventions without reason, even without consciousness. And the dilemma of the vicar becomes the dilemma of the thoughtful reader also.

The process of asking *Why?*—and, in other connections, *Why not?*—was the first step in Wells' crusade against "emphatic, cocksure, and unteachable" people; and the fantastic romances are an integral part of the whole body of his work, because of their challenging spirit of inquiry and criticism.

The second group—*novels of character and humour*—overlaps groups (i) and (iii) in point of time, and includes books which, without addition, would have sufficed to make Wells an important figure in English literature. Polly, at

least, is immortal—a great comic character who came quietly into the world and has been extending his kingdom ever since. And he is not *only* a great comic character; he is also the embodiment of all those exasperated and frustrated souls whom modern civilization throws up, stranded upon the beach of life. He is a figure too pathetic for tears—an almost tragic civilization-crippled genius; yet his pathetic and his tragic qualities merge into and increase his comic greatness, so that the spectacle of his life becomes, finally, a comedy for the gods rather than for men. We are too puny of soul to assimilate this Gargantuan feast. Kipps, Mr. Hoopdriver and Mr. Lewisham would seem even more admirable than they do, if Polly had never been born. As it is, they reach no higher than Polly's elbow.

In *The Contemporary Novel* Wells says: "I find all the novels of Dickens, long as they are, too short for me"; and in a later passage, commending Bumble, he adds, "but it is not only caricature and satire I demand." These references to Dickens raise interesting questions in regard to the methods of Wells and Dickens as social reformers. The effectiveness of Dickens' method lay in the fact that he made iniquitous officialdom seem not only wicked but ridiculous also—and the conviction that they are ridiculous reforms wrongdoers more quickly than the conviction that they are wicked. Not only were caricature and satire Dickens' most powerful weapons, they were also the most effective weapons he could possibly choose.

Under the laughter of Polly and Kipps (as already suggested) there is the stern face of Wells the reformer. In its own way, the humorous picture of Polly's education is as unforgettable as the Dotheboys Hall episodes; and the system which is indicted appears no less unforgivable. When he wrote *Joan and Peter* (1918), eight years after *The History of Mr. Polly*, H. G. Wells interrogated the English educational system in a more elaborate but less impressive

way. Throwing aside the weapons of humour and satire, he became merely bad-tempered—and bad temper is, surely, the worst possible equipment for a reformer. Oswald Sydenham (like Philip Rylands in *Meanwhile*, 1927), goes about England in a state of peevish indignation, producing his Catechism for Schoolmasters with an air that would have made any self-respecting schoolmaster neglect to be a gentleman. And this tendency towards peevishness is the bane of several of Wells' novels from *Joan and Peter* onward. When he laughed at abuses he was a second Dickens; when he grew fretful over them, he became a second-rate edition of himself.

The group of *discussion novels* began after *Tono-Bungay* (1909), the most notable piece of fiction Wells has produced. It is the central point at which all his competing interests meet and unite in proportion and harmony. *Tono-Bungay* stands alongside *The Forsyte Saga* as a diagnosis (though from another angle) of the break-up of English society during the second half of the nineteenth century. In these books the authors survey the disintegration of old-time strongholds of tradition and privilege—Galsworthy with a glance of pity; Wells with a glance of half-doubtful satisfaction—interrogative still; asking, by implication: "Is Lichtenstein better than Lord Drew?" *Tono-Bungay*, a sprawling and shapeless narrative ("an agglomeration . . . without discipline," as the narrator confesses) stands with the later novels as an exercise in the discursive method, but its social diagnosis is inseparable from the fascinating characters and the swift-moving story. This book is a forceful presentation of a problem of the first importance in modern England: the outgoing of the aristocracy—the "Quality"—and the incoming of moneyed charlatans and adventurers. "The last sad squires ride slowly towards the sea"—and what comes? England's insufficiency in this process of social replacement is the substance of H. G. Wells'

charge in *Tono-Bungay*. The great merit of the book as a piece of literary art is that the characters themselves state and illustrate the social theme; the author is veiled in their personalities, and does not himself speak as from a platform. Aunt Susan is a triumph of humorous portraiture; she is intensely real and lovable in her bewilderment as she floats from comparative poverty into affluence on a sea of patent medicine. "Round-eyed, button-nosed, pink-and-white Aunt Susan," with her faint ghost of a lisp and her non-sensically derisive attitude to the world in general, is queen in that delectable realm where Alfred Polly is king.

The theories set out in *The Contemporary Novel* explain Wells' intention and achievement in most of his novels since 1911. Each successive volume is a phase in his long inquiry as to the aims and ideals of civilized man engaged in the Human Adventure. Everything that man does is, to Wells, a subject for ceaseless interrogation. He sees civilization as a system which is "perpetually swaying and quivering and bending and sagging." Will the whole vast accidental edifice come smashing down? "Why shouldn't it?" he asked in 1909. By 1925 (after the World War and the failure of post-war reconstruction) he was occupied with the idea of mankind's progress toward the One World-State, which he then regarded as the next stage on the road of human development. Toward that One World-State he was urging men to work, saying:

"There was a time when men lived for a noble tomb and in order to leave sweet and great memories behind them; soon it will matter nothing to a man and his work to know that he will probably die in a ditch—misunderstood. So long as he gets the work done."

"With no last judgment ever to vindicate him," said Devizes.

"That will not matter in the least to him."

"I agree. Some of us begin to feel like that even now."¹

¹ *Christina Alberta's Father* (1925): Bk. III, ch. 4, § v.

It is a long pilgrimage from a general shop in Bromley, Kent, to the One World-State; but the pilgrimage has been continuous. Without the knowledge of what children in underground kitchens suffer from "this misery of boots" the vision of the One World-State might seem less urgent. It is a vision too wide and comprehensive for the majority—an abstraction so vast as to be meaningless even to millions who share Wells' desire to rid the world of miseries and hatreds and jealousies and wars. But if, in 1925, Mr. Polly was nearer to men's hearts than the One World-State, the fault may have been less that of H. G. Wells than of mankind in general, which can love the least of its fellow-creatures more readily than it can love even the noblest of political ideas.

§ 2.—*Arnold Bennett*

There is a class of novelists, rarer in England than in France, to whom the first principle in literary creation is *that this world is nothing but a spectacle*, which it is the novelist's task to record with complete detachment—looking on, but making no sound either of approval or protest. It is obvious that H. G. Wells' purpose as a writer has never been to report human affairs dispassionately. He has been an active and impassioned participant and protestant, not an observer merely. Arnold Bennett's purpose is a very different one. His masters, in the early stages of his development, were the French novelists, Maupassant, Flaubert and Balzac, and his endeavour has been to record life—its delights, its indignities, its distresses—without conscious intrusion of his own personality between the record and the reader. Like his French masters, he has been a copyist of life, and only indirectly (if at all), a commentator, an interpreter, or an apologist.

The moral sense—and more especially the emotional sense—of the Victorian English novelists would have caused

them to shrink from the idea of "detachment." They would not have understood (nor would they have thought it proper to attempt to understand) a writer who regarded a wife-beater and a nursing mother as equally interesting. But the wife-beater and the nursing mother are both part of the human spectacle; therefore, in a detached and dispassionate rendering of life in the novel, account has to be taken of both. "A cinematograph camera" does not become indignant over the wife-beater, nor lyrical over the nursing mother: it records the two without passion or prejudice. The resulting pictures are a faithful representation of two aspects of human life, and audiences are at liberty to adopt whatever attitude they choose; to find, it may be, the one distressing and the other ennobling. But with the distress, as with the ennoblement, the cinematograph camera is unconcerned.

The "naturalistic" novelist, so-called, desires to be as dispassionate and detached as a cinematograph camera. It is often said that undue ugliness results from his method, though it might be answered that, to a completely naturalistic novelist (if such a one could exist), there could be no ugliness as such—but only varying manifestations of life¹ to be recorded as they are seen. But that answer would be an inadequate apology. No "naturalistic" novelist can record the whole of life; nor the whole of any one life; nor the whole, even, of any one extended period of any one life. He is compelled to "self-determine" the nature of his picture of life, because (unable to include everything) he must select certain things as relevant and significant, rejecting others as irrelevant and without significance.

¹ "Probably no works have been more abused for ugliness than Huysman's," which "reproduced with exasperation what is generally regarded as the sordid ugliness of commonplace daily life. Yet . . . it is inconceivable that Huysman . . . was not ravished by the secret beauty of his subjects and did not exult in it."—Arnold Bennett: *The Author's Craft* (1914): Part 2, II.

And it is in the process of selection and rejection that naturalism breaks down. The naturalism of real life depends in a measure upon the empty interspaces between life's "significant" periods. Neither the novelist nor the dramatist can afford to attempt to indicate these empty interspaces, because tedium is the essential characteristic of such periods in human experience, and tedium is fatal to art. The few instances on record where a complete and positive naturalism has been attempted, have resulted in nothing but overwhelming dullness; ¹ while, in other instances of partial naturalism, novelists have so feared to distort their picture by making life seem too pleasant, that they have tended to eliminate too much joy and too little pain. Arnold Bennett's method has frequently been described as naturalistic, though it is only partially so. It is true that as he looks upon the world he is not obsessed by a conviction of life's injustices; nor is he like a tormented soul driven without rest to attempt to build a new world or to evolve a new race of creatures to inhabit it. He stands in the Age of Interrogation as, apparently, a detached figure; but his detachment is not that of an "unconcerned spectator" of life. He is merely detached, as an artist, from the current habit of protest and the current passion for utilizing creative literature as an instrument of moral and social reform.

Though he has himself repudiated the naturalistic convention, ² he has nevertheless followed it in part. Another writer might be content to remark, "Rachel lit the gas," but Arnold Bennett describes the simple act in minute detail in a passage five hundred words long.³ The truth seems to be that while he is, intellectually, well qualified for

¹ Cf. comments on James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson: *post*, pp. 50-51.

² "The notion that 'naturalists' have at last lighted on a final formula which ensures truth to life is ridiculous."—*The Ausber's Craft*, ch. 2, IV.

³ *The Price of Love* (1914): ch. I, i.

the naturalistic method, he is temperamentally incapable of sustaining it, even if he desired to do so. Life is not, for him, a spectacle merely. He becomes almost too easily and too delightfully conscious that it is a *wonderful* spectacle, a *thrilling* spectacle, a *fascinating* spectacle, an *awesome* spectacle. Trifles become charged with a tremendous, an apocalyptic significance. Two boys spitting over a canal bridge on the day that one of them leaves school for the last time are made symbolic of the battle of youth against "the leagued universe."¹ Sophia Baines refuses to take a dose of castor oil ordered by her mother: "It was a historic moment in the family life. Mrs. Baines thought the last day had come. But still she held herself in dignity while the apocalypse roared in her ears."² A girl holds out a lighted spill: "The gesture with which she modestly offered the spill was angelic; it was divine; it was one of those phenomena which persist in a man's memory for decades. At the very instant of its happening he knew that he should never forget it."³ A slatternly servant-girl in the rain with an apron of sacking protecting her head, is transformed by the visionary power of love into a celestial visitant wearing a bridal veil.⁴ But, lest such passages as these should stamp him too definitely as the romantic he is by temperament, Arnold Bennett "naturalizes" his novels by a perhaps disproportionate attention to disease and physical decay. In a final analysis, however, it is not life as a drab and depressing spectacle, nor as a well-balanced spectacle of good and ill together, that is the dominant vision in his best books. It is, rather, life as a spectacle in which almost every sensation and every phenomenon is sweet and lovable: "sweet, exquisite, blissful melancholy";⁵ "The incandescent gas-burner of the street-lamp

¹ *Claybanger*: Bk. I, ch. i.

² *The Old Wives' Tale*: Bk. I, ch. 3.

³ *The Price of Love*: ch. 4, iii.

⁴ *Riceyman Steps*: Part I, vii.

⁵ *The Old Wives' Tale*: Bk. III; ch. 1, ii.

outside had been turned down, as it was turned down every night! If it is possible to love such a phenomenon, she loved that phenomenon. That phenomenon was a portion of her life, dear to her."¹

Arnold Bennett's insistence upon the wonderment of life is partly an unnecessary stressing of an obvious truth, supported by evidence that is often irrelevant (and still more often inadequate to prove his case if it were in need of proof); and, partly, it is a relic of his provincialism. He has striven to become the sophisticated man of the world who knows all the ins and outs of life, and to reach that degree of knowingness when each sly dig and wink is comprehended. Yet he has never become altogether urbanized, nor ceased to be the country-cousin in modern literature—the man to whom all things are astounding. Life has never lost its glamour for him. He does not regret the passing of the glory and the grandeur of Greece and Rome, because he finds full recompense in the modern everyday life of the Five Towns, his native district, upon which he has conferred an almost legendary impressiveness. Next to Hardy's Wessex, Bennett's Five Towns are the most notable addition to the atlas of topographical fiction since Trollope and the Brontës.

Born at Shelton on the outskirts of Hanley, Staffordshire, in 1867, Enoch Arnold Bennett as a child lived behind a draper's shop ("Baines," in his novels). Educated at local schools, he matriculated at London University, and was a London solicitor's clerk at the age of twenty-one. Next, after receiving twenty guineas for a humorous story in *Tit-bits*, he became a free-lance journalist; contributed short stories to evening papers and to literary quarterlies; and became assistant-editor (afterwards editor) of *Woman*, for which he wrote "smart society" paragraphs under the name of "Gwendolen." In various ways,

¹ *The Old Wives' Tale*: Bk. IV, ch. 1, iv.

that paper enabled him to get the insight into the "secret nature of women" which he afterwards turned to account in his novels. From 1900 Arnold Bennett lived in France for nearly eight years, steeping himself in French literature. He died in London in 1931.

His books are numerous and their quality unequal. Three novels, *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910)¹ and *Riceman Steps* (1923), place him in the front rank of English novelists; *Buried Alive* (1908) and *The Card* (1911) are first-rate humorous character-novels; and *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902) is an entertaining and well-written extravaganza. His reputation was made and is maintained by the first three books named above.

The Five Towns of Arnold Bennett's works are the Staffordshire pottery towns which constitute the present federated borough of Stoke-on-Trent. Before 1908 there were five separate towns: Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent, and Longton, appearing in Bennett's books as Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, and Longshaw; while Oldcastle is the town of Newcastle-under-Lyne.

It is in this small area that the people of *The Old Wives' Tale*, *The Clayhanger Family* and other books spend most part of their lives; and readers become familiar not only with the principal streets and buildings and landmarks, but also with the men and women who walked the streets, inhabited the buildings, and looked admiringly upon the landmarks. The lifelike quality of Bennett's novels is secured by an accumulation of carefully chosen details. The ugliness and coarseness of which he has sometimes been accused are essential in his plan. He sees ugliness as part of the pattern of life; and the pattern of life woven without this element would be too threadbare to interest him.

¹ *Clayhanger*, the first part of a trilogy, was followed by *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and completed with *These Two* (1916); since collected in one volume (1925) as *The Clayhanger Family*.

The Old Wives' Tale is a long panorama of the lives of two sisters, Constance and Sophia Baines, who—first seen in girlhood full of surging hope and vigour and the fire of youth—have both died in advanced age before the end of the book, which combines humour and tragedy, pathos and indignity, beauty and ugliness. Masterpieces of character-drawing abound, and trivial incidents are made as interesting as great events. Sophia and Constance did not realize, says the author on the first page, that they were living in a district pulsating with interest; and at no time were they fully awake to the tremendousness of their own sensations. Constance did, indeed, on occasion, discover wonder in her domestic affairs; but Sophia, even in the turmoil of the Siege of Paris, was hardly conscious of living through strange and terrible days. But what *they* looked upon as commonplace, Arnold Bennett regards as full of lively and romantic possibilities. To anyone who might suggest that *The Old Wives' Tale* is drab and prosy stuff, he would reply: On the contrary, this is *life*; and life is always marvellous.

There are few lovable characters in *The Old Wives' Tale*, but *Clayhanger* has a population of fine, friendly people. Edwin Clayhanger, the outwardly commonplace son of a Bursley printer, is one of that small company in literature who, without loss of individuality, embody much generalized human experience. Most young Englishmen of a particular mentality have experienced the feelings which beset Edwin, and he contributes largely to the convincing effect of the book. In addition to Edwin there is the attractive Orgreave family, almost ideally fortunate in the harmony of its members. And who can forget good, solid, sensible Maggie (Edwin's sister) and inimitable Auntie Hamps?

Shortly after the *Clayhanger* trilogy was completed, Arnold Bennett determined to close the *Five Towns* series, and to work in a wider field. The novels which followed suggested that, in leaving his own people, he had sacrificed

too much. He recovered much of his former power, however, in *Riceyman Steps*, in which a decrepit district on the edge of the City of London is made as vivid as anything in the Five Towns books. *Riceyman Steps* is not so full as Bennett's two masterpieces, and he was not able here to reveal the characters with so intimate an understanding as that which marks the Baineses, the Clayhangers and the Orgreaves. Yet Elsie—a slatternly servant-girl outwardly, but inwardly an angel of light—is a beautiful piece of character-drawing. It is she who gives the novel its chief claim to greatness; though there is also the merit of its descriptive passages. And nowhere else does Arnold Bennett succeed so well in communicating the exact atmosphere of a place, as in his description of Riceyman Square “frowsily supine in a needed Sunday indolence after the week's hard labour.”¹ *Riceyman Steps*, though well received by the public and admired by other writers, was regarded by some as only a dismal book about dismal people in dismal surroundings. That, however, is a superficial judgment. Despite its drabness, the book is illumined by that “sense of beauty—indispensable to the creative artist,”² which is the soul of Bennett's novels. He has said that the foundation of the novelist's equipment is “universal sympathy”;³ and it is his possession of some measure of universal sympathy that enables him to see beauty everywhere, and to endow commonplace people with transfiguring interest.

In *The Old Wives' Tale*, *The Clayhanger Family*, and others of Arnold Bennett's novels, the historical and social background is sketched with remarkable skill, and with a sounder appreciation of what is truly significant than he shows, elsewhere, in his over-insistence upon the “significance” of trifling objects. In *Clayhanger* the narrative is

¹ *Riceyman Steps*, Part 1, X. ² *The Author's Craft*, Part 2, II.

³ *Ibid.*, Part 2, V.

made forceful and convincing by allusions to contemporary events, and these allusions are wide in their range, covering politics, religion, literature, and other interests.¹ Their total effect is to give to the story a "living" sense that is absent from any piece of imaginative writing where the characters seem to be suspended (historically) in a vacuum. Other writers have adopted this device of a panoramic background, but the result is not always happy.²

§ 3.—*John Galsworthy*

John Galsworthy, who came of a Devonshire family, was born at Combe in Surrey in 1867; educated at Harrow and Oxford; and called to the Bar in 1890. He practised little, but his legal knowledge is evident throughout his work, especially in *Justice* and in the enthralling court scene in *The Silver Spoon*. He travelled widely, but of this there is little evidence in his books.

If no biographical facts were available about any one of the three, it would be possible to deduce from a consideration of their literary styles that Wells and Bennett are plebeians and Galsworthy an aristocrat. For all his careful craftsmanship, Arnold Bennett's prose sometimes (and that of H. G. Wells more frequently) shows traces of being "puffy" and out of condition. There is an occasional air of fussiness about the writing. But though it may be true that Galsworthy, in his choice of subject, is at times suggestive of a well-meaning but over-anxious aunt, his

¹ The chapter (*Claybanger*, Book I, ch. iv) which describes Darius' experiences as a child in the grip of the factory system in early nineteenth-century industrial England, is a marvellous piece of re-creation, though, being a digression, it might be regarded as an artistic fault.

² The several effects of the use of this device can be seen in some of Rose Macaulay's novels, and in Beatrice Kean Seymour's *The Hopeful Journey*. In H. G. Wells' later books it is much more than a background; it is foreground and middle-distance as well.

style has the cool assurance and self-confident repose which it is pleasant to associate with the idea of true aristocracy. His sentences are crisp, clear-cut, athletic, and are free from the suspicion of obesity that attaches to a good deal of modern prose. This feature of his literary style is of particular advantage to his novels; but it is less so to his plays.¹ It clears his pages of what Pater called "surplusage," and gives a sense of progression and narrative swiftness to books not especially rich in incident. Galsworthy often produces passages of pure beauty, and creates a curious and unique sense as of *abstract Beauty* suspended in a clear, ethereal atmosphere. This effect is secured again and again in *The Country House* (1907), *The Patrician* (1911), and *The Forsyte Saga* (1922), especially in the passage describing Old Jolyon's death.² Galsworthy's lucent prose will probably keep his novels alive when they "date" as social commentaries. That dating had begun before his death in 1933.

Galsworthy's purposes as a novelist have been stated by himself in *The Inn of Tranquillity* (1912). *A Novelist's Allegory*, in that book, introduces a figure, Cethru, whose functions in the allegory are parallel to what Galsworthy regards as the function of the novelist in the modern world. Cethru is charged by the Prince of Felicitas to go all his life up and down the dark street (*Vita Publica*) bearing a lantern, so that wayfarers may see whither they are going and avoid the dangers that beset them in the darkness. The light shed by Cethru's lantern compels the citizens to take action against evils previously unseen and unchecked. The man with the lantern is consequently hated and persecuted, because he disturbs the complacent people. He does not himself observe the abuses he reveals to others; nor assist in quelling those abuses. He is the light-bearer,

¹ For discussion of this point see *post*, page 76.

² *The Forsyte Saga*: Interlude—*Indian Summer of a Forsyte*.

Cethru (*See-Through*)—the man through whose ministry others are compelled to see. He is at length arraigned before the judges for disturbing "good citizens by showing to them without provocation disagreeable sights" and endangering "the laws by causing persons to desire to change them." The defence of Cethru is that his lantern distorted nothing, it "did but show that which was there, both fair and foul, no more, no less." His advocate continues :

Surely, reverend Judges, being just men, you would not have this lantern turn its light away from what is ragged and ugly because there are also fair things on which its light may fall. . . . And I would have you note, Sirs, that by this impartial discovery of the proportions of one thing to another, this lantern must indeed perpetually seem to cloud and sadden those things which are fair, because of the deep instincts of harmony and justice planted in the human breast.

Since John Galsworthy's readers are sharply divided on the matter of his alleged impartiality, it is interesting to consider whether there is not a parallel between Galsworthy and Cethru, between Galsworthy's novels and Cethru's lantern. Is it a reasonable proposition to suggest (as many do) that Galsworthy writes "in cold blood, with his nerves at rest, and his brain and senses normal,"¹ and that he shows in a detached manner "that which is there, both fair and foul, no more, no less"? Beyond question, Galsworthy has honestly striven to give an impartial presentation of his problems. If he has not succeeded in doing so, it is because of some factor which he cannot control. Readers often persuade themselves that they incline toward the one side or the other "because of the deep instincts of harmony and justice planted in the human breast," and that Galsworthy has not definitely prompted their inclination. But if the matter is pondered coolly, the conviction grows that *the cult of the under-dog* is the ruling force in his work, as in that

¹ *The Inn of Tranquillity: The Windlestraw.*

of some Russian novelists, by whom he has been influenced ; and that Galsworthy is a subtle advocate who has deluded himself into believing that he is a presiding judge perpetually engaged in a dispassionate summing-up. He does weigh the evidence ; he does state the case for each contestant ; his intellect does continue to be on both sides at once : but *his emotions disturb the balance*. On the one side he gives a clear, cold, judicial statement ; on the other, his presentation is warmed and coloured by an additional emotional element. It is next to impossible to prove by references that Galsworthy is under the dominion of the cult of the under-dog ; the proof lies in the subtle emotional current—powerful though scarcely perceptible—which engages sympathy for one party rather than for the other. Some idea of the working of this emotional element could be gathered, perhaps, from an examination of the argument between Stanley and Felix Freeland¹ concerning comparative conditions of life as enjoyed by the “upper classes” and endured by the farm labourer. Felix, championing the under-dog, emphasizes that the wealthy Malloring is “called with a cup of tea, at, say, seven o’clock, out of a nice, clean, warm bed ; he gets into a bath that has been got ready for him, into clothes and boots that have been brushed for him.” Gaunt, on the other hand, “gets up summer and winter much earlier out of a bed that he cannot afford time or money to keep too clean or warm, in a small room that probably has not a large enough window ; into clothes stiff with work, and boots stiff with clay.” The comparison is a just one, but the significant point is that Felix’s statement is charged with sentiment and human feeling, whereas Stanley’s contribution to the argument is a brief and stubborn defence of things as they are. Stanley, indeed, is permitted to say far too little ; Felix undertakes both prosecution and defence, with effects (upon the readers’

¹ *The Freelands* (1915) : ch. VI.

mind) that might well be studied in their relation to the author's disputable "impartiality."

The Galsworthy world is peopled mainly by two classes—fugitives and pursuers. Love is closely related to pity, and hate is seen by Galsworthy as half-brother to fear. The hunted creatures of the world, he feels, are hunted because of a blind insensate fear driving forward their pursuers. The hunters are therefore also to be pitied, for they are themselves hard-driven by the hag Fear, the "black god-mother" of all mankind. In *The Black Godmother*¹ the hunted creature is a lost puppy who snapped at a farm labourer, out of sheer fright, when it was hungry and thirsty; and the farm labourer kicked it. Next it encountered some schoolboys, who stoned it. The puppy then fell in with a kind-hearted man, but he drove it away out of fear that it might infect his own dog with disease. And later, the half-maddened animal snapped at some children who tried to stroke it, and it was clouted on the head with a shovel by the children's father. An old stonebreaker was the next assailant:

"Well! you see," the old man explained to me, "the dog came smellin' round my stones an' it wouldn't come near an' it wouldn't go away; it was all froth and blood about the jaw, and its eyes glared green at me. I thought to meself, bein' the dog-days—I don't like the look o' you, you look funny! So I took a stone an' got it here, just on the ear; an' it fell over. And I thought to meself: 'Well, you've got to finish it, or it'll go bitin' somebody, for sure!' But when I come to it with my hammer, the dog it got up—an' you know how it is when there's somethin' you've 'alf killed, and you feel sorry and yet you feel you must finish it, an' you hit at it blind, you hit at it agen an' agen. The poor thing, it wriggled an' snapped, an' I was terrified it'd bite me, and some'ow it got away!"

A farmer afterwards wounded the puppy with a pitchfork because he was afraid it would bite his lambs. And in the

¹ First collected in *The Inn of Tranquillity*; since republished in *Caravan* (1925).

middle of the night the poor, wretched, hunted, harmless animal died in agony, in the house of the kind-hearted man who finally took it in and tended it—but too late. The little mealy-coloured mongrel was hunted to death, not by any vindictiveness of men (those who ill-used it were, at heart, kindly and protective), but by Fear, “the black godmother of all damnable things,” working through hag-ridden human beings.

Most of those who maltreated or drove off the puppy were actuated by fear moving them to guard their own possessions. At the root of their fear was the possessive instinct, an idea which leads up to Galsworthy's most monumental book, the series of novels and stories collectively named *The Forsyte Saga*, beginning with *The Man of Property*. The central character, Soames Forsyte, obsessed by the lust of possession, cannot overcome the passion to acquire everything desirable that is within his reach. By marriage he acquired Irene Heron. He over-persuaded her original reluctance to marry him, but the result was disastrous, and “the profound, subtle aversion which he felt in his wife was a mystery to him and a source of the most terrible irritation.” But he was a “man of property” and his wife was a property to be subjected to the exercise of full proprietary rights. Soames was at that time a selfish, acquisitive creature who could not endure beauty near him unless it was crushed and pinned in the specimen-case which was his house. Yet even here Galsworthy adduces the evidence for Soames—such as it is—through the thoughts of young Jolyon, who is less stultified by Forsyte prejudice and arrogance than most of his family. Young Jolyon meditates upon the deadlock in the Soames household in these terms :

Whence should a man like his cousin, saturated with all the prejudices and beliefs of his class, draw the insight or inspiration necessary to break up this life? It was a question of imagination, of projecting

himself into the future beyond the unpleasant gossip, sneers, and tattle that followed on such separations, beyond the passing pangs that the lack of the sight of her would cause, beyond the grave disapproval of the worthy. But few men, and especially few men of Soames's class, had imagination enough for that. A deal of mortals in this world, and not enough imagination to go round! . . . Most people would consider such a marriage as that of Soames and Irene quite fairly successful; he had money, she had beauty; it was a case for compromise. There was no reason why they should not jog along, even if they hated each other. . . . Half the marriages of the upper classes were conducted on these lines: Do not offend the susceptibilities of Society; do not offend the susceptibilities of the Church. To avoid offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings. The advantages of the stable home are visible, tangible, so many pieces of property; there is no risk in the *statu quo*. To break up the home is at the best a dangerous experiment, and selfish into the bargain.¹

Such is the evidence in defence of Soames. Galsworthy delivers no judgment, but here, again, in this earlier part of the *Saga*, there is an emotional current running against Soames. As the long record proceeds, however, an interesting change is perceptible. In the course of over twenty years in the bosom of the Forsyte family, Galsworthy's feelings have become mellowed in one respect and exasperated afresh in another. For a long time Soames Forsyte the Victorian was (metaphorically) in the dock, with the Younger (Edwardian) Generation in the jury-box. The jury was determined to be fair and to hear all the evidence, but it was stern, nevertheless, and implacable. In the second cycle of the *Saga* ² a different figure seems to occupy the dock: it is the Youngest Generation (the Neo-Georgian), Eton-cropped and rouged. The Edwardians are still in the jury-box, but their faces are lined with perplexity and regret. Soames Forsyte the Victorian, now a benevolent old gentleman, is seated quietly in the well of the court. On the bench is John Galsworthy, remarking sadly to the defendant, "Young woman, in my earlier days, it used to

¹ Book I, pt. 2, ch. x. ² Beginning with *The White Monkey* (1924).

be said that your Victorian grandfather was an undesirable person. I am now being very reluctantly forced toward the conclusion that, compared with you, he was a perfect gentleman."

But even if Galsworthy had become uneasy about the future of Fleur Forsyte, and indignant about the present of such as Marjorie Ferrar,¹ he was still able to understand and sympathize with those young people of the twentieth century who were animated by the restless spirit of the Age of Interrogation. The mentality of the Age has seldom been stated more lucidly than by Galsworthy in his analysis of Felix Freeland's young daughter, Nedda. He speaks of "the ceaseless questioning that was always going on within her; the thirst to know why this was and that was not. . . . Why, when people wrote and talked of God, they seemed to know what He was, and she never did? Why people had to suffer; and the world be black to so many millions? Why one could not love more than one man at a time? Why—a thousand things? . . ."

§ 4.—*Joseph Conrad*

Joseph Conrad had clear advantages over his English contemporaries. Though England became his home and Englishmen his friends, he was not limited in outlook or sympathy by national or racial consciousness. Poland and England meant much to him, but his experiences on the sea and in many lands made him a man of no one country. It is almost literally true to say that Conrad was a citizen of the world. His Malays and Borneans, Swedes and Englishmen, Germans and Dutch were all, alike, children of the human family, with some superficial differences but with more fundamental resemblances. H. G. Wells' endeavour to establish a world-outlook was a conscious and deliberate

¹ See *The Silver Spoon* (1926).

effort, and he did not cease to be, temperamentally, a twentieth-century Englishman. Conrad, as a writer, had no narrow allegiances from which to free himself: his interests were as wide as the world, and his outlook was, in that sense, universal. His Dain Maroola is no more "foreign" than his Axel Heyst or Captain Anthony. And no *less* foreign. It would be true to say that Conrad's characters are all "foreign," in a special sense. They move in a remote atmosphere, although they are actuated by the common passions of humanity. Their stature is heroic and, therefore, unlike the common stature. Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon* (1903), is dull, unimaginative, a fool in the eyes of his subordinates. But his dullness and lack of imagination are the foundation of that magnificent tenacity which makes him unconquerable, a hero unawares. He is, miraculously, the immovable object withstanding the irresistible force. By temperament he is remote from his fellows and foreign to them; yet in his way he is as representative as Hamlet (though in a different sense) of something universal in man. This universality and this foreignness are the distinguishing features of Conrad's men and women. They are universal in the sense that Conrad's drawing of them is "true" to certain general and fundamental experiences of humanity. They are "foreign" in the sense that he does not see them as they appear to be in the eyes of matter-of-fact neighbours, but through the diffusion lens of his own temperament.

To speak thus of the foreignness and the universality of Conrad's people is to express in another metaphor what is meant by those who refer to his "romantic realism." He was a realist because his creative genius, stabilized by experience, sought some central actuality as the starting-point for all his stories. He did not invent plots. He was almost incapable of such invention. His material was reality, subjected to the processes of a lively imagination. Seeds

of fact, planted in his mind, germinated (sometimes through long periods) under the light of his imaginative temperament, until there grew the completed "romantic-realistic" novel or tale. The change which facts underwent in transmission through Conrad's mind is evident. Describing how he first saw the original of *Almayer*, the chief character in his first novel, Conrad wrote :

He was moving across a patch of burnt grass, a blurred shadowy shape with the blurred bulk of a house behind him.¹

He wrote of another character :

Nina fancied she could distinguish the graceful figure of the trader standing erect in the stern sheets, but in a little while all the outlines got blurred, confused, and disappeared in the folds of white vapour shrouding the middle of the river.²

And again, in a letter concerning the first draft of *The Rescue* :

The idea has the bluish tenuity of dry wood smoke. It is lost in the words as the smoke is lost in the air.³

The "shadowy shape" of *Almayer*, the "blurred outlines" of Dain Maroola the Malayan trader, and the bluish smoky tenuity of *The Rescue*, are equally typical of the romantic "diffusing" tendency of Conrad's mind. And this softening of outlines, this modulation of the hard, glaring aspect of reality, is the essence of his romantic realism. His actualities and facts become clothed with romantic glamour and adventurous exaltation, more enduring than the excitement of romanticism of the common type because the imaginative treatment of truth is, finally, more satisfying than invention. Though the original fact comes to the reader with its outlines diffused, the diffusion does not pass over into falsification. Conrad's artistic conscientiousness

¹ *A Personal Record* (1912).

² *Almayer's Folly*.

³ To Mrs. Bontine, Nov. 22, 1898 (*Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, by G. Jean Aubry, 1927).

never relaxed after he had once determined his creed. His first two novels, *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), though vivid, powerful and original, are over-painted—the colours heavily laid on, the emotions crudely touched in. But by 1896 Conrad had become a sound self-critic. Writing to Edward Garnett, he says of *The Lagoon* (one of his earliest short stories), "It's a tricky thing with the usual forests—rivers—stars—wind—sunrise, and so on—and lots of secondhand Conradese in it." Yet though in the first two novels there was overmuch colour and insufficient drawing, he was even then capable of that pictorial exactitude which, in so many instances, gives his pages their marvellously living quality. Much of his work is atmospheric and impressionistic, but he often paints-in details with as particular care as the seventeenth-century Dutch painters used; and without distracting attention from his whole design. One example of this detail-painting is provided in the description of Mrs. Willems as she is seen by her husband:

She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upwards from bow to bow, noticing those that hung only by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. He looked at her lean throat, at the obtrusive collar-bone visible in the disarray of the upper part of her attire. He saw the thin arm and the bony hand clasping the child she carried.¹

Whether he is describing splendour or squalor, Conrad's artistic integrity is unsleeping; the artist's delight in the process of creation governs his work. Verloc's dismal shop, Mrs. Willems' disordered bedroom, glories of sunrise and sunset, the bowed form of a grief-stricken woman; upon these—as upon all his subjects, all his people, and all

¹ *An Outcast of the Islands*: Part I, ch. 3.

the incidentals of his books—he expended “unremitting, never-discouraged care.” That last phrase comes from Conrad’s original introduction to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* (1897) (his “beloved *Nigger*,” as he called it), an introduction which was, in fact, a declaration of method. Conrad regarded novel-writing as a definite art—“like painting, like music”—and not only as a matter of story-telling. The “story” element was secondary in his mind. He was aware of the paucity of events in his books, and remarked: “As to lack of incident—well, it’s life.” He maintained that the task of the worker in prose was not, primarily, to edify, console, amuse, improve, encourage, frighten, shock, or charm, but “by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel . . . before all, to make you *see*.” The novelist was to strive for the perfect blending of form and substance, aspiring “to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music,” which Conrad believed might “be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words; of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless use.”

