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ESSAYS

IN

ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME II

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PAPERS OF GEORGE SAINTSBURY 1875–1920

VOLUME II



1923
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PREFACE

MOST of the matter which would in ordinary circumstances find a place here has been dealt with already in the General Preface to Vol. I. I should however like to repeat to readers the warning that the section of *Corrected Impressions* dates definitely from nearly 30 years ago, and rests whatever claim it may have to interest, very largely on that fact. Glosses to a later date have been added where it seemed necessary: and any important *change* of view has been noted. But the substance has not been interfered with.

G. S.

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ESSAYS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

I

LOCKHART

In every age there are certain writers who seem to miss their due meed of fame, and this is most naturally and unavoidably the case in ages which see a great deal of what may be called occasional literature. There is, as it seems to me, a special example of this general proposition in the nineteenth century, and that example is the writer whose name stands at the head of this chapter. No one, perhaps, who speaks with any competence either of knowledge or judgment, would say that Lockhart made an inconsiderable figure in English literature. He wrote what some men consider the best biography on a large scale, and what almost every one considers the second best biography on a large scale, in English. His *Spanish Ballads* are admitted, by those who know the originals, to have done them almost more than justice; and by those who do not know those originals, to be charming in themselves. His novels, if not masterpieces, have kept the field better than most: I saw a very badly printed and flaringly-covered copy of *Reginald Dalton* for sale at the bookstall at Victoria Station the day before writing these words. He was a pillar of the *Quarterly*, of *Blackwood*, of *Fraser*, at a time when quarterly and monthly magazines played a greater part in literature than they have played since or are likely to play again. He edited one of these periodicals for thirty years. "Nobody," as Mr Browning has it, "calls him a dunce." Yet there

is no collected edition of his works; his sober, sound, scholarly, admirably witty, and, with some very few exceptions, admirably catholic literary criticism, is rarely quoted; and to add to this, there is a curious prepossession against him, which, though nearly a generation has passed since his death, has by no means disappeared[1]. Some years ago, in a periodical where I was, for the most part, allowed to say exactly what I liked in matters literary, I found a sentence laudatory of Lockhart, from the purely literary point of view, omitted between proof and publication. It so happened that the editor of this periodical could not even have known Lockhart personally, or have been offended by his management of the *Quarterly*, much less by his early *fredaines* in *Blackwood* and *Fraser*. It was this circumstance that first suggested to me the notion of trying to supply something like a criticism of this remarkable critic, which nobody has yet (1884) done, and which seems worth doing. For while the work of many of Lockhart's contemporaries, famous at the time, distinctly loses by re-reading, his for the most part does not; and it happens to display exactly the characteristics which are most wanting in criticism, biographical and literary, at the present day. If any one at the outset desires a definition, or at least an enumeration of those characteristics, I should say that they are sobriety of style and reserve of feeling, coupled with delicacy of intellectual appreciation and æsthetic sympathy, a strong and firm creed in matters political and literary, not excluding that catholicity of judgment which men of strong belief frequently lack, and, above all, the faculty of writing like a gentleman without writing like a mere gentleman. No one can charge Lockhart with dilettantism: no one certainly can

[1] See Appendix A—Lockhart.

charge him with feebleness of intellect, or insufficient equipment of culture, or lack of humour and wit.

His life was, except for the domestic misfortunes which marked its close, by no means eventful; and the present writer, if he had access to any special sources of information (which he has not), would abstain very carefully from using them. John Gibson Lockhart was born at the Manse of Cambusnethan on 14th July, 1794, went to school early, was matriculated at Glasgow at twelve years old, transferred himself by means of a Snell exhibition to Balliol at fifteen, and took a first class in 1813. They said he caricatured the examiners: this was, perhaps, not the unparalleled audacity which admiring commentators have described it as being. Very many very odd things have been done in the Schools. But if there was nothing extraordinary in his Oxford life except what was, even for those days, the early age at which he began it, his next step was something out of the common; for he went to Germany, was introduced to Goethe, and spent some time there. An odd coincidence in the literary history of the nineteenth century is that both Lockhart and Quinet practically began literature by translating a German book, and that both had the remarkably good luck to find publishers who paid them beforehand. There are few such publishers now. Lockhart's book was Schlegel's *Lectures on History*, and his publisher was Mr Blackwood. Then he came back to Scotland and to Edinburgh, and was called to the Bar, and "swept the outer house with his gown," after the fashion admirably described in *Peter's Letters*, and referred to by Scott in not the least delightful though one of the most melancholy of his works, the Introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*. Lockhart, one of whose distinguishing characteristics throughout life was shyness and reserve,

was no speaker. Indeed, as he happily enough remarked in reply to the toast of his health at the farewell dinner given to celebrate his removal to London, "I cannot speak; if I could, I should not have left you." But if he could not speak he could write, and the establishment of *Blackwood's Magazine*, after its first abortive numbers, gave him scope. "The scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men," as he or Wilson describes himself in the *Chaldee Manuscript* (for the passage is beyond Hogg's part), certainly justified the description. As to this famous *Manuscript*, the late Professor Ferrier undoubtedly made a blunder (in the same key as those that he made in describing the *Noctes*, in company with which he reprinted it) as "in its way as good as *The Battle of the Books*." *The Battle of the Books*, full of mistakes as it is, is literature, and the *Chaldee Manuscript* is only capital journalism. But it is capital journalism; and the exuberance of its wit, if it be only wit of the undergraduate kind (and Lockhart at least was still but an undergraduate in years), is refreshing enough. The dreadful manner in which it fluttered the dovecotes of Edinburgh Whiggism need not be further commented on, till Lockhart's next work (this time an almost though not quite independent one) has been noticed. This was *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, an elaborate book, half lampoon, half mystification, which appeared in 1819. This book, which derived its title from Scott's account of his journey to Paris, and in its plan followed to some extent *Humphrey Clinker*, is one of the most careful examples of literary hoaxing to be found. It purported to be the work of a certain Dr Peter Morris, a Welshman, and it is hardly necessary to say that there was no such person. It had a handsome frontispiece depicting this Peter Morris, and displaying not, like the portrait in Southey's

Doctor, the occiput merely, but the full face and features. This portrait was described, and as far as that went it seems truly described, as "an interesting example of a new style of engraving by Lizars." Mr Bates, who probably knows, says that there was no first edition, but that it was published with "second edition" on the title-page. My copy has the same date, 1819, but is styled the *third* edition, and has a postscript commenting on the to-do the book made. However all this may be, it is a very handsome book, excellently printed and containing capital portraits and vignettes, while the matter is worthy of the get-up. The descriptions of the Outer-House, of Craigcrook and its high jinks, of Abbotsford, of the finding of "Ambrose's," of the manufacture of Glasgow punch, and of many other things, are admirable; and there is a charming sketch of Oxford undergraduate life, less exaggerated than that in *Reginald Dalton*, probably because the subject was fresher in the author's memory.

Lockhart modestly speaks of this book in his *Life of Scott* as one that "none but a very young and thoughtless person would have written." It may safely be said that no one but a very clever person, whether young or old, could have written it, though it is too long and has occasional faults of a specially youthful kind. But it made, coming as it did upon the heels of the *Chaldee Manuscript*, a terrible commotion in Edinburgh. The impartial observer of men and things may, indeed, have noticed in the records of the ages, that a libelled Liberal is the man in all the world who utters the loudest cries. The examples of the Reformers, and of the eighteenth-century *Philosophes*, are notorious and hackneyed; but I can supply (without, I trust, violating the sanctity of private life) a fresh and pleasing example. Once upon a time, a person whom we shall call A. paid

a visit to a person whom we shall call B. "How sad," said A., "are those personal attacks of the —— on Mr Gladstone."—"Personality," said B., "is always disgusting; and I am very sorry to hear that the —— has followed the bad example of the personal attacks on Lord Beaconsfield."—"Oh! but," quoth A., "that was *quite* a different thing." Now B. went out to dinner that night, and sitting next to a distinguished Liberal Member of Parliament, told him this tale, expecting that he would laugh. "Ah! yes," said he with much gravity, "it is *very* different, you know."

In the same way the good Whig folk of Edinburgh regarded it as very different that the *Edinburgh Review* should scoff at Tories, and that *Blackwood* and *Peter* should scoff at Whigs. The scorpion which delighted to sting the faces of men, probably at this time founded a reputation which has stuck to him for more than seventy[1] years after Dr Peter Morris drove his shandrydan through Scotland. Sir Walter (then Mr) Scott held wisely aloof from the extremely exuberant Toryism of *Blackwood*, and, indeed, had had some quarrels with its publisher and virtual editor. But he could not fail to be introduced to a man whose tastes and principles were so closely allied to his own. A year after the appearance of *Peter's Letters*, Lockhart married, on 29th April, 1820 (a perilous approximation to the unlucky month of May), Sophia Scott, the Duke of Buccleuch's "Little Jacobite," the most like her father of all his children. Every reader of the *Life* knows the delightful pictures, enough for interest and not enough for vulgar obtrusion, given by Lockhart of life at Chiefswood, the cottage near Abbotsford which he and his wife inhabited for nearly six years.

They were very busy years for Lockhart. He was

[1] Perhaps more than a hundred (1923).

still active in contributing to *Blackwood*; he wrote all his four novels, and he published the *Spanish Ballads*. *Valerius* and *Adam Blair* appeared in 1821, *Reginald Dalton* and the *Ballads* in 1823, *Matthew Wald* in 1824.

The novels, though containing much that is very remarkable, are not his strongest work; indeed, any critic who speaks with knowledge must admit that Lockhart had every faculty for writing novels, except the faculty of novel-writing. *Valerius*, a classical story of the visit of a Roman-Briton to Rome, and the persecution of the Christians in the days of Trajan, is, like everything of its author's, admirably written, but, like every classical novel without exception, save only *Hypatia* (which makes its interests and its personages daringly modern), it somehow rings false and faint, though not, perhaps, so faint or so false as most of its fellows. *Adam Blair*, the story of the sudden succumbing to natural temptation of a pious minister of the kirk, is unquestionably Lockhart's masterpiece in this kind. It is full of passion, full of force, and the characters of Charlotte Campbell and Adam Blair himself are perfectly conceived. But the story-gift is still wanting. The reader finds himself outside: wondering why the people do these things, and whether in real life they would have done them, instead of following the story with absorption, and asking himself no questions at all. The same, in a different way, is the case with Lockhart's longest book, *Reginald Dalton*; and this has the additional disadvantage that neither hero nor heroine are much more than lay-figures, while in *Adam Blair* both are flesh and blood. The Oxford scenes are amusing but exaggerated—the obvious work of a man who supplies the defects of a ten years' memory by deepening the strokes where he does remember. *Matthew Wald*, which is a novel of madness, has excellent

passages, but is conventional and wooden as a whole. Nothing was more natural than that Lockhart, with the example of Scott immediately before him, should try novel-writing; not many things are more indicative of his literary ability than that, after a bare three years' practice, he left a field which certainly was not his.

In the early autumn of 1825, just before the great collapse of his affairs, Scott went to Ireland with Lockhart in his company. But very early in the following year, before the collapse was decided, Lockhart and his family moved to London, on his appointment as editor of the *Quarterly*, in succession to Gifford. Probably there never was a better appointment of the kind. Lockhart was a born critic; he had both the faculty and the will to work up the papers of his contributors to the proper level; he was firm and decided in his literary and political views, without going to the extreme Giffordian acerbity in both; and his intelligence and erudition were very wide. "He could write," says a phrase in some article I have somewhere seen quoted, "on any subject from poetry to dry-rot"; and there is no doubt that an editor, if he cannot exactly write on any subject from poetry to dry-rot, should be able to take an interest in any subject between and, if necessary, beyond those poles. Otherwise he has the choice of two undesirables; either he frowns unduly on the dry-rot articles, which probably interest large sections of the public (itself very subject to dry-rot), or he lets the dry-rot contributor inflict his hobby, without mercy and unedited, on a reluctant audience. But Lockhart, though he is said (for his contributions are not, as far as I know, anywhere exactly indicated) to have contributed fully a hundred articles to the *Quarterly*, that is to say one to nearly every number during the twenty-eight years of his

editorship, by no means confined himself to this work. It was, indeed, during its progress that he composed not merely the *Life of Napoleon*, which was little more than an abridgment, though a very clever abridgment, of Scott's book, but the *Lives* of Burns and of Scott himself. Before, however, dealing with these, his *Spanish Ballads* and other poetical work may be conveniently disposed of.