To make his novels true works of art was, then, at least half of Conrad’s desire; the other half was addressed to the philosophical (almost mystical) purpose of awakening “that feeling of unavoidable solidarity . . . which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.” That unifying purpose is the central theme of Conrad’s writings, and he expressed it again and again in his insistence upon the need for fidelity in human relationships. “Those who read me,” he said, “know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, amongst others, on the idea of Fidelity.”¹ Nothing stirred his admiration so profoundly as the keeping of faith between

¹ *A Personal Record*: Preface.

man and man. Who injured another (or, even, refrained from succouring another) was, in the terms of Conrad's philosophy, betraying the whole human brotherhood. The onus of judgment, of determining whether or not a fellow-creature is worthy of succour, does not rest upon us, Conrad would have said. Razumov, in *Under Western Eyes* (1911), betrays Haldin. Haldin is an assassin, and therefore (presumably) a fit subject to be handed over to justice. But under the law which governed Conrad's ideal universe the paramount fact was, in this case, that Razumov was a betrayer. His mentality is sympathetically explored with that power of intimate and subtle probing which gives to Conrad's books their intense psychological interest; but though Razumov may engage the reader's sense of pity and, possibly, arouse some degree of affectionate regard, he is a breaker of the solidarity of the human race, and, as such, must suffer as Haldin suffered before him. In *The Secret Sharer*,¹ a fugitive from justice is given refuge on the high seas by the narrator of the story, a ship's captain. The narrator acts instinctively upon the principle of Fidelity. He does not question whether the refugee is "worthy." He feels immediately that here is a fellow-creature bound inseparably to himself, and therefore to be protected from the Thing in pursuit—namely, man-made Justice. In this story, Conrad's idea of Fidelity is powerfully indicated, not by statement but in action. The captain's sense of solidarity between himself and the "sharer" is so acute that the two personalities become, in a curious way, almost unified. In his soliloquies the captain emphasizes his sense of the identity between himself and the other, speaking of him as "my double," "my second self," "part of me"; he experiences a mental feeling "of being in two places at once," or "as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror."

¹ One of three stories in *Twixt Land and Sea* (1912).

The same sense of Fidelity draws Captain Anthony to Flora de Barral (*Chance*, 1913) and Heyst to Lena (*Victory*, 1915); it dominates (consciously or otherwise) a score of characters whose creed is to keep faith. For such as these, Conrad had an undying regard; his contempt was reserved for such as Donkin (in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*), the creature who "knows nothing of courage, of endurance, of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company. The independent offspring of the ignoble freedom of the slums, full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea."

No mere accident of personal contact determined that the sea should occupy so important a place in Conrad's books. The sea and its "austere servitude," its "unconcerned immensity," the "sleeping and terrible sea," the "brotherhood of the sea," makes deeper demands upon fidelity than are made by life ashore, where men are more loosely knit together or (it may be) altogether divided by indifference and diversity of interests. At sea, on the contrary, the solidarity of mankind is a primary condition for maintaining an unbroken front against the common enemy, the ocean. Conrad loved ships. He did not love the sea, though he was fascinated by it: "Impenetrable and heartless, the sea has given nothing of itself to the suitors for its precarious favours . . . for all its fascination that has lured so many to a violent death."¹

At this point arises the question of why the child Conrad, born in the heart of a coastless country, should have become possessed by a passion for the sea, which (as he was afterwards to say) had "never been friendly to man."

Much of Joseph Conrad's life-story can be compiled in outline from his books, but as he was incapable of writing

¹ *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906): Section XXXV, which (with the preceding and following sections) should be carefully considered as a succinct statement of Conrad's attitude towards ships and the sea.

in the "I-was-born" style, neither *A Personal Record* nor *The Mirror of the Sea* is straightforwardly autobiographical. They are autobiography by lightning flashes.

His mother's family were Polish landowners named Bobrowski;¹ his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was a temperamental member of an impoverished Lithuanian family. Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski² (born in the Ukraine, South Poland, 1857) had early memories of exile in company with his parents. Their house was a meeting-place for Polish insurrectionists, and when Russian officials discovered an impending plot, the father and his wife and child were banished to Vologda in northern Russia. In consequence of hardships endured in exile, the mother died while Josef was still very young. The circumstances of his early days made him a lonely and brooding child without friends of his own age. He was driven in upon himself, and upon books "which described countries where it was possible to breathe and act freely, to fight openly, if necessary, and to speak thoughts above a whisper." When the father, in ill-health, was released from exile as being no longer dangerous, he and the boy settled (1869) at Cracow, where Josef attended a preparatory school.³ As a youth labouring under many repressions, he began to "desire to escape, cost what it might, into a freer world." The fullest promise of freedom seemed to the boy to lie in a seafaring life, and especially in the life of a sailor in the British Merchant Service. This was the desire distinctly formulated in his mind (and maintained against the desperate opposition of his relatives): to become a sailor on an English vessel. Conrad's first sight of the sea was at Venice when he was sixteen, and in the next year (1874) he started for

¹ Cf. the allusions to Mr. Nicholas B. in *A Personal Record*.

² He took the name Joseph Conrad when naturalized in England in 1884.

³ For reminiscences of his school-days, see Conrad's *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921), ch. IV, *Poland Revisited*.

Marseilles, where he shipped as a member of the crew of a French vessel. In the intervals between voyages to the West Indies he seems to have spent a good deal of time in Marseilles, an important period of his life that remains somewhat obscure. Among his intimate friends was Dominique Cervoni, a middle-aged Corsican seaman, who afterwards appeared, in one guise or another, in several of Conrad's books. Cervoni was the original for Nostromo, and for Captain Lingard (in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *The Rescue*, 1920); and he appears under his own name in *The Mirror of the Sea* and *The Arrow of Gold* (1919). The last-named novel is largely autobiographical. Conrad was implicated in the Carlist conspiracy described therein, "while in the character of Rita he drew the woman who first taught him to feel passionately."¹ Conrad left Marseilles in April, 1878, after recovering from a wound received in the duel with which his love-affair ended. His first landing in England was at Lowestoft on June 18, 1878, when he was twenty years old and knew only a few words of English. Six years later he gained his Board of Trade certificate as a master in the British Merchant Service, after voyages to Australia and the East, which were to provide part of the central facts around which he afterwards built *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and *Youth* (1902). The story of his first command is told in *The Shadow Line* (1917); while later experiences in Congo are outlined in *Heart of Darkness*.² Though at the time he had no intention of leaving the sea, what proved to be his last voyage ended on January 14, 1894, after nearly twenty years of sea life, spent chiefly on sailing vessels. In 1895, his first novel (*Almayer's Folly*) was published. If at first his manner of writing betrayed a foreigner, within a few years he was a master of English prose style. Yet his fame grew slowly, and when he

¹ G. Jean Aubry: *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*.

² Included in *Youth*.

died (August 1924) he had experienced only a few years' moderate popularity.

Conrad's usual deliberate method of indirect narration is a cause of stumbling to some readers, who find him tedious because (they say) "he does not get on with the story." This complaint is not unreasonable, though it is not true of more than half his books. It will be sufficient to suggest, here, that when he does not "get on with the story," it is because he had what he considered a more important task in hand; namely, to give, as far as possible, a clear revelation of the truth underlying the particular human problem engaging his attention. And so, in *Lord Jim* (1900) and elsewhere, he introduces Marlow as a receiver and sifter of evidence collected from several sources. Just as Browning, in *The Ring and the Book*, tells Pompilia's story again and again from changing points of view, so Conrad introduces a number of characters for the purpose of considering the problem from their differing angles. Though the progress of the narrative may be slow, the final gain is considerable, unless novels are to be regarded only as a form of light entertainment. At the close of *Lord Jim* a patient reader feels that many dark places in human personality have been explored and lighted up in such a way as to make Jim's "acute consciousness of lost honour" tremendously impressive. Jim deserted his ship; thereby violating "the solidarity of the craft" and offending against the immitigable law of Fidelity—an offence for which expiation had to be made. At the time of his desertion of an apparently sinking vessel he was young and untried; in essence a man of honour, but with a fatal tendency toward momentary panic. For the rest of his life he had the relentless ghost of lost honour ever pursuing him, and nothing could appease that spectre except the vow, "I shall be faithful . . . I shall be faithful," which brought him, after a dishonoured life, to a brave and honourable death. Jim is an important figure in the

Conrad universe since he is in himself so attractive and lovable that the temptation to make him more "sympathetic" than tragic must have been difficult to resist. But Conrad's moral integrity and artistic sincerity were always proof against the bribe of sentiment.

§ 5.—*Tradition and Experiment*

For nearly a century and a half—from Fielding to the last of the great Victorians—the English novel swept along on a torrent of creative energy which reached full power in Dickens' careless vitality and generous exuberance. Dickens neglected form and style because his passion for utterance was so urgent. Later novelists, George Meredith and Henry James among them, had less to say and could afford time to say it more carefully; and when creative energy became still less abundant, after 1914, disproportionate attention was given to theories of fiction. Scores of novelists with nothing to say knew all there was to know about how to say it—as they demonstrated in novels sometimes so devoid of substance and meaning that little would be lost by reading them backward.

But other phases of the twentieth-century novel intervened.

Round about 1910-1912, when Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, Conrad and others seemed to be restoring the prestige of the English novel, a group of younger writers were beginning to produce able and promising work. After writing a warmly-praised eighteenth-century story, *The Passionate Elopement* (1911), Compton Mackenzie turned to studies of modern young people. *Carnival* (1912), a novel of theatrical life, was followed by the two volumes of *Sinister Street* (1913, 1914), which set a fashion for long and detailed books dealing with childhood, adolescence, and undergraduate experiences. This Oxford novel

came to be regarded for a time almost as a charter of emancipated youth. Though Compton Mackenzie did not shirk ugly matters, his prose style coloured the tale with a hazy golden light, irresistible to younger readers. In *Guy and Pauline* (1915) he wrote an idyllic love story, full of warmth and sunshine. By that time the war-storm had burst, and the young novelists seemed much less important than they had done two years earlier. The War ended and a number of these writers survived, but their reputations never fully recovered. Compton Mackenzie retained wide popularity, and produced a succession of readable novels; but the post-War *intelligentsia* gave little attention to him. Hugh Walpole, J. D. Beresford, Frank Swinnerton and Francis Brett Young¹ suffered a similar eclipse. So far as the vagaries of public taste can be explained at all, it is probable that the overshadowing of these writers was due to the traditional quality of their novels. Though their material might be "up-to-date," the method of treatment was too orthodox to retain critical attention amid a swarm of heterodoxies.² The break-up of smooth tradition in the novel was already threatening by 1913, in the later chapters of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.

Among the experimenters were certain women novelists. Women had already written many fine novels in the early years of the twentieth century; and it is singular that, as masculine force and creative energy died down among men writers, women seemed to take over those qualities. Elizabeth Robins, who began to publish in the 'nineties, continued to produce novels marked by a combination of feminine insight and masculine vigour. In *The Magnetic North* (1904), one of several of her books dealing with the

¹ See Reading Lists, page 207, for titles of novels by these writers.

² The modernist view is expressed by John Carruthers (in *Scheherazade, or The Future of the English Novel*, 1927) when he refers to contemporary novels in the traditional style as "dead ends," and to experimental novels as "growing points."

Arctic zone, she displays an astounding knowledge of men's minds. Whether for incident, atmosphere, or psychology, *The Magnetic North* is a very remarkable novel.

May Sinclair, a restless genius, has never settled to any one type or style. Her sixth book, *The Divine Fire* (1904), is a long and detailed study of a poetic genius, in which character and discussion are of equal interest. The difficulty of creating a literary genius in a fictional work is evident, and perhaps May Sinclair never succeeds in making Savage Keith Rickman the Keats-like person he seems intended to be. Though he talks perfect Greek he is tortured by an imperfect control of English; he has "the soul of a young Sophocles battling with that of a junior journalist in the body of a dissipated young Cockney . . . the child of 'Ellas and of 'Olywell Street." But even if the whole extensive plan is not realized with uniform success, *The Divine Fire* is nevertheless a book of uncommon merit, at times approaching greatness. Both in this novel, and in *The Combined Maze* (1913) the author shows much ability in portraying drab and mean lives, with their jumbled pathos, kindliness and folly. This is particularly displayed in chapters dealing with the Bloomsbury boarding house in which Rickman lives, and in domestic scenes amid "the paradise of little clerks" in *The Combined Maze*. After the War, May Sinclair came under the influence of Freud's psycho-analytical theories, and also of Dorothy Richardson's literary methods. The absorption of these newer ideas was not beneficial to May Sinclair's books. *Mary Olivier* (1919) dabbles with the "Œdipus complex," spiritual inhibitions, fears of insanity, and thwarted desires. Though always interesting, *Mary Olivier* is rarely free from the desolating sense of "horrible tension" spoken of in the following passage:

. . . The evening had begun.

They took up their books. Mamma hid her face behind Anthony

Trollope, Mary hers behind Thomas Hardy. Presently she would hear Mamma sigh, then yawn.

Horrible tension.

Under the edge of her book she would see Anthony Trollope lying in Mamma's lap and Mamma's fingers playing with the fringe of her shawl. She would put Thomas Hardy down and take up Anthony Trollope and read aloud till Mamma's head began bowing in a doze. Then she would take up Thomas Hardy. When Mamma waked Hardy would go down under Trollope; when she dozed he would come to the top again.¹

The Life and Death of Harriett Frean (1922) covers about seventy years in 184 pages. If it be true that a drowning person sees his own past life in momentary retrospect, the series of mental pictures is probably like those given in *Harriett Frean*—a series of significant flashes along the "stream of consciousness." This book, though short, produces an impression that is, in its immediate effect, almost as vivid as that given by Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*. The omission of detail, however, robs *Harriett Frean* of the rich sense of humanity present in Arnold Bennett's novel, and little remains in the reader's memory but the consciousness of an ugly life. Harriett Frean was encouraged from childhood to strive consciously after "beautiful behaviour," but the deliberate cultivation of "her own moral beauty" leads to a type of narrow idealism indistinguishable from disastrous selfishness. The book is also marred by passages of excessive realism,² though occasionally May Sinclair's tiny realistic touches are deeply significant. What (for instance) could be more illuminating, or speak more significantly of Time's perpetual irony, than the part played in *Harriett Frean* by the ornamental blue egg? As a child Harriett loved the blue egg; later she grew to hate it, and when her mother died Harriett took it

¹ Book Four, ch. XXX, § ii.

² E.g., the description of Prissie's paralysis, ch. VI.

from the drawing-room to the spare room. Many years afterward :

She was back in the drawing-room of her youth. Only one thing was missing. She went upstairs and took the blue egg out of the spare room and set it in its place on the marble-topped table. She sat gazing at it a long time in happy, child-like satisfaction.¹

One by one the English counties are being parcelled out among the novelists, and at an early age Sheila Kaye-Smith justified her annexation of Sussex and its marshes. To a casual visitor, the landscape in which this writer sets her stories might appear to be given over almost wholly to the "rotting sea-mists" mentioned in *Joanna Godden* (1921). Yet Sheila Kaye-Smith brings immensity out of flatness, and the passionate masculine strength of her novels lies as much in environment as in character. She has been likened to Hardy, but there is not between Sheila Kaye-Smith and Sussex the symbolic intimacy that links Hardy to Wessex. She is a modern observer of scenes and phenomena ; he, an ancient indweller and soothsayer. Sheila Kaye-Smith's characters are more definitely localized (even parochialized) than Hardy's, and her readers are sometimes at a disadvantage if, being unfamiliar with local terms, they "don't know a teg from a tup."² Interest is closely concentrated upon the environment and upon what the environment makes of the inhabitants. Thus, in *Sussex Gorse* (1916), the implacable soil on Boarzell hill tries, and tortures, and almost destroys a whole family before it is tamed by the fanatical purpose of Reuben Backfield, who swore to bring it under cultivation. The battle between man and earth goes on without mercy, day after day, year after year, until both are scarred and torn. So titanic is the struggle, that on a first reading the sharp focussing of interest upon the

¹ Ch. XIV.

² *Joanna Godden*, Part I, § 12.

central spectacle obscures secondary impressions. But to re-read *Sussex Gorse* is to be conscious of a strain of cruelty running through the narrative, and leaving a final impression as shudderingly horrible as that of an Elizabethan tragedy of blood. There is no gleam of light, no sense of compensation; only madness and death and ruin.

Sheila Kaye-Smith's books miss the last touch of distinction because her emotional relentlessness is so overstrained that it approaches inverted sentimentality. She will not allow the afflicted to escape until they taste the dregs of anguish. Joanna Godden, in a frenzy after Martin Trevor's death, "expressed her grief in terms of fierce activity . . . because not merely her heart but her whole self was broken, and she was just flying and rattling about like a broken thing."¹ Reuben Backfield, Edward Monypenny² and the Rev. Mr. Sumption³ are also, like Joanna, frenzied creatures; but their frenzy is not so much a stroke from the high gods, or from the tumult within, as from the author's too ruthless pen.

Those trifling interests of civilized society which escape notice in Sheila Kaye-Smith's elemental world, are, on the other hand, Rose Macaulay's chief concern. She is the most acute social critic of her time; and her brilliance is almost insolent, for she appears to turn no more than half an eye upon the world. "Half an eye is enough," she seems to say; "who would need more to detect the palpable follies of this madly comic and tragically delirious world?" The general sense of negligent ease in her books suggests that Rose Macaulay has not yet found a subject to extend her powers to the full or to engage her whole mind. If she finds such a subject, the result should be dazzling beyond present imagining. As it is, she has demolished the follies and pretences of several generations, and her pen falters for

¹ Part III, § 1.

² *Tamarisk Town* (1919)

³ *Little England* (1918).

lack of other victims. *Orphan Island* (1924) was little more than a satirical paraphrase of Victorian history—too easy game for her keen and glittering weapons. *Potterism* (1920)—the first of the satirical novels to show fully Rose Macaulay's lively spirit—was dedicated to the "unsentimental precisians in thought, who have, on this confused, inaccurate, and emotional planet, no fit habitation." "Potterism" is a synonym for the discarded term "philistinism"—the worship of commercial success, "the booming of the second-rate," the admiration of popular things. Mrs. Potter is a "best-selling" novelist; Mr. Potter a flourishing Press magnate; the young Potters (Johnny and Jane, university bred) are members of the Anti-Potter League, a group of bright young people who "talked and discussed and played . . . and thought they had found things out." Then came the War and stopped their talk; then the Armistice. The War-period briefly, and the post-War period at greater length, provide Rose Macaulay with opportunities for that dispersed irony which she uses half maliciously, half contemptuously. Neither Potters nor Anti-PotTERS escape the lash. She regards humanity as a horde of "minds crowded together, making a dense atmosphere, impervious to the piercing of truth. All this mass of stupid, muddled, huddled minds. . . . Greedy minds, ignorant minds, sentimental, truthless minds. . . ." The author's irony and satire are distributed so even-handedly that she cannot altogether escape the suspicion with which a universe of fools will regard the one wise person in their midst. Clear-minded, witty, and immensely diverting though she is, Rose Macaulay is over-emphatic and undervalues mental discretion and discipline. She exposes too much. *Potterism*, *Dangerous Ages* (1921), and (the best of her books) *Told by an Idiot* (1923) leave mankind stripped naked of those rags of illusion without which human souls cannot in decency walk abroad. Society is held together as

much by its political, intellectual and spiritual *modistes* as by its dressmakers and tailors.

The argument between traditionalists and experimentalists in the modern novel is to some extent an argument about Time. Traditionalists keep their eyes upon the calendar and the clock: hours pass, the years go by—and proportion is kept between time and action.¹ Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and other modernists have set themselves to annihilate the time-factor. They do not accept as a fixed formula that the morning and the evening are one day; evening or morning—or any part of either—may represent eternity or (on the other hand) less than a single pulse-beat. Time, they imply, has no positive quality: its value and duration are relative to other fluctuating factors; one person's whole life-story may have no greater time-value than twenty-four hours in the life of another. This attempt to destroy the tyranny of Time in fiction has brought other changes. Old forms and old idioms sufficed for novelists who accepted the time-convention and the correlative conventions of plot, action and character used in orthodox novels. But since action *qua* action is usually sharply outlined and fixed in Time, action is almost eliminated from the novels of Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce; thought *qua* thought is also eschewed, as being susceptible of a certain fixity. Action and thought abandoned, there remains consciousness—without beginning and without end—able to effect infinite reduction of Time and infinite extension also. In the eight novels about Miriam Henderson written by Dorothy Richardson up to 1925, and in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), plot, action, character and thought are drowned in the "stream of consciousness,"

¹ "Traditional" novelists, of course, have sometimes ignored the time-factor. Conrad is challenged by traditionalist critics because Marlow's narratives could seldom have been spoken within the time assigned. And Samuel Richardson's Pamela could have had little time for domestic duties in the intervals between her letters.

down which drifts endlessly a mass of mental flotsam and jetsam seldom cohering into connected thought. *Ulysses* is a wild phantasmagoria. The "stream of consciousness" running through it is choked by sewage, and the whole book is incredibly dull and dismal. Its general tone might be better indicated if the title were *The Blackbeetles' Odyssey*. As an experiment in representing the backward and forward swirl of confused impressions passing through a mind, however, the last fifty unpunctuated pages of *Ulysses* should not be contemptuously dismissed. Dorothy Richardson's books, too, are dull. Miriam is an entirely uninteresting young woman, full of sound but (so far) signifying nothing that can be detected. Her record is not yet complete, and judgment may be withheld until the end of her "years falling into words."¹

What is ignored by Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and others, is that the time-factor is governed wholly by the *varying intensity* of human experience. The nearly seven hundred large pages of *Ulysses* cover only one day in the lives of three people, whose sensations are flattened out, like a desert unbroken by any sandhill or oasis. So also, Dorothy Richardson's books amble onward everlastingly, as Miriam goes through a life which has few emotional contours. Virginia Woolf is not so tedious as the other two, though she is exasperatingly shapeless. *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) are like snippets cut from a number of cinematograph films and indiscriminately joined up. Some fragments throw lively coloured "views" upon the screen; more often, however, only the irritation of discontinuity is provided.

The difficulty of preserving a sense of proportion in a survey of twentieth-century fiction is aggravated by the trend of contemporary criticism. Starting from the assumption that the traditional forms of fiction are exhausted

¹ *Revolving Lights*, ch. I.

and that new methods must be found, reviewers are disposed to give more prominence to what is new than to what is normal. Yet whatever patience and sympathy may be brought to a consideration of new movements in fiction, the traditionalists do "satisfy," whereas the modernists do not. Much of the "new fiction" is laborious to read, and impossible to re-read; it creates a distaste that can be removed only by turning to more normal writers. The idols of the *intelligentsia* are not the idols of the majority, but both sets of idols may be equally hollow. By 1950 Dorothy Richardson will no doubt rest "quite, quite forgot" in company with Ethel M. Dell, and Virginia Woolf with E. M. Hull; while a novelist so little trumpeted as the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* may be among the survivors.

Several pages might be filled by mentioning only the names of other authors who, between 1901 and 1925, wrote distinctive novels. Among the most interesting are E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence. The thin, dry atmosphere in E. M. Forster's books is bracing, yet too rarefied for the characters ever to live healthy and fully physical lives; they are sometimes so overstrung, emotionally and intellectually, that their crises grow from nothing but hysteria. Miss Quested's charge against Dr. Aziz¹ is a tragic consequence of hysteria; Lucy Honeychurch's reaction to George Emerson's kiss,² a semi-comedy of hysteria. E. M. Forster's style is luminous and sensitive, with many beautiful passages; his satire is sharp and penetrating as he deals with conventions and incidentals; and there is profound (sometimes bitter) irony in the poisoning of massive effects upon tiny causes, like a monstrous inverted pyramid. Nevertheless, when admiration has been fully expressed, the feeling returns that the characters are caged in the author's mind, unable to escape into actuality.

¹ *A Passage to India* (1924).

² *A Room with a View* (1908).

With *Sons and Lovers* (1913), D. H. Lawrence joined the leading contemporary novelists, though some later books failed to maintain him in that position, not because of any loss of skill as a writer, but because of his dreary pre-occupation with animal things in a world of frustrate passions, and "mystic suave loins of darkness, dark-clad and suave" and "the immemorial magnificence of mystic, palpable, real otherness."¹ Such phrases as these, taken alone, appear incredible; yet they constitute the very texture of Lawrence's books and withdrew attention from the remarkable qualities behind this heavy curtain of "darkness" and "otherness." His life (1885-1930) was one of inner turmoil; but in such books as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and *The Man Who Died* (1930) he pointed others to a means of resolving the distresses that had torn his own being.

George Moore (1853-1933), though belonging to the older generation, takes a place among the experimenters. Born in Ireland, he went to Paris in the 'seventies to study painting, but realizing that he could make no headway in graphic art he turned to literature. After essaying verse in the manner of Baudelaire, Moore found his way at length to fiction, and three Zolaesque novels were followed in 1894 by *Esther Waters* (a landmark among English realistic novels) written in London. In 1901 he went back to Ireland for several years, producing short stories and a novel of Irish peasant life (*The Untilled Field*, 1903; *The Lake*, 1905), and his superb masterpiece of indiscreet memories, *Hail and Farewell* (1911-1914). But Moore's chief claim to lasting remembrance depends upon *The Brook Kerith* (1916), in which his later phase of unremitting devotion to a prose style distinguished by unornamented clarity and lucidity is carried to perfection in a story of Jesus and Paul among the Essenes. Moore continued his experiments in crystalline English prose until he died, writing and re-writing to the end.

¹ *Women in Love* (1921).

DRAMATISTS

§ 1.—*The Twilight of the Drama*

AFTER the death of Shakespeare and his contemporaries the drama in England suffered a decline for upwards of two centuries. Occasionally, during that long sickness, it seemed that the patient might recover, and make the English theatre again a place to which writers would turn as naturally as the Elizabethans had turned. But the hope was delusive; and neither Congreve in the seventeenth century, nor Sheridan and Goldsmith in the eighteenth, restored the drama to robust health.

The closing of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642 was less harmful than the order of release some twenty years later, after the accession of Charles II. Although the Restoration gave a strong impetus to the theatres, the profligacy of the Stuart Court was reflected so blatantly in the cynical indecencies of Restoration drama, that not only religious fanatics had reason to regard the theatre with disgust. Moreover, the drama was almost fatally handicapped by the grant of a Royal Patent to the managers of Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres in 1662, and these two became the only houses at which classical drama could legally be performed; for this purpose, "classical drama" was regarded as including the plays of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Otway and some others. In 1766 the Royal Patent was extended (in a modified form) to the Haymarket Theatre, but other theatres were still restricted to plays of poor quality with musical accompaniment—whence arose the term *melo-drama*, now a byword for extravagantly false theatricalism.

Of course, the "minor theatres" (as the non-Patent houses were called) found means to evade the royal imposition, and it was at a minor theatre in Goodman's Fields, Whitechapel, that David Garrick made his name as a great Shakespearean actor. But only by elaborate subterfuge could these houses produce "classical" plays. At Garrick's first theatre, the audience paid its money for a brief musical entertainment, at the end of which a dramatic performance was provided, without charge! This ingenious method of evasion had obvious disadvantages, and it certainly was not a condition of affairs in which a healthy national drama could flourish. Nor was the Royal Patent lightly to be ignored. In 1819 and 1820, Junius Brutus Booth gave Shakespearean performances at the newly-opened Coburg Theatre (now the "Old Vic") in Waterloo Bridge Road. As a result the manager of the Coburg was prosecuted at the instigation of the management of Drury Lane and heavily fined.

Not until 1843 were efforts successful in removing these disabilities from the majority of London theatres. In that year the Theatre Regulation Act was at last passed by Parliament, and all regular theatres placed on an equal footing. Instead of three protected theatres with traditions and reputations to uphold, and a scattering of negligible smaller places, there suddenly sprang up, at the note of freedom, a strangely assorted group of playhouses, all with equal legal rights. The old protected companies broke up and became distributed piecemeal elsewhere. Supernumeraries of Covent Garden, who might, with training, have developed into accomplished actors, hurried to small local theatres, where their immature powers failed to sustain them in parts that were more exacting.

There is no need to describe in detail how the London stage fared in these new throes of wretchedness. For twenty years and more a period of chaos ensued. During that time the theatre had no intellectual or social standing,

and playgoers had perforce to leave their brains at home when setting out for the theatre.

The name of Thomas William Robertson (1829-1871) is inseparably associated with the beginning of the modern revival of English drama. Like other forerunners, he passed and became almost forgotten, and his plays now seem crude and commonplace. But he was a pioneer in bringing back life and intelligence to the theatre, and the production of Robertson's comedy, *Society*, by Marie Wilton and Squire Bancroft, at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, in November, 1865, was a more important occasion than either dramatist or actors realized.

In the Bancrofts' company at a later date (1881-2), when they had removed to the Haymarket Theatre, was a young actor, Arthur Wing Pinero, who had previously been with Irving and the Wyndhams. He was the son of a lawyer and had been intended for his father's profession, but at nineteen he took to the stage. In 1882, Pinero abandoned acting for writing. Plays by him had already been performed by Irving, John Hare, and Mr. and Mrs. Kendal (Madge Robertson, T. W. Robertson's youngest sister). Pinero's first notable work, *The Money Spinner*, produced in 1881, was followed by other original plays and adaptations, before he established a reputation with what became known as the Court Theatre farces: *The Magistrate* (1885), *The Schoolmistress* (1886), and *Dandy Dick* (1887). Thereafter, he turned from farce to comedy, to more serious drama, and even to tragedy. In *Sweet Lavender* (1888) the influence of Robertson is seen; and *Trelawney of the 'Wells'* (1898) is a delicate picture of the life of an earlier generation of actors, the character of Tom Wrench being a sketch-portrait of Robertson. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) was one of the first-fruits in England of the influence of Ibsen, though Pinero was far from expressing fully, in this and subsequent plays, the unorthodox individualism of the Norwegian

dramatist. Pinero did something toward transporting to the English stage the ~~husk~~ of Ibsen; but the inward substance of Ibsen's message provoked, in this country, an outburst of rage that only a Bernard Shaw could face with imperturbable self-possession. Pinero had a strong sense of effective stage situation; his plays are well written and very "readable"; and his characters more lifelike than characters in English drama had been for generations before he began to write.

While Pinero was addressing himself to stagecraft and the literary aspects of drama, Henry Arthur Jones was promoting the development of social drama. He began with extravagant melodramatic pieces—the best known was *The Silver King* (1882)—but later conducted extensive propaganda designed to give the theatre a more important place in the social life of the time, and he insisted that the drama should provide an uncompromising criticism of manners and institutions.

Another dramatist of the period, Oscar Wilde (1856-1900), brought into the theatre an acute and brilliant wit, while his care for literary style helped to clear the drama of verbiage and to make its dialogue keen-edged and clean-cut. His epigrams quickly lose their surprising and attractive impertinence, however; his characters are wooden, and his sentiments almost wantonly insincere. Yet he did much to improve the literary standing of the modern drama, and his own notoriously brilliant talk echoes through his plays. When, as in his last play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), the theme is entirely fantastic, his weaknesses become less obvious. This play has no purpose except to be gay; it is a piece of inconsequent extravagance; and as a contribution to English comedy it has been ranked with the plays of Sheridan.

The career of Stephen Phillips (1868-1915) was a curious episode in contemporary theatrical history. The advertise-

ment pages at the end of early editions of his plays quote the judgments of reputable critics whose praises could not have been warmer if Shakespeare had been under review. Stephen Phillips' poetic dramas show a smooth facility in versifying and a knowledge of stage technique, but they contain little true poetry or true drama. Yet the interest they aroused probably encouraged other writers and led to further experiments in poetic drama. Even if they did nothing else, Phillips' plays did at least indicate the limitations of Elizabethan blank verse for modern purposes, and led poets to seek a different medium. In that respect, Stephen Phillips was at least of negative importance in the development of modern dramatic literature; and there are still those who consider that an English National Theatre should include *Paolo and Francesca* (1899) in the permanent repertoire.

§ 2.—*George Bernard Shaw*

There came to London from Dublin in 1876 a young Protestant Irishman, belonging to a family that prided itself upon being connected with "the gentility." His father, a feckless and impecunious gentleman, was related to a baronet; and his mother, grown weary of her husband's shiftless ways, had preceded her son to England. This obscure youth—George Bernard Shaw—had little money, no prospects, and no hope of settled employment; yet he was able to say, twenty years later, "My destiny was to educate London."

He was born in Dublin in 1856, began his education under an uncle, the Rev. William George Carroll, and went on to the Wesleyan Connexional School in Dublin, where (as he has said) he learnt little—mainly because he himself did little and relied upon the help of two more brilliant boys, whom he repaid by reciting stories from Homer.

Mrs. George Carr Shaw, his mother, was the "New

Woman" before the New Woman had properly arrived. Independent and self-reliant, she cared nothing for the frowns of the orthodox. Her great passion was music, and the Shaws' home became a rehearsal centre for the amateur operatic society of which she and her singing master, George John Vandeleur Lee, were the leaders; Lee as producer and conductor, Mrs. Shaw as *prima donna*. At the age of fifteen, young G. B. S. had memorized operas and oratorios by Mozart, Handel, Beethoven, Rossini, Mendelssohn, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Gounod. He whistled these as a London street-boy whistles music-hall songs; and when, not long afterwards, he was working as an accountant in a Dublin land office, he taught the artiched pupils under him to sing (in office hours!) Italian operatic arias. In March, 1876, he walked out of the office and crossed St. George's Channel.

Shaw spent over sixteen years in London before his first play was produced, and in the nine years between 1876 and 1885 earned only £6 by spasmodic literary efforts—£5 being for a patent-medicine advertisement. He wrote five novels which were refused by publishers, though two or three of the stories ran serially in small magazines. In 1882 he heard a speech by Henry George on Land Nationalization, which fired him to enlist in "the liberative war of humanity." At that time, also, he came under the influence of Shelley's humanitarian and vegetarian doctrines. Shaw's circle of friends included Sidney Webb and other socialistic thinkers, and he became a member of the Fabian Society, founded in January, 1884, for the propagation of Socialist principles by methods of investigation, education, and general penetration—as opposed to the militant policy of cataclysmic change. Some of Shaw's earliest writings were done for the Fabian Society's economic and political tracts.