Lockhart's verse is in the same scattered condition as his prose; but it is evident that he had very considerable poetical faculty. The charming piece, "When youthful hope is fled," attributed to him on Mrs Norton's authority; the well-known "Captain Paton's Lament," which has been republished in the *Tales from Blackwood*; and the mono-rhymed epitaph on "Bright broken Maginn," in which some wiseacres have seen ill-nature, but which really is a masterpiece of humorous pathos, are all in very different styles, and are all excellent each in its style. But these things are mere waifs, separated from each other in widely different publications; and until they are put together no general impression of the author's poetical talent, except a vaguely favourable one, can be derived from them. The *Spanish Ballads* form something like a substantive work, and one of nearly as great merit as is possible to poetical translations of poetry. I believe opinions differ as to their fidelity to the original. Here and there, it is said, the author has exchanged a vivid and characteristic touch for a conventional and feeble one. Thus, my friend Mr Hannay points out to me that in the original of "The Lord of Butrago" the reason given by Montanez for not accompanying the king's flight is not the somewhat *fade* one that

> Castile's proud dames shall never point the finger of disdain,

but the nobler argument, showing the best side of

feudal sentiment, that the widows of his tenants shall never say that he fled and left their husbands to fight and fall. Lockhart's master, Sir Walter, would certainly not have missed this touch, and it is odd that Lockhart himself did. But such things will happen to translators. On the other hand, it is, I believe, admitted (and the same very capable authority in Spanish is my warranty) that on the whole the originals have rather gained than lost; and certainly no one can fail to enjoy the *Ballads* as they stand in English. The "Wandering Knight's Song" has always seemed to me a gem without flaw, especially the last stanza. Few men, again, manage the long "fourteener" with middle rhyme better than Lockhart, though he is less happy with the anapæst, and has not fully mastered the very difficult trochaic measure of "The Death of Don Pedro." In "The Count Arnaldos," wherein, indeed, the subject lends itself better to that cadence, the result is more satisfactory. The merits, however, of these *Ballads* are not technical merely, or rather, the technical merits are well subordinated to the production of the general effect. About the nature of that effect much ink has been shed. It is produced equally by Greek hexameters, by old French assonanced *tirades*, by English "eights and sixes," and by not a few other measures. But in itself it is more or less the same—the stirring of the blood as by the sound of a trumpet, or else the melting of the mood into or close to tears. The ballad effect is thus the simplest and most primitive of all poetical effects; it is Lockhart's merit that he seldom fails to produce it. The simplicity and spontaneity of his verse may, to some people, be surprising in a writer so thoroughly and intensely literary; but Lockhart's character was as complex as his verse is simple, and the verse itself is not the least valuable guide to it.

It has been said that his removal to London and his responsible office by no means reduced his general literary activity. Whether he continued to contribute to *Blackwood* I am not sure; some phrases in the *Noctes* seem to argue the contrary. But he not only, as has been said, wrote for the *Quarterly* assiduously, but after a short time joined the new venture of *Fraser*, and showed in that rollicking periodical that the sting of the "scorpion" had by no means been extracted. He produced, moreover, in 1828, his *Life of Burns*, and in 1836–37 his *Life of Scott*. These, with the sketch of Theodore Hook written for the *Quarterly* in 1843, and separately published later, make three very remarkable examples of literary biography on very different scales, dealing with very different subjects, and, by comparison of their uniform excellence, showing that the author had an almost unique genius for this kind of composition. The *Life of Scott* fills seven capacious volumes; the *Life of Burns* goes easily into one; the *Life of Hook* does not reach a hundred smallish pages. But they are all equally well-proportioned in themselves and to their subjects; they all exhibit the same complete grasp of the secret of biography; and they all have the peculiarity of being full of facts without presenting an undigested appearance. They thus stand at an equal distance from biography of the fashion of the old academic *Eloge* of the last century, which makes an elegant discourse about a man, but either deliberately or by accident gives precise information about hardly any of the facts of the man's life; and from modern biography, which tumbles upon the devoted reader a cataract of letters, documents, and facts of all sorts, uncombined and undigested by any exercise of narrative or critical skill on the part of the author. Lockhart's biographies, therefore, belong equally (to

borrow De Quincey's useful, though, as far as terminology goes, not very happy distinction) to the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. They are storehouses of information; but they are, at the same time, works of art, and of very great art. The earliest of the three, the *Life of Burns*, is to this day by far the best book on the subject; indeed, with its few errors and defects of fact corrected and supplemented as they have been by the late Mr Douglas, it makes all other Lives quite superfluous. Yet it was much more difficult, especially for a Scotchman, to write a good book about Burns then than now; though I am told that, for a Scotchman, there is still a considerable difficulty in the matter. Lockhart was familiar with Edinburgh society—indeed, he had long formed a part of it—and Edinburgh society was still, when he wrote, very sore at the charge of having by turns patronised and neglected Burns. Lockhart was a decided Tory, and Burns, during the later part of his life at any rate, had permitted himself manifestations of political opinion which Whigs themselves admitted to be imprudent freaks, and which even a good-natured Tory might be excused for regarding as something very much worse. But the biographer's treatment of both these subjects is perfectly tolerant, judicious, and fair, and the same may be said of his whole account of Burns. Indeed, the main characteristic of Lockhart's criticism, a robust and quiet sanity, fitted him admirably for the task of biography. He is never in extremes, and he never avoids extremes by the common expedient of see-sawing between two sides, two parties, or two views of a man's character. He holds aloof equally from *engouement* and from depreciation, and if, as a necessary consequence, he failed, and fails, to please fanatics on either side, he cannot

fail to please those who know what criticism really means.

These good qualities were shown even to better advantage in a pleasanter but, at the same time, far more difficult task, the famous *Life of Scott*. The extraordinary interest of the subject, and the fashion, no less skilful than modest, in which the biographer keeps himself in the background, and seems constantly to be merely editing Scott's words, have perhaps obscured the literary value of the book to some readers. Of the perpetual comparison with Boswell, it may be said, once for all, that it is a comparison of matter merely; and that from the properly literary point of view, the point of view of workmanship and form, it does not exist. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that, even in moments of personal irritation, any one should have been found to accuse Lockhart of softening Scott's faults. The other charge, of malice to Scott, is indeed more extraordinary still in a certain way; but, being merely imbecile, it need not be taken into account. A delightful document informs us that, in the opinion of the Hon. Charles Sumner, Fenimore Cooper (who, stung by some references to him in the book, attacked it) administered "a proper castigation to the vulgar minds of Scott and Lockhart." This is a jest so pleasing that it almost puts one in good temper with the whole affair. But, in fact, Lockhart, considering his relationship to Scott, and considering Scott's greatness, could hardly have spoken more plainly as to the grave fault of judgment which made a man of letters and a member of a learned profession mix himself up secretly, and almost clandestinely, with commercial speculations. On this point the biographer does not attempt to mince matters; and on no other point was it necessary for him to be equally candid, for this, grave as it is, is almost

the only fault to be found with Scott's character. This candour, however, is only one of the merits of the book. The wonderfully skilful arrangement of so vast and heterogeneous a mass of materials, the way in which the writer's own work and his quoted matter dovetail into one another, the completeness of the picture given of Scott's character and life, have never been equalled in any similar book. Not a few minor touches, moreover, which are very apt to escape notice, enhance its merit. Lockhart was a man of all men least given to wear his heart upon his sleeve, yet no one has dealt with such pitiful subjects as his later volumes involve, at once with such total absence of "gush" and with such noble and pathetic appreciation. For Scott's misfortunes were by no means the only matters which touched him nearly, in and in connection with the chronicle. The constant illness and sufferings of his own child form part of it; his wife died during its composition and publication, and all these things are mentioned with as little parade of stoicism as of sentiment. I do not think that, as an example of absolute and perfect good taste, the account of Scott's death can be surpassed in literature. The same quality exhibits itself in another matter. No biographer can be less anxious to display his own personality than Lockhart; and though for six years he was a constant, and for much longer an occasional, spectator of the events he describes, he never introduces himself except when it is necessary. Yet, on the other hand, when Scott himself makes complimentary references to him (as when he speaks of his party "having Lockhart to say clever things"), he neither omits the passage nor stoops to the missish *minauderie*, too common in such cases, of translating "spare my blushes" into some kind of annotation. Lockhart will not talk about Lockhart;

but if others, whom the public likes to hear, talk about him, Lockhart does not put his fan before his face.

This admirable book, however, is both well enough known (if not so well known as it deserves) and large enough to make it both unnecessary and impossible to criticise it at length here. The third work noticed above, the sketch of the life of Theodore Hook, though it has been reprinted more than once, and is still, I believe, kept in print and on sale, is probably less familiar to most readers. It is, however, almost as striking an example, though of course an example in miniature only, of Lockhart's aptitude for the great and difficult art of literary biography as either of the two books just mentioned. Here the difficulty was of a different kind. A great many people liked Theodore Hook, but it was nearly impossible for any one to respect him; yet it was quite impossible for Lockhart, a political sympathiser and a personal friend, to treat him harshly in an obituary notice. There was no danger of his setting down aught in malice; but there might be thought to be a considerable danger of over-extenuation. The danger was the greater, inasmuch as Lockhart himself had certainly not escaped, and had perhaps to some extent deserved, one of Hook's reproaches. No man questioned his integrity; he was not a reckless spendthrift; he was not given to excesses in living, or to hanging about great houses; nor was he careless of moral and social rules. But the scorpion which had delighted to sting the faces of men might have had some awkwardness in dealing with the editor of *John Bull*. The result, however, victoriously surmounts all difficulties without evading one. Nothing that is the truth about Hook is omitted, or even blinked; and from reading Lockhart alone, any in-

telligent reader might know the worst that is to be said about him. Neither are any of his faults, in the unfair sense, extenuated. His malicious and vulgar practical jokes; his carelessness at Mauritius; the worse than carelessness which allowed him to shirk, when he had ample means of discharging it by degrees, a debt which he acknowledged that he justly owed; the folly and vanity which led him to waste his time, his wit, and his money in playing the hanger-on at country houses and town dinner-tables; his hard living, and the laxity which induced him not merely to form irregular connections, but prevented him from taking the only step which could, in some measure, repair his fault, are all fairly put, and blamed frankly. Even in that more delicate matter of the personal journalism, Lockhart's procedure is as ingenuous as it is ingenious; and the passage of the sketch which deals with "the blazing audacity of invective, the curious delicacy of persiflage, the strong caustic satire" (expressions, by the way, which suit Lockhart himself much better than Hook, though Lockhart had not Hook's broad humour), in fact, admits that the application of these things was not justifiable, nor to be justified. Yet with all this, the impression left by the sketch is distinctly favourable on the whole, which, in the circumstances, must be admitted to be a triumph of advocacy obtained not at the expense of truth, but by the art of the advocate in making the best of it.

The facts of Lockhart's life between his removal to London and his death may be rapidly summarised, the purpose of this notice being rather critical than biographical. He had hardly settled in town when, as he himself tells, he had to attempt, fruitlessly enough, the task of mediator in the financial disasters of Constable and Scott; and his own share of domestic troubles

began early. His eldest son, after repeated escapes, died in 1831; Scott followed shortly; Miss Anne Scott, after her father's death, came in broken health to Lockhart's house, and died there only a year later; and in the spring of 1837 his wife likewise died. Then Fortune let him alone for a little, to return in no better humour some years later.

It is, however, from the early "thirties" that one of the best known memorials of Lockhart dates; that is to say, the portrait, or rather the two portraits, in the Fraser Gallery. In the general group of the Fraserians he sits between Fraser himself and Theodore Hook, with the diminutive figure of Crofton Croker half intercepted beyond him; and his image forms the third plate in Mr Bates's republication of the gallery. It is said to be the most faithful of the whole series, and it is certainly the handsomest, giving even a more flattering representation than the full-face portrait by Pickersgill which serves as frontispiece to the modern editions of the *Ballads*. In this latter the curious towzled mop of hair, in which our fathers delighted, rather mars the effect; while in Maclise's sketch (which is in profile) it is less obtrusive. In this latter, too, there is clearly perceivable what the Shepherd in the *Noctes* calls "a sort of laugh aboot the screwed-up mouth of him that fules ca'd no canny, for they couldna thole the meaning o't." There is not much doubt that Lockhart aided and abetted Maginn in much of the mischief that distinguished the early days of *Fraser*, though his fastidious taste is never likely to have stooped to the coarseness which was too natural to Maginn. It is believed that to him is due the wicked wresting of Alaric Watts' second initial into "Attila," which gave the victim so much grief, and he probably did many other things of the same kind. But Lockhart was

never vulgar, and *Fraser* in those days very often was.

In 1843 Lockhart received his first and last piece of political preferment, being appointed, says one of the authorities before me, Chancellor of the Duchy of Cornwall, and (says another) Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Such are biographers; but the matter is not of the slightest importance, though I do not myself quite see how it could have been Lancaster. A third and more trustworthy writer gives the post as "Auditorship" of the Duchy of Lancaster, which is possible enough.

In 1847, the death of Sir Walter Scott's last surviving son brought the title and estate to Lockhart's son Walter, but he died in 1853. Lockhart's only other child had married Mr Hope—called, after his brother-in-law's death, Mr Hope Scott, of whom an elaborate biography has been published. Little in it concerns Lockhart, but the admirable letter which he wrote to Mr Hope on his conversion to the Roman Church. This step, followed as it was by Mrs Hope, could not but be, and in this letter is delicately hinted to be, no small grief to Lockhart, who saw Abbotsford fall under influences for which certainly neither he nor its founder had any respect. His repeated domestic losses, and many years of constant work and excitement, appear to have told on him, and very shortly after his son's death in April 1853 he resigned the editorship of the *Quarterly*. He then visited Italy, a visit from which, if he had been a superstitious man, the ominous precedent of Scott might have deterred him. His journey did him no good, and he died at Abbotsford on the 25th of November. December, says another authority, for so it is that history gets written, even in thirty years.

The comparatively brief notices which are all that have[1] been published about Lockhart, uniformly mention the unpopularity (to use a mild word) which pursued him, and which, as I have remarked, does not seem to have exhausted itself even yet. It is not very difficult to account for the origin of this; and the neglect to supply any collection of his work, and any authoritative account of his life and character, will quite explain its continuance. In the first place, Lockhart was well known as a most sarcastic writer; in the second, he was for nearly a lifetime editor of one of the chief organs of party politics and literary criticism in England. He might have survived the *Chaldee Manuscript*, and *Peter's Letters*, and the lampoons in *Fraser*: he might even have got the better of the youthful imprudence which led him to fix upon himself a description which was sure to be used and abused against him by the "fules," if he had not succeeded to the chair of the *Quarterly*. Individual and, to a great extent, anonymous indulgence of the luxury of scorn never gave any man a very bad character, even if he were, as Lockhart was, personally shy and reserved, unable to make up for written sarcasm with verbal flummery, and, in virtue of an incapacity for gushing, deprived of the easiest and, by public personages, most commonly practised means of proving that a man has "a good heart after all." But when he complicated his sins by editing the *Quarterly* at a time when everybody attacked everybody else in exactly such terms as pleased them, the sins of his youth were pretty sure to be visited on him. In the first place, there was the great army of the criticised, who always consider that the editor of the paper which dissects them is really

[1] In 1894. They have been long superseded of course by Mr Lang's *Life* (1896), *v. inf.* at end (1923).

responsible. The luckless Harriett Martineau, who, if I remember rightly, gives in her autobiography a lurid picture of Lockhart "going down at night to the printer's" and inserting dreadful things about her, and who, I believe, took the feminine plan of revenging herself in an obituary article, was only one of a great multitude.

Lockhart does not seem to have taken over from Gifford quite such a troublesome crew of helpers as Macvey Napier inherited from Jeffrey, and he was also free from the monitions of his predecessor. But in Croker he had a first lieutenant who could not very well be checked, and who (though he, too, has had rather hard measure) had no equal in the art of making himself offensive. Besides, those were the days when the famous "Scum condensed of Irish bog" lines appeared in a great daily newspaper about O'Connell. Imagine the *Times* addressing Mr Parnell, when *his* time came, as "Scum condensed of Irish bog," with the other amenities that follow!

But Lockhart had not only his authors, he had his contributors. "A' contributors," says the before-quoted Shepherd, in a moment of such preternatural wisdom that he must have been "fou," "are in a manner fierce." They are—it is the nature and essence of the animal to be so. The contributor who is not allowed to contribute is fierce, as a matter of course; but not less fierce is the contributor who thinks himself too much edited, and the contributor who imperatively insists that his article on Chinese metaphysics shall go in at once, and the contributor who, being an excellent hand at articles on the currency, wants to be allowed to write on dancing; and, in short, as the Shepherd says, all contributors. Now it does not appear (for, as I must repeat, I have no kind of private information

on the subject) that Lockhart was by any means an easy-going editor, or one of that kind which allows a certain number of privileged writers to send in what they like. We are told in many places that he "greatly improved" his contributors' articles; and I should say that if there is one thing which drives a contributor to the verge of madness, it is to have his articles "greatly improved." A hint in the *Noctes* (and it may be observed that though the references to Lockhart in the *Noctes* are not very numerous, they are valuable, for Wilson's friendship seems to have been mixed with a small grain of jealousy which preserves them from being commonplace) suggests that his friends did not consider him as by any means too ready to accept their papers. All this, added to his early character of scoffer at Whig dignities, and his position as leader *en titre* of Tory journalism, was quite sufficient to create a reputation partly exaggerated, partly quite false, which has endured simply because no trouble has been taken to sift and prove it.

The head and front of Lockhart's offending, in a purely literary view, seems to be the famous *Quarterly* article on Lord Tennyson's volume of 1832. That article is sometimes spoken of as Croker's, but there can be no manner of doubt that it is Lockhart's; and, indeed, it is quoted as his by Professor Ferrier, who, through Wilson, must have known the facts. Now I do not think I yield to any man living in admiration of Lord Tennyson, but I am unable to think much the worse, or, indeed, any the worse, of Lockhart because of this article. In the first place, it is extremely clever, being, perhaps, the very best example of politely cruel criticism in existence. In the second, most, if not all, of the criticism is perfectly just. If any author himself, at a safe distance of time, could think of the

famous strawberry story and its application without laughing, he must have been extremely sensitive. And nobody, I suppose, would now defend the wondrous stanza which was paralleled from the *Groves of Blarney*. The fact is that criticism of criticism after some time is apt to be doubly unjust. It is wont to assume, or rather to imagine, that the critic must have known what the author was going to do, as well as what he had actually done; and it is wont to forget that the work criticised was very often, as it presented itself to the critic, very different from what it is when it presents itself to the critic's critic. The best justification of Lockhart's verdict on the volume of 1832 is what Lord Tennyson himself did do with the volume of 1832. Far more than half the passages objected to have since been excised or altered. But there are other excuses. In the first place, Mr Tennyson, as he then was, represented a further development of schools of poetry against which the *Quarterly* had always, rightly or wrongly, set its face, and a certain loyalty to the principles of his paper is, after all, not the worst fault of a critic. In the second, no one can fairly deny that some points in Mr Tennyson's early, if not in his later, manner must have been highly and rightly disgustful to a critic who, like Lockhart, was above all things masculine and abhorrent of "gush." In the third, it is, unfortunately, not given to all critics to admire all styles alike. Let those to whom it is given thank God therefor; but let them, at the same time, remember that they are as much bound to accept whatever is good in all kinds of critics as whatever is good in all kinds of poets.

Lockhart, within his own range, and it was for the time a very wide one, was certainly not a narrow critic, just as he certainly was not a feeble one. In the before-

mentioned *Peter's Letters* (which, with all its faults, is one of his best, and particularly one of his most spontaneous and characteristic works) the denunciation of the "facetious and rejoicing ignorance" which enabled contemporary critics to pooh-pooh Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and Coleridge is excellent. And it must be remembered that in 1819, whatever might be the case with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Lamb were by no means taken to the hearts of Tories on their merits, and that in this very passage *Blackwood* is condemned not less severely than the *Edinburgh*. Another point in which Lockhart made a great advance was that he was one of the first (Lamb himself is, in England, his only important forerunner) to unite and combine criticism of different branches of art. He never has the disgusting technical jargon, or the undisciplined fluency, of the mere art critic, any more than he has the gabble of the mere connoisseur. But it is constantly evident that he has a knowledge of and a feeling for the art of line and colour as well as of words. Nothing can be better than the fragments of criticism which are interspersed in the Scott book; and if his estimate of Hook as a novelist seems exaggerated, it must be remembered, as he has himself noted, that Thackeray was, at the time he spoke, nothing more than an amusing contributor of remarkably promising trifles to magazines, and that, from the appearance of *Waverley* to that of *Pickwick*, no novelist of the first class had made an appearance. It is, moreover, characteristic of Lockhart as a critic that he is, as has been noted, always manly and robust. He was never false to his own early protest against "the banishing from the mind of a reverence for feeling, as abstracted from mere questions of immediate and obvious utility." But he never allowed that reverence to get the better of

him and drag him into the deplorable excesses of gush into which, from his day to ours, criticism has more and more had a tendency to fall. If he makes no parade of definite æsthetic principles, it is clear that throughout he had such principles, and that they were principles of a very good kind. He had a wide knowledge of foreign literature without any taint of "Xenomania," sufficient scholarship (despite the unlucky false quantity of *Janua*, which he overlooked) in the older languages, and a thorough knowledge and love of English literature. His style is, to me at any rate, peculiarly attractive. Contrasted with the more brightly coloured and fantastically-shaped styles, of which, in his own day, De Quincey, Wilson, Macaulay, and Carlyle set the fashion, it may possibly seem tame to those who are not satisfied with proportion in form and harmony in tint; it will certainly not seem so to those who are more fortunately gifted. Indeed, compared either with Wilson's welter of words, now bombastic, now gushing, now horse-playful, or with the endless and heart-breaking antitheses of what Brougham ill-naturedly but truly called "Tom's snip-snap," it is infinitely preferable. The conclusion of the essay on Theodore Hook is not easily surpassable as an example of solid polished prose, which is prose, and does not attempt to be a hybrid between prose and poetry. The last page of the Tennyson review is perfect for quiet humour.

But there is no doubt that though Lockhart was an admirable critic merely as such, a poet, or at least a song-writer, of singular ability and charm within certain limits, and a master of sharp light raillery that never missed its mark and never lumbered on the way, his most unique and highest merit is that of biographer. Carlyle, though treating Lockhart himself with great politeness, does not allow this, and complains that Lock-

hart's conception of his task was "not very elevated." That is what a great many people said of Boswell, whom Carlyle thought an almost perfect biographer. But, as it happens, the critic here has fallen into the dangerous temptation of giving his reasons. Lockhart's plan was not, it seems, in the case of his *Scott*, very elevated, because it was not "to show Scott as he was by nature, as the world acted on him, as he acted on the world," and so forth. Now, unfortunately, this is exactly what it seems to me that Lockhart, whether he meant to do it or not, has done in the very book which Carlyle was criticising. And it seems to me, further, that he always does this in all his biographical efforts. Sometimes he appears (for here another criticism of Carlyle's on the *Burns*, not the *Scott*, is more to the point) to quote and extract from other and much inferior writers to an extent rather surprising in so excellent a penman, especially when it is remembered that, except to a dunce, the extraction and stringing together of quotations is far more troublesome than original writing. But even then the extracts are always luminous. With ninety-nine out of a hundred biographies the total impression which Carlyle demands, and very properly demands, is, in fact, a total absence of impression. The reader's mind is as dark, though it may be as full, as a cellar when the coals have been shot into it. Now this is never the case with Lockhart's biographies, whether they are books in half a dozen volumes, or essays in half a hundred pages. He subordinates what even Carlyle allowed to be his "clear nervous forcible style" so entirely to the task of representing his subject, he has such a perfect general conception of that subject, that only a very dense reader can fail to perceive the presentment. Whether it is the right or whether it is the

wrong presentment may, of course, be a matter of opinion, but, such as it is, it is always there.

One other point of interest about Lockhart has to be mentioned. He was an eminent example, perhaps one of the most eminent, of a "gentleman of the press." He did a great many kinds of literary work, and he did all of them well; novel-writing, perhaps (which, as has been said, he gave up almost immediately), least well. But he does not seem to have felt any very strong or peculiar call to any particular class of original literary work, and his one great and substantive book may be fairly taken to have been much more decided by accident and his relationship to Scott than by deliberate choice. He was, in fact, eminently a journalist, and it is very much to be wished that there were more journalists like him. For from the two great reproaches of the craft to which so many of us belong, and which seems to be gradually swallowing up all other varieties of literary occupation, he was conspicuously free. He never did work slovenly in form, and he never did work that was not in one way or other consistent with a decided set of literary and political principles. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about the unprincipled character of journalism, no doubt; and nobody knows better than those who have some experience of it, that if, as George Warrington says, "too many of us write against our own party," it is the fault simply of those who do so. If a man has a faculty of saying anything, he can generally get an opportunity of saying what he likes, and avoid occasions of saying what he does not like. But the mere journalist Swiss of heaven (or the other place), is certainly not unknown, and by all accounts he was in Lockhart's time rather common. No one ever accused Lockhart himself of being one of the class. A still more important fault, undoubtedly,

of journalism is its tendency to slovenly work, and here again Lockhart was conspicuously guiltless. His actual production must have been very considerable, though in the absence of any collection, or even any index, of his contributions to periodicals, it is impossible to say exactly to how much it would extend. But, at a rough guess, the *Scott*, the *Burns*, and the *Napoleon*, the *Ballads*, the novels, and *Peter*, a hundred *Quarterly* articles, and an unknown number in *Blackwood* and *Fraser*, would make at least twenty or five-and-twenty volumes of a pretty closely printed library edition. Yet all this, as far as it can be identified, has the same careful though unostentatious distinction of style, the same admirable faculty of sarcasm, wherever sarcasm is required, the same depth of feeling, wherever feeling is called for, the same refusal to make a parade of feeling even where it is shown. Never trivial, never vulgar, never feeble, never stilted, never diffuse, Lockhart is one of the very best recent specimens of that class of writers of all work, which since Dryden's time has continually increased, is increasing, and does not seem likely to diminish. The growth may or may not be matter for regret; probably none of the more capable members of the class itself feels any particular desire to magnify his office. But if the office is to exist, let it at least be the object of those who hold it to perform its duties with that hatred of commonplace and cant and the *popularis aura*, with, as nearly as may be in each case, that conscience and thoroughness of workmanship, which Lockhart's writings uniformly display.