During those years of political agitation and ferment, G. B. S. determined to become an effective public speaker.

He took every opportunity that offered for addressing public meetings, and was a familiar figure at street-corners and in the rooms of debating societies. By 1885 he was reduced to "quite straitened financial circumstances"; and with the help of introductions from William Archer, he began his career as a journalist, writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The World*. He was appointed music critic to *The Star* in 1888; and in 1895 dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, at that time entering a new phase of brilliance with Frank Harris as editor. The two volumes of *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, gathered from G. B. S.'s contributions to the *Saturday Review*, have been overshadowed by his later works; but the essays should be read for their lasting freshness and originality, their sound standards of judgment, and their lively wit and Shavian audacity.

At that time the "New Journalism" was being born in England. Compulsory elementary education commenced in the year he arrived in London, and by about 1895 a new reading public was growing up. The settled dignity of the Press began to be shaken by new methods, and by new periodicals in which liveliness was considered more important than authority. One of the liveliest new journalists was Bernard Shaw. Whatever he said or wrote was governed by the determination to make himself heard, and to keep his hearers alert. "In order to get a hearing," he says, "it was necessary for me to attain the footing of a privileged lunatic, with the licence of a jester. . . . My method is to take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then to say it with the utmost levity. And all the time the real joke is that I am in earnest." Already, before he climbed on to the theatre stage, he had impressed himself upon public notice. His quick, eager, destructive questioning of social institutions provided the mental stimulant for which the younger generation was ready. Though he aroused hatred, he also gathered an enthusiastic following.

As a matter of considered policy he lived in the limelight and used the paraphernalia of the circus to attract and hold his audience. He behaved, consciously, as a mountebank, employing the weapons of laughter and ridicule to attack bad housing, bad education, bad conditions of labour, bad morals, and other social evils which troubled him so deeply that he would have paraded London with a barrel organ and in a clown's attire if he could have got a hearing upon no other condition ; for, he held, "it is only the man who has no message who is too fastidious to beat the drum at the door of his booth." ¹

After trying many devices and using many platforms, Shaw discovered that the stage was the finest platform in the world. He climbed on to the stage, taught himself the dramatist's job, and in addition to being a great controversialist became an almost supremely great dramatist. His plays fall short of perfection—as whose do not ? Many of his characters are mechanical mouthpieces, rather than human beings standing upon their own feet and using their own tongues. He has lapses from good taste ; his humour is sometimes tiresome and feeble. Yet when all deductions are made, and when Shakespeare has been put at the head of the roll of English dramatists, who is to be placed second if not Shaw ? Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Congreve, Webster, Tourneur, Sheridan ? The failings of any of these are no fewer than those of Shaw, though they may be different failings ; their achievements seem less than his. Not one of their number directed and dominated the thought of the seventeenth or eighteenth century as Shaw directed and dominated the thought of the early twentieth century—in England and beyond. Not one of them was moved by a blaze of moral passion, as Shaw was. Not one of them had a greater command of rhetoric or a more brilliant wit. Some of them are great poets—as Shaw is not ; yet which of

¹ Preface to *Three Plays by Brieux* (1911).

them commands a better prose style than Shaw at his best?

Whatever Bernard Shaw's actual stature as a dramatist, his potential stature was still greater, for he has hampered his literary ability by subordinating it to his moral purpose. He became the Knight of the Burning Pencil, a crusader whose appointed lifework was the endeavour to build Jerusalem, the city of God, in England's once green and pleasant land. The eighteen-nineties, the period of his beginnings, was a period of "art for art's sake." Bernard Shaw, however, could find no justification for art that was not controlled by moral passion; his watchword was "art for life's sake"; "'for art's sake' alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence."¹ He is a natural literary artist fettered by reforming zeal, and his plays are a continuous record of the long struggle between artist and moralist. Whenever he found himself writing as an artist, as a master of prose, he was possessed by the dread of being *merely* an artist, a *dilettante*. He realized his great command of majestic rhetoric, and feared lest it should become a mental drug, tending to make audiences dull and solemn. When he suspected any such danger, his method of correction was (he has said) to "introduce a joke and knock the solemn people off their perch." Perhaps G. B. S. underrated the good sense of his audiences. Whatever the motive, it does not appear that any benefit—moral, psychological, or literary—came (for example) from following the sublime rhetoric of Cæsar's address to the sphinx with the childish prattle of Cleopatra.²

Bernard Shaw began as a dramatist in 1885, about six years after the earliest performance in England of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. It is possible to over-emphasize the extent of Ibsen's influence upon Shaw, strong though it was. The

¹ *Man and Superman*: Epistle Dedicatory.

² *Cæsar and Cleopatra* (1901): Act I.

unorthodox trend of his mind had been evident before he left Dublin, and before he knew anything of Ibsen. Contact with Ibsen's ideas did not bring about a revolutionary change of mental attitude in Shaw; it only confirmed an attitude previously adopted. He was impressed by the "technical novelty" of Ibsen's plays; by his judgments upon ideals and idealists; and by his anti-romantic impatience of "the womanly woman." Ibsen's conviction that the real slavery of his day was "slavery to ideals of goodness" was heartily approved by Shaw, for he, too, believed that unrestrained idealism was unintelligent idealism, without thought or reasoning, and therefore dangerous, destructive, and pernicious.¹ G. B. S. claimed, emphatically, the right of private judgment on all questions of conduct, as against the conventional habit of giving allegiance to "accepted" institutions: "conduct must justify itself by its effect upon happiness, and not by its conformity to any rule or ideal."²

To Shaw, the practice of questioning orthodox and "accepted standards of belief is at once the beginning of wisdom and the beginning of goodness." Anything that is popular (in the sense of being automatically accepted as the best thing possible) should, he believes, be looked upon with suspicion—whether it be vaccination, an educational system, the family, or a religion. One of his first propositions was that good institutions and bad institutions alike were regarded with confidence by the multitude only because the whole mass of accepted institutions had hardened into custom; so that what is customary is likely to be confused with what is virtuous and what is right. His career has been one long incitement to insistent questioning of *What is*, with the purpose of establishing a rightful conception of *What should be*: "Progress is not achieved by panic-stricken rushes back and forward between one folly

¹ See *Brand* for Ibsen's most massive presentation of this theme.

² *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891).

and another, but by sifting all movements and adding what survives the sifting to the fabric of our morality." ¹

Widowers' Houses, the first of Shaw's plays, was started in collaboration with William Archer, but, on Archer's withdrawal, the manuscript lay untouched for nearly seven years. It was at length completed by Shaw alone, and produced at the Independent Theatre by J. T. Grein towards the end of 1892. In 1898 the first collection of Bernard Shaw's plays appeared: *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant*, in two volumes. *Widowers' Houses* should be described as an economic tract in dramatic form. The characters are mostly (and intentionally) shown as hypocrites and humbugs: Trench is an ignorant sentimentalist, Blanche Sartorius a designing minx with a touch of insane unrestraint. It is, however, a lively and humorous tract; the opposing groups of characters are permitted to state their own case fairly; but there is no dramatic objectivity—i.e., the persons in the play automatically project the author's own attitudes and principles. Here, in his first play, Shaw's stock-character—the obtuse, thick-skinned, unimaginative, humourless Englishman—already appears. This character, the Cokane of 1892, is brother to a dozen others down to the de Stogumber of 1924 (in *Saint Joan*). These absurd Englishmen of Bernard Shaw's have been much abused by critics; but a more dispassionate consideration might suggest that they have a long and interesting ancestry. In respect of themselves they are Shaw's own creation—and not one of his best. Yet in respect of their dramatic function in the plays, they might be compared with the buffoons of an earlier tradition: the Vice of the medieval drama, and the Fool of the Elizabethan—before the Fool had been transformed by Shakespeare from a buffoon into a philosophic and poetic genius.

The stage situations in *Widowers' Houses* are contrived

¹ Preface to *Three Plays by Brieux*.

with less dramatic power than those in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, yet in each of the three *Unpleasant Plays* the characters remain as puppets controlled by the hand of the puppet-master. In *Pleasant Plays*, for the first time, the ideas become less important than the persons who state them—but the ideas lose none of their force. *Arms and the Man* is a success, not because of its ideas—impressive though these are—but because Bluntschli picks up the play and walks off with it on his shoulders. The artist in Shaw had already begun to play pranks with the moralist. William, the butler in *You Never Can Tell*, is another excellently individualized creation, as also are the majority of the people in *Candida*, the most satisfying of the early plays.

These two volumes, then, as well as the *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901) which followed, show G. B. S. the preacher struggling in the embraces of the siren, Art. The only desire of the preacher was to communicate his ideas and convictions. The dramatic artist had other desires. Though the preacher succeeded in keeping his feet, he had to fight constantly against the pull and lure of "mere literature."

By 1903, when *Man and Superman* appeared, Bernard Shaw was a fully equipped playwright. His apprentice days were over, and he was equal to whatever demands the theatre and the dramatic form could make. The later plays do not, however, show him going from strength to strength. It is now pull devil, now pull baker, as reforming zeal or literary power gets the upper hand. In *Man and Superman* the ideas are more memorable than the characters, and there is little reliance upon stage situation; but the tremendous stirring of moral and intellectual passion is compensation enough. Described by the author as "A Comedy and a Philosophy," this play was Bernard Shaw's earliest full statement of his conception of the Way of Salvation for the human race, through obedience to the Life Force, the term he uses to indicate a power continually

working upon the hearts of men and endeavouring to impel them toward a better and fuller life. In later plays the Life Force seems to become more and more closely identified with what most people mean when they speak of the Will of God and the Holy Ghost.¹ Though Shaw's Life Force is not anthropomorphic, in its functions it is not vastly different from the Christian idea of the function of the Holy Ghost. It might be described as the Holy Ghost denuded of personality—*it*, not *He*. If in future times the medieval habit of posthumously Christianizing the works of non-Christian writers were resumed, the editing of Bernard Shaw on such lines would be a comparatively simple task, demanding only a few suppressions here and there, and the substitution of some Christian term for the words Life Force. G. B. S. has himself led the way by writing, in his essay on Parents and Children, "the child feels the drive of the Life Force (often called the Will of God)."² But even if "the Will of God" had exactly defined Shaw's idea of the directing power behind Man, he would not have used the more familiar words, because he is convinced that over-familiarity with current phrases is the great obstacle to clear thought and positive action. If he had written about "the Will of God," only the already converted would have listened to him. He chose, instead, to write about an apparently new discovery, the Life Force. But the Life Force was nothing newer than God. If the religion of Bernard Shaw was, to twentieth-century ears, more attractive than orthodox aspects of faith, this was largely because of the invigorating call put into Barbara's mouth: "I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it

¹ The man who was scientific enough to see that the Holy Ghost is the most interesting of all the hard facts of life got easily in front of the blockheads who could only sin against it.—*Back to Methuselah*: Preface.

² Preface to *Misalliance* (1910).

cannot be done except by living men and women."¹ The idea of working for the world's good without thought of personal reward, here or hereafter (an insistent idea in twentieth-century literature²), is in sharp contrast with the familiar Christian desire for eternal personal felicity.

The philosophy (or the religion) of the Life Force, introduced in *Man and Superman*, ran through most of the later plays. Unlike Hardy's Immanent Will, Shaw's Life Force is represented as a power making consciously toward a state of existence far more abundantly vital than anything yet experienced by mankind. But the Life Force does not purpose to work unaided: men and women are required to act as willing and eager agents for the furtherance of its great work. The existing race of men, however (so Shaw thought in 1903), was too mean-spirited and too self-centred to serve the Life Force, which would consequently be compelled to supersede Man by a more effective instrument of its will—the Superman. The means likely to be adopted for the production of that higher type were suggested in *Man and Superman* (1903), where Woman is indicated as "Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its achievement," and Man as "Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest" that the Superman should be born to replace the existing "feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances."³ In *The Revolutionist's Handbook* (appended to *Man and Superman*) Shaw turned back to Scriptural language to express his convictions: there he speaks of Man as the Temple of the Holy Ghost; and urges, "'ye must be born again' and 'born different.'"

The crux of the whole problem, in Shaw's interpretation, is whether Man will or will not address himself to "the work

¹ *Major Barbara* (1905): Act III.

² Cf. quotation from H. G. Wells' *Christina Alberta's Father*, *ante*, page 17.

³ *Man and Superman*: Epistle Dedicatory.

of helping Life in its struggle upward." ¹ If Man will not undertake this work, if he will not help toward getting himself born again and born different—if, indeed, he sets obstacles in the way, or becomes, himself, a passive obstacle—what is to happen? Will the Life Force permit its purposes to be thwarted in order that Man may enjoy the prerogative of "free will"? The latter question was answered by Shaw with emphatic negatives in more than one of the plays that followed *Man and Superman*; ² until, at length, the unregarded warning of those negatives blazed up into prophetic denunciation of "cultured, leisured Europe." *Heartbreak House* was commenced in 1913, and even while Shaw was writing to remind men and women that Nature's patience was not inexhaustible, the judgment fell; and a generation that did not know how to live was forced back upon demonstrating, in a World War, that it knew how to die. Nature "demoralizes us with long credits and reckless overdrafts, and then . . . suddenly Nature takes her revenge." ³ When Mazzini Dunn remarks that there is much to be said for the theory of an over-ruling Providence, Captain Shotover replies: "Every drunken skipper trusts to Providence. But one of the ways of Providence with drunken skippers is to run them on the rocks." ⁴ To G. B. S., a generation that gave no heed to the purposes of the Life Force was like the drunken skipper to whom there comes—late, perhaps, but surely—"the smash of the ship on the rocks, the splintering of her rotten timbers, the tearing of her rusty plates, the drowning of the crew like rats in a trap." That was his vision of Europe in *Heartbreak House* (1919). There followed *Back to Methuselah* (1921), in which Shaw considered further the causes of the smash of the ship of Europe on the rocks, and

¹ *Man and Superman*: Epistle Dedicatory.

² Particularly in *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909).

³ *Heartbreak House*: Preface.

⁴ *Heartbreak House*: Act III.

contemplated the outlook for the future. Once again the purposes and claims of the Life Force were stressed ; once again, and in plainer terms than before, he spoke his warning : that if Man did not come up to the mark, Man would be replaced (perhaps catastrophically) by a less tragically futile creature. G. B. S. proclaimed that the effect of modern civilization had been to store up "the social disease and corruption which explode from time to time in gigantic boils that have to be lanced by a million bayonets" ; and he goes on to say :

This situation has occurred so often before, always with the same result of a collapse of civilization. . . . This does not mean that if Man cannot find the remedy no remedy will be found. The power that produced Man when the monkey was not up to the mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if Man does not come up to the mark. What it means is that if Man is to be saved, Man must save himself.¹

He lays the heaviest blame for the alleged failure of civilization upon Darwin and the theory of Natural Selection, which had (Shaw believes) "banished mind from the universe" and created a stultifying conviction that life was "a chapter of accidents" not capable of being modified or controlled by human action. He pleads for the substitution of Creative Evolution—his "religion of the twentieth century"—which teaches not only that Man is the potential Superman, but also that Man can himself hasten the evolutionary process by "willing" his own upward development : "If the giraffe can develop his neck by wanting and trying, a man can develop his character in the same way. . . . Indifference will not guide nations through civilization to the establishment of the perfect city of God."² The Life Force is not named so frequently in *Back to Methuselah* as in *Man and Superman*, but it remains as the power behind the idea of Creative Evolution. The ultimate desire of the

¹ *Back to Methuselah* : Preface.

² *Ibid.*

Life Force is to establish the city of God on earth. The intention at the back of the idea of Creative Evolution is that Man should work intentionally (*creatively*) toward the evolution of a human type that will be strong enough to establish and worthy enough to maintain the earthly Jerusalem. Creative Evolution is the doctrine commended by Shaw as a means through which the desire of Man and the purpose of the Life Force may be made identical.

For years to come, Bernard Shaw's ideas will continue to overshadow the literary aspect of his work. But in the one mature play that is already out-of-date in its subject-matter (*John Bull's Other Island*, 1904) it is possible to see the dramatic strength behind the fabric of topical interests. This play remains one of his most effective pieces, displaying his dramatic powers—mastery of rhetoric and exalted prose, effective handling of stage situation, skill in depicting character, and sense of comedy. Elsewhere, of course, these merits are unmistakable, particularly in *Saint Joan* (1924), where, also, as in previous plays,¹ the Discussion Scene is employed with triumphant effect. One of the most thrilling experiences that could come to a theatre-goer was to be present at an early performance of *Saint Joan*, as a unit of a great theatre-audience held spell-bound—motionless and silent for some half-an-hour—while three men sat at a table on the stage and did nothing but talk, *talk*, TALK.² In 1903, G. B. S. wrote, "I wanted a pit of philosophers." Twenty years later he had a theatreful, night after night. Some were not profound philosophers, perhaps; but at least they had brought their brains to the theatre—what is more, they were using their brains—and they were thrilled, as perhaps they had rarely been thrilled before, by the power of words and the excitement of ideas.

¹ E.g., *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906): Act I.

² *Saint Joan*: Scene IV.

§ 3.—*John Galsworthy*

In his essays, John Galsworthy speaks of "naturalistic technique" in relation to both the novel and the drama, not indeed as the ideal technique, but as a method offering definite advantages. Naturalistic art, he says, "is like a steady lamp, held up from time to time, in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly and in due proportion, freed from the mists of prejudice and partisanship."¹ The parallelism between these words and the allegory of Cethru² is sufficiently close to make it evident that Galsworthy desired to reproduce, both upon the stage and in his books, the natural spectacle of life, presented with detachment. The influences operating against this desire have been referred to on a previous page.³ Those delicate sympathies which make him so gently persuasive a partisan in the novels are fully active in the plays also, and since dramatic technique demands a form of treatment less expansive than that natural to the novel, stage plays give Galsworthy little scope for concealing the direction of his own sympathies. He is drawn into the faint mist of partisanship, sometimes by (1) his choice of incident at the climax of a play; sometimes by (2) an alienating strain of blatancy in a particular character; sometimes by (3) the emotional weight of a "third party" commentator. Illustration of these points is necessary.

(1).—In *Strife* (1909) the case for both sides is seen, "for a space, clearly and in due proportion." When the play begins, old John Anthony is presiding with adamant absolutism over a meeting of the directors of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works on the Welsh border. A strike has been going on for four months, through a hard winter, and

¹ *Some Platitudes Concerning Drama* (in *The Inn of Tranquillity*).

² See *ante*, page 28.

³ *Ante*, page 29.

tentative movements on both sides towards a settlement are prevented from making progress only by the persistent "No compromise!" cry of John Anthony for the owners, and the equally unyielding "No surrender!" of David Roberts, the men's leader. But at a critical moment, when the men are wavering, Roberts' wife dies. Both sides yield simultaneously, and, throwing over their leaders, accept the precise terms they had rejected four months earlier. In the interval there has been suffering, privation and death on the side of the men, and heavy financial loss by the owners. In the earlier part of the play the scales are held dispassionately by the dramatist, and the audience feels only the desperate futility of the tragic pride and prejudice on both sides. But then, by his choice of incident at the climax of the play, Galsworthy destroys in a moment the illusion of impartiality. The death of Mrs. Roberts is not an appeal to human instincts of harmony and justice; it is an appeal to humanitarian sentiment which, fundamentally, has no bearing upon the real problem of *Strife*.

(2).—*The Skin Game* (1920) presents the conflict between Hillcrist, one of the better type of old-established aristocratic landed proprietor, and the loud, pushful, uncultured, new-rich manufacturer, Hornblower. Dissension has arisen between the two families because the Hillcrist will not accord social recognition to Hornblower's family. In his resentment, Hornblower buys a beautiful estate, The Centry, which provides the Hillcrist with one of their finest views; and on The Centry he purposes to build a factory—unless the Hillcrist admit the Hornblowers' right to a place in the social sun. Mrs. Hillcrist, discovering that Chloe (Hornblower's daughter-in-law) has a questionable past, proposes—in opposition to the wishes of her husband and her daughter—to use this information as a weapon of protection against Hornblower's scheme of aggression. Chloe, in dread of the threatened revelation, attempts suicide, and at

the end of the play (in the printed version) she is carried in, just breathing: a victim hunted between two forces—neither having any direct grievance against her. The motto of the play is: "Who touches pitch shall be defiled"; and a question repeatedly on the lips of Hillcrist and his delightful daughter Jill is: "What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?" A case is stated (and well stated) for both sides, but Hornblower's case is weakened by the blatancy of the man himself. It is the same phase in the problem of social replacement as H. G. Wells comments upon in *Tono-Bungay*, and it is fair to say that (although he makes no claim to impartiality) Wells there "directs" the sympathies of his audience less definitely than Galsworthy does in *The Skin Game*. When Hornblower concludes a discussion by shouting, "I'm going on with as little consideration as if ye were a family of blackbeetles," it is difficult for any audience to retain a balanced sense of justice. There is, on the contrary, a strong inclination to say, "Justice or no justice, this man must be kept out."

(3).—*Justice* (1910) is a commentary upon the prison administration of that period.¹ Falder, a young unstable-minded solicitor's clerk, alters a cheque, with the idea of getting money to help Ruth Honeywell to escape from a brutal husband, and is sent to penal servitude. Cokeson, the managing clerk of the office where Falder was employed, visits him in the prison a month before his term of solitary confinement expires. In a subsequent interview with the prison chaplain, Cokeson says:

I can't help thinking that to shut him up there by himself'll turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I s'pose. I *don't* like to see a man cry.

THE CHAPLAIN. It's a very rare thing for them to give way like that.

¹ It was credibly reported that certain prison reforms introduced shortly after this date were due to *Justice*.

COKESON (*looking at him—in a tone of sudden dogged hostility*). I keep dogs.

THE CHAPLAIN. Indeed?

COKESON. Ye-es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, month after month, not if he'd bit me all over. . . . If you treat 'em with kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage.

The legitimacy of Cokeson's view is not in question; the point is that the effect of his remarks upon an average audience is the effect of an emotional bludgeoning; and such emotional reactions as naturally follow from this are a hindrance and not an aid to impartiality and the dealing of even-handed justice.

Disproportionate attention is secured by the social and ethical problems in Galsworthy's novels and plays, and there is a consequent tendency to overlook his remarkable technical efficiency as a dramatist. William Archer was among those who pointed out the fullness of effect obtained by utmost economy of means in the opening scene of *The Silver Box* (1909). The curtain goes up on an empty, well-furnished dining-room; the electric light is burning; the clock shows that the time is after midnight. The door is opened fumblingly by a young man in evening dress, benevolently drunk. He is carrying a lady's velvet bag. In the first speech, which consists of only fifty-nine broken words, incoherently spoken, the audience learns:

- (1) That the house is the young man's home.
- (2) That he has had to have assistance from a stranger in order to get into the house.
- (3) That the velvet bag is the property of a temporary lady companion who has annoyed him.
- (4) That he has purloined her bag in order to "pay her out."
- (5) That he has forgotten to "tip" the man who helped him in.

- (6) That he has in his pocket only one shilling (which he drops and loses among the furniture).

Six facts, several of them important in the development of the play, are thus conveyed in fifty-nine broken words ; and each of those facts excites interest and stimulates curiosity. But that is not the whole of the dramatic content of those few minutes. The young man has taken a cigarette out of a silver box lying on the table—thus drawing attention to the mainspring of the play. And the apparently unimportant action of dropping his last shilling sets that mainspring in motion. The dropping of the shilling is the most important factor in the play, for if the young man had kept hold of his shilling, or if he had had other money in his pocket, he would have been able to tip the man who helped him into the house ; the man, being paid, would have gone away ; and there would have been no consequent series of events. Analysis shows, therefore, that in addition to providing an important body of information about the characters, the nucleus of the ensuing tragedy-comedy is embedded in the words and actions of those opening moments. When the young man has dropped his last shilling, he goes out to tell his guide that he has no money to give to him ; and then returns with him to give him a drink in lieu of cash. This second man is seen to be fairly young but shabbily dressed, haggard and shady-looking, with a suspicious air. It is learnt, in a few further words, that Borthwick's father is a Liberal Member of Parliament ; and that Jones' wife is the Borthwicks' charwoman. Then, in the course of a short rambling speech, more light is thrown upon the velvet bag and its owner, before young Borthwick falls asleep on the sofa. Jones is then free to get drunk on the whisky. Partly as a result of his natural predatory instinct, and partly because of whisky-inspired malevolence, he steals the cigarette box, and also the crimson silk purse

from the lady's handbag, before (without waking Borthwick) he leaves the house; and the scene closes. If account be taken of what is conveyed to the audience in that one short passage, it will be seen that already, in his first play, Galsworthy was an able dramatist who delighted in his craft. The economy of construction noted in *The Silver Box* is an excellence present in other plays also. There is here, moreover, an effective economy of style and characterization, which in the later plays runs to extremes. In *A Bit o' Love* (1915) and in *Loyalties* (1922), the treatment and the language are so denuded of superfluity as to be almost threadbare. Dialogue in a play, though it must be free from cloudiness, ambiguity and tautology, cannot afford to be meagre and bare. The illusion of life upon the stage depends mainly upon the quality of the dialogue, which must have warmth and a certain richness, and, even, what might be called a fine excess.¹ Simplicity of aim and singleness of purpose are merits in literature, but when these are carried too far the result is bloodlessness and absence of human warmth. *Loyalties* is saved from bloodlessness only by the character of Jacob Twisden the old solicitor, but neither he nor any other character in Galsworthy's more recent plays can compare with Mrs. Jones, the charwoman, in *The Silver Box*, or John Anthony in *Strife*. The latter, though a monument of human stubbornness, is cast in a tremendously impressive mould; and of the memorable episodes in Galsworthy's plays probably the finest is John Anthony's cry when, after half a century of work, he is flung overboard by his fellow-directors: "Fifty years! You have disgraced me, gentlemen."

§ 4.—*The Irish Theatre*

From the middle of the eighteenth century down to

¹ Cf. comments upon Granville Barker, page 88.

the beginning of the twentieth the chief additions to English drama were the work of Irishmen. Until the end of the nineteenth century, however, there was no Irish drama. Sheridan and Goldsmith, Wilde and Shaw, were not engaged with Irish themes. Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*, an Irish play, is an isolated example. Shaw, like his predecessors, is an English *dramatist* though he is an Irish *man*. In the Victorian period there were lesser Irish playwrights who took Irish subjects, but such plays as Dion Boucicault's *Colleen Bawn* and *Arrah-na-Pogue* do not belong either to literature or to life. They helped to perpetuate the "stage Irishman"—a travesty which the new Irish drama set itself to destroy.

William Butler Yeats, the leader of the new movement, was born in Dublin in 1865, and spent some years of his early life in Sligo, the background to much of his work. His father was Jack B. Yeats the artist, and the family were in London for some time while W. B. Yeats was still a boy; he was educated first at Hammersmith and afterwards in Dublin. When about twenty-two years old he returned to London, and became acquainted with W. E. Henley, William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, and others. Yeats went back to Dublin in 1891, having established in London an Irish Literary Society in which he enrolled all the Irish authors and journalists in the metropolis. He founded a similar Literary Society in Ireland in 1892, regarding it as a preliminary to his great hope of establishing an Irish National Theatre. That hope was realized in 1899. Much had previously been done by the Gaelic League to revive popular interest in the old fairy stories and folk-lore of the Irish people. Yeats himself had been inspired by the Gaelic movement, and he was convinced that through a wide dissemination of these Celtic myths, not alone Ireland but the whole modern world might be stimulated. No form of literary art reaches so large an audience as the acted

drama, and drama was the medium to which Yeats looked. Yet the only means then available for producing plays was the commercial theatre, representing all that he detested: stage-conventions were anathema to him; stage-realism the very antithesis of the symbolism which moved him strongly. When, therefore, the Irish Literary Theatre gave its first performance at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin on May 8, 1899, the *play* was the main thing, and stage-setting comparatively unimportant.

A beginning was made with the help of Lady Gregory and the backing of a group of guarantors upon whom it was never necessary to make any call. At first, English actors and an English producer were engaged, though (at least in intention) the scheme was thoroughly Irish. The plays chosen for the first performance were Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen*, and *The Heather Field*, a modern play by Edward Martyn. The opening season was so promising that, in the next year, the promoters were able to accept an invitation to give their performances at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin.

The Irish Literary Theatre, with professional English actors performing Irish plays under an English producer, lasted only three seasons. In 1902, an Irish amateur company of players under W. G. Fay—in co-operation with Yeats and Lady Gregory—produced *Deirdre*, by A. E.,¹ and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, by W. B. Yeats, at St. Teresa's Hall, Dublin; and out of that performance grew the Irish National Theatre Society and the world-renowned Irish Players. In 1904 Miss A. E. F. Horniman provided money to enable the company to acquire and reconstruct the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, which became the permanent home of the Society. The opportunities afforded by the Irish National Theatre Society made it possible for young Irish dramatists of merit to get a hearing. Although reasonable financial

¹ George Russell.

success was secured by the Irish Players, they took risks that commercial managers would not have taken ; artistic sincerity and literary promise were regarded as more important than immediate profit.

The first prominent figure among the dramatists of the Irish literary theatre movement was, of course, W. B. Yeats himself. His *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) have become widely known, but their popularity has depended more upon poetic charm and strangeness than upon dramatic power. In such an exacting medium as poetic drama exceptional skill is required to maintain the balance between poetry, action, and characterization. Yeats' plays are deficient in organic construction. They do not create the illusion of possible people behaving credibly and using an appropriate speech-medium. Though the characterization is more effective in *The Land of Heart's Desire* than in *The Countess Cathleen*, poetry is obtrusive in both plays. When the characters speak extended passages of verse they belong as obviously to an artificial convention as a *prima donna* who persistently takes the centre of the stage. An effect of suspension is created—a hiatus, as it were, in both action and character—as in Cathleen's reply in the following passage :

ALIEL

This house

You are to leave with some old trusty man . . .

CATHLEEN

He bids me go

Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when the trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. No—no—no !
I cannot.¹

¹ *The Countess Cathleen*, Sc. III.

Yeats is essentially a lyric poet, and he does not move with ease in the dramatic form. Every playwright has, of course, to use artificial conventions; but a true dramatist uses these conventions so skilfully that the audience is not conscious of assisting at an artificial display: the illusion is complete.

In 1903 two new names appeared in the Irish National Theatre Society's list of authors: Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge.

John Millington Synge (1871-1909) was born near Dublin, of a family of landowners. He graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, afterwards wandering through France, Germany and Italy for several years, separated from Irish life and interests until W. B. Yeats met him in Paris in 1899 and advised him to get away from the Continent altogether and go back to Ireland to live among the peasants on the Aran Islands in Galway Bay. Synge took this advice, dwelling as a peasant among peasants, steeping himself in their language, storing his mind with their tales, and observing closely their customs and character, before writing those plays which some critics have ranked as second only to Shakespeare.

The great merit of Synge's plays is at the same time their chief fault. His material is reduced to the utmost degree of concentration, until his humour becomes bitingly grim and sardonic, and his tragedy bitter pain. He rarely introduces a superfluous word; indeed he uses the pruning knife too ruthlessly. Some part of Shakespeare's greatness lies in his generous superfluity—which corresponds to the superabundance of life itself. Synge's plays never quite "live" outside the mind, because he failed to recognize that there is a point beyond which the virtue of economy passes into the fault of deficiency.

Riders to the Sea (1904) is one of the few twentieth-century examples of true tragedy, and it comes short of being a

great tragedy only because of its excessively harrowing effect. Jack B. Yeats said that Synge's plays were "poetry in unlimited sadness." There is austere beauty in the unlimited sadness of old Maurya (in this play) who loses all her men-folk one by one. But the beauty fades out, and only the shadow of death remains as the curtain falls upon Maurya kneeling by the body of the last of her sons. Yet, though *Riders to the Sea* presents Life as all darkness and winter, it is the true winter of Life, not merely that gloomy obscuring of the sun which some writers of tragedy mistake for the darkness of Nature.

Synge's bleak comedy *The Shadow of the Glen* aroused much protest when it was first produced in Dublin in 1903. It was a tradition among Nationalists that Irish women were more virtuous than English women. When Synge made Nora Burke unfaithful to her husband it was felt that he was maligning Ireland, and there was uproar in the theatre. These demonstrations, however, were a storm in a teacup compared with the tornado that fell upon the Abbey Theatre when Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* was first acted at the beginning of 1907. Each night for a week the performances were violently interrupted, but the players stood firm, and this has since become the most popular of Synge's plays. An old man in the Aran Islands told Synge a story which began: "If any gentleman has done a crime we'll hide him. There was a gentleman that killed his father, and I had him in my house for six weeks till he got away to America." *The Playboy of the Western World* is based upon that story, and it was the suggestion that Irishmen were capable of glorifying a murderer which provoked the riots. To English people the theme may seem incredible and outside their range of vision, but *The Playboy* does not depend upon credibility of theme. It gives an impressive representation of Irish peasant life and character, and is full of "striking and beautiful phrases" heard by the

author on the roads from Kerry to Mayo or among beggar-women and ballad-singers around Dublin. What Synge desired in drama (he wrote in the preface to *The Playboy*) were reality and joy, and speeches "as fully flavoured as a nut or apple." He felt that in Ireland

... for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent and tender; so that those of us who wish to write, start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the spring-time of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

Deirdre of the Sorrows, left uncompleted, was Synge's only departure from the treatment of modern themes; but he worked upon the legendary story of Deirdre in his austere way, and endowed it with the gaunt granite-like beauty that is characteristic of most of his work.

Lady Gregory has experimented extensively in her dramatic works, which range from Irish historical plays to translations of Molière into Irish dialect. She has, in addition, done much to preserve the folk-lore of her country. Her best-known pieces are in the volume entitled *Seven Short Plays* (1909). Her characters are more genially human than those of Synge; and she approaches nearer than Synge himself ever did to the joy of which he speaks in the introduction to *The Playboy*. Though her dialogue may not be so remarkable as Synge's it has a sweet savour that is all its own, and there is no "baldness" about the language of her peasants.

Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory are the leading figures of the older generation of dramatists in the modern Irish theatre. The younger generation is more numerous than the old, but, again, three names stand out: St. John Ervine, Lennox Robinson, and Sean O'Casey.

As a vigorous and controversy-loving dramatic critic, St. John Ervine has enlivened many a dull Sunday for commercial theatre managers whose standards enraged him,

and has probably done more useful service for the theatre as a critic than as a dramatist. Like Lennox Robinson, he was, for a time, manager of the Abbey Theatre, and his two Irish domestic tragedies, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) and *John Ferguson* (1915), had fair success, particularly in America. Both these plays, powerful and moving, contain excellent examples of character-drawing, though a strain of hopelessness runs through their picture of the invincible and devastating stubbornness of men in the grip of religious and political "convictions." Lennox Robinson dealt impressively in *The Lost Leader* (1919) with the legend that Parnell did not die at the time his death was announced, but lived in hiding for some time longer. *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1920), an extremely laughable comedy, contains a gallery of human portraits that are not the less delightful because they verge upon caricature. In later experimental plays, such as *The Round Table* (1924), Lennox Robinson seemed inclined to lose himself in a metaphysical mist.