*

APPENDIX A

LOCKHART

THE most singular instance of the floating dislike to Lockhart's memory, to which I have more than once referred in the text, occurred subsequently to the original publication of my essay, but not long after it, when my friend Mr Louis Stevenson thought proper to call Lockhart a "cad." This extraordinary *obiter dictum* provoked, as might have been expected, not a few protests, but I do not remember that Mr Stevenson rejoined, and I have not myself had any opportunity of learning from him what he meant[1]. I can only suppose that the ebullition must have been prompted by one of two things, the old scandal about the duel in which John Scott the editor of the *London* was shot, and a newer one, which was first bruited abroad, I think, in Mr (now Sir) Sidney Colvin's book on Keats. Both of these, and especially the first, may be worth a little discussion.

I do not think that any one who examines Mr Colvin's allegation, will think it very damaging. It comes to this, that Keats's friend Bailey met Lockhart in the house of Bishop Greig at Stirling, told him some particulars about Keats, extracted from him a promise that he would not use them against the poet, and afterwards thought he recognised some of the details in the *Blackwood* attack which ranks next to the famous *Quarterly* article. Here it is to be observed, first, that there is no sufficient evidence that Lockhart wrote this *Blackwood* article[2]; secondly, that it is by no means certain that if he did, he was making, or considered himself to be making, any improper use of what he had heard; thirdly, that for the actual interview and its tenor we have only a vague *ex parte* statement made long after date.

The other matter is much more important, and as the duel itself has been mentioned more than once or twice in the foregoing pages, and as it is to this day being frequently referred to in what seems to me an entirely erroneous manner, with occasional implications that Lockhart showed the white feather, it may be well to give a sketch of what actually happened, as far as can be made out from the most trustworthy accounts, published and unpublished.

One of Lockhart's signatures in *Blackwood*—a signature which, however, like others, was not, I believe, peculiar to him—was "Zeta," and this Zeta assailed the Cockney school in a sufficiently scorpion-like manner. Thereupon Scott's magazine, the *London*, retorted, attacking Lockhart by name. On this Lockhart set out

[1] For a not uninteresting sequel to this see *A Letter Book* (London, 1921), under the head of Stevenson (1923).

[2] "I'm afraid he did," once said a person, very well qualified to know, to me. But almost everybody of that time, down to Thackeray, was tarred with the brush of critical "ragging" (1923).

for London and, with a certain young Scotch barrister named Christie as his second, challenged Scott. But Scott refused to fight, unless Lockhart would deny that he was editor of *Blackwood*. Lockhart declared that Scott had no right to ask this, and stigmatised him as a coward. He then published a statement, sending at the same time a copy to Scott. In the published form the denial of editorship was made, in the one sent to Scott it was omitted. Thereupon Scott called Lockhart a liar. Of this Lockhart took no notice, but Christie his second did, and, an altercation taking place between them, Scott challenged Christie and they went out, Scott's second being Mr P. G. Patmore, Christie's Mr Traill, afterwards well known as a London police magistrate. Christie fired in the air, Scott fired at Christie and missed. Thereupon Mr Patmore demanded a second shot, which, I am informed, could and should, by all laws of the duello, have been refused. Both principal and second on the other side were, however, inexperienced and probably unwilling to baulk their adversaries. Shots were again exchanged, Christie this time (as he can hardly be blamed for doing) taking aim at his adversary and wounding him mortally. Patmore fled the country, Christie and Traill took their trial and were acquitted.

I have elsewhere remarked that this deplorable result is said to have been brought on by errors of judgment on the part of more than one person. Hazlitt, himself no duellist and even accused of personal timidity, is said to have egged on Scott, and to have stung him by some remark of his bitter tongue into challenging Christie, and there is no doubt that Patmore's conduct was most reprehensible. But we are here concerned with Lockhart, not with them. As far as I understand the imputations made on him, he is charged either with want of straightforwardness in omitting part of his explanation in the copy sent to Scott, or with cowardice in taking no notice of Scott's subsequent lie direct, or with both. Let us examine this.

At first sight the incident of what, from the most notorious action of Lord Clive, we may call the "red and white treaties" seems odd. But it is to be observed, first, that Lockhart could not be said to conceal from Scott what he published to all the world; secondly, that his conduct was perfectly consistent throughout. He had challenged Scott, who had declined to go out. Having offered his adversary satisfaction, he was not bound to let him take it with a proviso, or to satisfy his private inquisitiveness. But if not under menace, but considering Scott after his refusal as unworthy the notice of a gentleman, and not further to be taken into account, he chose to inform the public of the truth, he had a perfect right to do so. And it is hardly necessary to say that it was the truth that he was not editor of *Blackwood*.

This consideration will also account for his conduct in not renewing his challenge after Scott's offensive words. He had offered the man satisfaction and had been refused. No one is bound to go on challenging a reluctant adversary. At all times Lockhart seems

to have been perfectly ready to back his opinion, as may be seen from a long affair which had happened earlier, in connection with the "Baron Lauerwinkel" matter. There he had promptly come forward and in his own name challenged the anonymous author of a pamphlet bearing the title of "Hypocrisy Unveiled." The anonym had, like Scott, shirked, and had maintained his anonymity. (Lord Cockburn says it was an open secret, but I do not know who he was.) Thereupon Lockhart took no further notice, just as he did in the later matter, and I do not believe that a court of honour in any country would find fault with him. At any rate, I think that we are entitled to know, much more definitely than I have ever seen it stated, what the charge against him is. We may indeed blame him in both these matters, and perhaps in others, for neglecting the sound rule that anonymous writing should never be personal. If he did this, however, he is in the same box with almost every writer for the press in his own generation, and with too many in this. I maintain that in each case he promptly gave the guarantee which the honour of his time required, and which is perhaps the only possible guarantee, that of being ready to answer in person for what he had written impersonally. This was all he could do, and he did it.

I wish this could have been written after, instead of before the appearance of Mr Lang's "official" (as one may call it) *Life* of Lockhart (1896), and the publication of Scott's *Journal* and *Letters*[1]. But I do not know that these require any correction to be made in the Essay or in the Appendix to it, though of course they would have afforded valuable "stuff" for it. The history of the Tennyson review is very curious. No doubt as to Lockhart's authorship seems to have been entertained till a few years ago when in the centenary article of the *Quarterly Review* it was assigned to Croker and all good Lockhartians rejoiced, clever as it is. But Mr John Murray has had the extreme kindness to inform me since that this was all but certainly a mistake, and to explain how it happened.

[1] The fuller account of the dual complications to be found in Mr Lang's *Lockhart* does not, I think, necessitate any addition or alteration here, except that the difference of "the red and white treaties" is *proved* there to have been a pure oversight. Scott's (Sir Walter) *Letters* had already told us that no less final a referee in such a matter than "the Duke" (*i.e.* Wellington) approved Lockhart's conduct. But Mr Lang has exposed the almost incredible folly and misbehaviour of the other side.

II

PRAED

IT was not till half a century after his death that Praed, who is loved by those who love him perhaps as sincerely as most greater writers, had his works presented to the public in a form which may be called complete[1]. This is of itself rather a cautious statement in appearance, but I am not sure that it ought not to be made more cautious still. The completeness is not complete, though it is in one respect rather more than complete; and the form is exceedingly informal. Neither in size, nor in print, nor in character of editing and arrangement do the two little fat volumes which were ushered into the world by Derwent Coleridge in 1864, and the one little thin volume which appeared in 1887 under Sir George Young's name with no notes and not much introduction, and the very creditable edition of the political poems which appeared a year later under the same care but better cared for, agree together. But this, though a nuisance to those who love not a set of odd volumes, would matter comparatively little if the discrepancies were not equally great in a much more important matter than that of mere externals. Only the last of the four volumes and three books just enumerated can be said to have been really edited, and though that is edited very well, it is the least important. Sir George Young, who has thus done a pious work to his uncle's memory, was concerned not merely in the previous

[1] (1) *The Poems of Winthrop Mackworth Praed, with a Memoir by the Rev. Derwent Coleridge.* In two volumes. London, 1864. (2) *Essays by Winthrop Mackworth Praed, collected and arranged by Sir George Young, Bart.* London, 1887. (3) *The Political and Occasional Poems of Winthrop Mackworth Praed, edited, with Notes, by Sir George Young.* London, 1888.

cheap issue of the prose, but in the more elaborate issue of the poems in 1864. But either his green unknowing youth did not at that time know what editing meant, or he was under the restraint of some higher powers[1]. Except that the issue of 1864 has that well-known page-look of "Moxon's," which is identified to all lovers of poetry with associations of Shelley, of Lord Tennyson, and of other masters, and that the pieces are duly dated, it is difficult to say any good thing of the book. There are no notes; and Praed is an author who is much in need of annotation. With singular injudiciousness, a great deal of album and other verse is included which was evidently not intended for publication, which does not display the writer at his best, or even in his characteristic vein at all, while the memoir is meagre in fact and decidedly feeble in criticism. As for the prose, though Sir George Young has prefixed an introduction good as far as it goes, there is no index, no table even of contents, and the separate papers are not dated, nor is any indication given of their origin —a defect which, for reasons to be indicated shortly, is especially troublesome in Praed's case. Accordingly anything like a critical study of the poet is beset with very unusual difficulties, and the mere reading of him, if it were less agreeable in itself, could not be said to be exactly easy. Luckily Praed is a writer so eminently engaging to the mere reader, as well as so interesting in divers ways to the personage whom some one has politely called "the gelid critic," that no sins or shortcomings of his editors can do him much harm, so long as they let him be read at all.

Winthrop Mackworth was the third son of Serjeant Praed, Chairman of the Board of Audit, and, though

[1] Sir George himself has been good enough to tell me later that there *was* an inordinate amount of family "restraint" or constraint (1923).

his family was both by extraction and by actual seat Devonian, he was born in John Street, Bedford Row, on 26th June, 1802, the year of the birth of Victor Hugo, who was perhaps about as unlike Praed in every conceivable point, except metrical mastery, as two men possessing poetic faculty can be unlike one another. John Street may not appear as meet a nurse for a poetic child as Besançon, especially now when it has settled down into the usual office-and-chambers state of Bloomsbury. But it is unusually wide for a London street; it has trees—those of the Foundling Hospital and those of Gray's Inn—at either end, and all about it cluster memories of the Bedford Row conspiracy, and of that immortal dinner which was given by the Briefless One and his timid partner to Mr Goldmore, and of Sydney Smith's sojourn in Doughty Street, and of divers other pleasant things. In connection, however, with Praed himself, we do not hear much more of John Street. It was soon exchanged for the more cheerful locality of Teignmouth, where his father (who was a member of the old western family of Mackworth, Praed being an added surname) had a country house. Serjeant Praed encouraged, if he did not positively teach, the boy to write English verse at a very early age: a practice which I should be rather slow to approve, but which has been credited, perhaps justly, with the very remarkable formal accuracy and metrical ease of Praed's after-work. Winthrop lost his mother early, was sent to a private school at eight years old, and to Eton in the year 1814. Public schools in their effect of allegiance on public schoolboys have counted for much in English history, literary and other, and Eton has counted for more than any of them. But hardly in any case has it counted for so much with the general reader as in Praed's. A friend of mine, who, while entertaining

high and lofty views on principle, takes low ones by a kind of natural attraction, says that the straightforward title of *The Etonian* and Praed's connection with it are enough to account for this. There you have a cardinal fact easy to seize and easy to remember. "Praed? Oh! yes, the man who wrote *The Etonian*; he must have been an Eton man," says the general reader. This is cynicism, and cannot be too strongly reprehended. But unluckily, as in other cases, a kind of critical deduction or reaction from this view has also taken place, and there are persons who maintain that Praed's merit is a kind of coterie-merit, a thing which Eton men are bound, and others are not bound but the reverse, to uphold. This is an old, but apparently still effective trick. I read not long ago a somewhat elaborate attempt to make out that the people who admire Mr Matthew Arnold's poems admire them because they, the people, are Oxford men. Now this form of "ruling out" is undoubtedly ingenious. "You admire Mr Arnold's poems?"—"Yes, I do."—"You are an Oxford man?"—"Yes, I am."—"Ah! I see." And it is perfectly useless for the victim to argue that his admiration of the poet and his allegiance to the University have nothing to do with each other. In the present case I, at least, am free from this illogical but damaging disqualification. I do not think that any one living admires Praed more than I do; and neither Eton nor Cambridge, which may be said to have divided influence on him, claims any allegiance from me.

On Praed himself, however, the influence of Eton was certainly great, if not of the greatest. Here he began in school periodicals ("Apis Matina" a bee buzzing in manuscript only, preceded *The Etonian*) his prose—and, to some though a less extent, his verse-exercises in finished literature. Here he made the beginnings of

that circle of friends (afterwards slightly enlarged at Cambridge by the addition of non-Etonians and including one or two Oxford men who had been at Eton) which practically formed the staff of *The Etonian* itself and of the subsequent *Knight's Quarterly* and *Brazen Head*. The greatest of them all, Macaulay, belonged to the later Trinity set; but the Etonians proper included divers men of mark. There has been, I believe, a frequent idea that boys who contribute to school-magazines never do anything else. Praed certainly could not be produced as an instance. He was not a great athlete, partly because his health was always weak, partly because athletics were then in their infancy. But he is said to have been a good player at fives and tennis, an amateur actor of merit, expert at chess and whist, and latterly a debater of promise, while, in the well-known way of his own school and University, he was more than a sufficient scholar. He went to Trinity in October, 1821, and in the three following years won the Browne Medals for Greek verse four times and the Chancellor's Medal for English verse twice. He was third in the Classical Tripos, was elected to a Fellowship at his college in 1827, and in 1830 obtained the Seatonian Prize with a piece, "The Ascent of Elijah," which is remarkable for the extraordinary facility with which it catches the notes of the just published *Christian Year*. He was a great speaker at the Union, and, as has been hinted, he made a fresh circle of literary friends for himself, the chief ornaments whereof were Macaulay and Charles Austin. It was also during his sojourn at Cambridge that the short-lived but brilliant venture of *Knight's Quarterly* was launched. He was about four years resident at Trinity in the first instance; after which, according to a practice then common enough but now, I believe, obsolete, he returned to

Eton as private and particular tutor to Lord Ernest Bruce. This employment kept him for two years. He then read law, was called to the Bar in 1829, and in 1830 was elected to Parliament for the moribund borough of St Germans. He was re-elected next year, contested St Ives, when St Germans lost its members, but was beaten, was elected in 1834 for Great Yarmouth, and in 1837 for Aylesbury, which last seat he held to his death. During the whole of this time he sat as a Conservative, becoming a more thorough one as time went on; and as he had been at Cambridge a very decided Whig, and had before his actual entrance on public life written many pointed and some bitter lampoons against the Tories, the change, in the language of his amiable and partial friend and biographer, "occasioned considerable surprise." Of this also more presently: for it is well to get merely biographical details over with as little digression as possible. Surprise or no surprise, he won good opinions from both sides, acquired considerable reputation as a debater and a man of business, was in the confidence both of the Duke of Wellington and of Sir Robert Peel, was made Secretary of the Board of Control in 1834, married in 1835, was appointed Deputy-High Steward of his University (a mysterious appointment, of the duties of which I have no notion), and died of disease of the lungs on 15th July, 1839. Not very much has been published about Praed personally; but in what has been published, and in what I have heard, I cannot remember a single unfriendly sentence.

Notwithstanding his reputation as an "inspired schoolboy," I do not know that sober criticism would call him a really precocious writer, especially in verse. The pieces by which he is best known and which have most individuality, date in no case very early, and in

almost all cases after his five-and-twentieth year. What does date very early (and unluckily it has been printed with a copiousness betokening more affection than judgment, considering that the author had more sense than to print it at all) is scarcely distinguishable from any other verses of any other clever boy. It is impossible to augur any future excellence from such stuff as

> Emilia often sheds the tear
> But affectation bids it flow,

or as

> From breasts which feel compassion's glow
> Solicit mild the kind relief;

and, for one's own part, one is inclined to solicit mild the kind relief of not having to read it. Even when Praed had become, at least technically, a man, there is no very great improvement as a whole, though here and there one may see, looking backwards from the finished examples, faint beginnings of his peculiar touches, especially of that pleasant trick of repeating the same word or phrase with a different and slightly altered sense which, as Mr Austin Dobson has suggested, may have been taken from Burns. The Cambridge prize poems are quite authentic and respectable examples of that style which has received its final criticism in

> Ply battleaxe and hurtling catapult:
> Jerusalem is ours! *Id Deus vult,*—

though they do not contain anything so nice as that, or as its great author's more famous couplet respecting Africa and the men thereof. The longer romances of the same date, *Gog*, *Lilian*, *The Troubadour*, are little more than clever reminiscences sometimes of Scott, Byron, Moore, and other contemporaries, sometimes of Prior and the *vers de société* of the eighteenth century. The best passage by far of all this is the close of *How to Rhyme with Love*, and this, as it seems to me, is the only passage of even moderate length which, in the

poems dating before Praed took his degree, in the least foretells the poet of *The Red Fisherman*, *The Vicar*, the *Letters from Teignmouth*, the *Fourteenth of February* (earliest in date and not least charming fruit of the true vein), *Good-night to the Season*, and best and most delightful of all, the peerless *Letter of Advice*, which is as much the very best thing of its own kind as the *Divine Comedy*.

In prose Praed was a little earlier, but not very much. *The Etonian* itself was, even in its earliest numbers, written at an age when many, perhaps most, men have already left school; and the earlier numbers are as imitative, of the *Spectator* and its late and now little read followers of the eighteenth century, as is the verse above quoted. The youthful boisterousness of *Blackwood* gave Praed a more congenial because a fresher cue; and in the style of which Maginn, as Adjutant O'Doherty, had set the example in his Latinisings of popular verse, and which was to be worked to death by Father Prout, there are few things better than the "Musæ O'Connorianæ" which celebrates the great fight of MacNevis and MacTwolter. But there is here still the distinct following of a model—the taint of the school-exercise. Very much more original is "The Knight and the Knave": indeed I should call this the first original thing, though it be a parody, that Praed did. To say that it reminds one in more than subject of *Rebecca and Rowena*, and that it was written some twenty years earlier, is to say a very great deal. Even here, however, the writer's ground is rented, not freehold. It is very different in such papers as "Old Boots" and "The Country Curate," while in the later prose contributed to *Knight's Quarterly* the improvement in originality is marked. "The Union Club" is amusing enough all through: but considering that it was written in 1823,

two years before Jeffrey asked the author of a certain essay on Milton "where he got that style," one passage of the speech put in the mouth of Macaulay is positively startling. "The Best Bat in the School" is quite delightful, and "My First Folly," though very unequal, contains in the introduction scene, between Vyvian Joyeuse and Margaret Orleans, a specimen of a kind of dialogue nowhere to be found before, so far as I know, and giving proof that, if Praed had set himself to it, he might have started a new kind of novel.

It does not appear, however, that his fancy led him with any decided bent to prose composition, and he very early deserted it for verse; though he is said to have, at a comparatively late period of his short life, worked in harness as a regular leader-writer for the *Morning Post* during more than a year. No examples of this work of his have been reprinted, nor, so far as I know, does any means of identifying them exist, though I personally should like to examine them. He was still at Cambridge when he drifted into another channel, which was still not his own channel, but in which he feathered his oars under two different flags with no small skill and dexterity. Sir George Young has a very high idea of his uncle's political verse, and places him "first among English writers, before Prior, before Canning, before the authors of the *Rolliad*, and far before Moore or any of the still anonymous contributors to the later London press." I cannot subscribe to this. Neither as Whig nor as Tory, neither as satirist of George the Fourth nor as satirist of the Reform Bill, does Praed seem to me to have been within a hundred miles of that elder schoolfellow of his who wrote

> All creeping creatures, venomous and low,
> Still blasphemous or blackguard, praise Lepaux.

He has nothing for sustained wit and ease equal to the best pieces of the *Fudge Family* and the *Two-penny Postbag*; and (for I do not know why one should not praise a man because he happens to be alive[1] and one's friend) I do not think he has the touch of the true political satirist as Mr Traill had it in *Professor Baloonatics Craniocracs*, or in that admirable satire on democracy which is addressed to the "Philosopher Crazed, from the Island of Crazes."

Indeed, by mentioning Prior, Sir George seems to put himself rather out of court. Praed *is* very nearly if not quite Prior's equal, but the sphere of neither was politics. Prior's political pieces are thin and poor beside his social verse, and with rare exceptions I could not put anything political of Praed's higher than the shoestring of "Araminta." Neither of these two charming poets seems to have felt seriously enough for political satire. Matthew, we know, played the traitor; and though Mackworth ratted to my own side, I fear it must be confessed that he did rat. I can only discover in his political verse two fixed principles, both of which no doubt did him credit, but which hardly, even when taken together, amount to a sufficient political creed. The one was fidelity to Canning and his memory: the other was impatience of the cant of the reformers. He could make admirable fun of Joseph Hume, and of still smaller fry like Waithman; he could attack Lord Grey's nepotism and doctrinairism fiercely enough. Once or twice, or, to be fair, more than once or twice, he struck out a happy, indeed a brilliant flash. He was admirable at what Sir George Young calls, justly enough, "political patter songs" such as,

> Young widowhood shall lose its weeds,
> Old kings shall loathe the Tories,

[1] Alas! not now (1923).

And monks be tired of telling beads,
And Blues of telling stories;
And titled suitors shall be crossed,
And famished poets married,
And Canning's motion shall be lost,
And Hume's amendment carried;
And Chancery shall cease to doubt,
And Algebra to prove,
And hoops come in, and gas go out
Before I cease to love.

He hit off an exceedingly savage and certainly not wholly just *Epitaph on the King of the Sandwich Islands* which puts the conception of George the Fourth that Thackeray afterwards made popular, and contains these felicitous lines:

The people in his happy reign,
Were blessed beyond all other nations:
Unharmed by foreign axe and chain,
Unhealed by civic innovations;
They served the usual logs and stones,
With all the usual rites and terrors,
And swallowed all their fathers' bones,
And swallowed all their father's errors.

When the fierce mob, with clubs and knives,
All swore that nothing should prevent them,
But that their representatives
Should actually represent them,
He interposed the proper checks,
By sending troops, with drums and banners,
To cut their speeches short, and necks,
And break their heads, to mend their manners.

Occasionally in a sort of middle vein between politics and society he wrote in the "patter" style just noticed quite admirable things like *Twenty-eight and Twenty-nine*. Throughout the great debates on Reform he rallied the reformers with the same complete and apparently useless superiority of wit and sense which has often, if not invariably, been shown at similar crises on the losing side. And once, on an ever-memorable occasion, he broke into those famous and most touching *Stanzas on seeing the Speaker Asleep*

which affect one almost to tears by their grace of form and by the perennial and indeed ever-increasing applicability of their matter.

Sleep, Mr Speaker: it's surely fair,
If you don't in your bed, that you should in your chair:
Longer and longer still they grow,
Tory and Radical, Aye and No;
Talking by night and talking by day;
Sleep, Mr Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr Speaker: slumber lies
Light and brief on a Speaker's eyes—
Fielden or Finn, in a minute or two,
Some disorderly thing will do;
Riot will chase repose away;
Sleep, Mr Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr Speaker; Cobbett will soon
Move to abolish the sun and moon;
Hume, no doubt, will be taking the sense
Of the House on a saving of thirteen-pence;
Grattan will growl or Baldwin bray;
Sleep, Mr Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr Speaker: dream of the time
When loyalty was not quite a crime,
When Grant was a pupil in Canning's school,
And Palmerston fancied Wood a fool.
Lord, how principles pass away!
Sleep, Mr Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr Speaker; sweet to men
Is the sleep that comes but now and then;
Sweet to the sorrowful, sweet to the ill,
Sweet to the children who work in a mill.
You have more need of sleep than they,
Sleep, Mr Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

But the chief merit of Praed's political verse as a whole seems to me to be that it kept his hand in, and enabled him to develop and refine the trick, above referred to, of playing on words so as to give a graceful turn to verse composed in his true vocation.

Of the verse so composed there are more kinds than one; though perhaps only in two kinds is the author absolutely at his best. There is first a certain class of

pieces which strongly recall Macaulay's *Lays* and may have had some connexion of origin with them. Of course those who are foolish enough to affect to see nothing good in *The Battle of the Lake Regillus*, or *Ivry*, or *The Armada*, will not like *Cassandra*, or *Sir Nicholas at Marston Moor*, or the *Covenanter's Lament for Bothwell Brigg*, or *Arminius*. Nevertheless they are fine in their way. *Arminius* is too long, and it suffers from the obvious comparison with Cowper's far finer *Boadicea*. But its best lines, such as the well-known

> I curse him by our country's gods,
> The terrible, the dark,
> The scatterers of the Roman rods,
> The quellers of the bark,

are excellent in the style, and *Sir Nicholas* is charming. But not here either did Apollo seriously wait for Praed. The later romances or tales are far better than the earlier. *The Legend of the Haunted Tree* shows in full swing that happy compound and contrast of sentiment and humour in which the writer excelled. And *The Teufelhaus* is, except *The Red Fisherman* perhaps, the best thing of its kind in English. These lines are good enough for anything:

> But little he cared, that stripling pale,
> For the sinking sun or the rising gale;
> For he, as he rode, was dreaming now,
> Poor youth, of a woman's broken vow,
> Of the cup dashed down, ere the wine was tasted,
> Of eloquent speeches sadly wasted,
> Of a gallant heart all burnt to ashes,
> And the Baron of Katzberg's long moustaches.

And these:

> Swift as the rush of an eagle's wing,
> Or the flight of a shaft from Tartar string,
> Into the wood Sir Rudolph went:
> Not with more joy the schoolboys run
> To the gay green fields when their task is done;
> Not with more haste the members fly,
> When Hume has caught the Speaker's eye.