When W. B. Yeats began his work for the Irish National Theatre, he proposed to found the new drama upon ancient Irish folk-lore. He wanted the new literature to be undated; or, when it was dated at all, to be set in a remote period, as in the vaguely-indicated age of his own *Countess Cathleen*. The actual course of literary history in Ireland since 1900, however, has been away from folk-story, and toward the peasant life and town life of modern times. So far, the most remarkable of the "town" dramatists is Sean O'Casey, whose *Juno and the Paycock* (1925) at once caused him to be acclaimed as a great dramatist. Brought up in the Dublin tenements which serve as a setting for his plays, he has found ripe comedy as well as intense tragedy in those slum dwellings. Out of the recent history of Ireland O'Casey has endeavoured, with success, to create tragic-comedy on the grand scale; and considering the intense partisan passions aroused by the Easter Rebellion of 1916

and the subsequent Civil War, his objectivity is astonishing. The promise shown in O'Casey's early work is sufficient to place him, with Synge, at the head of the Abbey Theatre dramatists. His faults are those of undisciplined power and exuberance, rather than of inadequacy. *Juno and the Paycock* might have been a better play than it is if the comic material in the first half had been kept under firmer control: the plunge into overwhelming tragic intensity after the appearance of Mrs. Tancred near the end of the second act is too sharp a transition.¹ Sean O'Casey's plays are much more than tragedies of the individual person or of particular groups of persons; they suggest, in symbolic form, the tragedy of Ireland itself, where heroism and cupidity, idealism and vainglory, vision and vice, beauty and foulness, poetry and profanity are inextricably mingled. The language of his plays is distinguished: though it is the language of the slums, it is full of beauty. His humorous characters are almost Falstaffian in stature, abundantly comic though without the wit and subtlety of Falstaff; and the portraits of women are, in general, extremely well drawn. There appear to be few qualifications, necessary to a fine dramatist, that Sean O'Casey does not possess.

§ 5.—*The Repertory Movement*

The Irish theatre movement and the repertory theatres in England brought about that decentralization of the drama which has been the most important development in English theatrical history since the sixteenth century. From the time of Shakespeare onward, "English drama" meant,

✓ ¹ In *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) there is again a disturbing juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy, but the proportions are more skilfully kept. What inward disturbance an audience may feel on account of the close and incongruous relationship between comedy and tragedy in the later play, is a disturbance due rather to life itself, than to the dramatist.

virtually, the plays produced in the London theatres. Dramatists had come to accept the London monopoly as one of the natural conditions of their craft, and grew accustomed to working within the limits imposed by that monopoly. The theatre was a place existing mainly for one of two purposes: (a) the exploitation of the personality of an actor-manager; (b) the provision of financial profit for a commercial manager who "kept" a theatre as other men might keep a butcher's shop.

The first confident challenge to the London monopoly came from the Irish theatre in Dublin; but meanwhile, in London itself, there had been the beginnings of revolt. J. T. Grein's *Théâtre Libre* experiment introduced Bernard Shaw as a dramatist, and there were other sporadic efforts of a similar kind in the middle of the 'nineties.

One name stands out from the list of pioneers—that of Miss A. E. F. Horniman, the mother of the twentieth-century English drama. Miss Horniman (a Londoner, born at Forest Hill in 1860) studied art under Professor Legros at the Slade School, and horrified her Victorian parents by interesting herself in woman's suffrage and in theatrical affairs. In 1894 she provided money for a season at the Avenue Theatre, London, which helped forward the Ibsen-Shaw movement. The season was "a fruitful failure." Ten years later Miss Horniman put the Abbey Theatre in Dublin firmly on its feet; and in 1907 she established the first modern repertory theatre in Great Britain at the Midland Theatre, Manchester. Next year she took the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester, and for over twelve years "Miss Horniman's Company" set a standard for the rest of the theatrical world. When she retired in 1921, the Manchester Gaiety fell from grace and became a cinematograph theatre. By that time, however, Miss Horniman's work had had substantial and lasting results elsewhere. Other provincial towns had instituted successful

repertory theatres. Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, after doing excellent work at the Manchester Gaiety, helped Miss Lillian Baylis to give London a permanent Shakespeare theatre at the Old Vic in Waterloo Bridge Road; after which, on their own account, they proceeded to popularize Greek tragedy throughout the country in the intervals of much other work.

The repertory movement was not only an attempt to free the theatre from the dictatorship of the financier and the actor-manager; it was also inspired by definite theories of dramatic art. (1)—The "long-run" system was regarded as injurious to both the play and the players, since it led to a mechanical style of acting that deadened the mind of the player and made him a machine instead of a sensitive instrument; the result being a coarsened interpretation of the play. (2)—The repertory system was based upon the team spirit. There were no permanent "stars" among the actors: the Hamlet of one performance might be a second murderer in the next. (3)—Under the old system, theatre-managers "called in" scene-painters, costumiers, composers, lighting experts, and others, to carry out certain separated pieces of work. Under the repertory system it was proposed to create a corporate art of the theatre—an organic whole, not a casual assemblage of disunited parts. (4)—Most important of all for dramatic literature was the fact that repertory directors recognized that a good play might attract only comparatively small audiences. Under former conditions such a play had practically no chance of production, since little, if any, profit could be expected from it. But in the repertory theatres a few performances of a play with a limited appeal were balanced financially by the production of plays of a more popular type.

The most successful repertory experiment in London was that conducted at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907

by J. E. Vedrenne and Granville Barker: Vedrenne as the man of affairs, Barker the man of the theatre. During that Court season thirty-two plays (new and old, native and foreign) were staged. The outstanding feature was the unanticipated popularity of Bernard Shaw. Eleven of his plays were produced, and these accounted for 701 performances out of a total of 988 during the season. The Vedrenne-Barker programme included, also, plays by Granville Barker himself (*The Voysey Inheritance*), John Galsworthy (*The Silver Box*), Ibsen, Euripides (in Gilbert Murray's translations), Maeterlinck, John Masefield, St. John Hankin and others. Much that is best in contemporary drama came from the Court Theatre season.¹

Granville Barker—producer, playwright, and actor during the Court season—was born in London in 1877, and at the age of only thirteen was sent to the Theatre Royal, Margate, at that time a combination of stock company and dramatic school. In 1891 he made his first appearance on the London stage, under Charles Hawtrey, and afterwards acted in Ben Greet's and William Poel's Shakespearean companies. He also appeared in Shaw plays, and served as producer to the Stage Society. By the time he began work at the Court Theatre, therefore, Barker was a fully qualified man of the theatre. In a later venture (at the Savoy, 1912) he produced three Shakespearean plays in an original manner. Though *A Winter's Tale* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were perhaps unduly strange and fantastic, *Twelfth Night* was a triumph. The costumes and stage setting were new in style, unobtrusive but sufficient. They were a pleasant "point of rest" for the eyes of the audience, whose minds were left free to take in the sense and enchanting music of Shakespeare's poetry. Though the work of a stage producer cannot be preserved and immortalized, it is not the least of Granville Barker's achievements that he enabled some

¹ See *The Court Theatre: 1904-1907*, by Desmond MacCarthy (1907).

thousands of his contemporaries to hear, for the first time, Shakespeare as he should be heard. These performances were taken at a much faster pace than is customary on the modern stage, and the gain was obvious.¹

In later years Granville Barker's appearances in the theatre became rare. For a short time it seemed that he might become the leading dramatist of his generation. *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899), his first play, appeared before the influence of the Russian dramatist Tchekhov had reached England, yet it is probably the most Tchekhovian play in English. The censoring of *Waste* (1907) brought Granville Barker into public notice, but *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905) is his finest achievement. This is one of the best and richest plays of modern times. It lacks the moral and intellectual fervour of Bernard Shaw, but in almost every other respect *The Voysey Inheritance* displays that joy of creation and superabundant vitality lacking from a great deal of contemporary drama. Granville Barker's people in this play are well nourished at the feast of life; by their side, some of Galsworthy's later characters seem like dyspeptic ghosts gathered around a board of funeral baked meats. Galsworthy has, however, what Barker evidently has not—namely, sustained power of creation. Apart from a few translations Granville Barker wrote only two long plays between 1907 and 1925: *The Madras House* (1911) and *The Secret Life* (1923). In neither of these did he equal the standard of *The Voysey Inheritance*, although the first act of *The Madras House* is excellent.

Drama follows the theatre. A debased theatrical system means a debased drama; an enlightened theatre leads to

¹ Granville Barker's lesson on this point will probably be lost, and the loss will be a real misfortune. What has killed Shakespeare for modern audiences is excessive slowness of production. It is as vitally important to preserve the correct *tempo* in a Shakespearean play as in a piece of great music. *Macbeth* played slowly is *Macbeth* destroyed in every sense—poetry, story, and characterization alike.

an enlightened drama. What happened in connection with the Abbey Theatre and the Court Theatre, happened also at the Manchester Gaiety. When Miss Horniman began her venture there in 1908 scarcely any native dramatic material was available. By 1912 there was a "Manchester school" of dramatists known on two continents. The leading playwrights of the Manchester group were Allan Monkhouse, Harold Brighouse, and Stanley Houghton. More or less by accident the last-named came to be regarded as the leader.

Stanley Houghton (born in 1881 at Ashton-upon-Mersey, Cheshire) was a Manchester business man with an active interest in the theatre. Between 1905 and 1912 he wrote dramatic criticism for Manchester newspapers, and in 1908 his one-act play *The Dear Departed* was accepted for Miss Horniman's company. With this and other pieces he gained a measure of local fame, but in 1912 he found himself suddenly and unexpectedly with a London reputation. Miss Horniman had been invited by the Stage Society to give a performance in London, and she chose *Hindle Wakes* by Stanley Houghton for that occasion. The play, which had not previously been performed, was received with enthusiasm by critics and audiences alike, and Stanley Houghton was "made." *Hindle Wakes* was put on for an extended season in London, and managers pursued the author. He wrote three plays¹ for Arthur Bourchier, but his earlier success was not repeated. Tired of being lionized by London people, and discouraged by the failure of his new plays, Houghton went to Paris, where he died a few months later. The virtue of his two best works, *Hindle Wakes* and *The Younger Generation* is in their sincerity and unpretentiousness, and the fidelity with which they portray Lancashire life and character. It is probable that London was attracted by the wrong things in *Hindle Wakes*.

¹ *Pippis*; *Pearls*; *Trust the People*.

Metropolitan audiences detected a piquant flavour of sexual excitement in Fanny Hawthorn's refusal to marry the young man with whom she had enjoyed a week-end excursion at Llandudno. The true dramatic and literary interest lies mainly, however, in the skilful portraits of the old people of the two families. This is true also of *The Younger Generation*, with its terrifying Puritan grandmother whose religious philosophy can be summed up in her own words: "There's original sin in every young man and young woman, and it's got to be stamped out of them. Yes, scourged out of them with whips, and burnt out of them with fire if need be."

Under the repertory theatre system, drama has flourished in the English provinces as it had not done since the days of the medieval craft guilds and their cycles of religious plays. There are numerous successful dramatic enterprises in the larger towns, while amateur groups are working with skill and enthusiasm all over the country in villages, towns and cities—in Scotland and Wales as well as in England.

Apart from Dublin and Manchester, only Birmingham has yet produced a repertory dramatist of wide repute. John Drinkwater was already an acknowledged poet, before (in 1918) he produced *Abraham Lincoln*. This play, with its idealistic central figure and its story of noble aspirations, came as a tonic to many people distressed by the World War and its brutalities, its threats of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Written at any other time its success with the public might have been no greater than that of Drinkwater's later historical plays (*Cromwell*, *Mary Stuart*, and *Robert E. Lee*). It is, however, a more impressive play than these: a skilful adaptation of biography and history to the conditions of the modern theatre. It is impressive without pretentiousness or grandiloquence; and by the careful selection and utilization of significant detail,¹ Drinkwater

¹ As (for example) the passage about Lincoln's disreputable hat in Scene 1.

has created a convincing and admirable personality. Yet what still seems to be, at close quarters, its nobility of mood, may in the future appear to be sentimentality.

By attracting large audiences for a long period, *Abraham Lincoln* demonstrated that the spoken word (without the aid of extravagant action) can be given a popular appeal. That was a point worth demonstrating in a time (before broadcasting) when the cinema was threatening the spoken drama. *Abraham Lincoln* went far also towards fulfilling a prophecy made by John Galsworthy nearly ten years previously. Writing in 1909 he suggested that the renascent English drama would, in the coming years, travel in two main channels, one of them bearing "new barques of poetry, shaped, it may be, like prose; . . . a poetic prose-drama, emotionalizing us by its diversity and purity of form and invention, and whose province will be to disclose the elemental soul of man and the forces of Nature, not perhaps as the old tragedies disclosed them, not necessarily in the epic mood, but always with beauty and in the spirit of discovery."¹ The plane of exaltation required in poetic drama is reached more frequently in the prose passages of *Abraham Lincoln* than in the blank verse of Stephen Phillips.

§ 6.—J. M. Barrie

The modern drama of ideas—rooted in England by Bernard Shaw and cultivated by Galsworthy, Granville Barker and others—had practically no influence upon J. M. Barrie. Like many of his contemporaries he found little that was admirable in twentieth-century standards of life and conduct, but he did not feel called upon to enlist as a fighter in "the liberative war of humanity." His was not the temperament of a crusading Bernard Shaw who could with enjoyment raise his ethical battle-axe and split

¹ *Some Platitudes Concerning Drama (The Inn of Tranquillity).*

the skulls of fools and rogues. Barrie's only weapons were a faint disarming smile and a dreamy eye. He came out and looked round the world and saw the men and women that God had made. He did not agree that they were "very good." On the contrary: he believed that he could do much better himself. He went back indoors, put his feet on the fender, and began to create a world of his own, peopled with men and women made to his own pattern. There are no standards of literary judgment applicable to Barrie. It is possible to write one of two things about him: either, that his world is more delightful than the real world; or, that his world is unpleasantly sweet and sticky. And since it needs only very small space to write either of those two things, fewer books have been written upon Barrie than upon other leading authors of the day. His plots are preposterous (*e.g.*, *Quality Street* and *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*); his characters incredible (*e.g.*, Valentine Brown and Phoebe Throssel, Matey and Lob, Richardson, Tweeny, Mary Rose); his dialogue sometimes as creaky as a rusty machine. Yet after all the critical tomahawks have been used upon him Barrie continues to smile his disarming smile. As a dramatist he does nearly all the wrong things. Blithe as Pantaloon, he hits his audiences upon their heads and rides in triumph through their hearts. He does not fit in anywhere among early twentieth-century writers. Uninfluenced by any, influencing none,¹ it might be said that he is altogether without significance. But because he is not in the main stream of tendency, because he is "not of an age," he may impress posterity more than he impresses the sour-faced among his own generation. Only a venturesome man would prophesy that England will not be celebrating a Barrie centenary in 1960.

¹ Though as a novelist in the nineteenth century he led the Kailyard School (a group of writers who dealt with Scottish peasant life) he has not exercised particular "influence" upon dramatists.

Like Bernard Shaw, James Matthew Barrie came from foreign parts to conquer London. Born at Kirriemuir (the Thrums of his novels) in 1860, he was educated at the village school, Dumfries Academy, and Edinburgh University, where he graduated in 1882. His early days as a journalist (first in Nottingham and afterwards in London) are described under a thin veil of fiction in *When a Man's Single* (1888), a book which has many touches of Barrie's individual humour. Between that time and 1900 he wrote several novels and collections of sketches, as well as a charming biography of his mother (*Margaret Ogilvie*, 1896). He has had practically no "public life," yet high official distinctions have fallen upon him: a baronetcy in 1913; the Order of Merit in 1922; the Rectorship of St. Andrew's University, also in 1922.¹

At the end of the nineteenth century Barrie had a large following as a novelist. He had made a few experiments in play-writing, but with no marked success. A quarter of a century later, however, when his novels were out of fashion, he had become probably the most popular living dramatist.

His experimental plays (*The Professor's Love Story*, 1895; *The Little Minister*, 1897; *The Wedding Guest*, 1900) show Barrie endeavouring to fit himself to accepted stage conventions, before he began to write in a more original manner. *Quality Street* (1901) has the atmosphere of *Cranford*. Set in the Napoleonic period, its maiden ladies are "old" (according to the judgment of the time) almost before they are past girlhood, and the pathos of the piece comes from the barbarity of a generation which put its women "on the shelf" if they did not marry in the earliest twenties or before. The delightful "lavendered" atmosphere of *Quality Street* is robbed of a good deal of its pleasantness

¹ His Rectorial Address, *Courage*, is a typical piece of Barriism.

by that suggestion of fading and slow decay which hangs about its lavender-preserved souls.

Social reformers in need of an effective and entertaining tract might turn *The Admirable Crichton* (1903) to their own uses. It is a powerful argument for the claims of God's nobleman as against the "rights" of those who are merely noblemen of the United Kingdom; and its power is in no way lessened by the consideration that it most probably was not intended to be an argument at all. It is rarely possible to apply the usual vocabulary of criticism to Barrie; and though this play has several well-rounded and finished characters, it would be rash to say that any one of them is "probable." The illusion of lifelikeness given by Barrie to his characters comes, not from their conformity to the human model, but from the fact that they are consistent with the requirements of Barrie's own imaginative world. In a world of phantasy normal human beings are "out of the picture." If it is agreed to swallow the camel which is Barrie's universe, it is absurd to strain at the gnats which are his characters. All that can be asked is that the people within the author's created universe shall look as though they belong there.

The cleavage between the actual world and the Barrie world of phantasy does not prevent his plays from providing a critical commentary upon life. To Barrie, one of the most interesting spectacles in the two worlds—his own and ours—is the eternal tragi-comic contest between man and woman. In the Meredithian sense Barrie is one of "the pick of men."¹ He has womanly insight, and a wish to see life and mankind from the woman's point of view. He is the male egoist's least flattering friend, and will not pretend to believe that the world is kept on its way by

¹ "You meet, now and then, men who have the woman in them without being womanized; they are the pick of men."—George Meredith: *The Tragic Comedians*.

strong, self-reliant males. He has drawn at least two portraits of such strong, self-reliant men: John Shand (*What Every Woman Knows*, 1908), and Harry Sims (*The Twelve Pound Look*, 1913)—and their actual strength is no more than that of over-inflated airballs!

The Twelve Pound Look is possibly the best one-act comedy yet written. Barrie was a friend and admirer of George Meredith and in this play he has observed several of the principles laid down in Meredith's famous *Essay on Comedy*. Except that it has not the rapier-thrusts of wit that Meredith required in the ideal comedy, *The Twelve Pound Look* might usefully be appended to the *Essay* as an exemplification of the working of the Comic Spirit. Harry Sims, a pompous and ridiculous figure, is presented without contempt, as Meredith insisted that a truly comic figure should be. Shand and Sims give glimpses of the universal egoist, even as Meredith's Willoughby Patterne gives a glimpse from a different angle. Sir Willoughby is more rarefied and intellectualized than Barrie's two men, and the latter are therefore closer to average humanity, and more useful as corrective agents of male egoism. Barrie, though himself a "glorious, dazzling success," pleads through Kate in *The Twelve Pound Look* for the "poor souls" who have not "got on" and who have, therefore, retained those humane feelings that are often endangered by the worship of success and efficiency.

In two of his later plays, *Dear Brutus* (1917) and *Mary Rose* (1920) Barrie gets farther from the world of reality; away to Lob's enchanted Wood of the Second Chance, and Mary's Island that Likes to be Visited. There is always something of the emotional trapeze artiste about Barrie. He seems often to be poised above a large bath of warm tears, and unemotional spectators catch their breath for fear he should tumble in and drown. He avoids that discomfort very skilfully, but the strain of fearful

anticipation is trying for the audience. Both *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* impose some such strain, but, here again, it is the laws of the Barrie universe that must be applied, not the laws of earth.

It is easy to give judgment that Barrie either is or is not a great dramatist. But whatever verdict be given, the judge is usually tormented by a subconscious conviction that his conclusion is wrong. Moreover, Tuesday's judgment does not always correspond with Monday's! Purdie in *Dear Brutus* says: "I feel that there is something in me that will make me go on being the same ass, however many chances I get." Something inexplicable in Barrie makes a critic feel a different kind of ass at each chance he gets.

§ 7.—*The Post-War Theatre*

In the years before the World War, it had been assumed that the English theatre was at the beginning of an epoch of activity unequalled since the decline of Elizabethan drama. With some half-dozen men of letters writing for the London stage, and with a chain of repertory theatres outside London, this spirit of optimism seemed justified. But the catastrophe of war brought a rapid change of conditions. The audience for what may be called the intellectual drama had never been large, and the necessities of national service seriously diminished the number of thoughtful theatre-goers. At the same time, the stress and strain of warfare increased the demand for light (even frivolous) entertainment—revue, musical comedy, and farce. Theatre rents and production costs rose ruinously; and by the end of the War a number of London playhouses had become little more than expensive toys for millionaires, some of whom were without elementary knowledge of theatrecraft or dramatic literature. Under these new conditions even Bernard Shaw was unable, for a long time,

to get *Heartbreak House* produced in England. Masterpieces were at a discount.

Future historians considering English drama of the decade following the Armistice of 1918, will require to take account of the economic conditions then governing the London and provincial theatres, and hampering the dramatists who wrote for them. Serious plays had little chance of production unless they were written for a small cast; while expenses of mounting had also to be reduced to a minimum by avoidance of scenic changes.¹ The "unities" came into their own again, because it was cheaper to observe than to ignore them!

The moribund condition of the commercial theatres was the less regrettable, since interest in the better kind of play was kept alive by a remarkable increase of amateur companies, and by small repertory theatres. During the War, social and educational institutions (both voluntary and State-aided), increased rapidly in number, and play-production formed part of the cultural work in hundreds of local centres. The establishment of the British Drama League in 1919 did much to foster and co-ordinate such activities. Though the amateur movement is outside the scope of a brief literary survey of the post-War period, it should not be overlooked that members of village companies (and of similar organizations elsewhere) were writing, as well as producing, plays. The immediate future of English drama may be influenced as much by these unnamed dramatists as by professional playwrights.

The conditions obtaining in the commercial theatres after 1918 did result in the virtual exclusion from the public stage of at least one dramatist who seemed important

¹ Such economies were imposed only upon "straight" plays. Musical comedies and revues became more garish and expensive than before. Some of these spectacles led to the Bankruptcy Court, but there was apparently an endless line of footlight-dazzled financiers to fill the gaps.

before the War. Critical opinion had been divided as to the merit of *The Tragedy of Nan* (1909) by John Masefield, but at the lowest estimate it was a work of much promise, and one of the few twentieth-century plays that approximate to true tragedy. This and one or two other plays by Masefield had been performed with moderate success, but after the War (apart from a few experimental performances in London) Masefield's new plays got little further than the private theatre in his home at Boar's Hill, near Oxford. In *Good Friday* (1916) and *The Trial of Jesus* (1925), alternative versions of the same Gospel incidents, John Masefield cramped himself by endeavouring to keep close to the Scriptural record. Unless an author accepts the artistic necessity of breaking away from a slavish imitation of the original narrative, a play dealing with the life of Christ can hardly escape seeming a weak paraphrase of biblical English. There is some dramatic and psychological interest in Masefield's treatment of Herod, Pilate, and Pilate's wife; but no play can overcome the handicap of a static central figure. Moreover, while the consistent artlessness of medieval dramatists enabled them to handle religious themes with unpretentious effect, the occasional 'artless' simplicity of Masefield's verse seems only a studied and irritatingly self-conscious trick.

John Masefield's ability as a playwright up to 1925 must finally be judged by *The Tragedy of Nan*. A comparison of performances by two professional companies of equal standing in 1913 indicated that *The Tragedy of Nan* requires exceptionally sensitive interpretation by every actor, and that in the absence of this, the dramatist's characters have little individual force of their own. Masefield does not help his actors; he gives them "voices," which they must clothe in convincing personalities. The vindictiveness of Mrs. Pargetter, the fluctuating loves of Dick, the innocence and despair of Nan, Pargetter's frenzy of

grief over his broken toby jug, the poetic mutterings of old Gaffer Pearce: all these are speciously effective on the printed page, but they do not easily bear transportation to the stage. Genius in acting may make the play live and communicate itself across the footlights; nothing less can do it. Here again John Masefield is betrayed by his desire to avoid artificiality, and to keep close to the great simplicities—love, hate, justice, death. A dramatist, however, should do more than is done in *The Tragedy of Nan* to vivify inert simplicities before asking an actor to realize them in action. Though no play can be fully alive until it is seen on the stage, a good play nevertheless has life in itself before ever it reaches the theatre.

A far richer sense of character is shown in Arnold Bennett's plays. *Milestones*¹ (1912) is as good as any play of the century (apart from those of Bernard Shaw, which are in another category). Its three acts cover three generations (1860—1885—1912), knit together in the play by the unifying idea of the stubborn prejudice with which each successive generation meets the spirit of progress and change: in 1860, Sam Sibley opposes iron ships; in 1885, John Rhead, who had been a pioneer in constructing iron ships, is contemptuous of the project for steel ships. That historical sense which serves Arnold Bennett so well in his novels for building up the panoramic "time-background," enables him also in *Milestones* to reproduce with vigour the tone and colour of the mid-Victorian and late Victorian periods. The characters are excellently drawn, with subtle shades of humour and gravity, as the leading figures pass under the moulding hand of Time. *Milestones* is at once a solid and a brilliant achievement; a play of which the twentieth century may well be proud, and as deserving of a place in a representative English repertory as any piece by Goldsmith or Sheridan. Nothing else among Bennett's

¹ By Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock.

works as a playwright (either alone or in collaboration) touches the *Milestones* level. He can write wittily, but in plays written mainly to exploit verbal wit (as in *The Title*, 1918) he is unsatisfying. This is, no doubt, because Arnold Bennett is much more than a wit. He can afford to leave that barren field to lesser men, while exercising himself more appropriately as a humorist, as in *The Great Adventure* (1913—a dramatized adaptation of his excellent comic novel, *Buried Alive*) and *What the Public Wants* (1909). In both these pleasant plays he comments with gentle satire upon modern matters; and, in both, his character-creation is admirable.

One of the most interesting occasions in the London theatre during the years following the War was on March 14, 1921, when Clemence Dane's *A Bill of Divorcement* had its first performance. The authoress had previously made her mark as a novelist with *Regiment of Women* (1917), a ruthless analysis of peculiarly horrible and cruel egoism. *A Bill of Divorcement* is, in some respects, of the Pinero type: "well-made" and with a carefully-engineered "great scene." But there the resemblance ends. Unlike most of Pinero's, Clemence Dane's play faces a real human problem; and her people behave less like stage automata. Yet it cannot be claimed that the characters are altogether exempt from being crippled by the dramatist to fit the exigencies of the situation she has contrived. The weakness of the scene between Sydney and Kit in the last act may be due to the necessity of getting Sydney flung high and dry, in an emotional sense. If that is so, it is the management of plot that is at fault. But, on the other-hand, Kit's caddishness and imbecility may be due to the fact (shown in almost all her stories and plays) that Clemence Dane is regrettably weak in portraying men. For its freshness and sincerity, however, and for its combination of clever stagecraft and serious purpose, *A Bill of Divorcement* was a remarkable beginning for a young dramatist.

Her next play, *Will Shakespeare* (1921) was so glorious a failure as to be little short of a grand success. Cumbersome dramatic machinery¹ and a dismally unpleasant Shakespeare were too heavy a handicap to be carried buoyantly; yet there were really impressive passages, and the quality of the blank verse almost justified its own ambitiousness. If Shakespeare, or any other genius of the first rank is to be brought upon the stage, some sign must be given of the genius of the original. Clemence Dane failed to give any such sign—as, presumably, anyone but Shakespeare himself must always fail.

Three other playwrights may be mentioned as typical of varying phases of public taste between 1919 and 1925. A. A. Milne scored a series of successes with his light comedies, *Mr. Pim Passes By* (1919), *The Dover Road* (1922), *The Truth about Blayds* (1922) and others. Entirely unpretentious, and professing to be no more than occasions for entertainment, these plays have, nevertheless, a claim to be regarded as within the catholic fold of literature. The quality of the humour and the carefulness of the writing were typical of an author who had served with distinction upon the *Punch* staff. The best example of his Puckish humour is embodied in the character of Mr. Pim. The worst that can be said of A. A. Milne is that he is a pale shadow of Barrie; but he is more lightsome and dabbles less in conscious "charm" and sentiment. The popularity of Milne's Christopher Robin books² diverted him from the theatre. For a few years, at least, he did good service by supplying healthy light comedy—not much more substantial than a kind of intellectual cream meringue, but certainly preferable to what came to be known as the Cocktail Drama, purveyed by Noel Coward and others.

Before Noel Coward, as a very young man, made himself

¹ See, for example, the "shadows" in Act I.

² See Postscript on Children's Books, *post*, page 203.

the most talked-of dramatist of his day, Somerset Maugham had been writing plays of a similar type for twenty years or so. Maugham belonged, in manner, to the Society dramatists of the eighteen-nineties, combining the technique of Pinero with the verbal mannerisms of Oscar Wilde. His plays (from *A Man of Honour*, of 1903, to *Our Betters*, of 1923) provide an interesting reflection of the changes in taste among those playgoers who like to see on the stage an imitation of the "high life" of their own day. Whether or not the dregs of Society actually speak as they are made to speak in some of Somerset Maugham's plays matters little, but a student of modern drama will find it interesting to compare the stage idioms of 1907 with those of 1922. *Lady Frederick* (1907), a typically tiresome Woman With a Past, remarks: "I've done a lot of foolish things in my time, but, my God, I have suffered." That voice is the voice of all the Women With a Past who walked sinuously through late Victorian and Edwardian stage-plays. And when Dick Lomas says (*The Explorer*, 1908): "Half the women I know merely married their husbands to spite somebody else. It appears to be one of the commonest forms of matrimony," it seems as if Somerset Maugham has completely bridged the twenty-five years between Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward. Free on the one hand from Victorian ready-made morality, and on the other hand from neo-Georgian licentiousness and cynicism, *Cæsar's Wife* (1919) is one of Maugham's best plays; while *The Circle* (1921) and *Our Betters* (1923) have been much praised for their careful craftsmanship and acute social criticism.

Bernard Shaw has said: "I hate to see dead people walking about." Noel Coward's plays must surely infuriate G.B.S., for they are full of galvanized corpses—talking and making the motions of living creatures, but corpses all the same, mere shells of men and women. If he did not seem

to take a cynical delight in his repulsive parade of "hags who've never surrendered to Anno Domini,"¹ Noel Coward would be as sound a moralist as those medieval writers who paraded the Seven Deadly Sins. But he snaps his fingers in the faces of the moralists and tweaks their noses in derision.² The immediate popularity of his plays was due to the "smartness" of the dialogue (an echo of the conversation that many listeners like to imagine themselves conducting all day and every day) and to the opportunity that these plays give for the vicarious satisfaction of anti-social impulses. He has written one first-rate comedy, *Hay Fever* (1925), but otherwise his plays are important only as a symptom of the state of public taste at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century—in America as well as in England. America had, however, what England lacked—the primitive vigour of a Eugene O'Neill to counteract the poison of effete "society drama."

The condition of the London theatre at the end of the quarter-century might lead to the conclusion that English drama had lapsed to the position from which it was rescued twenty-five years or so earlier by Bernard Shaw and those who followed him. Intellectual Drama seemed to have exhausted its vogue, and Imbecile Drama to have returned in force. The efforts made by a succession of playwrights to bring the stage plays into closer touch with actuality, or to turn them in the direction of a sane ideality, had ended in—the Cocktail Drama. Fortunately, the state of the London professional theatres is no longer an index to the true condition of English drama.

¹ *Lady Frederick*, by Somerset Maugham.

² See "The Author's Reply to his Critics": *Three Plays*, by Noel Coward.

CHAPTER IV

POETRY

§ 1.—*Survivors and Precursors*

WHEN the twentieth century opened, Tennyson had been dead nine years, and there was a widespread impression that English poetry had died with him. Alfred Austin, Tennyson's successor as Poet Laureate, was an inferior writer; and although two of the greater nineteenth-century poets, Swinburne and Meredith, lived on until 1909, their best poetry appeared before the death of Tennyson. Robert Bridges, the most notable "active" poet alive in 1901, was then in his fifty-seventh year. He had written several poetic dramas and many uncommonly beautiful lyrics, yet he had to wait for years before, on his appointment as Poet Laureate in 1913, he began to receive even partial recognition of his standing as a true poet. Though his poetic dramas are undramatic and involved to the point of obscurity, his lyrics are clear as crystal—and often as cold. A strict sense of form and a desire for purity of outline made it impossible for him to admit into his poetry those luscious qualities that might have made him popular between 1876 and 1898, his period of full production. In the time sense he is a Victorian poet; in form and spirit he belongs to the future. A contemplative and unfevered temper is required for the appreciation of Robert Bridges' poetry. He has written impassioned love lyrics, but his voice is never lifted in a shout of joy; nor in his elegies does it shrill into complaint. He is always serene: feeling is *contained* in his verse rather than expressed by it. His emotion is "emotion recollected

in tranquillity," and this tranquil air is present in his many landscape pieces also. The external features of his nature poetry are in sharp contrast with Wordsworth's descriptions of the wild magnificence of northern England. Bridges' landscapes are of the south country, "bathed in a warm and comfortable glow";¹ and when he contemplates the seas, they are benign seas,

Whereon the timid ships steal out
And laugh to find their foe asleep,
That lately scattered them about,
And drave them to the fold like sheep.²

The retiring genius of Robert Bridges,³ serviceable to him as a poet, disqualified him from popular esteem as Laureate. That office, it is sometimes declared, should be filled by a writer with the ability to become melodiously articulate on all occasions of public rejoicing and mourning. If that argument is sound, Rudyard Kipling would have had strong claims to the Laureateship had it become vacant round about 1901, when he was looked upon by thousands as the unofficial laureate of the British nation. His verses were read even by those to whom poetry was otherwise repellent, and the Empire thrilled to the marching measure of Kipling's Boer War anthem, *The Absent-Minded Beggar*. But the acclamation was not unanimous. Certain sensitive-minded people found Kipling intolerable as a poet: they were infuriated by his aggressive Imperialism, by his incongruous union of brutality and sentimentality, by his banjo rhythms and excessive use of Cockney soldier speech. In their opinion Kipling was loud and vulgar. Once again, in the early twentieth century as in the early years of the nineteenth, political prejudice and literary criticism became confounded, and critics who held other political views were often less than just to Kipling's writings. Indeed, prejudice

¹ *Eros and Psyche*: *March*, stanza 24. ² *Shorter Poems*: Book I, No. 12.

³ Bridges died in 1930, Massfield succeeding him as Laureate.

often made them wholly blind to his real powers. Throughout his career the shadow of partisan disfavour continued to fall across him, although, as imperialistic fervour died down, he became less of a political storm-centre. By 1925 Kipling had ceased to be either a popular idol or an object of detestation. This change was advantageous, for Kipling's prose and poetry continued to be widely read, but in a more dispassionate atmosphere, and judgment of his work by literary standards superseded the earlier biased political judgments.