But in *The Red Fisherman* itself there is nothing that is not good. It is very short, ten small pages only of some five-and-twenty lines each. But there is not a weak place in it from the moment when "the Abbot arose and closed his book" to the account of his lamentable and yet lucky fate and punishment whereof "none but he and the fisherman could tell the reason why." Neither of the two other practitioners who may be called the masters of this style, Hood and Barham, nor Praed himself elsewhere, nor any of his and their imitators has trodden the breadthless line between real terror and mere burlesque with so steady a foot.

Still not here was his "farthest," as the geographers say, nor in the considerable mass of smaller poems which practically defy classification. In them, as so often elsewhere in Praed, one comes across odd notes, stray flashes of genius which he never seems to have cared to combine or follow out, such as the unwontedly solemn *Time's Song*, the best wholly serious thing that he has done, and the charming *L'Inconnue*. But we find the perfect Praed, and we find him only, in the verses of society proper, the second part of the *Poems of Life and Manners* as they are headed, which began, as far as one can make out, to be written about 1826, and the gift of which Praed never lost, though he practised it little in the very last years of his life. Here, in a hundred pages, with a few to be added from elsewhere, are to be found some of the best-bred and best-natured verse within the English language, some of the most original and remarkable metrical experiments, a profusion of the liveliest fancy, a rush of the gayest rhyme. They begin with *The Vicar, vir nullâ donandus lauru.*

> [Whose] talk was like a stream, which runs
> With rapid change from rocks to roses:
> It slipped from politics to puns,
> It passed from Mahomet to Moses;

Beginning with the laws which keep
The planets in their radiant courses,
And ending with some precept deep
For dressing eels, or shoeing horses.

Three of the Vicar's companion *Everyday Characters* are good, but I think not so good as he; the fifth piece, however, *The Portrait of a Lady*, is quite his equal.

You'll be forgotten—as old debts
By persons who are used to borrow;
Forgotten—as the sun that sets,
When shines a new one on the morrow;
Forgotten—like the luscious peach
That blessed the schoolboy last September;
Forgotten—like a maiden speech,
Which all men praise, but none remember.

Yet ere you sink into the stream
That whelms alike sage, saint, and martyr,
And soldier's sword, and minstrel's theme,
And Canning's wit, and Gatton's charter,
Here, of the fortunes of your youth,
My fancy weaves her dim conjectures,
Which have, perhaps, as much of truth
As passion's vows, or Cobbett's lectures.

Here, and perhaps here first, at least in the order of the published poems, appears that curious mixture of pathos and quizzing, sentiment and satire, which has never been mastered more fully or communicated more happily than by Praed. But not even yet do we meet with it in its happiest form: nor is that form to be found in *Josephine* which is much better in substance than in manner, or in the half-social, half-political patter of *The Brazen Head*, or in *Twenty-eight and Twenty-nine*. It sounds first in the *Song for the Fourteenth of February*. No one, so far as I know, has traced any exact original[1]

[1] Since I wrote this I have been reminded by my friend Mr Mowbray Morris of Byron's

I enter thy garden of roses,
Beloved and fair Haidee. (1892.)

It is not impossible that this *is* the immediate original. But Praed has so improved on it as to deserve a new patent, just as Byron had improved on Gay who has something like it, as have Chesterfield and "Lady Mary" (1923).

for the altogether admirable metre which, improved and glorified later in *The Letter of Advice*, appears first in lighter matter still like this:

> Shall I kneel to a Sylvia or Celia,
> Whom no one e'er saw, or may see,
> A fancy-drawn Laura Amelia,
> An *ad libit* Anna Marie?
> Shall I court an initial with stars to it,
> Go mad for a G. or a J.,
> Get Bishop to put a few bars to it,
> And print it on Valentine's Day?

But every competent critic has seen in it the origin of the more gorgeous and full-mouthed, if not more accomplished and dexterous, rhythm in which Mr Swinburne has written *Dolores*, and the even more masterly dedication of the first *Poems and Ballads*. The shortening of the last line which the later poet has introduced is a touch of genius, but not perhaps greater than Praed's own recognition of the extraordinarily vivid and ringing qualities of the stanza. I profoundly believe that metrical quality is, other things being tolerably equal, the great secret of the enduring attraction of verse: and nowhere, not in the greatest lyrics, is that quality more unmistakable than in *The Letter of Advice*. I really do not know how many times I have read it; but I never can read it to this day without being forced to read it out loud like a schoolboy and mark with accompaniment of hand-beat such lines as

> Remember the thrilling romances
> We read on the bank in the glen:
> Remember the suitors our fancies
> Would picture for both of us then.
> They wore the red cross on their shoulder,
> They had vanquished and pardoned their foe—
> Sweet friend, are you wiser or colder?
> My own Araminta, say "No!"
>
> . . . . .
>
> He must walk—like a god of old story
> Come down from the home of his rest;

He must smile—like the sun in his glory,
On the buds he loves ever the best;
And oh! from its ivory portal
Like music his soft speech must flow!
If he speak, smile, or walk like a mortal,
My own Araminta, say "No!"

There are, metrically speaking, few finer couplets in English than the first of that second stanza. Looked at from another point of view, the mixture of the comic and the serious in the piece is remarkable enough; but not so remarkable, I think, as its extraordinary metrical accomplishment. There is not a note or a syllable wrong in the whole thing, but every sound and every cadence comes exactly where it ought to come, so as to be, in a delightful phrase of Southey's, "necessary and voluptuous and right."

It is no wonder that when Praed had discovered such a medium he should have worked it freely. But he never impressed on it such a combination of majesty and grace as in this letter of Medora Trevilian. As far as the metre goes I think the eight-lined stanzas of this piece better suited to it than the twelve-lined ones of *Good Night to the Season* and the first *Letter from Teignmouth*, but both are very delightful. Perhaps the first is the best known of all Praed's poems, and certainly some things in it, such as

The ice of her ladyship's manners,
The ice of his lordship's champagne,

are among the most quoted. But this antithetical trick, of which Praed was so fond, is repeated a little often in it; and it seems to me to lack the freshness as well as the fire of the *Advice*. On the other hand, the *Letter from Teignmouth* is the best thing that even Praed has ever done for combined grace and tenderness.

You once could be pleased with our ballads—
To-day you have critical ears;
You once could be charmed with our salads—
Alas! you've been dining with Peers;

You trifled and flirted with many—
  You've forgotten the when and the how;
There was one you liked better than any—
  Perhaps you've forgotten her now.
But of those you remember most newly,
  Of those who delight or enthral,
None love you a quarter so truly
  As some you will find at our Ball.

They tell me you've many who flatter,
  Because of your wit and your song:
They tell me—and what does it matter?—
  You like to be praised by the throng:
They tell me you're shadowed with laurel:
  They tell me you're loved by a Blue.
They tell me you're sadly immoral—
  Dear Clarence, that cannot be true!
But to me, you are still what I found you,
  Before you grew clever and tall;
And you'll think of the spell that once bound you;
  And you'll come—won't you come?—to our Ball!"

Is not that perfectly charming?

It is perhaps a matter of mere taste whether it is or is not more charming than pieces like *School and Schoolfellows* (the best of Praed's purely Eton poems) and *Marriage Chimes*, in which, if not Eton, the Etonian set also comes in. If I like these latter pieces less, it is not so much because of their more personal and less universal subjects as because their style is much less individual. The resemblance to Hood cannot be missed, and though I believe there is some dispute as to which of the two poets actually hit upon the particular style first, there can be little doubt that Hood attained to the greater excellence in it. The real sense and savingness of that doctrine of the "principal and most excellent things," which has sometimes been preached rather corruptly and narrowly, is that the best things that a man does are those that he does best. Now though

I wondered what they meant by stock,
  I wrote delightful Sapphics,

and

With no hard work but Bovney stream,
  No chill except Long Morning,

are very nice things, I do not think they are so good in their kind as the other things that I have quoted; and this, though the poem contains the following wholly delightful stanza in the style of the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy*:

> Tom Mill was used to blacken eyes
> Without the fear of sessions;
> Charles Medlar loathed false quantities
> As much as false professions;
> Now Mill keeps order in the land,
> A magistrate pedantic;
> And Medlar's feet repose unscanned
> Beneath the wide Atlantic.

The same may even be said of *Utopia*, a much-praised, often-quoted, and certainly very amusing poem, of *I'm not a Lover now*, and of others, which are also, though less exactly, in Hood's manner. To attempt to distinguish between that manner and the manner which is Praed's own is a rather perilous attempt; and the people who hate all attempts at reducing criticism to principle, and who think that a critic should only say clever things about his subject, will of course dislike me for it. But that I cannot help. I should say then that Hood had the advantage of Praed in purely serious poetry; for Araminta's bard never did anything at all approaching *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, *The Haunted House*, or a score of other things. He had also the advantage in pure broad humour. But where Praed excelled was in the mixed style, not of sharp contrast as in Hood's *Lay of the Desert Born* and *Demon Ship*, where from real pity and real terror the reader suddenly stumbles into pure burlesque, but of wholly blended and tempered humour and pathos. It is this mixed style in which I think his note is to be found as it is to be found in no other poet, and as it could hardly be found in any but one with Praed's peculiar talent and temper combined with his peculiar advantages of edu-

cation, fortune, and social atmosphere. He never had to "pump out sheets of fun" on a sick-bed for the printer's devil, like his less well-fated but assuredly not less well-gifted rival; and as his scholarship was exactly of the kind to refine, temper, and adjust his literary manner, so his society and circumstances were exactly of the kind to repress, or at least not to encourage, exuberance or boisterousness in his literary matter. There are I believe who call him trivial, even frivolous; and if this be done sincerely by any careful readers of *The Red Fisherman* and *The Letter of Advice* I fear I must peremptorily disable their judgment. But this appearance of levity is in great part due exactly to the perfect modulation and adjustment of his various notes. He never shrieks or guffaws: there is no horse-play in him, just as there is no tearing a passion to tatters. His slight mannerisms, more than once referred to, rarely exceed what is justified by good literary manners. His points are very often so delicate, so little insisted on or underlined, that a careless reader may miss them altogether; his "questionings" are so little "obstinate" that a careless reader may think them empty.

> Will it come with a rose or a brier?
> Will it come with a blessing or curse?
> Will its bonnets be lower or higher?
> Will its morals be better or worse?

The author of this perhaps seems to some a mere jesting Pilate, and if he does, they are quite right not to even try to like him.

I have seen disdainful remarks on those critics who, however warily, admire a considerable number of authors, as though they were coarse and omnivorous persons, unfit to rank with the delicates who can only relish one or two things in literature. But this is a foolish mistake. "One to one" is not "cursedly con-

fined" in the relation of book and reader; and a man need not be a Don Juan of letters to have a list of almost *mille e tre* loves in that department. He must indeed love the best or those among the best only, in the almost innumerable kinds, which is not a very severe restriction. And Praed is of this so fortunately numerous company. I do not agree with those who lament his early death on the ground of its depriving literature or politics of his future greatness. In politics he would most probably not have become anything greater than an industrious and respectable official; and in letters his best work was pretty certainly done. For it was a work that could only be done in youth. In his scholarly but not frigidly correct form, in his irregular sallies and flashes of a genius really individual as far as it went but never perhaps likely to go much farther, in the freshness of his imitations, in the imperfection of his originalities, Praed was the most perfect representative we have had or ever are likely to have of what has been called, with a perhaps reprehensible parody on great words, "the eternal undergraduate within us, who rejoices before life." He is thus at the very antipodes of Wertherism and Byronism, a light but gallant champion of cheerfulness and the joy of living. Although there is about him absolutely nothing artificial—the curse of the lighter poetry as a rule—and though he attains to deep pathos now and then, and once or twice (notably in *The Red Fisherman*) to a kind of grim earnestness, neither of these things is his real *forte*. Playing with literature and with life, not frivolously or without heart, but with no very deep cares and no very passionate feeling, is Praed's attitude whenever he is at his best. And he does not play at playing as many writers do: it is all perfectly genuine. Even Prior has not excelled such lines as these in one

of his early and by no means his best poems (an adaptation too), for mingled jest and earnest:

> But Isabel, by accident,
> Was wandering by that minute;
> She opened that dark monument
> And found her slave within it;
> *The clergy said the Mass in vain,*
> *The College could not save me:*
> *But life, she swears, returned again*
> *With the first kiss she gave me.*

Hardly, if at all, could he have kept up this attitude towards life after he had come to forty year; and he might have become either a merely intelligent and respectable person, which is most probable, or an elderly youth, which is of all things most detestable, or a caterwauler, or a cynic, or a preacher. From all these fates the gods mercifully saved him, and he abides with us (the presentation being but slightly marred by the injudicious prodigality of his editors) only as the poet of Medora's musical despair lest Araminta should derogate, of the Abbot's nightmare sufferings at the hands of the Red Fisherman, of the plaintive appeal after much lively gossip:

> And you'll come—*won't* you come?—to our Ball,

of all the pleasures, and the jests, and the tastes, and the studies, and the woes, provided only they are healthy and manly, of Twenty-five. Unhappy is the person of whom it can be said that he neither has been, is, nor ever will be in the temper and circumstances of which Praed's verse is the exact and consummate expression; not much less unhappy he for whom that verse does not perform the best perhaps of all the offices of literature, and call up, it may be in happier guise than that in which they once really existed, the many beloved shadows of the past.