The chief obstacle in the way of a fair appreciation of Kipling's poetry is its massive bulk. None but perfervid admirers could read the whole of his verse with enjoyment, nor is his place among modern poets likely to be determined until a friendly but judicial critic does for him what Matthew Arnold did for Wordsworth. Until the rubble is cleared away, the building will not be visible.

Soldier and sailor rhymes predominated in Kipling's earlier collections of verse, and among these are his most characteristic (though not most beautiful) poems. By causing the ordinary uneducated British fighting man to become articulate, Kipling brought a new element into English poetry. With its dropped consonants and distorted vowels, its sprinkling of foreign words picked up on active service, and its technical jargon, this rude and ungainly speech is difficult to harmonize with the mood of poetry, though on general grounds it is as defensible as the Dorset dialect of William Barnes or the Scottish peasant speech of Burns. There is, however, a reasonable complaint to be made against Kipling in this connection. He was a cultured Anglo-Indian (born at Bombay in 1865), and although he travelled widely and studied the British soldier at close quarters, "cockney" was virtually a foreign tongue to him. In his use of this dialect, therefore, he was performing a literary trick, not employing a natural medium of expression :

the self-conscious man of letters can be detected behind the tatter of illiterate sounds. A born Cockney knows that a "foreigner" is speaking, and suspects that the fellow is trying, condescendingly, to talk down to his level. From this point of view, it is arguable that Kipling's parade of malformed and crippled words (*e.g.*, 'ave, 'er, guv, chanst, Gavod, bloomin', oficers an' lydies) is an offence against literary good manners.

As a craftsman in verse, Kipling's equipment is that of a master-in-embryo. He has not always used his technical gift to advantage, and when the weeding-out process is undertaken there will be much doggerel to remove. But over against his ready tendency to drop into jog-trot verse must be set the almost Miltonic impressiveness with which he can marshal the pageantry of names—names of people and places,¹ of ships,² flowers and herbs.³ The power at the command of a skilful craftsman in verse is also shown in *Boots*. The sickening and deadly state of semi-idiocy produced in a marching column of exhausted soldiers, is conveyed with exact effect by the deliberate processional monotony of hammered syllables. If it were true, as William Morris believed, that "craftsmanship is all," Kipling at his best might claim to stand among the leading English poets. Yet the magical something that lies beyond mere craftsmanship—that intensity of vision which vitalizes the idea and spirit of great poetry—is rare in Kipling. He has written "patriotic" poems (such as *The Ballad of the "Clampherdown"*) and "English" poems (such as *The Way Through the Woods*). Ideas of militant patriotism vary from age to age, but for Englishmen the love of England endures, and it is the *English* poems of Kipling that are likely to be remembered.

¹ *The Run of the Downs*; *The Land*; *The Roman Centurion's Song*; *The Last Sutte*.

² *Mine Sweepers*, etc.

³ "Our Fathers of Old."

His poetry has little metaphysical interest. What serves as a philosophy of life in most of Kipling's poetry is the conviction that Englishmen are divinely charged with the duty of enlightening the world's

fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.¹

His attitude—partly domineering, partly humble—is that of benevolent despotism. Impatient of the belief spreading in the early part of this century, that every race has the right to be free even though freedom may imply misery and subjection contentment, Kipling wanted the world cleaned up. He preached that the cleaners were not to expect gratitude for their pains; they were to go about their task as “serfs and sweepers,” determined that the work should be carried through, though it be against the will of “the silent, sullen peoples”:

Take up the white man's burden—
And reap his old reward :
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly !) toward the light—
“ Why brought ye us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night ? ”

Kipling's doctrine made little headway after the new century began. The idea of self-determination in national and racial affairs gained increasing support, and inclined men to believe that if “subject peoples” preferred to live in Egyptian night, they should not be “humoured” compulsorily toward the dawn. Between Kipling's view and the doctrine of “Liberty at any cost” there could be no reconciliation.

¹ *The White Man's Burden* (1899).

While Kipling was writing *Barrack Room Ballads* in the early years of the eighteen-nineties, W. B. Yeats was laying the foundations of the Irish literary movement, described in the preceding chapter. The full effect of Yeats' work for the Irish theatre was not seen until after 1901. His best and most influential collections of lyrics, however, were *Poems* (1895) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). He continued to produce lyrics as well as plays after 1901, and in the opinion of some of his contemporaries the *Later Poems* (1922) showed no lessening of poetic power. This was not the general opinion, nor does it seem to have been that of Yeats himself. In one of his later poems he complained, "I am worn out with dreams"—a memorable fragment of self-criticism. It has been pointed out¹ that, comparatively early, Yeats began to cut himself off from a source of poetic energy that had been to him, as to greater poets, remarkably fruitful. As a young man he enriched his poems with a wealth of concrete images, but these became fewer as the impulse to draw upon personal observation of nature grew fainter. It appeared as if he, also, fled

And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.²

For the glory that was gained, there was a counterbalancing loss of patience to watch for the nearer beauties that once held him: "wet wild strawberry leaves," "drowsy water rats," "mice in the barley sheaves," "bubbles in a frozen pond." Carried away as he was by dreams, by theosophy and Eastern mysticism, the faery's song in Yeats' own poem, *The Stolen Child*, might have been applied to himself:

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside,

¹ See *W. B. Yeats: A Critical Study* (1915), by Forrest Reid.

² *When You Are Old* (*Poems*).

Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.

The nature of the change can be seen by comparing *The Falling of the Leaves*¹ with *Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*.² The beauty of the second poem (published ten years later than the first) is more tenuous and unstable than the beauty of the other. No poet has been successful in escaping from earth and making his poetry exclusively from the tapestries of heaven. It is no defence to reply that "the heaven's embroidered cloths enwrought with gold and silver light" suggests a rare magnificence of beauty that is not to be found in

Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us
And yellow the wet wild strawberry leaves.³

The later increase of occasional magnificence is not disputed, but what is gained does not compensate for the loss of touch with natural things. In moods when ethereal beauties were beyond his reach, Yeats declined upon pretty literary artifices and fragments of Christmas-tree decoration—"moth-like stars" and "silver apples of the moon." At such times he was little better poet than Oscar Wilde, who took delight in picturing the sun as a "heated opal."

The Lake Isle of Innisfree provides a compromise between concrete picturing and dream-like imagining. The cabin of clay and wattle, the bean rows and the honey bee; "evening full of the linnet's wings"; the lapping of lake-water—these are actualities recalled by the exile. When a more freely imaginative picture is used (as in the lines:

—for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning, to where the cricket sings),

¹ *The Wanderings of Oisín*, 1888 (now included in *Poems*).

² *The Wind Among the Reeds*

³ *Poems*.

the infusion of personal feeling is powerful enough to make the image more substantial than a vague dream-tracery of words. The universal appeal of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* does not depend wholly upon response to the sentiment of the words. The studiously careful rhythmical structure is equally effective. Yeats freed himself from the metrical regularity he had previously observed, and gave attention mainly to securing a rhythmical basis which should allow scope for natural speech-stress, and also for the general maintenance of natural word-order. Some use is made of repetition, but little of inversion. There is no rigid syllabic structure, the number of syllables to the line ranging from eight to fifteen. The emotional effect of the poem is also heightened by the subtle interaction of vowel music and consonant values, combining a preponderance of open vowels (sometimes further lengthened by the governing rhythm) with a judicious use of alliteration and sibilants, to suggest the bees and linnets, crickets and lapping water. This might seem, at first, to be no more than the familiar device of *onomatopœia*, but that device forms only the stem upon which a variety of other devices is grafted. Few modern poems can have had so much artistry lavished upon them as *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*.

A. E. Housman (born 1859) is remarkable for the perfection of his poetic workmanship, astonishing in one who has had little time to give to poetry. His output is small—104 brief poems in two volumes, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and *Last Poems* (1922)—but it would be difficult to find a weak line. Everything has been winnowed with scrupulous care, and he admits nothing superfluous or merely decorative in form or style. While there is no excess, at the same time there is no insufficiency: everything is perfectly adjusted and adequate for its purpose. Housman makes effective use of vowel quality and the balance of vowel sounds, but (unlike the majority of poets) he depends much

upon explosive consonants—B, T, D, P, K, M—especially when used in the final position.¹ The extraordinary simplicity of his vocabulary is shown by an analysis of *Bredon Hill*.² This poem contains 191 words: two of these are trisyllables; twenty-seven disyllables; the remainder (162 words) are monosyllables. Housman has the secret of creating beauty by rigid exclusion of ornament. One of his most beautiful poems, *Loveliest of Trees*,³ contains only one epithet of beauty, and no adjectives of colour. The exquisite picture is built up by means of four principal words—three nouns and one adjective: *bloom*, *white* ("wearing white for Easter-tide"), *snow*, and *loveliest*.

In regard to the content of his poetry, Housman has a superficial likeness to Hardy, but his philosophic outlook results in an altogether different attitude. Hardy lived entrenched behind his sombre defences, enduring the siege perilous; Housman is out in the open, serene amid the battle—undismayed because entirely without hope:

I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.
Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.⁴

Hardy was too sensitive to be actively a rebel; while Housman is too resolute in an heroic despair.

§ 2.—*Thomas Hardy*

Between 1871 and 1896 Thomas Hardy published the prose works which placed him alongside Meredith as one of the two outstanding novelists of the late Victorian period. The hostile reception given to *Jude the Obscure* brought Hardy's career as a novelist to an end. Although his later books were immoderately attacked on account of their bitter

¹ E.g., *Reveille (A Shropshire Lad)*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *A Shropshire Lad*.

⁴ *Ibid.* (XLVIII).

dissent from orthodox moral and religious standards, Hardy's reputation was already secure when, deliberately, he closed the first phase of his writing life. He then went on to do what no writer had done before—namely, to build up a second reputation, and a third. It is the second and third phases of his work that belong to twentieth-century literature.

Thomas Hardy (born at Upper Bockhampton, near Dorchester, in 1840; died 1928) was descended from an old Jersey family that migrated to England before the end of the sixteenth century. A Thomas Hardy who died at Melcombe Regis in 1599 was an ancestor of Nelson's flag captain Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy, from whom, in turn, the novelist and poet traced his descent. Hardy's father was a builder, his mother the daughter of a Dorsetshire small landowner, and the centuries of settled English tradition in Hardy's ancestral record were undoubtedly powerful in arousing his interest in the ancient English kingdom of Wessex. Hardy's Wessex is much more than a scenic setting for his stories and poems; it is the dominating Over-Character brooding constantly above his works, and casting its changeless shadow upon the author as well as upon the people in his books. He lays emphasis upon the unaltering aspect of large tracts of Wessex. Egdon Heath is "a face upon which time makes but little impression"¹ . . . "a tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition which made Cæsar anxious every year to get clear of its glooms before the autumnal equinox."² The men and women of Hardy's Wessex, though living in the nineteenth century, are subject to "curious fetichistic fears" and touched by a "lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads."³ The tragedies that fall

¹ *The Return of the Native* (Book I, ch. 1).

² *Ibid.* (Book I, ch. 6).

³ *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (ch. 3).

upon them are often, in Hardy's interpretation, due to the intrusion of modern customs and new habits of mind; themselves the product of association between the past and the present, these Wessex people are "harassed by the irrepressible New."¹ The decorative veneer of civilization and progress lies uneasily upon them. Grace Melbury turns upon her father with the cry, "I wish you had never, never thought of educating me. I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South! I hate genteel life. . . . Cultivation has only brought me inconveniences and troubles."² The timeless, changeless spirit of Wessex speaks in her, revolting against newness and "cultivation." For the full significance of Hardy's Wessex to be realized, it must stand in the consciousness of readers like an eternal Presence, in relation both to the poems and the prose. Wessex was a persistent and symbolic factor in Hardy's mentality. Unlike Wordsworth, who was for a time possessed by Nature's "weird hauntings," Hardy never passed on to experience her "holy calm" overspreading his spirit. Though he loved Nature he found little consolatory power in her, and her constant appearance to him was probably as it was, temporarily, to Wordsworth in a troubled period:

Growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me.³

Before his first novel was published (in 1871) Hardy had written poems which remained in manuscript until 1898. These early experiments belong to the years from 1865 to 1869, when he was practising as an architect, and before he turned to literature as a profession. He said that he was

¹ *The Return of the Native* (Book I, ch. 1).

² *The Woodlanders* (ch. 30).

³ *The Prelude* (Book I).

compelled to give up poetry in 1868, probably under economic pressure, and his public career as a poet did not begin until *Wessex Poems* (1898) appeared. But Hardy's prose was always that of a man of acute poetic vision. He records in the novels a thousand and one aspects of nature—from the tiny twig on "the bare bough of a tree stretched horizontally against the evening fire" of the western sky, to the immense landscapes of Blackmoor Vale and Egdon Heath. These things are seen through the eye of a poet, and it was probably with delight that he turned back at length to the verse form.

From 1866 to 1925 there is little change of outlook in Hardy's poetry. A few harmonies are heard in the old man's songs at seventy that were absent from the harsher tunes of the young man of twenty-five; but *Hap*¹ (written in 1866) might have been the seed from which *The Dynasts* grew, for the interpretation of the universe is the same in *Hap* as it was in the great epic-drama written forty years later. This consistency in Hardy's philosophy is striking—deeply impressive even—because it conveys a sense of something far more potent than merely crabbed and stubborn pessimism. Though the root remained fixed, the tree grew and extended its branches over an area as wide as Europe.

In *Hap* the "suffering thing" is one single person, whose joy lies slain and whose best hope has failed. The sufferer questions why this should be; and the only answer that suggests itself to him is that human destiny lies in the hands of a blind and indifferent power which strews joy and pain with a nerveless and purposeless hand:

These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

Hardy puts the same question time after time, in one form or another:

¹ *Wessex Poems*.

"Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry ?

Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains ? . . ."¹

Sometimes, the poet implied, no answer is given ; but when an answer does come, it is the unvarying suggestion that the world and humanity are all a part of one vast unconsciousness—"an ever unconscious automatic sense, unweeting why or whence." The most mature statement of this central theme in Hardy's poetry is given in *The Dynasts*, where the problem of individual suffering merges into the vision of a world in travail. The first few pages of the Fore Scene in the Overworld contain the essence of Hardy's final presentation of his philosophy. "What of the Immanent Will and Its designs ?" asks the Shade of the Earth ; and, as the scenes proceed, a detailed response is slowly elicited from the several Spirits—a response with the following main keynotes :

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance . . .

Thinking on, yet weighing not Its thought,
Unchecks Its clock-like laws . . .

This viewless, voiceless Turner of the Wheel . . .

Like a knitter drowsed,
Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,
The Will has woven with an absent heed
Since life first was ; and ever will so weave.

Throughout *The Dynasts*, the Spirit of the Pities yields the one faint element of hope—so faint as to seem no better

¹ *Nature's Questioning* (*Wessex Poems*).

than the hope of a climber struggling on a dark mountain of polished glass. In the last Chorus of the *Pities* (at the end of the After Scene) there is a somewhat stronger final flash of brightness, suggestive of man's ultimate release from the presumed mindless and soulless domination of the Immanent Will :

. . . . a stirring fills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair.

Except among those who are governed by a dispassionately speculative temper, it is almost certain that the repeated charge of pessimism will continue to be brought against Hardy, though there is no sound reason why pessimism should automatically be regarded as an indictment demanding defence or apology. A poet-philosopher can scarcely ever be unhappy; and it is possible for a philosophy of pessimism to be accepted by a man who is completely happy in himself.¹ Yet the view is widely current that Hardy must always have been exceedingly unhappy. If this is so, his unhappiness originated, not in his philosophic pessimism, but in his acute sense of pity. He was vulnerable through his emotions rather than through his mind, and was almost morbidly sensitive to pain suffered by other creatures :

Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you ?²

¹ "The poetical character . . . lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. . . . It does no harm from its relish for the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation." (Keats' letter to Richard Woodhouse, Oct. 27, 1818).

² *The Reminder* (*Time's Laughingstocks*).

For one whose sensibilities were so sharp as this poem (and much else in Hardy) suggests, philosophic pessimism was no doubt an effective anodyne. Christian fortitude may inure a soul to its own agonies, without reconciling it to the sufferings of others. "Life had bared its bones," to Hardy, and he sought refuge from the "long drip of human tears."¹ He found that refuge in what others call pessimism, but he preferred to define as "'obstinate questionings' in the exploration of reality", and he regarded this policy of obstinate questioning as "the first step toward the soul's betterment and the body's also."² In this connection Hardy called special attention to a line in one of his early poems (*In Tenebris*):

If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst

—a courageous doctrine, though comforting to very few.

Hardy's first sixty years fell in Victorian times, but his continual "obstinate questionings" separate him from spiritual affinity with Victorianism and mark him as a forerunner of the Age of Interrogation. Kipling, a good Victorian, is at the opposite extreme; he is not plaintively interrogative, but acquiescent and dogmatically assertive, as his *Natural Theology* shows:

This was none of the good Lord's pleasure,
For the Spirit He breathed in Man is free;
But what comes after is measure for measure,
And not a God that afflicteth thee.
As was the sowing so the reaping
Is now and ever more shall be.
Thou art delivered to thine own keeping.
Only thyself hath afflicted thee.

Kipling marches with trumpets, affirming that the God of

¹ On an Invitation to the United States (*Poems of the Past and the Present*).

² See the *Apology* prefixed to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*.

avoid failure. He wrote few things more likely to live than the war lyric, *In Time of "the Breaking of Nations,"*¹ containing only sixty-three words. How it is possible, then, to reconcile this small piece of perfection with the stated theory that Hardy was essentially a "spacious" writer? The answer may be reached by reference to another lyric, *Shelley's Skylark*.² In 1887 Hardy was in the neighbourhood of Leghorn, where Shelley wrote *To a Skylark* in 1820. Most people think of Shelley's bird as a creature immortal in itself, alive and ever in flight. Not so Hardy. He thought of it as a thing perished; it

Lived its meek life; then, one day, fell—
A little ball of feather and bone;

and is now "a pinch of unseen, unguarded dust." It was when Hardy permitted himself a spacious *vision*—allowing room for his spirit to move freely—that he created with the power of unquestionable genius. *In Time of "the Breaking of Nations"* has for its theme little less than the whole aim and direction of the active human spirit, and in this immense field of vision Hardy was able to exercise the full scope of his mind and art. The fewness of the words does not reduce the magnitude of the achievement; rather it enhances it, by fulfilling one of the requirements of great poetry—that it should hold "an ocean of thought in a drop of language." In *Shelley's Skylark*, on the contrary, Hardy harnessed his vision to a speck of dust. This is a fault common to a large number of his lyrics, and it applies with particular force to the sequence of fifteen *Satires of Circumstance*.

Never at any time is Hardy's poetry intoxicating or magical. Occasionally it approaches profundity, or rises toward a guarded exultation;³ but its chief characteristic is a "satisfying flatness". It is "satisfying", because it presents the interesting spectacle of a mind continually

¹ *Moments of Vision*. ² *Poems of the Past and the Present*.

³ E.g., "*When I set out for Lyonnesse*" (*Lyrics and Reveries*).

probing and exploring ; while its " flatness " is produced by the persistent pressure of the Spirit of Negation. Negations are not exhilarating ; and when Hardy's poetry does leave flatness behind, temporarily, it is because affirmation is for a moment in the ascendant.¹ Hardy makes no use of the charm of verbal felicity. Though his rhymes and metres are extraordinarily resourceful, the effect is often discounted by a wanton angularity of phrase. This combination of ugly word-forms with carefully considered verse-technique is a curious and recurrent feature in the lyrics. *The Alarm*,² for example, suggests Hardy's aural obtuseness and imperfect sense of literary tact, for here (in a narrative poem on a traditional theme) he put into the mouth of a Wessex peasant soldier of the Napoleonic period such constructions as *antedate*, *jeopardize*,³ etc. Elsewhere he borrowed a variety of terms belonging to science and philosophy, subjects unhappily handicapped by a complex jargon. Such features in Hardy's poetry are as disturbing as an ugly wound on an otherwise comely face.

The third of Hardy's reputations rests upon *The Dynasts*. The test of mere bigness is not often apposite in literature, though in relation to the twentieth century it is a significant test. Since the passing of the great Victorians, poets have shown little of that power of sustained production possessed by most poets of the first rank. Robert Bridges' longer poems belong, of course, to the last century. Between 1906 and 1920 Charles Doughty wrote several lengthy works in verse,⁴ but his archaisms and crabbed style have deterred

¹ E.g., *In Time of "the Breaking of Nations."* ² *Wessex Poems*.

³ It is interesting to note the comparative effect of Chaucer's use of the word *jeopardise*. Meeting it in *The Boke of the Duchesse* (line 666) the reader feels no incongruity between the word and the speaker, nor between the word and its surroundings. As in *The Alarm*, so in the earlier poem, *jeopardise* is a rhyme-word ; but there is no appearance that the exigencies of rhyme, alone, dictated its use by Chaucer.

⁴ *The Dawn in Britain*, etc.

most people, even those who admire his masterly travel book, *Arabia Deserta*.

The Dynasts is by far the biggest single work in English literature since the Victorian age, and is almost certainly the greatest : great in conception and in execution. Originally published in three parts (1904, 1906, 1908) this Epic-Drama of the war with Napoleon is presented in nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes, the action covering ten years, from 1805 to Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo.

In this crowning achievement, most of the Hardy-esque elements that had previously distinguished his novels and short poems are gathered up in a unified form, and applied in an attempt to represent and account for the Human Tragedy. Mention has already been made of the form in which Hardy pursues, in *The Dynasts*, his interrogation of the universe, conducted here by the Phantom Intelligences which he created "as spectators of the terrestrial action." Hardy's purpose was to dispense with both the Greek and the Hebrew theogony,¹ and to substitute a supernatural system acceptable to modern minds capable of "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith." George Meredith (in the first chapter of *The Egoist*) discusses the problem of whether the literary artist should consider life minutely with "the watchmaker's eye" or "under the broad Alpine survey of the Spirit." Hardy does both in *The Dynasts*. Through the Phantom Intelligences the world is observed as under the broad Alpine survey of the Spirit, while through the speech and actions of the human figures—"the Persons"—smaller "patches of life" are seen in detail, as under a magnifying glass. Hardy followed historical sources as closely as is consistent with the poet's function : that is to say, he

¹ As in (a) Aeschylus and other Greek tragic poets ; and (b) Milton's *Paradise Lost*, etc.

took historical fact as his raw material and created from it a vision of life that is, in essentials, "truer" than history itself. The formal historian has no other duty than to record plainly the actions of men through the eyes of a man; his view is earthbound. But the poet is a visionary as well as a clear-sighted human creature. He sees from the heights of imagination as well as from the level of earth; he possesses something of divinity in amplification of his powers as a man. *The Dynasts*, therefore, offers this twofold (or, rather, manifold) view of a "vast international tragedy"—Europe's life-or-death struggle against Napoleon, "the Man of inharmonious jars." Hardy's vision permits the reader to obtain a view which sweeps over insular and continental boundaries, escapes from social class-divisions, and transcends the limitations of human sight. The conflict is seen as it appeared to French and Austrian, English and Russian; to monarch and peasant, marshal and common soldier; to servants, spies, and street women; to spirit messengers and recording angels. Hardy, unlike Kipling, was never associated in the public mind with enthusiastic patriotism, but it is worth while to note that part of Hardy's purpose in *The Dynasts* was to redress the balance of history, by emphasizing what Continental historians had previously disregarded—namely, that England's achievement was vitally important in saving the world from Napoleonic domination.

The man Napoleon is the central figure of the tragic conflict in *The Dynasts*, which might indeed be entitled *The Tragedy of Napoleon Buonaparte*. The other dynastic personages—kings and queens, military and naval leaders—are not in themselves essentially tragic. Napoleon, on the contrary, as Hardy represents him, is a towering tragic figure, "the Man of Destiny" in whom is implanted some influence that carries him onward in spite of himself; deluding him with false promises of triumph; luring him

at last to defeat and ruin. To the Queen of Prussia, Napoleon says :

Know you, my Fair,
That I—ay, I—in this deserve your pity—
Some force within me, baffling mine intent,
Harries me onward, whether I will or no.¹

And again, in his soliloquy after the defeat at Waterloo :

A miss-mark they will dub me ;
And yet—I found the crown of France in the mire,
And with the point of my prevailing sword
I picked it up ! But for all this and this
I shall be nothing. . . .
To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche
In human fame, as once I fondly felt,
Was not for me. . . .
Great men are meteors that consume themselves
To light the earth. This is my burnt-out hour.²

This revelation of inward conflict ranks Hardy's Napoleon with the tragic heroes of Greek and Shakespearean drama, though the fundamental Idea of Tragedy is not one and the same in all three.

The further tragic element in *The Dynasts* (the conflict between "the pale panting multitudes"³ and the Immanent Will) cannot be more than mentioned here, though it is of the utmost importance in Hardy's design, and is implicit in his motto on the title-page :

And I heard sounds of insult, shame, and wrong,
And trumpets blown for wars.

Nor is there space to dwell upon the skill and variety of the versification ; the vivid originality and force of the "stage directions" ; the remarkable set of original songs and ballads distributed in the text ;⁴ or the scenes of rustic

¹ Part II, Act 1, Sc. viii.

² III, 7, ix.

³ *After Scene.*

⁴ See Part I, Act 1, Sc. i ; I, 5, vii ; III, 1, xi ; III, 2, i ; III, 5, vi.

comedy,¹ in respect of which (in *The Dynasts* and elsewhere) Hardy is comparable with Shakespeare.

§ 3.—*Narrative and Satire*

The disparity between popular taste and critical opinion is often seen in an aggravated form in relation to story-telling in verse. Simplification of thought, romantic colouring, and smooth facility in versification—these are qualities which commend a particular type of narrative poetry even to readers who find little pleasure in other kinds of verse. From Scott onward there has been in English literature a succession of story-tellers in verse, and when the larger public has delighted in poetry at all it is usually vigorous narrative poetry that they have bought and read.

Alfred Noyes shares with Kipling the distinction of being one of the few twentieth-century poets who attract an eager and loyal audience. It has been recorded that Noyes "was early distinguished as the one modern poet who could make poetry—even the epic—pay"!² Yet when interest in modern poetry revived, between 1912 and 1922, he was neglected (and sometimes abused) by those writers and critics who were most desirous of fostering the revival. His own public continues faithful to him, and (like Noyes himself) is alternately puzzled and indignant when commentators suggest that his verse is poor stuff.

When contemporary prejudice has been cleared away, it will no doubt be felt that Noyes was both as good and as bad a poet as most of those who scoffed at him. Though he became the bugbear of some of the young "Georgians", his limitations are theirs also. They all alike laid out the stock-in-trade of the versifier on a peddler's tray and offered pretty images and glittering toys as poetry. The

¹ See I, 2, v; I, 5, vii; III, 5, vi.

² *Contemporary British Literature*, by Manly and Rickert.

only difference between Alfred Noyes and the duller of the Georgians is that their stock was smaller and more pretentiously "precious" than his, and that they cried their wares more lustily and were less unassuming than he. For the rest, Noyes gives pleasure where they do not, because his poetry carries echoes of the Victorian tradition. He lingered in the faint but mellow Victorian twilight; they belonged to the Georgian false dawn.

Alfred Noyes was born in Staffordshire in 1880, and after leaving Oxford devoted himself to poetry and began to produce works of large bulk. Although he is an industrious writer with an astonishingly large accumulation of poetical material at command, his verse is not marked by such range and variety as it might at first seem to be. Fair criticism of any one page of *Drake*, *A Tale of Old Japan*, or *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern*, might with equal appositeness be applied to everything he has written. He does not "load every rift with ore"—he overloads every cranny with a gleaming substance which will not pass the acid test. Superficially his verse is attractive and fascinating; so is Aladdin's cave in a Christmas pantomime. Admirers of Noyes are dazzled by the gilding and colouring and emotional lights that spread over the surface of his work, and while "the broad dazzle of sunset-coloured tides"¹ is in their eyes, critical insight is difficult to exercise. The thousand pages which Noyes has encrusted with glittering images and adjectives of colour contain depressingly few unhackneyed pictures or illuminating thoughts. This familiar picturesqueness, this re-echoing of commonplace ideas, this pretty refurbishing of a shabby poetic Lord Mayor's Show is exactly what gives immediate pleasure. But as literature, it is flashy and hollow and empty—a mere confection, sweet to the palate, but quickly dissolved and soon forgotten. Yet perhaps Alfred Noyes did a better

¹ *Drake*: Book II, line 557.

thing by turning poetry into pleasant though cloying confectionery than some of his detractors did by turning it into the dismal disease of third-rate *vers libre*.

While Noyes went along the old familiar road, John Masefield had been experimenting both in life and literature. Leaving his Shropshire home (where he was born in 1874) he ran away to sea, and memories of that period are given in *Dauber* (1913). Following some experience as a working sailor,

He took to the road in America, living a free vagrant life, sleeping in barns, working here and there on farms, finally turning-up in New York, where he got a job at ten dollars a month in the Colonial Hotel, and earned his money by about sixteen hours' handiwork a day, scouring beer taps, cleaning cuspidors (which we call spittoons) and ejecting turbulent patrons. At about two or two-thirty a.m. he went to his garret, where he read *Morte D'Arthur*, his only book, until he fell asleep.¹

Once or twice Masefield lifts the veil and allows himself to be seen "roughing it."² After working as a gardener and a potman he returned to England and, becoming a journalist, edited the Miscellany column in the *Manchester Guardian*. Then he came back to London and settled in Bloomsbury, where he made friends with several well-known writers, including J. M. Synge, the Irish playwright. These two took many long walks through London, engaged in talk which often kept them wandering half the night along deserted streets.³

Between 1901 and 1911 John Masefield wrote poems, plays, novels, short stories, essays, and criticism, all with moderate success; and he was an established writer before the remarkable outburst of acclamation which greeted *The Everlasting Mercy* on its appearance in the *English Review*

¹ A. G. Gardiner (in the *Daily News*, May 3, 1913).

² As in *A Raines Law Arrest (A Tarpausin Muster)*.

³ See Masefield's poem, *Biography*.

in 1911. This long narrative poem in octosyllabic couplets was an attempt to represent in verse, realistically, the spiritual conversion of a prodigal, "tokened to the devil." Saul Kane, the central character, tells the story in his own words, and Masfield suppresses nothing: the brutality, the delirium, the foul language—all are there, in the first half of the poem. Later, when Saul Kane has been converted by a Quaker woman, his spiritual ecstasy is described. In the midst of the earlier blasphemous passages there are attempts to incorporate poetry, but the whole incongruous mixture would have been more effective as a seventeenth-century Puritan tract. It plunges into incredible bathos—

John and Mary died of measles,
And Rob was drowned at the Teasels.
And little Nan, dear little sweet,
A cart run over in the street ;
Her little shift was all one stain,
I prayed God put her out of pain—

and it does not excuse the many such passages to suppose that Masfield was trying to write the kind of verse Saul Kane himself might have been expected to produce. Bald pedestrian jog-trot and ludicrous manufactured rhymes are also a blot upon the other long narrative pieces which Masfield wrote in the following years: *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912) and *The Daffodil Fields* (1913). *Dauber* (1913), though not free from such blemishes, is relieved by magnificent passages of sea poetry. These poems were written in reaction from the picturesque modes of versifying, and caused a sensation by their newness. But with that their interest ends. Readers are discomfited less by the ugliness and the bathos than by the attempt to patch on pieces of nature poetry and pieces of religious poetry here and there. The effect is as horrible as if some maudlin and obscene old hag in the dock of a police court should be

heard drunkenly mumbling out fragments of Wordsworth and Francis Thompson.

John Masefield had done better work than this in his earlier *Saltwater Ballads* (1902) and *Ballads and Poems* (1910), in which such pieces as *Sea Fever* and *Cargoes* appeared; and he was afterwards to write a much better narrative poem—*Reynard the Fox* (1919). This record of a fox-hunt is notable for its Chaucerian "thumb-nail" sketches of human character in the description of the meet in the first part; and the fox's-eye view of the run in part two. Here the poet seems to be at last the master of his rhythms and metres, and not their helpless slave as in the earlier narrative poems. By prosodic variation the changing sensations of the fox are imaginatively indicated—his first excitement, his fear, his growing weariness, his relief when

The threat of the hounds behind was gone,
and how (after the scent is found again)

His strength was broken, his heart was bursting,
His bones were rotten, his throat was thirsting;
His feet were reeling, his brush was thick
From dragging the mud, and his brain was sick.

But the fox escapes and the poem ends with a quiet descriptive passage. *Reynard the Fox* is among the best examples of sustained narrative poetry written in the quarter-century, and goes some way toward justifying Masefield's appointment as Poet Laureate on the death of Bridges in 1930.

Journalism has been a convenient by-road to literature for many authors; for G. K. Chesterton the poet, on the contrary, it has proved a blind alley. An inveterate journalist, his eyes and ears have strained to see and hear the affairs of the hour; and like all satirical poets below the first rank he treats the insignificant twitterings of minor politicians as seriously as if they were the blasphemous

thunders of the lords of hell. His *Collected Poems* (1927) is, therefore, a lop-sided book, page after page being filled with versified disquisitions upon phrases extracted from current newspapers, magazines, sermons and speeches. But amid this jumbled mass are a score or so of pieces that no English poet could have written better, and a few that no other poet could have written at all. The long narrative poems—*Lepanto*, *The Ballad of St. Barbara*, and *The Ballad of the White Horse*—are less impressive than ambitious: none of them has a compelling story-interest, but in *Lepanto* there are a number of passages that are delightful to declaim; for example:

Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop,
 Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop,
 Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds,
 Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds,
 Thronging of the thousands up that labour under sea
 White for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for liberty.

This is stirring verse if not first-rate poetry. Probably few readers care what the lines are *about*—the syllabic pomp suffices.

Among Chesterton's satirical poems the twelve-line *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* is so superlatively good that the rest of his satires seem trivial in comparison. It has the advantage of a theme that, though "timed," is likely to remain applicable for generations to come; and it has, also, pity and a fine indignation to raise it above the common level of satire, a type of verse which is too often tinged by prejudice and personal animus. Compared with the *Elegy*, there is an absurdly ponderous air of humourless inflation about *Antichrist, or The Reunion of Christendom: An Ode*, in which Chesterton attacks F. E. Smith (Lord Birkenhead) for a now-forgotten speech on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill.

The best section of G. K. Chesterton's verse is the group of road-songs and drinking-songs scattered through his novel, *The Flying Inn*,¹ Their combination of wisdom and nonsense, humour and high spirits, is irresistible and unique, and these (together with one magnificent "serious" lyric, *The Donkey*) constitute Chesterton's indispensable contribution to English poetry.

Hilaire Belloc's verse is smaller in quantity than that of his intimate friend G. K. Chesterton, but it includes less perishable stuff. A few of his lyrics (such as *The South Country*) are already firmly placed in the anthologies. The satirical *Cautionary Tales for Children*—though caustic and critical—are at the same time delightfully funny. Belloc is also a neat epigrammatist, whether the purpose be to offer a compliment to a friend or to shoot an arrow at a foe.