III

GEORGE BORROW

In this paper I do not undertake to throw any new light on the little-known life of the author of *Lavengro*. Among the few people who knew Borrow intimately, surely some one will soon be found who will give to the world an account of his curious life, and perhaps some specimens of those "mountains of manuscript" which, as he regretfully declares, never could find a publisher—an impossibility which, if I may be permitted to offer an opinion, does not reflect any great credit on publishers. For the present purpose it is sufficient[1] to sum up the generally-known facts that Borrow was born in 1803 at East Dereham in Norfolk, his father being a captain in the army, who came of Cornish blood, his mother a lady of Norfolk birth and Huguenot extraction. His youth he has himself described in a fashion which nobody is likely to care to paraphrase. After the years of travel chronicled in *Lavengro*, he seems to have found scope for his philological and adventurous tendencies in the rather unlikely service of the Bible Society; and he sojourned in Russia and Spain to the great advantage of English literature. This occupied him during the greater part of the years from 1830 to 1840. Then he came back to his native country—or, at any rate, his native district—married a widow of some property at Lowestoft, and spent the last forty years of his life at Oulton Hall, near the piece of water which is thronged in summer

[1] And is probably still so: though of course a good deal has been added to our knowledge of Borrow and still more to discussions of him, since this was written. It's only claim, if it has any, lies in a certain pioneership, though of course that pioneership was not absolute (1923).

by all manner of sportsmen and others. He died but a few years ago; and even since his death he seems to have lacked the due meed of praise which the Lord Chief Justice of the equal foot usually brings, even to persons far less deserving than Borrow.

There is this difficulty in writing about him, that the audience must necessarily consist of fervent devotees on the one hand, and of complete infidels, or at least complete know-nothings, on the other. To any one who, having the faculty to understand either, has read *Lavengro* or *The Bible in Spain*, or even *Wild Wales*, praise bestowed on Borrow is apt to seem impertinence. To anybody else (and unfortunately the anybody else is in a large majority) praise bestowed on Borrow is apt to look like that very dubious kind of praise which is bestowed on somebody of whom no one but the praiser has ever heard. I cannot think of any single writer (Peacock himself is not an exception) who is in quite parallel case. And, as usual, there is a certain excuse for the general public. Borrow kept himself, during not the least exciting period of English history, quite aloof from English politics, and from the life of great English cities. But he did more than this. He is the only really considerable writer of his time in any modern European nation who seems to have taken absolutely no interest in current events, literary and other. Putting a very few allusions aside, he might have belonged to almost any period. His political idiosyncrasy will be noticed presently; but he, who lived through the whole period from Waterloo to Maiwand, has not, as far as I remember, mentioned a single English writer later than Scott and Byron. He saw the rise, and, in some instances, the death, of Tennyson, Thackeray, Macaulay, Carlyle, Dickens. There is not a reference to any one of them in his works.

He saw political changes such as no man for two centuries had seen, and (except the Corn Laws, to which he has some half-ironical allusions, and the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, which stirred his one active sentiment) he has referred to never a one. He seems in some singular fashion to have stood outside of all these things. His Spanish travels are dated for us by references to Doña Isabel and Don Carlos, to Mr Villiers and Lord Palmerston. But cut these dates out, and they might be travels of another century. His Welsh book proclaims itself as written in the full course of the Crimean War; but excise a few passages which bear directly on that event, and the most ingenious critic would be puzzled to "place" the composition. Shakespeare, we know, was for all time, not of one age only; but I think we may say of Borrow, without too severely or conceitedly marking the difference, that he was not of or for any particular age or time at all. If the celebrated query in Longfellow's *Hyperion*, "What is time?" had been addressed to him, his most appropriate answer, and one which he was quite capable of giving, would have been, "I really don't know."

To this singular historical vagueness has to be added a critical vagueness even greater. I am sorry that I am unable to confirm or to gainsay at first hand Borrow's wonderfully high estimate of certain Welsh poets. But if the originals are anything like his translations of them, I do not think that Ab Gwilym and Lewis Glyn Cothi, Gronwy Owen and Huw Morris can have been quite such mighty bards as he makes out. Fortunately, however, a better test presents itself. In one book of his, *Wild Wales*, there are two estimates of Scott's works. Borrow finds in an inn a copy of *Woodstock* (which he calls by its less known title of *The Cavalier*), and decides that it is "trashy": chiefly, it would appear,

because the portrait therein contained of Harrison, for whom Borrow seems, on one of his inscrutable principles of prejudice, to have had a liking, is not wholly favourable. He afterwards informs us that Scott's *Norman Horseshoe* (no very exquisite song at the best, and among Scott's somewhat less than exquisite) is "one of the most stirring lyrics of modern times," and that he sang it for a whole evening; evidently because it recounts a defeat of the Normans, whom Borrow, as he elsewhere tells us in sundry places, disliked for reasons more or less similar to those which made him like Harrison, the butcher. In other words, he could not judge a work of literature as literature at all. If it expressed sentiments with which he agreed, or called up associations which were pleasant to him, good luck to it; if it expressed sentiments with which he did not agree, and called up no pleasant associations, bad luck.

In politics and religion this curious and very John Bullish unreason is still more apparent. I suppose Borrow may be called, though he does not call himself, a Tory. He certainly was an unfriend to Whiggery, and a hater of Radicalism. He seems to have given up even the Corn Laws with a certain amount of regret, and his general attitude is quite Eldonian. But he combined with his general Toryism very curious Radicalisms of detail, such as are to be found in Cobbett (who, as appeared at last, and as all reasonable men should have always known, was really a Tory of a peculiar type), and in several other English persons. The Church, the Monarchy, and the Constitution generally were dear to Borrow, but he hated all the aristocracy (except those whom he knew personally) and most of the gentry. Also, he had the odd Radical sympathy for anybody who, as the vernacular has it, was "kept out of his rights." I do not know, but I should

think, that Borrow was a strong Tichbornite. In that curious book *Wild Wales*, where almost more of his real character appears than in any other, he has to do with the Crimean War. It was going on during the whole time of his tour, and he once or twice reports conversations in which, from his knowledge of Russia, he demonstrated beforehand to Welsh inquirers how improbable, not to say impossible, it was that the Russians should be beaten. But the thing that seems really to have interested him most was the case of Lieutenant P—— or Lieutenant Parry, whom he sometimes refers to in the fuller and sometimes in the less explicit manner. My own memories of 1854 are rather indistinct, and I confess that I have not taken the trouble to look up this celebrated case. As far as I can remember, and as far as Borrow's references here and elsewhere go, it was the doubtless lamentable but not uncommon case of a man who is difficult to live with, and who has to live with others. Such cases occur at intervals in every mess, college, and other similar aggregation of humanity. The person difficult to live with gets, to use an Oxford phrase, "drawn." If he is reformable he takes the lesson, and very likely becomes excellent friends with those who "drew" him. If he is not, he loses his temper, and evil results of one kind or another follow. Borrow's Lieutenant P—— seems unluckily to have been of the latter kind, and was, if I mistake not, recommended by the authorities to withdraw from a situation which, to him, was evidently a false and unsuitable one. With this Borrow could not away. He gravely chronicles the fact of his reading an "excellent article in a local paper on the case of Lieutenant P——"; and with no less gravity (though he was, in a certain way, one of the first humorists of our day) he suggests that the complaints of the martyred

P—— to the Almighty were probably not unconnected with our Crimean disasters. This curious parochialism pursues him into more purely religious matters. I do not know any other really great man of letters of the last three-quarters of a century of whose attitude Carlyle's famous words, "regarding God's universe as a larger patrimony of Saint Peter, from which it were well and pleasant to hunt the Pope," are so literally true. It was not in Borrow's case a case of *sancta simplicitas*. He has at times flashes of by no means orthodox sentiment, and seems to have fought, and perhaps hardly won, many a battle against the army of the doubters. But when it comes to the Pope, he is as single-minded an enthusiast as John Bunyan himself, whom, by the way, he resembles in more than one point. The attitude was, of course, common enough among his contemporaries[1]; indeed any man who has reached middle life, must remember numerous examples among his own friends and kindred. But in literature, and such literature as Borrow's, it is rare.

Yet again, the curiously piecemeal, and the curiously arbitrary character of Borrow's literary studies in languages other than his own, is noteworthy in so great a linguist. The entire range of French literature, old as well as new, he seems to have ignored altogether—I should imagine out of pure John Bullishness. He has very few references to German, though he was a good German scholar—a fact which I account for by the other fact, that in his earlier literary period German was fashionable, and that he never would have anything to do with anything that fashion favoured. Italian, though he certainly knew it well, is equally slighted. His education, if not his taste for languages, must have made him a tolerable (he never could have been an

[1] In 1866 (1923).

exact) classical scholar. But it is clear that insolent Greece and haughty Rome possessed no attraction for him. I question whether even Spanish would not have been too common a toy to attract him much, if it had not been for the accidental circumstances which connected him with Spain.

Lastly (for I love to get my devil's advocate work over), in Borrow's varied and strangely attractive gallery of portraits and characters, most observers must perceive the absence of the note of passion. I have sometimes tried to think that miraculous episode of Isopel Berners and the Armenian verbs, with the whole sojourn of Lavengro in the dingle, a mere wayward piece of irony—a kind of conscious ascetic myth. But I am afraid the interpretation will not do. The subsequent conversation with Ursula Petulengro under the hedge might be only a companion piece; even the more wonderful, though much less interesting, dialogue with the Irish girl in the last chapters of *Wild Wales* might be so rendered by a hardy exegete. But the negative evidence in all the books is too strong. It may be taken as positively certain that Borrow never was "in love," as the phrase is, and that he had hardly the remotest conception of what being in love means. It is possible that he was a most cleanly liver —it is possible that he was quite the reverse: I have not the slightest information either way. But that he never in all his life heard with understanding the refrain of the *Pervigilium*,

> Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet,

I take as certain.

The foregoing remarks have, I think, summed up all Borrow's defects, and it will be observed that even these defects have for the most part the attraction of a certain strangeness and oddity. If they had not been

accompanied by great and peculiar merits, he would not have emerged from the category of the merely bizarre, where he might have been left without further attention. But, as a matter of fact, all, or almost all, of his defects are not only counterbalanced by merits, but are themselves, in a great degree, exaggerations or perversions of what is intrinsically meritorious. With less wilfulness, with more attention to the literature, the events, the personages of his own time, with a more critical and common-sense attitude towards his own crotchets, Borrow could hardly have wrought out for himself (as he has to an extent hardly paralleled by any other prose writer who has not deliberately chosen supernatural or fantastic themes) the region of fantasy, neither too real nor too historical, which Joubert thought proper to the poet. Strong and vivid as Borrow's drawing of places and persons is, he always contrives to throw in touches which somehow give the whole the air of being rather a vision than a fact. Never was such a John-a-Dreams as this solid, pugilistic John Bull. Part of this literary effect of his is due to his quaint habit of avoiding, where he can, the mention of proper names. The description, for instance, of Old Sarum and Salisbury itself in *Lavengro* is sufficient to identify them to the most careless reader, even if the name of Stonehenge had not occurred on the page before; but they are not named. The description of Bettws-y-Coed in *Wild Wales*, though less poetical, is equally vivid. Yet here it would be quite possible for a reader, who did not know the place and its relation to other named places, to pass without any idea of the actual spot. It is the same with his frequent references to his beloved city of Norwich, and his less frequent references to his later home at Oulton. A paraphrase, an innuendo, a word to the wise he delights in, but

anything perfectly clear and precise he abhors. And by this means and others, which it might be tedious to trace out too closely, he succeeds in throwing the same cloudy vagueness over times as well as places and persons. A famous passage—perhaps the best known, and not far from the best he ever wrote—about Byron's funeral, fixes, of course, the date of the wondrous facts or fictions recorded in *Lavengro* to a nicety. Yet who, as he reads it and its sequel (for the separation of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* is merely arbitrary, though the second book is, as a whole, less interesting than the former), ever thinks of what was actually going on in the very positive and prosaic England of 1824–25? The later chapters of *Lavengro* are the only modern *Roman d'Aventures* that I know. The hero goes "overthwart and endlong," just like the figures whom all readers know in Malory, and some in his originals. I do not know that it would be more surprising if Borrow had found Sir Ozana dying at the chapel in Lyonesse, or had seen the full function of the Grail, though I fear he would have protested against that as popish. Without any apparent art, certainly without the elaborate apparatus which most prose tellers of fantastic tales use, and generally fail in using, Borrow spirits his readers at once away from mere reality. If his events are frequently as odd as a dream, they are always as perfectly commonplace and real for the moment as the events of a dream are—a little fact which the above-mentioned tellers of the above-mentioned fantastic stories are too apt to forget. It is in this natural romantic gift that Borrow's greatest charm lies. But it is accompanied and nearly equalled, both in quality and in degree, by a faculty for dialogue. Except Defoe and Dumas, I cannot think of any novelists who contrive to tell a story in dialogue and

to keep up the ball of conversation so well as Borrow; while he is considerably the superior of both in pure style and in the literary quality of his talk. Borrow's humour, though it is of the general class of the older English—that is to say, the pre-Addisonian—humorists, is a species quite by itself. It is rather narrow in range, a little garrulous, busied very often about curiously small matters, but wonderfully observant and true, and possessing a quaint dry savour as individual as that of some wines. A characteristic of this kind probably accompanies the romantic *ethos* more commonly than superficial judges both of life and literature are apt to suppose; but the conjunction is nowhere seen better than in Borrow. Whether humour can or cannot exist without a disposition to satire co-existing, is one of those abstract points of criticism for which the public of the present day has little appetite. It is certain (and that is what chiefly concerns us for the present) that the two were not dissociated in Borrow. His purely satirical faculty was very strong indeed, and probably if he had lived a less retired life it would have found fuller exercise. At present the most remarkable instance of it which exists is the inimitable portrait-caricature of the learned Unitarian, generally known as "Taylor of Norwich." I have somewhere (I think it was in Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*) seen this reflected on as a flagrant instance of ingratitude and ill-nature. The good Harriet, among whose numerous gifts nature had not included any great sense of humour, naturally did not perceive the artistic justification of the sketch, which I do not hesitate to call one of the most masterly things of the kind in literature.