§ 4.—Rupert Brooke and the Soldier Poets

When Rupert Brooke died at Scyros in the Ægean Sea, on April 17, 1915, he was immediately canonized in the popular imagination as St. Rupert of England, and by the influence of his personality rather than his poetry he became a figure of importance in contemporary literature. In the tragic stress of the early months of the World War, the nation needed a human symbol to keep attention fixed upon the professed idealistic aims for which it had been led into battle. After eight months such a symbol was revealed in the dead poet, Rupert Brooke—remembered, not as a figure of death, but as he was while alive: young, quick and eager, a golden-haired Apollo. His early death while on war-service, his physical beauty, his intellectual gifts, his genius for friendship—these were accepted as marks of "one who seemed to have everything that is worth having."

¹ These poems, reprinted in *Wine, Water and Song* (1915), are included in *Collected Poems* (1927).

So, out of proportion to his merits as a singer, Brooke became the sign and symbol of his age—even as, three centuries earlier, another handsome and accomplished young Englishman, Sir Philip Sidney, had been the sign and symbol of the Elizabethans.

Born at Rugby in 1887, Rupert Brooke was the son of a housemaster at Rugby School, and there he spent a happy schoolboy life.¹ Later, at King's College, Cambridge, he was at first less happy, but he quickly made new friends and became absorbed in amateur acting and in the University Fabian Group. Soon he found the Fabians hard and intolerant, devoid of the imaginative idealism urgent in himself. At that time he affirmed :

There are only three things in the world : one is to read poetry, another is to write poetry, and the best of all is to live poetry !

Out of term-time, Rupert lived in a cottage at Grantchester (near Cambridge), of which place he wrote one of his best-known poems. When he left Cambridge, some years were spent in travel—first on the Continent, and afterwards in America and the South Seas.² He returned to London in June, 1914, and passed six happy weeks among old and new friends. Then came the War. He took part in the unsuccessful defence of Antwerp, and at the end of February, 1915, sailed for the East, where he died less than two months later.

Rupert Brooke had at first been attracted by the artifices of the eighteen-nineties group of writers, but he quickly reacted against their vitiated hot-house atmosphere, and wallowed in ugliness in order to demonstrate his distaste for "pretty" poetry. He wrote sonnets on seasickness (*A*

¹ Rupert Brooke's biography, by Edward Marsh, appeared as an introduction to the *Collected Poems*, and has since been issued separately : *Rupert Brooke : A Memoir*.

² See his *Letters from America*.

Channel Passage) and sweating Germans (*Dawn*) ; and, as a protest against the exclusively romantic view of classical heroes, suggested in the *Menelaus and Helen* sonnets that "the perfect knight" and "the perfect queen" afterwards degenerated into disgusting senility. He quickly passed out of that phase, however, and before long the beauty of life held him spellbound. Sitting at a Berlin café in 1912 he thought of the "incredibly lovely superb world," and wrote his poem about one of the loveliest places he knew, *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*. Though he himself referred to this poem as "hurried stuff," it is as cool and refreshing as are the May fields (of which he speaks) to "the bare feet that run to bathe." His love of Nature was neither mystical nor metaphysical. He saw and touched and enjoyed ; that was enough for him :

I only know that you may lie
Day long and watch the Cambridge sky,
And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass,
Hear the cool lapse of hours pass,
Until the centuries blend and blur
In Grantchester, in Grantchester.

In *The Great Lover* he speaks of the hundred and one everyday things that gave him joy—plates and cups, dust, wet roofs, wood-smoke, "the cool kindliness of sheets . . . and the rough male kiss of blankets." He invests this domestic catalogue with significance and beauty, and, as a poet should, turns the commonplace into the strangely and enchantingly new.

Though the five sonnets entitled 1914 were enthusiastically received at their first appearance, their poetic qualities probably did not undergo close scrutiny. When war-time emotions had been forgotten, it became fashionable to decry Rupert Brooke, and to challenge those who admired him. On the evidence of the *Collected Poems* it would be

rash to describe him as a great poet ; yet he was a poet of remarkable promise, and the 1914 sonnets hint at a growing "high seriousness" which might have matched his sense of melody with an adequate measure of sustaining thought. Because of its prophetic interest, *The Soldier* has become the one poem inseparably linked with Rupert Brooke's name. It is, for all time, his epitaph—beautiful and tranquil ; but its broken, staccato movement (awkward for the sonnet form) places it, as poetry, below the first and third sonnets of the 1914 group (*Peace* and *The Dead*) ("Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead !")

It is natural, though unprofitable, to speculate as to what might have been Rupert Brooke's place in English poetry if he had lived on. The marks of greatness in his poems are not numerous, but such marks are there. He saw the world with a clear eye and recorded what he saw with directness and clarity. Yet, however poetic in himself, Rupert Brooke was more important as the occasion of poetry in others ; though it is not true, as some have suggested, that the war-time revival of English poetry had its origin in Brooke alone. The emotional necessity of poetry had been independently revealed to the fighting men in Flanders and elsewhere before Rupert Brooke's death had stirred home-keeping wits.

In glancing at some other soldier-poets who wrote verse between 1914 and 1918, the next to whom it is common to turn is Julian Grenfell. Though a soldier on active service in France, Grenfell was able to capture at least one mood of tranquillity amid the turmoil, and in that mood he wrote *Into Battle*, a true poem. He wrote other verse, but this is his masterpiece and his memorial, created not out of urgent passions, but through calm and deep communion with unwarlike things. It shows him as a man who, in the midst of fire, could withdraw into himself and find solace, harmony and fellowship with earth and trees and the grass ; with

stars and the birds and horses. Death to him did not seem as a pit into which he would be plunged headlong and despairing ; it was a rest to which he would go as confidently as men go each night to bed :

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings ;
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings.

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth ;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth ;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.

This spirit of confidence and tranquillity is unapproached by other war-time poets. Grenfell preserved his spiritual certitude and moral courage even whilst realizing all that war meant and all that it probably would mean for him very soon. He was killed early in the War.

The Irish peasant poet, Francis Ledwidge, though his poems, also, are quiet in mood, seemed to induce calm within his soul by deliberately turning his eyes and thoughts from the actualities of war ; turning to Nature as an antidote for the poison of conflict. In Julian Grenfell is seen the paradox of a man who loved life so passionately that he could go out of life without a tremor. Ledwidge was a lover of life and earth, but his grasp of life was less firm and assured than Grenfell's ; to Ledwidge, Death was an enemy ; to Grenfell, not an enemy—only a necessary but wretched menial into whose hands had somehow fallen the keys to the gate of Rest. In a poem written in barracks Ledwidge said :

When the war is over I shall take
My lute a-down and sing again

Songs of the whispering things amongst the brake,
 And those I love shall know them by their strain.
 Their airs shall be the blackbird's twilight song,
 Their words shall be all flowers with fresh dews hoar.
 But it is lonely now in winter long,
 And, God ! to hear the blackbird sing once more.¹

He was killed in action in 1917.

A very different type of warrior-poet was Siegfried Sassoon. In the early months of the War he served as an officer, but, after being invalided home, resigned his commission and, for a time, conducted a propagandist campaign designed to rid mankind of the spectre of war. So, in *Counter Attack*, he set out to present in brutal verse the realities of war without gloss or evasion of truth—no matter how ghastly and terrible. The war-poems of Siegfried Sassoon, therefore, take more account of war as a dirty mess of blood and decaying bodies, than as a source of heroic deeds. Many of the verses are a nightmare of horror ; if they burn into the memory of the reader they have done what the author required. Yet Siegfried Sassoon was quickly disillusioned of hope that the public conscience would be moved to stop war because a soldier told the truth. Some said that his truths were only the gibberings of a crank, and, in the end, Sassoon re-enlisted and went back to get on with the business of war which truth could not stop. The verses in *Counter Attack* (1918) seldom rise to the level of poetry ; but criticism is disarmed by their intense sincerity and the fact that they were put forward as a contribution not to æsthetics but to the cause of human brotherhood. It is useless to rebuke a writer for not having done what he admittedly never set out to do. At least these verses reveal the war-mind of thousands who felt (though they might not have spoken in print) as Siegfried Sassoon did :

¹ *The Place* (*Complete Poems of Francis Ledwidge*).

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
 Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
 Sneak home and pray you'll never know
 The hell where youth and laughter go.¹

The most discerning of the war anthologies² contains poems by nearly a hundred writers, and of these about two-thirds are by soldier-poets. Most of them conformed to the accepted modes of poetry, but Wilfred Owen broke away and tried a form which he considered more suited to the disharmony of war. Before his death in action on November 4, 1918 (at the age of twenty-five), Owen had experimented with assonance and dissonance in place of rhyme, and the jarring effect suggested the clangour of modern warfare without destroying the normal basis of verse structure. Wilfred Owen's *Poems* (1920) are only about a score in number, and in an unfinished preface he wrote :

This book is not concerned with Poetry.
 The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
 The Poetry is in the pity.

The conjunction of poetry and pity can be noted in his most familiar piece, *Strange Meeting*, in which two dead soldiers ("enemies") speak to each other. The waste of young life, and the tragic pathos of cheated youth struck down on the threshold of "the undone years": these are the themes that move the lips of the second speaker, who closes the poem with the only request that living millions can grant to the millions dead, "Let us sleep now. . . ."

§ 5.—Georgian Poetry

Poetry given, the problem was to sell it. In the first ten years of the twentieth century English readers bought very

¹ *Suicide in the Trenches (Counter Attack)*.

² *Valour and Vision*, edited by Jacqueline Trotter.

little new verse, and with a few exceptions living poets were not considered by publishers as a "commercial proposition." By 1912 Rupert Brooke was satisfied that public neglect was a serious hindrance to the development of contemporary poetry. The desire for a wider audience was prompted not only by a hope for increased sales (at best, the writers could have little expectation of a sufficient income from poetry); it was prompted equally by the need of intelligent appreciation outside their own coterie. Mental inbreeding among members of literary cliques has been a blight and a curse upon many young twentieth-century authors, and a healthy instinct and sound commonsense caused Rupert Brooke to attempt to break the narrow and vicious circle.

Edward Marsh has described¹ how Brooke devised a scheme for stimulating public curiosity. He planned to write a volume of poems and to publish it as the work of "twelve different writers, six men and six women, all with the most convincing pseudonyms." Edward Marsh made the counter-suggestion of publishing an anthology by "flesh and blood poets," and at his rooms in Gray's Inn, on September 20, 1912, the suggestion was approved and adopted over luncheon by a party consisting of Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, Harold Monro, W. W. Gibson, Arundel del Ré and Edward Marsh. The details are noteworthy, for at that gathering a new phase in English poetry was inaugurated. Though in the future little attention may be paid to the neo-Georgians of 1912-1925, they did at least stir the public to buy and to read poetry, *before* the World War came to throw men back upon those elemental emotions which can be expressed only in poetry.

A few weeks before Christmas, 1912, Harold Monro published from his Poetry Bookshop in a Bloomsbury slum, a volume in brown paper boards entitled *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912*, edited by E. M. (Edward Marsh). A larger

¹ *Rupert Brooke: A Memoir.*

circulation had been hoped for, but the actual success went far beyond expectation. New editions were called for month after month, and the sales ran into many thousands. Other *Georgian Poetry* books followed at intervals up to 1922, when (with the fifth collection) the series came to an end. By that time the fervour of 1912 had died down in a number of the poets. One or two of the best had unaccountably ceased from producing verse; in others, verse-writing had become merely a habit. The reign of the Georgians was over and the poetic fire—a little dimmed—scattered itself here and there upon other hearths.

The Georgians seemed always on the verge of doing something much better than they had done before—but the possibilities remained possibilities only. The five volumes—brown, blue, green, orange, red—have now a sepulchral air, like five chambers of a mausoleum where faded chaplets hang round the brows of a company of the embalmed. Yet it *was* “glorious in that dawn to be alive,” and to share with Edward Marsh the hope that England was “at the beginning of another ‘Georgian period’ which might take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past.”

In these five books the work of forty poets was represented. G. K. Chesterton was admitted into the first volume and John Masefield into that and others, but few other well-known writers appeared, though afterwards (and largely through the ministry of *Georgian Poetry*) most of the forty became well-known.

Of all the work appearing in *Georgian Poetry*, none was more promising than that of Ralph Hodgson, who seemed to be a poet of almost unlimited possibility. *The Bull* and *The Song of Honour*,¹ as well as some of his short lyrics, appeared to bring a new force into English poetry. But *Poems* (1917), including almost all Ralph Hodgson's work, contains only about seventy pages, and it is evident that he,

¹ Both in *Georgian Poetry* (II) 1913-1915.

like other contemporaries, was not gifted with sustained creative ability. Yet, though Hodgson's poetry is small in bulk, it is remarkable for emotional force, subtlety of music, and power to compress a wide range of pictorial and dramatic effects into a minimum of words. Compassion for animals is dominant in his poems, and he expresses this with such a depth of passion and vision as to bring it into true relation with poetry. In *The Bells of Heaven*¹ Hodgson speaks of the need of "angry prayers"

For shamed and shabby tigers
And dancing dogs and bears,
And wretched blind pit ponies,
And little hunted hares.

If humanitarian pity produced the last three lines, assuredly poetic vision and understanding created the image of intolerable indignity in the phrase "shamed and shabby tigers," with its unforgettable suggestion of a majestic beast torn from the boundless liberty of the forest and crushed into cowed manginess by some circus-monger. *The Bull*, a more ambitious poem, is an attempt to present, psychologically and poetically, the history of a bull, the leader of a herd, who has been dethroned in his old age and decrepitude by a young rebel. The old monarch stands—bewildered, unhappy, sick—waiting only for death, while vultures hover about him with patient and remorseless persistence :

See him standing dewlap-deep
In the rushes at the lake,
Surly, stupid, half-asleep. . . .

Dreaming things : of days he spent
With his mother gaunt and lean
In the valley warm and green,
Full of baby wonderment,
Blinking out of silly eyes
At a hundred mysteries.

Georgian Poetry (III) 1916-1917.

He relives, in a dream, the glories of his past, but the dream fades; he wakes from his vision; the clouds of flies are about him,

And the dreamer turns away
From his visionary herds
And his splendid yesterday,
Turns to meet the loathly birds
Flocking round him from the skies,
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

Ralph Hodgson has treated an unpleasant and ugly subject, without glozing over the ugliness. Yet neither the ugliness, nor the sobering solemnity of greatness fallen to decay, predominates in the final impression. That final impression is of the grandeur of life, the dignity and courage that can be brought to it, and of the majesty that can remain even in defeat—the philosophy of the tameless heart. There is temptation to linger over Hodgson, but the rest of his poetry must be passed over with no more than brief mention of his longest and most elusive poem, *The Song of Honour*—a remarkable piece of rhythmical virtuosity in doggerel metre; *Eve*,¹ lovely in its music and its word-pictures; and *The Gipsy Girl*,² a miracle of compression—the substance of a five-act drama and a psychological novel in twenty lines.

James Stephens, like Hodgson, is troubled by man's cruelty to animals,³ though this theme is not so frequent in his work. The songs of birds and the happy fools of the world are things he likes to hear and to record, as in Mad Patsy's song,⁴ *The Rivals*,⁵ and *The Fifteen Acres*.⁶ Still more striking than these, however, are two poems of a different kind—*In the Cool of the Evening* and *The Lonely*

¹ *Poems* (1917). ² *Georgian Poetry* (III) 1916-1917.

³ *The Snare*: *Georgian Poetry* (II) 1913-1915.

⁴ *In the Poppy Field*: *Georgian Poetry* (I) 1911-1912.

⁵ *Georgian Poetry* (II) 1913-1915.

⁶ *Georgian Poetry* (III) 1916-1917.

God.¹ The first of these creates with extraordinary skill an impression of the agonized suspense in Adam and Eve as they hide from the face of God in Eden :

He will look upon
Our crouching shame, make us stand upright
Burning in terror—O that it were night !
He may not come . . . what ? listen, listen, now—
He is here ! lie closer . . . *Adam, where art thou ?*

The Lonely God, a much longer poem in rhyming couplets (so carefully varied in metrical structure as to suggest something of the dignity of blank verse), describes the scene in Eden after the expulsion of Adam, and considers the sensations of God separated from his creation, Man. James Stephens' poem is not unworthy of a subject of epic magnitude which perhaps only a Milton could treat fully and adequately. It is a fault with many twentieth-century poets that when they write upon "serious" themes, the result is often heavy and oppressive. Within the limits of its length (some 350 lines), however, *The Lonely God* is magnificent, and in the strength of its versification is suggestive of superhuman forces.

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson—part Hogarth and part Dickens—has come closer than any of his contemporaries to representing in verse the deadening specialization of twentieth-century life. It is not a complete picture that he gives, because he is concerned mainly with the lives of people engaged in arduous labour. Consequently he sees

All life moving to one measure—
Daily bread, daily bread—

the "hand-to-mouth" life. Much of his poetry is unlovely with the unloveliness of the subjects he chooses, but it belongs to the first quarter of the twentieth century as the work of no other poet does. It is murky, wrapped in a pall

¹ Both in *Georgian Poetry* (I).

of smoke, and lit (as it were) only by the glare of furnaces and the glow of white-hot metal :

The great, red eyes . . .
 They burn me through and through.
 They glare upon me all night long ;
 They never sleep ;
 But always glower on me.
 They never even blink ;
 But stare, and stare . . .¹

Gibson is essentially the laureate of modern industrialism, though an unexultant laureate who tells chiefly of a man-made hell of machines and creatures of the machines. Gibson may be seen as the Hogarth of contemporary poetry in *Geraniums*,² where he depicts

A poor old weary woman . . .
 Broken with lust and drink, blear-eyed and ill,
 Her battered bonnet nodding on her head.

The furnace fires of Gibson are in striking contrast to the almost chilly austerity of John Freeman, a contributor to the last three volumes of *Georgian Poetry*. Though Freeman, like several of his fellow-poets, writes a good deal about Beauty, he does not appear ever to be really in touch with her. In his case the reason is plain, for he regards Beauty as his own creation :

It was my eyes, Beauty, that made thee bright ;
 It was my ears that heard, the blood in my veins,
 The vehemence of transfiguring thought—
 Not lights and shadows, birds, grasses and rains—
 That made thy wonders wonderful.³

It may be true that Beauty dwells in the eye of the beholder, but she reveals herself in response to an instinctive act of

¹ *The Furnace (Daily Bread)*, 1910.

² *Georgian Poetry (I)*.

³ *Discovery : Georgian Poetry (III)*.

faith rather than to "the vehemence of transfiguring thought." John Freeman's phrase is, however, significant of that intellectual approach which has caused some twentieth-century poets to believe (mistakenly) that Beauty can be manufactured, or caused to materialize, from the mere conjunction of poetic ingredients.

James Elroy Flecker (born at Lewisham, London, in 1884) was the eldest child of Dr. Flecker, afterwards headmaster of Dean Close School, Canterbury, where the boy was educated before going to Oxford. After a period as a school teacher, J. E. Flecker entered the diplomatic service, and thereafter, with intervals of leave for ill-health, was posted to various Consulates in the Near East. He died at Davos, Switzerland, on January 3, 1915.¹ Following the objective methods of Leconte de Lisle, Hérédia, and other modern French poets of the "Parnassian" school, Flecker eschewed personal and emotional poetry, and (as he said) wrote "with the single intention of creating beauty."² Except in his oriental play, *Hassan* (1922), he rarely got beyond the stage of experimentation in verse. *Hassan*, a store of poetic delights, will probably be cherished longer for its lyrics than for dramatic qualities. The London production of *Hassan* was a beautiful spectacle, but apart from the stage pictures and the enchanting lyrics the play was tedious, and it had, moreover, touches of that sensual cruelty³ which has become a recurrent feature of imaginative writing in England during recent years. The songs from *Hassan* are included in the *Collected Poems*, where they appear like gems torn from their setting; the setting is not perfect, but it displays these jewels to advantage. In

¹ See J. C. Squire's introduction to *The Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker* (1916).

² *Ibid.*

³ This sadistic strain is more strongly suggested in Rafi's whisper to Pervaneh (and the dialogue following), Act IV, Sc. 2, than displayed in the Procession of Protracted Death.

Hassan's song to Yasmin (Act I, Sc. 2), *The War Song of the Saracens* (Act III, Sc. 3), and *The Golden Road to Samarkand*, Flecker came as near as he ever did to his "single intention of creating beauty." It may be doubted, however, whether so deliberate a quest of beauty can be successful. A rose is not "created" by painting and perfuming. Flecker's verse was too closely acquainted with the paint pot and the perfume jar.

The human spirit is continually seeking, from age to age, to free itself from the intolerable bondage of its own civilization; to escape from the hell of complication to the heaven of simple things. Blake found a way out, though no one else has followed him to the end of his path; Wordsworth found another way out—by "returning to Nature"; and in the twentieth century Walter de la Mare has found a different way—by a return to the direct vision of childhood. He is not (except incidentally) a children's poet. If his vision is that of a child, his imagination and intellect are always fully adult. This does not mean that his poems are not *for* children. Children do enjoy them, as children can be led to enjoy Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. But no one will pretend that charming innocence is the whole content of *Peacock Pie* or any other of de la Mare's books. He is, as Blake often was, a master in the art of under-statement—taking the world and calling it a grain of sand. Blake's *Tiger, Tiger* has a divine incomprehensibility behind its external simplicity. And who would care to say that a similar divine incomprehensibility does not lie hid in a score of de la Mare's poems?—in *Tillie*, *Miss T.*, *Hide and Seek*¹:

Hide and seek, say I,
To myself and step
Out of the dream of Wake
Into the dream of Sleep.

¹ All in *Peacock Pie* (1913).

Walter de la Mare's poems are, mostly, on a single subject : *the dream of Wake*. In that dream, natural and supernatural become one, as muffins and mutton and Miss T. become one ; the poet sees the future in the instant, and all experience comes to him preternaturally sharpened and free from mental fog. It is doubtful whether de la Mare, even if he were persuaded to set himself to the task, could produce a long poem. But any such inability would not be traceable to deficiency in power of sustained effort. Rather it would be because there is nothing in heaven or earth that comes to his vision veiled in sufficient complexity to fill out a poem of anything approaching epic length. He has written in *The Scribe*¹ about the subject of all great verse—God and man and the universe. Milton made ten thousand lines on the theme ; de la Mare makes twenty-six lines only ! In the "dream of Wake" he sees the universe as a map laid out ; he sees its immensity at a glance ; and he knows that all Time is not long enough to catalogue what he sees. Why write epics, when an epic can no more justify the ways of God than a lyric can ? Why write epics, when a lyric may equally well suggest the boundless and inexhaustible immensity of the works of God ?—

... still would remain
My wit to try— . . .
All words forgotten—
Thou, Lord, and I.

Walter de la Mare was born at Charlton, Kent, in 1873. Educated at St. Paul's Cathedral School, he worked in a business house in the City of London for some years before it became possible for him to devote himself wholly to literature.

His first poems, *Songs of Childhood* (1902), are delightful in themselves, and also interesting as embodying qualities that came to be recognized as characteristic excellences of his

¹ In *Motley* (1918).

poetry. The subtle and varied metrical music was already in process of development; and he was already a poet of silences and shy solitary creatures. In later volumes he has frequently reached perfection of workmanship unequalled in twentieth-century verse. An example of this (though not perhaps the best example) may be seen in *The Horseman*,¹ a poem as perfectly wrought and shaped as a silver figure by Benvenuto Cellini. De la Mare's exquisite craftsmanship does not betray him into preoccupation with mere artifice; nor does the dream quality of his verse separate him from consciousness of reality. He is never unaware of "the smooth-plumed bird . . . the seed of the grass, the speck of stone . . . the wayfaring ant," nor of "fetlocked horses" and bony, knobble-kneed donkeys. He walks all the time on the common earth, interested in a hundred things besides literature. His imagination is fed, not upon honeydew, but upon substantial fare; and though he may frequently be thought of in company with fairies and witches, it is doubtful whether he has ever discovered to us a more delightful or more "ordinary" companion than his lovable mangy donkey, *Nicholas Nye*.²

The names of many writers appearing in *Georgian Poetry* have been omitted from this section, and not all the omissions are due to lack of space. Most of the Georgians were able to assemble the raw materials of poetry—moons, rivers, ships, hills, colours, flowers, birds, buds, summer nights, dusky passions, and so forth—but few of them realized sufficiently that poetry is something more than the assembling and pretty arrangement of poetic material.

§ 6.—*Nature Poetry*

Rupert Brooke's services to twentieth-century poetry did not end with his death. He left legacies to three of his

¹ In *Peacock Pie*.

² *Ibid.*

fellow-writers, with the intention of enabling them to apply themselves more single-heartedly to poetry. He was aware that daily drudgery left several contemporary authors with their minds only half free for poetry; and that English literature would probably have suffered if Milton had been preoccupied with minor journalism, Wordsworth with insurance policies, and Tennyson with the buying and selling of oil. The demands of business (which did in fact stifle some promising Georgian writers) were to some extent responsible for the double-edged epithet "The Week-end School"—applied to the Poetry Bookshop group. When these poets wrote of Nature, they wrote as town-dwellers who met Nature only from Saturdays to Mondays, rather than as men who knew her in all moods. Poetry, for many of its lovers, could be only an occasional indulgence, and those who had little time for observation and meditation (possible to "dedicated souls" in the past) drifted against their own better judgment into the use of a poetic diction, less restricted perhaps than that of the eighteenth century, but equally monotonous.

A few poets succeeded—for a time, at least—in avoiding the handicaps borne by the Week-end School, and as nearly as anyone might in such circumstances as his, William Henry Davies dedicated himself to poetry. He saw the external world with a blessedly uncultured eye and wrote about it, for the most part, in "non-literary" verse.

The remarkable story of his early life is told in *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* (1908). Born in Newport, Monmouthshire, in 1870, he had a restless and lawless youth, afterwards living as a tramp and very casual worker in America and England until he was thirty-seven. During a quiet period in youth, while apprenticed to a picture-frame maker, Davies "composed and caused to be printed a poem describing a storm at night, which a young friend recited at a mutual improvement class." Years later, after

losing his right foot while "jumping" a railway train in Canada, he turned again to poetry, and in a public lodging-house in South London wrote a blank verse tragedy, *The Robber*. When this had been rejected by two managers, he wrote a long narrative poem, a hundred sonnets, "another tragedy, a comedy, a volume of humorous essays, and hundreds of short poems."¹ After further wanderings and privations he accumulated £19, the sum required to publish a book of fifty poems² at his own risk. Review copies sent out by the printer produced only two brief notices in provincial papers. Davies then began to post copies to well-known people, inviting them to send him the price of the book. Some did so, and attention was drawn slowly to his poems. Long articles began to appear in the London papers, journalists interviewed and photographed him, and he became a notable figure in twentieth-century poetry.

In the few early pieces retained in the *Collected Poems* (1916) there is evidence that Davies distrusted his own ability, and had then a more marked tendency than he shows elsewhere to lean upon stereotyped practices in verse. The "artless simplicity" of his later work has been easy game for parodists, yet, in those characteristic poems, Davies displays a more pleasing and distinctive quality than in such a stanza as the following:

I would that drowsy June awhile were here,
The amorous South wind carrying all the vale—
Save that white lily true to star as pale,
Whose secret day-dream Phoebus burns to hear.³

Although the second-hand furniture of verse lumbers up the lines here, to produce poetry of any worthy kind was an achievement in circumstances such as Davies describes

¹ *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*: ch. XXI.

² *The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems* (1907).

³ *Autumn*, from *The Soul's Destroyer*.

in *The Lodging-House Fire*, a verse transcription of experiences related in the *Autobiography* (ch. XXVII). Like Herrick, W. H. Davies is a poet of extreme accomplishment and sophistication, wrapped in a deceptive aura of simplicity. His poetry has more moods than one, but it was his sheep and grass and cloudlets that were most refreshing to a jaded world :

When I came forth this morn I saw
Quite twenty cloudlets in the air ;
And then I saw a flock of sheep,
Which told me how those clouds came there.

That flock of sheep on that green grass,
Well might it lie so still and proud !
Its likeness had been drawn in heaven,
On a blue sky, in silvery cloud.¹

Though his acute sensibilities are displayed chiefly in enumeration of the smaller delights of the countryside—sights and sounds and odours—Davies is far from insensible to the menace of the dark wing that Life spreads above multitudes of creatures. Allowing for obvious metrical diversity, Thomas Hardy might have written the following lines in which Davies describes the effects made upon him by cities :

When I am in those great places,
I see ten thousand suffering faces ;
Before me stares a wolfish eye,
Behind me creeps a groan or sigh.²

But whereas Hardy sought persistently in Nature for analogies to compel attention to the "ten thousand suffering faces" of mankind and "the long drip of human tears," Davies flies to Nature for solace and forgetfulness, pursuing Joy, eschewing Sadness.³ The central fact in his poetry is not

¹ *The Likeness* (*New Poems*).

² *In the Country* (*from Farewell to Poetry*).

³ See *Songs of Joy* and *Sadness and Joy*.

that he sees little more than externals, but that he is grateful to Nature for hanging her lovely veil between his susceptibilities and the world's pain. He learned in his wandering years what lies at the back of that veil; and in later life he has preferred to look no further than its exquisite surface-pattern. For him to attempt to reduce Nature to a philosophical system would be to succumb to that barren earnestness and purposiveness against which he protests (interrogatively) in *Leisure*—his apology for idlers: Beauty may have a soul to be sought; meanwhile, she certainly has a body to be admired, and—

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.¹

Edward Thomas (born 1878; educated at St. Paul's and Oxford) published his first book when he was nineteen, and for the next twenty years wrote and edited numerous works in prose. He joined the army and was killed in France in 1917, and in that year appeared the earliest collection of poems under his own name. As "Edward Eastaway" he had published a few poems previously, but readers were not prepared for the revelation of Edward Thomas as a poet at least equal to the best of his contemporaries. He is entirely original, and his originality is itself strangely original, though there is nothing freakish, either in manner or matter. The sense of "newness" given by his poetry comes from a feeling that it is written by one whose vision and music are free from lights and echoes of others' work. Though Thomas was a reader and critic of poetry, he neither "followed" nor "reacted." He sang as though he were the first and only poet in the world, and there is a curious absence of conscious literary effort in his choice of material. This casualness (if it may be so called) is suggested in Thomas' indifference to titles. Many of

¹ *Leisure (Songs of Joy)*.

his poems have for heading the first half-line (*e.g.*, *How at once*), as though each piece was written to relieve the mind in song, not to state a theme. His instrument is not a harp, nor a trumpet, nor an organ; it is a divine penny whistle, full of delicate, half-sweet, half-troubled music. He speaks of a boy, hidden in a thicket, who

Slowly and surely playing
On a whistle an olden nursery melody,
Says far more than I am saying.¹

But Thomas' own whistle says more than he may have been aware. It also says more than others can realize until they become attuned to its strange cadences. Paper and print are no benediction to Edward Thomas' poetry; the woodland and his own little pipe are needed in place of book and pen. His poems (more than most) require to be memorized and spoken. To read them is not enough.

In 1925 Edmund Blunden was still a poet of promise. He had written verse so good in its kind as to arouse strong hopes that he would be an outstanding figure in the second quarter of the century. Both Davies and Thomas, though intimate with Nature, were more detached than any thoroughgoing Nature poet can be. Blunden, on the other hand, completely identifies himself with Nature, whether in the mire and soggy wetness of a November day in the Kentish fields, or

When the morning ripens and unfolds
Like beds of flowers the glories of the plain.²

His real achievement is, in fact, that he does not insist on keeping Nature out of sight until her toilette is completed and she is decked out for the public eye. He is as devoted to her in her "before-breakfast" dishevelment, as when

¹ *The Penny Whistle.*

² *The Shepherd.*

she appears in stately robes, and this is the mark of truth in his pastoral poetry.

His first book of verse, *Pastorals*, was published in 1916, a few months after he left school (Christ's Hospital) to take a commission in the army. War service in France, a long sea voyage (in 1921-22),¹ and a period as lecturer in English literature at Tokyo University have given Blunden varied experiences, but the dominant note in his poetry up to 1925 remained true to *The Preamble of Pastorals* :

I sing of the rivers and hamlets and woodlands of Sussex and Kent,
Such as I know them : I found a delight wherever I went,
By plat and by hatch, through acres of hops or of corn.

His master is John Clare (1793-1864), the Northamptonshire poet, and these two share the distinction of writing perhaps the best "winter poetry" in English. There has been much talk in verse about bright frosty winter days, but the drab saturation of winter (though less picturesque) is equally true and equally English—and Blunden is completely English.

§ 7.—*Innovators and Others*

At the close of the quarter-century there were a score or two of competent verse-makers whose publications continued to be received with critical attention. Scarcely more than half-a-dozen of these seemed likely, however, to produce verse with the exciting quality of unexpectedness that belongs to true poetry. Such of the Georgians as continued to be productive were pottering about in pleasant and very well-tended literary back-gardens, cultivating the same poetic varieties as had given colour to the narrow landscape ten years before. There is little need, at any time, for poets to be startlingly "new," either in form or substance ; yet, though few great poets are anti-traditional,

¹ See *The Bonadventure* (1922), a record of the voyage.

they have the power to impart to tradition and commonplace a spirit that transforms tidy back-gardens of thought and imagery to majestic and limitless expanses. If poetry does not (for both poet and reader) smash through the walls of the imprisoning universe of self and give entrance into new countries—whether beautiful or terrifying—poetry might as well not be written. Nothing is so disturbing in poetry as the quality of incomprehensibility; but it is doubtful whether any poet of the first rank has entirely avoided or desired to avoid this quality. Incomprehensibility (not to be confused with incoherence: God is incomprehensible—He is not incoherent) is a quality present in even the “simple” poems of the great poets. Though it may not be a something that is finally and for ever incomprehensible, it is at least a necessary something that produces exquisite growing-pains of the mind and spirit. Lack of power to suggest anything beyond the immediately comprehensible facts of existence was a fatal limitation in most of the Georgian poetry: it provided no enlargement of experience.

Robert Graves was one of the few who escaped from the back-garden tradition. He found himself in a large and bewildering (but somehow satisfying) wilderness, where familiar things are strange and new:

The evening air comes cold,
The sunset scatters gold,
Small grasses toss and bend,
Small pathways idly tend
Towards no certain end.¹

It is because Robert Graves' poetry appears to tend “towards no certain end” that it is so well worth reading and considering. The paths of Graves' mind are as bafflingly full of promise as the paths of an English wood,

¹ *An English Wood.*

and the wayfarer goes on in a state of continuous expectation : anything may appear round the next corner.

Like a storm of sand I run
 Breaking the desert's boundaries ;
 I go in hiding from the sun
 In thick shade of trees.
 Straight was the track I took
 Across the plains, but here with briar
 And mire the tangled valleys crook,
 Baulking desire.¹

An illuminating index to Robert Graves' mind is provided by the poem called *In Procession*, where, having spoken of the qualities and powers of

The poets of old
 Each with his pen of gold
 Gloriously writing,

he goes on to indicate the abundance of material in his own "teeming mind" : children's rhymes, strange tongues and stranger shapes, land and sea and heaven and hell, all history and all religion. But the poet's task is not only to *possess* ; it is, also, to *present* :

Could I show them so to you
 That you saw them with me,
 Oh then, then I could be
 The Prince of Poetry
 With never a peer,
 Seeing my way so clear
 To unveil the mystery.

The poet has had "marvellous hope of achievement," but also (and on these words the poem closes) "deceiving and bereavement of this same hope." To read Robert Graves' poetry is to feel that one is assisting him to wrestle with Chaos. Chaos may in the end be too strong for him, yet

¹ *Unicorn and the White Doe*

every poem he writes will be worth reading, since he creates confidence that he has the potential power to organize, out of his very interesting Chaos, a Universe of corresponding interest.

Robert Graves is a theorist as well as a maker. His treatise *On English Poetry* (1922)—a sane and sound piece of criticism—is neither slavishly traditional nor hurriedly emancipated. At that time the claims of “free verse” were being advocated, and in a section devoted to *vers libre*, Graves approves the attitude of a friend who “denied that there was such a thing as *vers libre* possible, arguing beyond refutation that if it was *vers* it couldn’t be truly *libre* and if it was truly *libre* it couldn’t possibly come under the category of *vers*.” Since the successes and failures of Whitman in America and Henley in England with free verse forms, unmetrical and unrhymed verse has been tried by many. When a definite rhythmical current is provided in place of metre, free verse can be made both pleasing and impressive, but the chief objection to be met is the difficulty of distinguishing between free verse and prose. Probably the only satisfactory means of deciding whether the necessary distinction has been preserved, is to listen sympathetically to *vers libre* read aloud sympathetically by a competent reader. Unless the ear can detect that what is being spoken is definitely not prose, it is pedantic nonsense for the *vers libre* school to pretend that such writing has any advantage over plain prose.

The merits and possibilities of *vers libre* were revived as the subject of a good deal of short-tempered controversy after the World War, when the Sitwell family (Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell) became prominent as the leaders of an anti-traditional movement. If the Sitwells had been less hardy controversialists, they would have been laughed into silence; but their minds were more effectively armoured than those of their opponents. They had wit, command of

an aggressive vocabulary, and unbounded self-confidence. Consequently, by 1925, they had attracted a following, and had compelled silence even where they had not won admiration.

When the noise had died down, it began to be realized that the Sitwells were not wedded to *vers libre*, though they flirted with it. Their revolt went further. A succinct negative statement of their aims has been given by Osbert Sitwell: "You cannot write well in the idiom of the day before yesterday."¹ They were impatient and scornful of the equipment of the traditional poets, as they would have been of anyone who offered them a sedan-chair from South Kensington Museum when they required an aeroplane from Croydon. They demanded both an idiom and a form suitable for the reflection and expression of twentieth-century minds. The argument was not that twentieth-century minds are better than those of any other century, but only that they are *different*—as aeroplanes and sedan-chairs are different.

Edith Sitwell's world is full of hard, bright-coloured objects; everything is objectified, and abstractions are banished. It is a world of things and not of thoughts; yet at the same time it is a world of sensations, rather than of appearances. Objects and scenes are often robbed of their visual quality, in order that they may be given a *sensation quality*. That is to say, the reader is expected to receive an impression of things, not through descriptions that enable him to recognize them as things known by sight; but by an application of epithets designed to revive the sensations previously experienced in contact with similar objects, or in similar circumstances. *Aubade*² is a simple example of this method:

Jane, Jane,
Tall as a crane,
The morning light creaks down again.

¹ *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (1921).

² *Bucolic Comedies* (1923).

Comb your cockscomb-ragged hair ;
 Jane, Jane, come down the stair.
 Each dull blunt wooden stalactite
 Of rain creaks, hardened by the light . . .

The frowsy appearance of a lank domestic servant roused at early morning is suggested in the second and fourth lines above, and elsewhere in the unquoted part of the poem ; and the third, sixth and seventh lines attempt to re-create in the reader the sensations produced by a dismal wet morning upon a person reluctantly awakening to resume menial duties. Edith Sitwell's verse is too varied to be comprehended in a single category. It has occasional echoes of older poetry—the traditional ballads, Donne, Wilde and others.¹ Of beauty there is little ; it is elbowed out by a succession of vivid fashion-plate pictures alternating with kaleidoscope designs.

Sacheverell Sitwell has no special eccentricities of his own, and, of the three, is perhaps nearest to being a normal poet. Osbert Sitwell has done his best work in a series of satirical character-sketches in *vers libre* (occasionally varied by rhymed passages). He has also produced some successful poems in the impressionistic mode favoured by his sister. In the following extract from *Giardino Pubbico* the sensations of heat, and then of coolness and silence, are skilfully suggested :

Petunias in mass formation,
 An angry rose, a hard carnation,
 Hot yellow grass, a yellow palm
 Rising, giraffe-like, into calm,
 All these glare hotly in the sun.
 Behind are woods where shadows run
 Like water through the dripping shade
 That leaves and laughing winds have made.
 Here silence like a silver bird
 Pecks at the droning heat.²

¹ See, e.g., *The Mother* (1915) reprinted in *Rustic Elegies* (1927).

² First version, 1922. Reprinted (revised) in *Out of the Flame* (1923).

Experiments on somewhat similar lines to those carried out by the Sitwells had been begun in England and America round about 1914 by a group of verse-writers who took the name of Imagists. They, too, shunned abstractions; they also aimed at utmost economy of words, and reduced poetic ornament to a minimum. They wished to produce poems with the sharpness of outline and precision of form which belong to a perfectly proportioned statuette or other carved image: "An 'Image,'" they said, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, and Ezra Pound were the leaders of the group, but the ablest was H. D. (Hilda Doolittle—Mrs. Aldington) who, in a number of poems, succeeded in crystallizing in a moment of time a beautifully moulded image, as in this passage (from *Loss*¹) describing a young Greek warrior:

I marvelled at your height.

You stood almost level
with the lance-bearers
and so slight.

And I wondered as you clasped
your shoulder-strap
at the strength of your wrist
and the turn of your young fingers,
and the lift of your shorn locks,
and the bronze
of your sun-burnt neck.

After excursions in devious byways, English poetry returns to a broader track in the work of Humbert Wolfe, who in 1925 was only on the threshold of the recognition which came to him a little later on account of his *News of the Devil* (1926) and *Requiem* (1927). But previously,

¹ In *Sea Garden* (1916).

in *Kensington Gardens* (1924) and *The Unknown Goddess* (1925), he had proved himself a poet with a command of many themes and varied metres, and one who had not only a capacity for humour and satire but could also impart to verse the high significance and sincerity that belong to fine poetry. Almost every page of *The Unknown Goddess* contains arresting images and thoughts, and there is little that is not admirable, except the author's over-fondness for adjectives of colour—particularly gold and silver. Humbert Wolfe belongs, however, to the future, not to the past. Here there is no need to do more than remark upon his gift for creating memorable phrases, as when he speaks of his writing-desk as

this
slim doorway to infinities;¹

and to suggest his attitude toward poetry by quoting the opening sentences of his preface to *The Unknown Goddess*: "However the writing that follows can be described, it cannot, with accuracy, be called modern verse. Because there is no such thing and never has been. Nor is there ancient verse. . . . Verse has one impulse, if a million results of that impulse, and the impulse is to smash one more fragment of shapelessness into shape, one piece more of folly and cruelty into partial sanity, one more shard of ugliness into limited beauty."

Mention must be made of one other poet who has done fine work and is likely to do finer—Charles Williams. His poetry has received warm praise from Alice Meynell, Sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Bridges and others of equal discernment, and his slowness in "arriving" is due much more to absence of critical perception in the public than to certain difficulties in his poetry. He can never be popular, though he ranks as a major poet of his time and one to

¹ *My Desk* (*The Unknown Goddess*).

whom fuller recognition must at length be given. Charles Williams' sonnet sequence, *The Silver Stair* (1912) is among the few examples of sustained love poetry in the twentieth century, and its beauty and exaltation are less impeded than some of his later poems by a disposition to treat human love as a division of theology and philosophy. In *The Silver Stair* the young poet and lover was stronger than the young-old theologian and philosopher, and the result is a series of love sonnets comparable with the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in imaginative quality, though more intellectualized than Elizabeth Browning's.

The later poems of Charles Williams¹ are exceptionally interesting for the diversity of their moods, and the manner in which the poet's mind ranges at large over the world and the universe beyond: at one moment addressing his own feet: ²

Consider, feet, to how great lineage ye
Are kin, the serfs of climbing Hannibal
And they who friended Nelson on his sea;
Think to what stools and stairways temporal
Your strong and slender brethren have drawn nigh,
Caesar's to Rome, Moses' to Sinai;—

at another, writing a child's *Walking Song*³:

Here we go a-walking, so softly, so softly,
Down the world, round the world, back to London town,
To see the waters and the whales, the emus and the mandarins,
To see the Chinese mandarins, each in a silken gown;—

and at a third, expressing spiritual ecstasy in the contemplation of Love:

¹ *Poems of Conformity* (1917); *Divorce* (1920); *Windows of Night* (1925).

² *Ghast Royal of Feet (Divorce)*.

³ In *Windows of Night*.

" My Lord and God," cried he,
 A hundred, yea, five hundred thoughts and dreams
 At once behold the light that from him streams.
 Love, in a single cloud of radiant dust,
 Love, from this earth's austerity or lust,
 Love, from the place of shades doleful and dim,
 Love is arisen, and we are risen with him,
 With him are risen, who is by us adored,
 Our Child, our Son, our Destiny, our Lord !¹

Charles Williams is akin to Donne and other seventeenth-century metaphysical poets in attributing a religious value to love and attaching to it a theological language. So far, his preoccupation with "romantic theology" has been of disservice to him ; but, even so, his poetry seems to be the biggest "discovery" yet to be made among neglected writings of the period.

¹ *The Christian Year (Poems of Conformity)*.

CHAPTER V
ESSAYISTS AND CRITICS

§ 1.—*Max Beerbohm*

MAX BEERBOHM began, in the middle of the eighteen-nineties, with a little book of less than two hundred pages, exquisitely printed, in which a rivulet of text meandered through a meadow of margin. This was published—the *first* of his books—as *The Works of Max Beerbohm* (1896). He was then twenty-four years old. Following the *Works* came several volumes of prose, and also his coloured cartoons, the wittiest and most delicate examples of the art of caricature. But though it was as “Max” the caricaturist that he became most widely known, his literary excellence gave the caricatures their touch of greatness. Nearly every picture bears, in minute handwriting, a fragment of the artist’s jewelled prose, and the effect of these phrases upon current foibles and follies was as incisive as a diamond upon thin glass.

In *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) Max Beerbohm wrote an Oxford love-story unlike all other love-stories. *Zuleika* is superb. She had been a conjurer—an appallingly clumsy third-rate conjurer; but she is so beautiful that all Oxford fell in love with her—and all Oxford committed suicide because of hopeless unrequited passion! This joyous book is crammed with brilliant irony and satire, and the coping-stone to the whole crazy, mad, sublime structure is in the last few lines. *Zuleika* had desolated Oxford: the halls of the colleges were empty, its quadrangles silent, its lecture-rooms more than ever deserted. *Zuleika*, however, sighed for other worlds to conquer, and on the last

page of the book she is ordering a special train—for Cambridge. . . .

When Bernard Shaw retired from the *Saturday Review* in 1898, Max Beerbohm succeeded him as dramatic critic. Almost everything he has written or drawn shows clearly the acute and penetrating critic behind the playful exquisite, though the full brilliance of his critical ability was not seen until *A Christmas Garland* (1912) set the fashion for a revival of the art of parody, which brought in J. C. Squire, E. V. Knox, J. B. Priestley and others. For some years before the appearance of *A Christmas Garland*, parody had been looked upon as a debased type of writing. That misconception was due to the lack of any parodist of genius, for parody may be (as at its best it cannot fail to be) a valuable form of creative criticism. In modern usage the word "parody" no longer implies exact imitation, but a form of humorous yet controlled exaggeration.¹ In that quality of "*controlled exaggeration*" lies the value of parody as criticism. The formal critic is able only to take a pointer to literature, hoping that as he speaks and shifts his indicating wand from place to place on the surface of the work criticized, the audience will detect the significance of his comments. The parodist makes no direct comment. Unlike the formal critic, he *creates*: he has ceased to be an analyst, a breaker-down, a separator of part from part; that was his chrysalis stage: he is now a synthesist, a builder-up, a combiner of part with part. He sets to work to make a new thing—similar to the already existing thing, but with differences. The texture is similar, but the peculiarities of patterning are slightly more pronounced. The parodist has a twofold function: (a) he must produce writings that are of immediate interest in themselves, even for a reader who knows nothing of the original that is being

¹ Unless the exaggeration is controlled, judiciously and sensitively, the result is *burlesque*, not parody.

parodied—that is to say, he must be, in part, a creator ; (b) he must be an unusually illuminating critic for those who go to him for that service. Every book of parodies should be able to justify the unwritten sub-title, *Criticism without Tears*.

A Christmas Garland is made up of seventeen chapters, each with Christmas as its topic, and each written in the style of some contemporary author—A. C. Benson, Wells, Conrad, Bennett, Shaw and a dozen others. The title of the Benson chapter, *Out of Harm's Way*, is itself a clue to the prevailing mood in that author's writings. A. C. Benson, a pleasant essayist, lived as a college don in cloistered remoteness. His observations of life were made from the safe distance and quietude of a college window, to which the noises of the world came muted from far away. Life, for him, had been coloured by autumnal mellowness, as beautiful as Max Beerbohm's captured breath of its spirit :

The yellowing leaves of the lime trees, the creeper that flushed to so deep a crimson against the old grey walls, the chrysanthemums that shed so prodigally their petals on the smooth green lawn—all these things, beautiful and wonderful though they were, were somehow a little melancholy also, as being signs of the year's decay.

Max Beerbohm's gentle though merciless hand unveils the safe obviousness of Benson's reflections ; the genial and placid sermonizing tone ; the genteel restraint of "h——g" (for "hang"), "b-th-r" ("bother") ; the pedantic qualification of statement, and the thoughtful provision of alternative phrases, as though the writer would not permit himself to use definite and settled words for which he might be called to account.

Very different, of course, is *Perkins and Mankind*, "after" H. G. Wells. Here there is no placidity or autumnal greyness, but the notorious Wellsian determination to be up and doing, never to sit still and submit. The breathless lack of repose in Wells' style is pointedly indicated ; in the

Wells way, a little plebeian hero moves in country-house circles; there is the familiar note of a mechanized system of social reform; and here, too, is the curious sensation (so well known to H. G. Wells' readers) as though mankind has suddenly become a smear of minute organisms on a bacteriologist's microscope slide.

The Joseph Conrad parody (*The Feast*) shows those peculiarities of manner¹ evident in the early novels, before Conrad accommodated himself to the intricacies of the English language. Max Beerbohm also contrives to display the irony for which Conrad's books are celebrated.

A Christmas Garland, and the several other volumes he has published since 1900, make Max Beerbohm one of the few writers of the eighteen-nineties who carried their reputations undimmed into the twentieth century. Though Bernard Shaw, Wells and others lived and wrote in the 'nineties they were not of that period. The typical eighteen-nineties people—Wilde and Dowson, Beardsley, Charles Conder and others—were, in their better moments, brilliant and hard, gleaming and iridescent, like diamonds and rubies and sapphires and opals. Sometimes their works—books and pictures—were like painstakingly wrought cameos of exquisite design: and their writings might also be compared with creations in several arts outside literature. These men were like painters, jewellers, goldsmiths and sculptors who had mislaid their proper century, lost their way, and fallen into the wrong country. As contemporaries and countrymen of Benvenuto Cellini, they would have felt more at ease. The larger liberties of the Italian Renaissance period would have enabled them to stab with the utmost grace; to poison quite beautifully; to carve tombs and to fashion goblets for the world to wonder at

¹ E.g., the inverted positions of adjectives and nouns, with the adjectives usually in twos or threes: "the silence murmurous and unquiet;" "tendrils venomous, frantic and faint,"

during centuries afterward. But their destiny was to live in late nineteenth-century England; and thirty years after their heyday even their names were almost forgotten.

Max Beerbohm survived, however—a phenomenon, immaculate in dress and in mental vesture. While the other writers of the eighteen-nineties were becoming mythical figures, and the period itself seemed like a vapour of opium, Max continued to flourish. In an age of hurry he has never hurried; in a machine age he has preserved in his writings and drawings the delicate craftwork of a more leisured and less strenuous time; in an age when most people can write moderately well, but few have anything to write about, he has been perfect in both manner and matter. From the senility of youth he grew in vigour and sincerity and humanity, until, in middle life, heart was revealed as well as brain. The 1920 volume of essays, *And Even Now*, has the same perfection of style as the former volumes—every word in its place, not a word too many; but, additionally, it has an admixture of human feeling that sets it apart from Beerbohm's youthful work. If *William and Mary* and *Something Defeasible*¹ are compared with *The Pervasion of Rouge*,² it becomes obvious that the author had travelled far, emotionally, in twenty-five years. He could not, in 1896, have drawn the word-picture of Mary, with her laugh that was like the chiming of silvery bells. Among many good things in *And Even Now*, nothing is better than No. 2. *The Pines*, a miniature masterpiece of biography in which Swinburne and Watts-Dunton come vividly to life again. In that sketch Beerbohm anticipated the methods of Lytton Strachey.

As the years passed, Max Beerbohm's prose grew less mannered and artificial than formerly (without losing anything of its economy, rhythm and balance), while his books grew richer in content, gaining immeasurably by the

¹ Both in *And Even Now*. ² In *The Works of Max Beerbohm*.

maturity and sanity of his outlook. He takes a high place among twentieth-century essayists because, in his later books, he is completely original, whereas others are carrying on the tradition of the early nineteenth-century periodical essayists.

Max Beerbohm is not among the supremely great; nor is he a creative artist on the grand scale. He is, rather, a creative critic of literature and life, with a generous streak of special genius. He is a Little Master in all that he has touched; a tonic in a jaded age; a philosophic jester bursting bubbles of snobbery and pretence with wit and irony and satire. He has played little if any part in the social and political turmoil of his time; but if it cannot be said of him that he is "ever a fighter," it must be said that he is ever a watcher. Little has escaped his notice. He can portray the mind of a contemporary in a phrase, and with a few strokes of the pencil fix both his body and his soul upon paper. Though not himself a vocally aggressive interrogator, he accurately diagnosed the spirit of the age when, shortly after the War ended, he drew a cartoon entitled *The Future as the Twentieth Century sees it*. The picture was of a haggard young man looking disconsolately upon a looming mist; nothing can be seen beyond it, but, on the face of the mist—reflecting the dominant quality of the young man's mind—appears a large mark of interrogation.

§ 2.—*The Mantle of Lamb*

No one who chanced to rub shoulders in the street with E. V. Lucas would be astonished to hear him singing:

"Charles Lamb's body lies a-mouldering in the grave.
But his soul goes marching on."

Regard for Charles Lamb was never so deep and widespread as in the present generation; and no other generation has been so infected by his spirit. This may be due to

E. V. Lucas' sustained enthusiasm for Elia ; or to some close communion between Lamb and ourselves, in which Lucas shares more richly than most. Whatever the cause, the twentieth-century revival of the essay would probably have developed very differently but for Elia and his influence.

In our day (as in Lamb's), journalism has nursed and housed literature, its elder brother. But for the popularization of familiar essays¹ in newspapers and journals, it would have been an unreasonably risky adventure to publish collections of such essays in book form. Nor has it been a matter merely of granting journalistic hospitality *en route*. More than one well-known essayist began at the instigation of some newspaper editor. This point is worth notice, since it is a cause which has produced at least two interesting effects. *First*, the introduction into the Press of writings definitely literary in character helped to raise the standard of journalistic prose all round, and the word "journalese" is losing its sting. *Secondly*, the essayists themselves, in "writing to order" and to fill a limited space, have been compelled to submit to discipline that is serviceable, even though irksome. A writer who produces, all the year round and for years on end, a daily essay that seldom falters from a high level of prose style, is not a hack journalist but a genius. Only a little genius, perhaps ; though the diminutive is unimportant, since the writings of little geniuses—like the pictures of little masters—are often extraordinarily pleasant to meet and return to.

Again, the periodical essayist who is limited to a thousand or fifteen hundred words has no space for "frills" or verbiage or elaborated purple patches. That is to every one's advantage. Complaint is not made against a sonnet because it has only fourteen lines ; and limitation is no more harsh or artificial when an essay has to be kept within

¹ The term "familiar essay" is used here to distinguish between this type and the formal or critical essay.

a thousand words. What good work can be done frequently and regularly in narrow space is shown by "The Londoner"¹ in *Day In and Day Out* (1924), a collection from essays contributed to the *Evening News* during a continuous period of about twenty years. "The Londoner" is sound and sensible, bright and witty, and he is often wise also. He picks up his subjects anywhere. That (as might well be argued) is the only right way; for the familiar essayist's subject is anything, everything, nothing. In the end, he requires no *subjects* but only *material*, and his material is Life. Open "The Londoner's" volume and what faces the reader on every page is some facet of Life; for example:

There is no saying to what we may come or how we shall earn to-morrow's bread in this world that pitches and tosses in a gale of change. Any day might see my business of selling words fail me; might see me, instead, selling bone collar studs and indiarubber umbrella rings. I hope that I should take that change calmly. Much could be said in favour of the collar stud industry; he who follows it lives under the open sky and sees life.²

Ten thousand people meeting those sentences in the evening paper feel at once a peculiar pleasant "something" emanating from the words. They call it "charm"—and they let it rest vaguely at that. And this something called "charm" is the indispensable gift of the essayist. Without it, learning, wit, style are not enough. Robert Louis Stevenson's style (if it were possible to isolate it from his charm) would be to many an intolerable nuisance. He is a popular writer in spite of his style, not because of it; and his popularity is rooted in the same quality as that of Lamb, Lucas, "The Londoner," Lynd, and others: namely, in his charm. What, then, is charm? The answer might be found in the quotation above, as well as on any other page of the essayists named. What is loosely described as a writer's

¹ Oswald Barron.

² *Being Good with Children.*

charm consists in his sympathy and understanding and sense of fellowship. These are picked up and communicated by his style, as broadcast matter is picked up and communicated by an aerial. Style without charm is as silent for most people as an aerial in a world without receiving sets or transmitters. Ten thousand now comfortable people reading "The Londoner's" words about collar studs and umbrella rings feel that, "in this world that pitches and tosses," they too might next week be peddling penny trifles in the gutter; and they are glad to know "The Londoner" because "he is a fellow who understands." Is there any difference, fundamentally, between the quality of their sensations and the sensations experienced by Athenian citizens sitting at a tragedy in the theatre of Dionysus? Is it not the corollary (in a lighter medium) of the Greek idea: namely, spiritual and emotional inoculation against pity and terror by the suggestion of the presence of these elements in the lives of others?

E. V. Lucas' publications occupy twenty-three columns in the British Museum catalogue, and recognizing that some embarrassment might be caused by his own fertility, he has anthologized himself¹ as well as other writers. With *The Open Road* (1899), *The Gentlest Art*² (1907) and other popular collections, E. V. Lucas drew attention to the fruitfulness of the field in which he was at that time almost a solitary gleaner—and always a discriminating one. Since then a swarm of anthologists has settled locust-like upon English literature.

Edward Verrall Lucas was born at Eltham in 1868, and educated at London University. After working on provincial and London newspapers he became assistant-editor of *Punch*; and subsequently literary adviser and director to a publishing house. He has edited a definitive edition

¹ *Variety Lane* (1916), *Harvest Home* (1913), etc.

² An excellent anthology of letters.

of the works and letters of Charles and Mary Lamb (1903-5), and written the standard *Life of Charles Lamb* (1905). His remaining works comprise travel-books, essays, books about paintings, and a number of distinctive volumes that hover (successfully and delightfully) between essay and novel: these last E. V. Lucas calls "entertainments."

He has said: "Lamb lives and will live by virtue of being himself and expressing this self in a series of prose essays unsurpassed in their charm, prodigality of fancy and literary artifice, marked by profound commonsense, and starred with passages of great beauty, dazzling insight and kindly capricious humour."¹ This passage is interesting in relation to the man who wrote it, as well as to Elia. Lucas could wear the mantle of Charles Lamb without presumptuousness, but there are pronounced dissimilarities between the two writers. E. V. Lucas' books have considerable charm, but . . . ! "Gentle Elia" exactly fits the mood of Lamb's essays; and it no doubt fitted his personality perfectly. But has any reader been moved to close *One Day and Another* (for example) with a faint sigh and to murmur "Gentle E. V." ? The robust urbanity and sophistication of Lucas make him unlike Lamb, who, though he knew "more about what books are worth reading than anyone living," wore all his knowledge with a deceptive air of innocence: he was "all for quietness and not being seen, and having his own thoughts and his own jokes."² Lucas' essays and "entertainments" are marked by fancy, literary artifice, commonsense and humour, as well as charm. Yet his humour, though kindly in general, is sometimes almost savage, as in *Those Thirty Minutes*,³ a satirical

¹ Introduction to *The Best of Lamb* (1914).

² The phrases quoted in this passage are from an imaginary conversation—"My Cousin the Bookbinder"—in *Character and Comedy* (1907), in which E. V. Lucas puts descriptions of Elia and his circle into the mouth of the bookbinder cousin mentioned in Lamb's letters.

³ *Mixed Vintages* (1919).

dialogue aimed at people who agonize their friends by "seeing them off" on railway journeys.

The delight of E. V. Lucas' essays is that they entice into so many bypaths; they give the sense of browsing in a fully-informed and liberal mind. That may be said of his "entertainments" also. *Over Bemerton's* (1908), the best of these, is perennially charming—for its delicate sentiment, its quiet wisdom, its humane "bookishness," and its store of curious knowledge. Lucas is, first and foremost, *enticing*.

To guess at the identity of "Alpha of the Plough" was for some time a pleasant literary parlour-game. When the official revelation was made it was not easy to recognize "Alpha" in A. G. Gardiner, then best-known as a political journalist and editor. Over the initials A. G. G. he had already made his mark in literature with a series of character-sketches which were a feature in the *Saturday Daily News*, before they appeared in the two volumes, *Prophets, Priests, and Kings* (1908) and *Pillars of Society* (1913). These biographical and critical essays are remarkable for direct and forceful English, insight, conscientious fairness and sense of proportion, and sound judgment of character. They were written for a paper representing a political party, and often amid the turmoil of controversy; yet, after a lapse of fifteen to twenty years, comparatively few revisions of judgment appear necessary.

In the early days of the War *The Star* introduced new features into its columns. That newspaper had previously been indispensable to amateur financiers who had faith in the prophecies of Captain Coe. When essays by "Alpha of the Plough" began to appear regularly, *The Star* became as interesting to bookmen as to bookmakers. The earlier pieces (collected in *Pebbles on the Shore*, 1917) reflect something of that pathetic belief in the coming of a new world, which upheld English people in 1915 and 1916, only to

fail them when the War ended. Mostly, however, "Alpha" approaches Life in the playful spirit that is frequently more perceptive than is ponderous meditation. He writes about reading in bed, cats and dogs, umbrella morals, talking to one's self, falling in love, beer and porcelain, short legs and long legs. . . . "Alpha" has a little of Elia's gentleness, and he, too, is "all for quietness." Of Elia's "prodigality of fancy" he has little; and his humour—good and sufficient in its own kind—is neither boisterous nor capricious. He is a smiling philosopher, with an appropriate word for every mood; a friendly spirit, either by the fireside or on the road. Yet from his pages there occasionally blows a faint wind of mortality—a sobering breath, no more—as when he writes:

We are all glad to have come this way once. It is the thought of a second journey that chills us and gives us pause. . . . If you came back with that weak chin and flickering eye, not all the experience of all the ages would save you from futility.

As "Y.Y." of the *New Statesman*, Robert Lynd has looked at the world week by week for several years, setting down his reflections, now gravely, now with gaiety and gusto. He is always readable, and his comments upon men and manners are shrewd and penetrating. Being more directly and coolly critical in his approach, he has neither the confident urbanity of E. V. Lucas nor the sensitive comprehensiveness of A. G. Gardiner. But he is a skilled phrasemaker¹; he can describe a Cup Final with his eye on many things besides the game—or on everything except the game²; and few things more deliciously funny than *Eggs: An Easter Homily*³ have been written.

¹ E.g., "There is grave danger of a revival of virtue in this country. There are, I know, two kinds of virtue, and only one of them is a vice."—*Virtue (The Pleasures of Ignorance, 1921)*.

² *The Battle of Footersloo (The Blue Lion, 1923)*.

³ *The Pleasures of Ignorance*.

§ 3.—*Literature—and Life*

Although journalism fostered the familiar essay, its influence upon literary criticism in the twentieth century was not equally helpful. The "new journalism" at the end of the Victorian period had one principal aim—to get rid of stolidity. It succeeded. At the same time (intentionally or not) it abolished solidity, until at length, in the popular Press, the tendency was to attempt to make headlines not only the essence of journalism, but its substance also. The literary quarterlies resisted the spirit of the age, but their former influence had declined, and their attention was increasingly engaged by politics. Certain weeklies and monthlies¹ strove to uphold the cause of letters, yet even these did not find it easy to provide substantial criticism while dealing with an ever-swelling tide of new books.

The multiplicity of books was in some degree accountable for the gentle tone of early twentieth-century criticism, compared with that of the nineteenth century. "Review the popular. Review some of the good. Ignore the bad": this became more and more a general standing order. The tradition of Jeffrey and Gifford and Macaulay was left behind. When (infrequently) criticism was caustic, it was usually very brief, and critics sometimes cared more for turning an epigram than for righteous judgment. Macaulay destroyed Montgomery by patient and leisured disintegration; Rebecca West, in such circumstances, would have chosen the method of instant detonation, as she did on a memorable occasion when, set to review a popular novelist's new book, she wrote only: "Mr.— has produced another novel. How long, O Lord, how long."²

This was also, in general, the method practised (though

¹ *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Observer*, *New Statesman*, *London Mercury*, and a few others.

² *New Statesman*: July 8, 1922.

less briefly) by G. K. Chesterton. He was nevertheless a fine critic, until the trick of paradox became a pernicious habit, and led him to parody his own early manner more extravagantly than Max Beerbohm had done in *A Christmas Garland*.¹ The deterioration in his style can be seen by comparing Chesterton's books on Browning (1903)² and Dickens (1906) with his *Francis of Assisi* (1923). The *Browning* is brilliant, and also clear and helpful. It is probably the best introductory guide for readers troubled by the poet's "difficulty." The book on Dickens combines enthusiasm with sanity, and ranks second only to George Gissing's critical study, *Charles Dickens* (1898). *Francis of Assisi*, however, is often a confusion of epigram and paradox, with Chesterton gyrating among words as amusingly (and as unprofitably) as a puppy chasing its own tail. A phrase or two from *Twelve Types* (1910) will show how, before verbal trickery became an obsession with him, Chesterton could put as much into one sentence as another critic into a chapter:

In the pacifist mythology of Tolstoy and his followers St. George did not conquer the dragon: he tied a pink ribbon round its neck and gave it a saucer of milk.³

.

Charlotte Brontë showed that abysses may exist inside a governess and eternities inside a manufacturer; her heroine is the commonplace spinster, with the dress of merino and the soul of flame.⁴

A sound argument against criticism by epigram is that it can be quoted with unintelligent facility by people too indolent to form their own judgments. Chesterton's description of Thomas Hardy as "the village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot"⁵ is not the

¹ *Some Damnable Errors about Christmas*.

² *English Men of Letters* series.

³ *Tolstoy and the Cult of Simplicity*.

⁴ *Charlotte Brontë*.

⁵ *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913).

whole truth about Hardy; it contains a germ of truth, and it also has behind it more thoughtful consideration than is usually understood by those who hurry to quote the epigram.

Some of the best literary criticism of the period was done by writers whose temperaments were at variance with the hurried spirit of the age; and especially by those whose vision was not narrowed down to the petty heresy that criticism is a private affray between reviewers and authors. Literary criticism is valueless save when it also provides a commentary upon life: the critic's qualifications and standards are proportionate to his own inner experience. His function (aside from the examination of technical and textual questions) is to judge of the quality and degree of Truth (imaginatively considered) in the author's work. Alice Meynell (1850-1922)—herself an austere critic and an austere-perfect creator in poetry and prose—demanded much of any critic who should presume to judge Coventry Patmore's odes. What she required in that one relation is what might reasonably be looked for, always, in every critic: "precision, and its rare companions—liberty, flight, height, courage, a sense of space and a sense of closeness, readiness for spiritual experience, and all the gravity, all the resolution, of the lonely reader."¹ What she demanded of others she herself possessed. A lonely reader and profoundly meditative, she was at the same time acquainted with life in its depth and breadth and height. When she pronounced upon a book, life was her standard and measure—as when she says:

It is no wonder that the proffer of Browning's optimism, half-heartedly made again on the day of his centenary, did again fail. His "All's well with the world" is as vain as the pessimist's "All's wrong

¹ *Coventry Patmore (The Second Person Singular, and other Essays, 1922).*

with it." It is out of the range of customary life. Intelligible joy and grief are in the midways, and in the midways there is cause for as much sadness as our human hearts can hold.¹

Alice Meynell's judgments may not always command assent (she is even a little perverse about Jane Austen²), but her sympathies were much wider than might have been expected of anyone so little touched as she by what some regard as grosser delights. In one essay she discusses Job, Genesis, Dante, Boccaccio, Claudel, . . . and concludes thus :

Monsieur Paul Claudel's *L'Âge* should be ministered to pessimists, or rather to their readers, for tears, and Mr. Jacobs for laughter. The age is not without its remedies.³

Neither before nor since, probably, has W. W. Jacobs been named in such august company. Yet the root of truth (as Alice Meynell well knew) is in that conjunction of names. Poor is the man (and the critic, too) whose spirit is so illiberal as to restrain him from being on good terms simultaneously with Job and Jacobs, Boccaccio and Francis of Assisi, Milton and Edgar Wallace, Donne and P. G. Wodehouse.

The collected *Essays of Alice Meynell* (1914) is a harvest of wisdom and loveliness. Whether she writes of Andromeda and Arcturus, of laughter or colour, children or sleep, her touch is perfect and her vision clear. She sees a ragged London boy in Hyde Park on the margin of the Serpentine :

Clothed now with the sun, he is crowned by-and-by with twelve stars as he goes to bathe, and the reflection of an early moon is under his feet. . . .

It is easy to replace man, and it will take no great time, when Nature has lapsed, to replace Nature. It is always to do, by the happy easy way of doing nothing. The grass is always ready to grow in the streets—

¹ *Pessimism in Fiction (The Second Person Singular).*

² *The Classic Novelist (Ibid.).*

³ *Pessimism in Fiction.*

and no streets could ask for a more charming finish than your green grass. . . . As the bathing child shuffles off his garments—they are few, and one brace suffices him—so the land might always, in reasonable time, shuffle off its yellow brick and purple slate, and all the things that collect about railway stations.¹

It has been said that Alice Meynell's poetry consists less of sounds than of silences. That is equally true of her prose. She was at once impassioned and austere; her emotions were severely disciplined, to the end that reticence might prevail in her writings.

A natural, though perhaps not obvious, association of ideas leads from Alice Meynell to Maurice Hewlett (1861–1923). Hewlett tried for twenty years or more to throw off the reputation he made with *The Forest Lovers* in 1898. That novel is among the best of its kind—and the kind need not be despised. But Hewlett disliked being labelled as a romantic medievalist. His interests, for a large part of his life, lay in other directions—in poetry, philosophy, and the study of agricultural conditions. In addition to several historical novels² he wrote a fine trilogy³ about a gipsy-scholar, John Maxwell Senhouse—one of the most fascinating figures in contemporary fiction. Senhouse's letters to Sanchia Percival⁴ express what may be accepted (in part, at least) as Hewlett's own philosophy, based upon the maxim: "Now abide . . . Poverty, Temperance, Simplicity—these three. But the greatest of these is Poverty." Hewlett, without being tied to any religious denomination, was, by temperament, part Franciscan, part Quaker. For the last few years of his life he lived among Wiltshire villagers, and testified: "I who was once rich and now am poor, seriously declare that I had not the gleam of a notion

¹ *The Colour of Life* (in the *Essays*).

² *The Life and Death of Richard Tea-and-Nay* (1900); *The Queen's Quair* (1904), etc.

³ *Halfway House* (1908), *Open Country* (1909), *Rest Harrow* (1910).

⁴ These were published separately in 1910.

what contentment was until I became as I am.”¹ His long poem, *The Song of the Plow* (1916), is a chronicle of the travail of the agricultural labourer through the centuries; and the cause of the English peasantry filled Maurice Hewlett’s thoughts and guided his actions from the War-period onward. During those years he wrote what is probably his best and most valuable work—a long sequence of essays gathered into four volumes.² The English spirit—its placidity and depth, its sound commonsense, its poetry and idealism—has seldom been better expressed than in these essays. His style, perfectly adjusted to the subject-matter, is clear and luminous, sensitive and serene. The likeness between Hewlett and Alice Meynell came from their quietness of spirit. Hewlett began an essay on Dorothy Wordsworth³ with these words: “I have often wished that I could write a novel in which, as mostly in life, nothing happens”; and he valued Dorothy’s *Journal* because “the peace of it is profound. . . . This woman was not so much poet as crystal vase. You can see the thought cloud and take shape.” It followed as a natural consequence of Hewlett’s love of quietness, that even the pages in which he was most proudly English are not disfigured by any insular arrogance. Imperial greatness made little appeal to him. Amid the doubts and difficulties of the years after the War, Hewlett thought it probable that a time would arrive when “we shall become . . . once more ‘a small, hardy, fishing, and pastoral people.’” He looked forward without apprehension to that prospect, saying, “If a little England was good enough for Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh it is good enough for me.”⁴

In prose of unique loveliness, Percy Lubbock’s *Earlham*

¹ *Our First, and Last* (*Wiltshire Essays*, 1921).

² For titles, see Reading Lists, page 216.

³ *The Crystal Vase* (*In a Green Shade*).

⁴ *Our First, and Last*.

(1922) enshrines the English spirit of a passing age. Of no other book written in recent times can literary immortality be prophesied so confidently. With exquisite art the atmosphere and life of a country household in Victorian times is re-created by the author, who, as a child, stayed at Earlham Hall, the Norfolk seat of the Gurneys, an old Quaker family. Percy Lubbock visited the house again in later life, and as he passed through the rooms and the garden and wandered about the countryside, he endeavoured to re-live the memories so vividly stirred. The result is that a rapidly-disappearing phase of English life has been brought imperishably into literature. To read *Earlham* is like passing a long sunny day shielded from hot sunshine in a cool leafy place. The old virtues—modesty, humility, piety, charity, and those others that some in the twentieth century regard as dull and stuffy—are here seen in the guileless beauty of true holiness. Famous figures—Elizabeth Fry, George Borrow—pass across the scene; but in the future these will seem insignificant in comparison with one whom Percy Lubbock has surely made to live for very long—"our grandmother":

She loved the green window-seat and the rustling shadow of the limes. As she grew old and older, she used to sit there in the window for long hours, alone in the summer evening, till the light faded away. She sat without book or work, drinking in the twilit fragrance, communing in her mind—with what?—with the thought of many beloved dead, whom she had lost and mourned, and with the joy of reunion with them that she saw near at hand now, in a very few years. Her mind was *there*, more and more. As the evening darkened she seemed, sitting in the window, to have all but passed already into the light she awaited; it shone in her face, I remember, as she spoke of it. I remember vividly her look as she once exclaimed, in sudden uncontrollable wonder, "*What* will it be?—what will it be like?"

What power have words—or music—to evoke more than the author's faultless delicacy and tact have evoked here, and on a hundred occasions more in *Earlham*?

Percy Lubbock, in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), endeavoured with success to make a critical study of the novel, considered objectively and "in the round." He refers to the difficulty of "seeing" a novel as a unity—in the way that a statue, a picture, or a lyric can be seen. The largeness of novels causes them to enter the reader's mind piecemeal, in a sequence of inconstant pictures. Percy Lubbock takes a few representative novels and treats them critically, in such a manner as to make it possible for a reader to hold them more definitely in the mind as complete and rounded works of art.

The Craft of Fiction and Lascelles Abercrombie's *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925) stand very high among twentieth-century critical works. Whereas Lubbock's book is principally concerned with problems of form, the field of inquiry is wider in *The Idea of Great Poetry*. Most immediately helpful to the reader and student of poetry is the first chapter on Diction and Experience, in which Abercrombie develops the thesis that the function of poetry is the translation into language (and the communication) of unusually intense and vivid experience. This theory carries the interesting proposition that the reading of great poetry has a practical value, in providing an enlargement and intensification of experience.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's published lectures on literature, though graceful and attractive, are less substantial and illuminating than Abercrombie's. As King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge (1912 onward), Q¹ influenced many young writers. Before his university duties began, he had written short stories, novels, and some criticism; and a new generation welcomed his *On the Art of Writing* (1916) and *On the Art of Reading* (1920), harvested from the Cambridge lectures. Q's colloquial ease and geniality (and a gift for much quoting) are attractive, even

¹ Quiller-Couch's pseudonym.

if his substance is sometimes thin. Three achievements must be credited to Q: a revival of interest in the English (1611) Bible; a partially-successful campaign against jargon, and in support of simplicity in prose style; and *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (1900)—which is now (as much as Westminster Abbey) a national institution.

CHAPTER VI

TRAVELLERS AND BIOGRAPHERS

§ 1.—*W. H. Hudson ; R. B. Cunninghame Graham*

OF millions who have wandered up and down the world and of thousands with travel stories worth telling, only the tens have had the ability to write of their wanderings in enduring form. The man who goes about determined to see wonders everywhere, persuading himself that every village mill-race is a Niagara and every molehill an Everest, is not the man who is likely to write fine traveller's tales. The material for travel books is perhaps the richest available for any form of literature, but it is stubborn material to handle. Curiously enough, it is not the wonders of the world that have provided travellers with their most memorable material ; it is, rather, such simple episodes as might happen equally well in an English country lane, on the Arabian desert, or in the forests of the Andes. Ultimately, it is probably true that a first-rate travel book depends comparatively little upon strangeness or remoteness of locality, and much upon the character and vision of the traveller. An ingenious controversialist (G. K. Chesterton, for instance) could no doubt ably support the proposition that the finest of travel books may yet be written by a man who has never stirred beyond his own backyard. A few sentences about fleas (as in Kinglake's *Eöthen*), or a paragraph about a drunken schoolmaster on the South American pampas (as in W. H. Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago*), may help to make a book greater than any pretentious volume on the wonders of the world.

Both W. H. Hudson and R. B. Cunninghame Graham

travelled in far corners of the world, and became richly stored with wanderer's lore. Yet Hudson wrote some of his most entrancing books about life in the English counties, and Cunninghame Graham about his native Scotland. Many autobiographical glimpses were given by Hudson, but in *Far Away and Long Ago* (1918) he entered upon a detailed picture of his early years. He does not mention dates, however, and his biographer, Morley Roberts, found it difficult to determine the few that are relevant. Hudson's birthplace was the farm of the Twenty-five Ombú Trees on the grasslands of Argentina, about ten miles from Buenos Aires. Though his grandfather was an Englishman, born in Exeter, his father and mother were both from the United States. They migrated to the Argentine before the birth of their children, of whom William Henry Hudson was the third—born in 1841. He came to England a year or two before he was thirty; was naturalized in this country thirty years later (1900); and died in London, 1922. Though not English either by parentage or birthplace, Hudson was a faithful and devoted lover of England, its soil and people, and he liked to be regarded as a native.

The picture of his childhood on the pampas, in *Far Away and Long Ago*, is more than a plain autobiographical record. It abounds in remembered beauties and wise reflections on life. He was an old man when he wrote this book, and the play of memory upon the remote years produced "a wonderfully clear and continuous vision of the past." Hudson was a man of wide and deep experience, as well as a reader and thinker; he was a "full man", with a natural sense of what should be said and what left unsaid. Though he cannot perhaps be described as a natural stylist, his work has a clear naturalness—so much so, that the same hasty conclusion is sometimes made about Hudson as about even better prose writers than he: namely, that he had *no* style. That is a point not worth debating, when it is considered

that, at his best, Hudson could make a page of English prose as satisfying and refreshing as a stretch of English downland lying still and calm in the pale golden light of a late autumn evening.¹

The quiet serenity of Hudson's prose is in natural accord with the spirit of the man. He was one who *enjoyed* life. *Enjoyed* is a word enfeebled by misuse, but it can be truly applied to Hudson. Life to him was a source of quiet joy, and his delight in mere living is worth noting, since many of his contemporaries in English literature were men aggrieved—if not in respect of themselves, then in respect of others who suffer. Hudson's delight in life was not an occasional impulse, but a conviction declared in his works, from first to last. In *The Purple Land* (1885), Richard Lamb (a fictitious character) is made to say on the first page, "What soul in this wonderful various world would wish to depart before ninety! The dark as well as the light, its sweet and its bitter, make me love it." On the last page of *Far Away and Long Ago*, published thirty-three years after, Hudson speaks of an earlier time when he passed through a period of spiritual questioning, following a serious illness. The physicians had prophesied gloomily in regard to his probable length of life, but they proved to be false prophets, Hudson goes on to say:

Barring accidents, I could count on thirty, forty, even fifty years with their summers and autumns and winters. And that was the life I desired—the life the heart can conceive—the earth life. When I hear people say they have not found the world and life so agreeable and interesting as to be in love with it, or that they look with equanimity to its end, I am apt to think they have never been properly alive nor seen with clear vision the world they think so meanly of, or anything in it—not a blade of grass. . . . In my worst times, when I was compelled to exist shut out from Nature in London for long periods, sick and poor and friendless, I could yet always feel that it was infinitely better to be than not to be.

¹ See, for example, Hudson's description of the Vale of the Wylde: *A Shepherd's Life*, ch. XIII.

He was no armchair philosopher: he had known not only the sweets of life, but its bitterness also, and pain, poverty and loneliness. The solace and assurance that he found in the simple fact of being alive were derived from his intimate communion with Nature. He was no recluse, however. When considering the loveliness of a landscape, he thought much of the people among its hills and valleys, and suggested, as one of its principal charms, "the sense of beautiful human things hidden from sight among the masses of foliage."¹

From early boyhood Hudson was a patient and solitary watcher of Nature. Out in the Argentine, while a child, he would often be missed from home, and these unexplained absences worried his mother: "She would secretly follow and watch me standing motionless among the tall reeds or under the trees by the half hour, staring at vacancy." Happily, his mother—a woman of wisdom and understanding—left him undisturbed to continue his watching. A friend whom he used to visit in London toward the end of his life, has told how Hudson would be found standing motionless, with bent back, staring out through the window. Thus he would remain perfectly still for long periods—watching the birds amid the trees in the courtyard.

Those who care at all for Hudson's books like them intensely, but his audience has never been large. After he died, his name became familiar to thousands for the first time when the bird-sanctuary was set up in Hyde Park as a memorial to him. Interest was artificially stimulated by a newspaper controversy around Jacob Epstein's sculptured representation of Rima, a semi-human character in Hudson's South American romance, *Green Mansions* (1904). The publicity thus given to Rima persuaded many people that *Green Mansions* is Hudson's most notable book—an untenable judgment. Imaginative romance was not his natural

¹ *A Shepherd's Life*, ch. XIII.

field. He was happier in a form which permitted direct transmission of his extraordinarily acute faculty of observation, and in the discursively personal books he is most truly himself, the W. H. Hudson who is different from all other writers.

A Shepherd's Life (1910) is the best of Hudson's Nature books, though that term is too narrow for writings so full and various as these. He was not a Maeterlinck, nor a Fabre: Maeterlinck's bees, he thought, were falsely humanized; Fabre he admired, but he could not himself have been content to watch Nature under the microscope. Nor was he a Richard Jefferies. Jefferies was a more lyrical and impassioned writer; and Hudson had no patience with the type of naturalist represented by Jefferies. The snaring and killing of rare birds was an abominable offence, in Hudson's eyes, even though it might be committed in the name of science and for the sake of securing museum specimens. His museum was the open air, and he protested that rare specimens should be allowed to live unmolested. *A Shepherd's Life* is an entrancingly discursive narrative, a series of episodes and digressions grouped loosely around a central figure, Caleb Bawcombe, an old Wiltshire shepherd from whom Hudson heard most of the stories in the book. Plants, animals, men and women, are the stuff from which *A Shepherd's Life* is made, and everything comes vividly to life in Hudson's prose. He perceives activity and intelligence everywhere: in the grasses and herbs on Salisbury Plain, and in foxes and rabbits, as well as in Joe the coalman and the old church-cleaner, and a host of others. Among many fine things are the passages dealing with sheep-dogs and their ways. This is a book to stand alongside *The Compleat Angler* and *Selborne*—company in which it has no need to be apologetic.

Fully one-third of Hudson's writings is devoted to bird-studies; the birds of Argentina, the birds of England,

the birds of London. His ability as an observer, and the amazing sharpness of his perceptions, can be gathered from the statement that he was able to recognize, by their songs alone, over one hundred and fifty different varieties of South American birds. He collaborated in a book on *Argentine Ornithology* (1889), the standard work on that subject; and in his last years wrote a number of excellent pamphlets for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham is a more romantic figure than W. H. Hudson. He was born in Scotland in 1852, the eldest son of a Scottish laird who married the sister of Baron Elphinstone. Cunninghame Graham was educated at Harrow, and subsequently became a Member of Parliament, a Deputy Lieutenant, and a Justice of the Peace for three counties. Yet he was also, at one time, a prominent anarchist, and a leader in the great Dock Strike in London in 1887, when on "Bloody Sunday" he fought the police in Trafalgar Square and went to prison. He has also peered into many of the world's remote holes and corners, and his books record out-of-the-way experiences in out-of-the-way places. Like Hudson, he spent some time in South America, and returned to that country during the World War to buy horses on behalf of the British Army. One of the best things written about him is the sketch by Bernard Shaw appended to *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Referring to Graham's *Mogreb-el-Aksa* (Morocco the Most Holy) (1898), Shaw says he was "intelligent enough" to steal from that book the local colour he wanted for his play: "its scenery, its surroundings, its atmosphere, its geography, its knowledge of the East, its fascinating Cadis and Kroo-boys and Sheikhs and mud castles." There follows a vivid and amusing description of Cunninghame Graham's character and personality.

In his books the several Cunninghame Grahams come into sight: the Scottish laird and the Spanish *bidalgo*, the

irreverent legislator and the anarchic socialist. This bandit of letters has a word and a blow for every man. He is equally sceptical about aristocrats and anarchists, and can knock the wind out of a popular hero with a single sentence: "Gladstone . . . though in talk for fifty years, never contrived to say a single thing either original or worth remembering."¹ Travel sketches and travel stories are interspersed with episodes of Scottish life and character, and the moods of his writings are as varied as the scenes and adventures. There are horror and splendour, beauty and squalor; love and hate, passion and pain; cruelty, pity, cynicism, fear, courage and irony. His pages are vigorous as life itself. While Hudson is placid and meditative, with passages sweet as bird-song, Cunninghame Graham is turbulent and acrid and explosive, restless as the broken waters of a mountain stream falling over jagged rocks. Nevertheless, when occasion demands, he stands away from the picture, effaces himself, and reveals the pageant of the East. In *Mogreb-el-Aksa* the curtain is often thus drawn aside; while a shorter piece, *From the Mouth of the Sahara*,² is an admirable example of his descriptive method. In that essay he gives an impression of the passing hours during a day in the desert, and ends with a description of a veiled holy man riding at evening into Marrakesh: "The night descended on the town, and the last gleams of sunlight flickering on the walls turned paler, changed to violet and grey, and the pearl-coloured mist creeping up from the palm woods outside the walls enshrouded everything."

§ 2.—Hilaire Belloc

G. K. Chesterton once wrote that his only claim to remembrance in the future would be that he had taken part in a public debate with Hilaire Belloc. These two writers

¹ *A Memory of Parnell (His People)*, 1906. ² *In Success* (1902).

ran in harness together on many occasions, and it was a stock joke of the period to refer to them as a hybrid creature, "the Chesterbelloc." They collaborated as illustrator and author in a few satirical novels,¹ G. K. C. providing the pictures; but their general community of convictions and interests was more important in their works than any formal collaboration could be. Belloc's influence must be accounted the stronger, since Chesterton has moved more and more closely toward the religious medievalism that Belloc commended from the first. They have both rewritten English history, starting with the thesis that the Protestant Reformation was England's worst blunder, destroying the golden Ages of Faith.² The history in these volumes is, however, weighed down with too much demonstration, and is no more convincing than other histories with a Protestant bias which Belloc and Chesterton aimed to supersede. Belloc's interest in current affairs and energy in controversy have often diverted him from literature to argumentation, and much of his writing is ephemeral. Two controversies in which he has been almost unceasingly engaged centre around his advocacy of Roman Catholicism and his persistent antagonism to Jews.

In his creative and imaginative books Belloc is so versatile that he might be put in any category, except that of the dramatists. He is novelist, poet, travel-writer, essayist, critic, historian, biographer, and children's writer. Despite G. K. Chesterton's enthusiasm it is doubtful whether Belloc's works will survive much beyond his own lifetime. If any do so, *The Path to Rome* (1902) will probably ensure him a place among travel-writers; while *Danton* (1899) exemplifies the vitality and living interest of Belloc's methods in biography and history.

¹ *Emmanuel Burden* (1904), *Mr. Petre* (1925), etc.

² See Chesterton's *A Short History of England* (1917); and Belloc's *History of England* (1925 onward).

Joseph Hilaire Pierre Belloc, born near Paris in 1870, is the son of a French barrister and an Englishwoman who was descended from Priestley, the great eighteenth-century chemist and Nonconformist republican. After attending the Oratory School at Edgbaston, Birmingham, Belloc returned to France to serve in the army, and developed that expert interest in military operations which, between 1914 and 1918, attracted very large audiences to his lectures and articles on the conduct of the World War. He came back to England in 1892, and took his degree at Oxford in 1895 with first-class honours in history. Since then he has been, by turns, literary adviser on the *Morning Post*, a Member of Parliament (1906-1910), and Professor of English Literature at East London College (1911-1913).

The Path to Rome describes the author's journey on foot from Toul, down the valley of the Moselle, across Switzerland, over the Alps and down through northern Italy to the City on the Tiber. It tells of hills and valleys, rivers, trees, and churches; of peasants and priests; wine, bridges and Mass; of poets and songs and beer; of nuns, and wine again. Had it been written by a man of quieter spirit it would have been perfect. As it is, the book is like the conversation of a garrulous and unusually genial highwayman who occasionally pulls up short with a "Stand and deliver!" The least pleasant feature of Belloc's prose style is his habit of writing at the top of his voice. In an essay on *Getting Respected at Inns and Hotels*¹ he advises:

As you come into the place go straight for the smoking-room, and begin talking of the local sport: and do not talk humbly and tentatively as so many do, but in a loud authoritative tone. You shall insist and lay down the law and fly in a passion if you are contradicted.

Hilaire Belloc has followed his own advice elsewhere than in hotels and inns, though there is little to be gained by

¹ *On Nothing and Kindred Subjects* (1908).

using "a loud authoritative tone" in literature. There are many delights, however, in *The Path to Rome*. It is a rambling, gossipy book, written in unornamented but pictorial prose; without much set or formal descriptive comment, yet clearly suggesting the widely differing appearance and character of places and people. There is phantasy, also, of a satirical kind, as in the imaginary conversation between St. Michael and the Padre Eterno, as they look down from heaven upon this world, "one far point of light" shining in the void among some seventeen million others.¹ The affairs of the Earth and its people have slipped from the memory of the Padre Eterno. When St. Michael reminds Him of the making of Earth and Man, the Eternal Father asks why the men are throwing themselves into strange attitudes:

"Sire!" cried St. Michael, in a voice that shook the architraves of heaven, "they are worshipping You!" "Oh! they are worshipping me! Well, that is the most sensible thing I have heard of them yet, and I altogether commend them. *Continuez*," said the Padre Eterno, "*continuez!*"

As a historian, Belloc dissents from the academic methods current at the end of the nineteenth century. Though he makes use of historical documents and formal studies, these are, for his purpose, only the roughest of raw material. His aim is to take the attitude and point of view of a "traveller in time," working upon documentary evidence and shaping it by the deliberate exercise of creative imagination. Belloc considers that the historian's first duty is to identify himself directly and intimately with the period upon which he is working. It is not enough, in his opinion,

¹ It is curious that the idea here treated by Belloc in a vein of high comedy appeared independently, the same year (1902), in Hardy's *God-Forgotten* (*Poems of the Past and the Present*). The fundamental difference in treatment provides an interesting comment upon the two writers.

for a twentieth-century historian to interpret a past age in terms of modernism : the historian should not only *look* back, he should *go* back and make the past age his own age for the time being, putting himself, imaginatively, in the position of an eye-witness of the events narrated. A plea for this method was made by Belloc in *Esto Perpetua* (1906) :

Historians have fallen into a barren contemplation of the Roman decline, and their readers with difficulty escape that attitude. Save in some few novels, no writer has attempted to stand in the shoes of the time and to see it as must have seen it the barber of Marcus Aurelius or the stud groom of Sidonius' Palace.

Belloc then proceeded to write *The Eye-Witness* (1908), "a series of descriptions and sketches in which it is attempted to reproduce certain incidents and periods in history, as from the testimony of a person present at each." This method is brilliant and attractive. It is also dangerous, except when used by a writer able to decide with conscientious precision what liberty may be allowed in the imaginative "restoration" of historical material. Belloc himself, for example, instead of reproducing or summarizing the extant rough notes of speeches made at Danton's trial, expands those notes and puts reconstructed speeches into the mouths of the persons concerned. What is possibly an exact representation and impression of scenes and actions is thus conveyed far better than by formal documentation. Acknowledgment of the advantage gained does not, however, fully meet the objection that the vivid picture may also be a distorted picture. At what stage, in the use of this method, does "serious" history end and historical fiction begin ?

Of the literary effectiveness of Belloc's method there can be no doubt ; he has written nothing better than the frequently dramatic and moving passages in the histories and biographies. It is fascinating to watch the literary

artist painting-in details on a canvas where the main outlines are already drawn. Thomas Paine's "ignorance of French was such that his speech on Louis's exile was translated for him": taking this piece of documentary evidence, Belloc turns it indirectly to account when describing Paine's meeting in prison with Danton: "The author of 'The Rights of Man' stepped up to him, doubtless to address him in bad French."¹ Again:

In the morning of the 12th Germinal the Convention met, and *each man looked at his neighbour, and then, as though afraid, let his eyes wander to see if others thought as he did.*²

De Montfort . . . sat erect and firm . . . ; *only an occasional shifting of his foot in the stirrup* betrayed the weakness of his broken leg.³

Phrases similar in effect to those here italicized occur many times, and by such additions to the bare narrative Belloc succeeds in bringing history out of schoolroom, library and study, into spacious places where its pageantry and movement can be realized: "The day had remained serene and beautiful to the last, the sky was stainless, and the west shone like a forge. Against it, one by one, appeared the figures of the condemned. . . . One by one they came up the few steps, stood for a moment in the fierce light, black or framed in scarlet, and went down."⁴

§ 3.—*The New Biography*

It has been seen in the preceding section that, by the beginning of the century, writers were questioning the literary manner hitherto accepted as adequate for biography. Hilaire Belloc's main concern, however, was with biography

¹ *Danton*: ch. VII.

² *Ibid.*

³ *The Armies Before Lewes (The Eye-Witness).*

⁴ *The Death of Danton (Danton: ch. VII).*

as a part of history. A few other writers apparently felt, vaguely, that something was wrong with the general literary principle of English biography, and in such a book as A. G. Gardiner's *Prophets, Priests, and Kings* the foreshadowing of a new manner might be detected. A dreary utilitarianism had settled upon biography. When a "Life" was not merely a pious memorial tribute it was usually a repository of facts—a work designed for information, not for delight.

In 1900, those English biographies that were also pieces of literature could have been counted on the fingers of one hand; sporadic efforts toward change had produced little evident result up to 1918. In that year, Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* was published. Six reprints were called for in seven months, and it became the talk of Britain and America. So far as English literature is concerned, Lytton Strachey's book was that rare phenomenon, "something new." Within a few weeks other authors were persuaded that, for the future, this was the best possible way to write biography, and during the next seven years no other book had so many imitators. The chorus of praise was far from unanimous, however. *Eminent Victorians* was more than an essay in literary method. It was also a lively and impudent challenge to Victorian self-content. Victorians had preferred to "edit" their great men and women. They did not say: "God made them, therefore let them pass"; nor did they much care to acknowledge that the elements are puzzlingly mixed in most people—even in the great. Victorian biographies, therefore, were often accommodated to the prevalent conviction that it was improper and disloyal to tell the whole truth about the dead. And though (as in many instances) the whole truth might contain nothing discreditable, Victorians still preferred, on the whole, to have the truth softened and sentimentalized. They could not rid themselves of the

belief that it is indecent to look upon the naked—even upon naked truth. Moreover, they were devoted to mere prettiness, whether in externals or in the world of ideas.

Lytton Strachey broke into the Victorian stronghold without apology. He had salutary things to say; he said them provocatively and without romantic embroidery. In his *Florence Nightingale*¹ the Lady of the Lamp is put away in her little niche, and a much more wonderful creature is revealed—she who transformed the Army Medical Service by the irresistible force of her will operating through and upon others. She *was* the Lady of the Lamp—in her spare moments. At other times she was an Angel of Wrath armed with thunderbolts, which she never hesitated to throw. Although this was the authentic Florence Nightingale, many preferred the less authentic but more picturesque popular version. There is a romantic thrill in contemplating the sister of mercy; there is but a sense of lonely majesty in seeing her as a great administrator locked out of her natural sphere by the “womanly woman” convention, and forced to use one or two loyal men who were ready to be worked to death (literally) in order that her will might be fulfilled. Knowing her as she was, how could Sidney Herbert and Arthur Hugh Clough doubt that her will was the will of God, and that their duty was to work to the end for its fulfilment? It is a wonderful story, wonderfully told by Lytton Strachey.

While it is impossible to separate style from content in *Eminent Victorians*, the book is still more remarkable as a literary feat than as a representation of personal history. As tales of men and women, these are absorbing from first to last, whether the subject be Manning, Newman, Arnold of Rugby, Gladstone, or another. Yet there is less in the tale than in the telling. All these lives had been written

¹ *Eminent Victorians*.

before—but no similar thrill had previously resulted. The new brilliance and new force came from Lytton Strachey's achievement of his purpose to make biography in England an art instead of an industry.

The preface to *Eminent Victorians* is the manifesto of the New Biography. Until Lytton Strachey wrote, biographers approached their task as though they were painstaking foreigners "doing" the British Museum. They set their teeth and marched down every corridor, surveyed every room, deliberated in every lobby and recess. Having learned everything that could be learned, they then recorded facts and observations with verbose patience, after discreetly censoring any Pepysian resemblances. Lytton Strachey began his manifesto with a statement upon the problem of method, postulating that it is a disadvantage for any biographer to know too much about the subject of his book. Not accumulation of material, but, rather, scrupulous selection and ruthless rejection should be (Strachey considers) the primary aim. He himself chose to work upon a period already encumbered by the result of too much and too detailed research. And yet, as he looked through the heavy mass, he saw that a certain amount of available material had remained unused, and this (perversely perhaps, but naturally) seemed to him more important than the rest. It was as though he had entered a vast mansion, wherein several cupboards were locked and sealed—as a precaution against the risk of a public display of family skeletons. Lytton Strachey at once threw open all the cupboards. The contents were interesting, but the skeletons were few. Gordon drank brandy and read the Bible; Disraeli chuckled in private over "The Faery" Queen Victoria whom he flattered in public; Dr. Arnold believed in the Second Coming; Gladstone was a "confusion of incompatibles." There is nothing shocking in all this; not even (finally) in Gordon's brandy. Strachey did

not suggest any shockingness; nor did he (as some pretended) depreciate the great Victorians. He presented them as men and women "more various than nature," instead of as inanimate idols. If the historian is wise, Lytton Strachey said, "he will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined."¹

Nothing makes English people more uneasy than irony. Some hate it as abstainers hate alcohol. And they are right. Literature gets drunk upon irony more quickly than upon anything else. But English literature cannot live everlastingly upon a milk diet, even though it is well that it does so most of the time. Literature has had several outbursts of glorious drunkenness, and no prohibition could prevent future repetitions. Twentieth-century biography got briskly and entertainingly drunk upon Lytton Strachey's irony. By 1925 the less mature irony of his followers had already begun to make biography fatuous.

A detailed study of Strachey's prose would be a useful undertaking, though impossible here. His style is not unexceptionable. Its serpentings appear to be, at first glance, a part of the general intoxication; but no such conclusion should be hurriedly drawn. If the winding sentences were made straight by reducing the number of adjectives and qualifying phrases, the "superfluous" words would often carry away with them that pervasive irony which runs through every line and is the spirit of Lytton Strachey's prose. In the quotation below, omission of any of the words enclosed within square brackets might result in economy, but it would also be inharmonious with the whole design of the essay to which the sentence belongs:

A minority of [susceptible and serious] youths fell completely under his sway, responded [like wax] to [the pressure of] his influence, and

¹ *Eminent Victorians*: Preface.

moulded their [whole] lives [with passionate reverence] upon the teaching of their [adored] master.¹

As Lytton Strachey's pages are read with attention, the feeling grows stronger that most of the adjectives and epithets have been fitted in place with deliberation. As the narrative sweeps onward, every second sentence, almost, appears to have a sting in its tail.² Strachey has his beautiful passages, also—as in the instance which is already classic: the final paragraph of *Queen Victoria* (1921).

The calculated effects of Lytton Strachey's books have been hardened into a formula by some still more recent biographers. The originality of the opening of *The End of General Gordon*,³ with its sudden "fall upon the flank" of the subject, was particularly attractive to other writers,⁴ with some of whom it became an imitative trick.

Philip Guedalla, if not a disciple of Lytton Strachey, at least shares his principles. Strachey refers to biography as "the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing";⁵ Guedalla says: "Biography is the painting of portraits . . . and it is impossible to paint them without a touch of art."⁶ Strachey writes that the old-style biographies, "one is tempted to suppose, . . . were composed by the undertaker, as the final item of his job"; Guedalla, that biographies have often been "dismal products in which the official biographer vies with the monumental mason."

¹ Dr. Arnold (*Eminent Victorians*).

² E.g., "When Newman was a child he 'wished that he could believe the Arabian Nights were true.' When he came to be a man, his wish seems to have been granted."—(*Cardinal Manning: Eminent Victorians*).

³ *Eminent Victorians*.

⁴ Cf. the openings of *Byron: The Last Journey*, by Harold Nicolson (1924); and *Parnell*, by St. John Ervine (1925).

⁵ *Eminent Victorians*.

⁶ General introduction to *Curiosities of Politics* series (1925).

Lytton Strachey's books not only have literary attraction ; they are also informative to ordinary men and women. Philip Guedalla, on the other hand, writes as though for an audience of experts, and is in constant danger of breaking his shins over his own wit. With him, *manner* is all ; with Strachey, only a part. There are facts in abundance behind the scenes of Guedalla's *Palmerston* (1926), but these are seldom allowed on the stage, because the author is monopolizing it most of the time. His performance, dazzling at first, becomes tiresome with repetition, and nerve-racking as he grows hilarious. In the War Office chapter of *Palmerston* the first section closes thus :

The French sentries in their bearskins stiffened to salute, as marshals clanked by in blue and gold ; and three hundred miles away Palmerston, fresh from Cambridge, touched a civilian hat to the mounted sentries in Whitehall and climbed a dark staircase to plumb the mysteries of the War Department.

This cinematographic device of the "flash back," calling the audience to "look here upon this picture, and on this," is enlivening—once. But used at the end of four successive sections in one chapter (and frequently elsewhere in the book), it is embarrassing. Guedalla is obviously capable of sense and brilliance together ; but so far he has "played about" with words, recalling the worst mannerisms of Oscar Wilde, Chesterton and Lytton Strachey. He has as many adjectives as Strachey, but in Guedalla's use of them they are intrusive, not indispensable. His sentences also (like Strachey's) lift their tails—but often only to waggle harmlessly where they were meant to sting.

Because his inimitable qualities drew so many unsuccessful imitators, the value of Lytton Strachey's influence was dubious ; yet the positive merit of his own books is beyond doubt, and his death in 1932 (born 1880) was a major loss.

POSTSCRIPT

ASIDE from the main divisions of early twentieth-century literature are a number of excellent books to which attention should be called.

Particular interest was taken in children's books during the twenty-five years. Barrie's play, *Peter Pan*, was not published in dramatic form until 1928, but the story had been told by the author in *Peter and Wendy* (1911). Unless posterity reverses our judgment, Peter Pan is certain to be in the children's paradise with Alice. And there, also, should go Christopher Robin with Winnie, his Teddy Bear—A. A. Milne's creations (though one is "real") in *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). The poems in the former book are the best in their kind since Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verse*. In some respects they are better than R. L. S.'s. Pictures are not literature, but once or twice in a century they may help to make it, and the Christopher Robin poems and stories could not spare the pictures by E. H. Shepard which perfect the two volumes named. Rose Fyleman's verses (1918 onward), Hugh Lofting's Dr. Dolittle series (1922 onward), and Elinor and Bernard Darwin's *The Tale of Mr. Tootleoo* (1925) are all delightful, and none of them is "written down" in the unpardonable condescending manner used by some authors who write for children. Best among the good, however, are Kenneth Grahame's young people's books.¹ No education—and no life—is complete without the companionship of his children and animals. These will quite certainly be in the children's paradise. One question arises in connection with several books mentioned in this

¹ See Reading Lists for titles, page 218.

paragraph: Are these really children's books? They all appeal strongly to grown-ups, and the majority of copies are probably in the possession of grown-ups. Inquiry among teachers and parents, however, has produced satisfactory evidence that children also love them.

One, at least, of the hundreds of detective novels written during the quarter-century belongs to literature: E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* (1913).

The mortality-rate among humorous books is depressingly high; few survive their author's lifetime. The symbol of P. G. Wodehouse's future is therefore a question mark. For his own day he is the *perfect* fool; inanity cannot be more sublime than he makes it. Each generation deserves one prince of jesters, and P. G. Wodehouse is ours. He is incomparable. Some do not think him funny: that is their sufficient punishment.

The Reading Lists which follow should be regarded as an integral part of this book, since they include authors and titles not mentioned in the text.

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