Another Taylor, the well-known French baron of that name, is much more mildly treated, though with little less skill of portraiture. As for "the publisher"

of *Lavengro*, the portrait there, though very clever, is spoilt by rather too much evidence of personal animus, and by the absence of redeeming strokes; but it shows the same satiric power as the sketch of the worthy student of German who has had the singular ill-fortune to have his books quizzed by Carlyle, and himself quizzed by Borrow. It is a strong evidence of Borrow's abstraction from general society that with this satiric gift, and evidently with a total freedom from scruple as to its application, he should have left hardly anything else of the kind. It is indeed impossible to ascertain how much of the abundant character-drawing in his four chief books (all of which, be it remembered, are autobiographic and professedly historical) is fact and how much fancy. It is almost impossible to open them anywhere without coming upon personal sketches, more or less elaborate, in which the satiric touch is rarely wanting. The official admirer of "the grand Baintham" at remote Corcubion, the end of all the European world; the treasure-seeker, Benedict Mol; the priest at Cordova, with his revelations about the Holy Office; the Gibraltar Jew; are only a few figures out of the abundant gallery of *The Bible in Spain*. *Lavengro*, besides the capital and full-length portraits above referred to, is crowded with others hardly inferior, among which only one failure, the disguised priest with the mysterious name, is to be found. Not that even he has not good strokes and plenty of them, but that Borrow's prejudices prevented his hand from being free. But Jasper Petulengro, and Mrs Hearne, and the girl Leonora, and Isopel, that vigorous and slighted maid, and dozens of minor figures, of whom more presently, atone for him. *The Romany Rye* adds only minor figures to the gallery, because the major figures have appeared before; while the plan and sub-

ject of *Wild Wales* also exclude anything more than vignettes. But what admirable vignettes they are, and how constantly bitten in with satiric spirit, all lovers of Borrow know.

It is, however, perhaps time to give some more exact account of the books thus familiarly and curiously referred to; for Borrow most assuredly is not a popular writer[1]. Not long before his death *Lavengro*, *The Romany Rye*, and *Wild Wales* were only in their third edition, though the first was nearly thirty, and the last nearly twenty, years old. *The Bible in Spain* had, at any rate in its earlier days, a wider sale, but I do not think that even that is very generally known. I should doubt whether the total number sold, during some fifty years, of volumes surpassed in interest of incident, style, character and description by few books of the century, has equalled the sale, within any one of the last few years, of a fairly popular book by any fairly popular novelist of to-day. And there is not the obstacle to Borrow's popularity that there is to that of some other writers, notably the already-mentioned author of *Crotchet Castle*. No extensive literary cultivation is necessary to read him. A good deal even of his peculiar charm may be missed by a prosaic or inattentive reader, and yet enough will remain. But he has probably paid the penalty of originality, which allows itself to be mastered by quaintness, and which refuses to meet public taste at least halfway. It is certainly difficult at times to know what to make of Borrow. And the general public, perhaps excusably, is apt not to like things or persons when it does not know what to make of them.

Borrow's literary work, even putting aside the

[1] Hardly that, perhaps, even now: but much nearer to it than he was 40 years ago (1923).

"mountains of manuscript" which he speaks of as unpublished, was not inconsiderable. There were, in the first place, his translations, which, though no doubt not without value, do not much concern us here. There is, secondly, his early hackwork, his *Chaines de l'Esclavage*, which also may be neglected. Thirdly, there are his philological speculations or compilations, the chief of which is, I believe, his *Romano-Lavo-Lil*, the latest published of his works. But Borrow, though an extraordinary linguist, was a somewhat unchastened philologer, and the results of his lifelong philological studies appear to much better advantage from the literary than from the scientific point of view. Then there is *The Gypsies in Spain*, a very interesting book of its kind, marked throughout with Borrow's characteristics, but for literary purposes merged to a great extent in *The Bible in Spain*. And, lastly, there are the four original books, as they may be called, which, at great leisure, and writing simply because he chose to write, Borrow produced during the twenty years of his middle age. He was in his fortieth year when, in 1842, he published *The Bible in Spain*. *Lavengro* came nearly ten years later, and coincided with (no doubt it was partially stimulated by) the ferment over the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill. Its second part, *The Romany Rye*, did not appear till six afterwards, that is to say, in 1857, and its resuscitation of quarrels, which the country had quite forgotten (and when it remembered them was rather ashamed of), must be pronounced unfortunate. Last, in 1862, came *Wild Wales*, the characteristically belated record of a tour in the principality during the year of the Crimean War. On these four books Borrow's literary fame rests. His other works are interesting because they were written by the author of these, or because of their subjects, or because

of the effect they had on other men of letters, notably Longfellow and Mérimée, on the latter of whom Borrow had an especially remarkable influence. These four are interesting of themselves.

The earliest has been, I believe, and for reasons quite apart from its biblical subject perhaps deserves to be, the greatest general favourite, though its literary value is a good deal below that of *Lavengro*. *The Bible in Spain* records the journeys, which, as an agent of the Bible Society, Borrow took through the Peninsula at a singularly interesting time, the disturbed years of the early reign of Isabel Segunda. Navarre and Aragon, with Catalonia, Valencia, and Murcia, he seems to have left entirely unvisited; I suppose because of the Carlists. Nor did he attempt the southern part of Portugal; but Castile and Leon, with the north of Portugal and the south of Spain, he quartered[1] in the most interesting manner, riding everywhere with his servant and his saddle-bag of Testaments at, I should suppose, a considerable cost to the subscribers of the Society and at, it may be hoped, some gain to the propagation of evangelical principles in the Peninsula, but certainly with the results of extreme satisfaction to himself and of a very delightful addition to English literature. He was actually imprisoned at Madrid, and was frequently in danger from Carlists, and brigands, and severely orthodox ecclesiastics. It is possible to imagine a more ideally perfect missionary; but it is hardly possible to imagine a more ideally perfect traveller. His early habits of roughing it, his gipsy initiation, his faculties as a linguist, and his other faculties as a born vagrant, certain to fall on his feet anywhere, were all called into

[1] An ingenious carper when this first appeared particularly objected to this word, whereby he only showed his own ignorance. The use, especially in a sporting sense, for traversing ground backwards, forwards and crossways is perfectly good (1923).

operation. But he might have had all these advantages and yet lacked the extraordinary literary talent which the book reveals. In the first chapter there is a certain stiffness; but the passage of the Tagus in the second must have told every competent reader in 1842 that he had to deal with somebody quite different from the run of common writers, and thenceforward the book never flags till the end. How far the story is rigidly historical I should be very sorry to have to decide. The author makes a kind of apology in his preface for the amount of fact which has been supplied from memory. I daresay the memory was quite trustworthy, and certainly adventures are to the adventurous. We have had daring travellers enough during the last half-century, but I do not know that any one has ever had quite such a romantic experience as Borrow's ride across the Hispano-Portuguese frontier with a gipsy *contrabandista*, who was at the time a very particular object of police inquiry. I daresay the interests of the Bible Society required the adventurous journey to the wilds of Finisterra. But I feel that if that association had been a mere mundane company and Borrow its agent, troublesome shareholders might have asked awkward questions at the annual meeting[1]. Still, this sceptical attitude is only part of the official duty of the critic, just as, of course, Borrow's adventurous journeys into the most remote and interesting parts of Spain were part of the duty of the colporteur. The book is so delightful that, except when duty calls, no one would willingly take any exception to any part or feature of it. The constant change of scene, the romantic episodes of adventure, the kaleidoscope of characters, the crisp dialogue, the quaint reflection and comment relieve each other with-

[1] Some, but not I think full, light has since been shed on the attitude of these good hens to their not ugly but terribly adventurous duckling (1923).

out a break. I do not know whether it is really true to Spain and Spanish life, and, to tell the exact truth, I do not in the least care. If it is not Spanish it is remarkably human and remarkably literary, and those are the chief and principal things.

Lavengro, which followed, has all the merits of its predecessor and more. It is a little spoilt in its later chapters by the purpose, the antipapal purpose, which appears still more fully in *The Romany Rye*. But the strong and singular individuality of its flavour as a whole would have been more than sufficient to carry off a greater fault. There are, I should suppose, few books the successive pictures of which leave such an impression on the reader who is prepared to receive that impression. The word picture is here rightly used, for in all Borrow's books more or less, and in this particularly, the narrative is anything but continuous. It is a succession of dissolving views which grow clear and distinct for a time and then fade off into vagueness before once more appearing distinctly; nor has this mode of dealing with a subject ever been more successfully applied than in *Lavengro*. At the same time the mode is one singularly difficult of treatment by any reviewer. To describe *Lavengro* with any chance of distinctness to those who have not read it, it would be necessary to give a series of sketches in words, like those famous ones of the pictures in *Jane Eyre*. East Dereham, the Viper Collector, the French Prisoners at Norman Cross, the Gipsy Encampment, the Sojourn in Edinburgh (with a passing view of Scotch schoolboys only inferior, as everything is, to Sir Walter's history of Green-breeks), the Irish Sojourn (with the horse-whispering and the "dog of peace,") the settlement in Norwich (with Borrow's compulsory legal studies and his very uncompulsory excursions into Italian, Hebrew,

Welsh, Scandinavian, anything that obviously would not pay), the new meeting with the gipsies in the Castle Field, the fight—only the first of many excellent fights —these are but a few of the memories which rise to every reader of even the early chapters of this extraordinary book, and they do not cover its first hundred pages in the common edition. Then his father dies and the born vagrant is set loose for vagrancy. He goes to London, with a stock of translations which is to make him famous, and a recommendation from Taylor of Norwich to "the publisher." The publisher exacted something more than his pound of flesh in the form of Newgate Lives and review articles, and paid, when he did pay, in bills of uncertain date which were very likely to be protested. But Borrow won through it all, making odd acquaintances with a young man of fashion (his least lifelike sketch); with an apple-seller on London Bridge, who was something of a "fence" and had erected Moll Flanders (surely the oddest patroness ever so selected) into a kind of patron saint; with a mysterious Armenian merchant of vast wealth, whom the young man, according to his own account, finally put on a kind of filibustering expedition against both the Sublime Porte and the White Czar, for the restoration of Armenian independence. At last, out of health with perpetual work and low living, out of employ, his friends beyond call, he sees destruction before him, writes *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Sell* (name of fortunate omen!) almost at a heat and on a capital, fixed and floating, of eighteenpence, and disposes of it for twenty pounds by the special providence of the Muses. With this twenty pounds his journey into the blue distance begins. He travels, partly by coach, to somewhere near Salisbury, and gives the first of the curiously unfavourable portraits of stage coachmen,

which remain to check Dickens's rose-coloured representations of Mr Weller and his brethren. I incline to think that Borrow's was likely to be the truer picture. According to him the average stage coachman was anything but an amiable character, greedy, insolent to all but persons of wealth and rank, a hanger-on of those who might claim either; bruiser enough to be a bully but not enough to be anything more; in short, one of the worst products of civilisation. From civilisation itself, however, Borrow soon disappears, as far as any traceable signs go. He journeys, not farther west but northwards, into the West Midlands and the marches of Wales. He buys a tinker's beat and fit-out from a feeble vessel of the craft, who has been expelled by "the Flaming Tinman," a half-gipsy of robustious behaviour. He is met by old Mrs Hearne, the mother-in-law of his gipsy friend Jasper Petulengro, who resents a Gorgio's initiation in gipsy ways, and very nearly poisons him by the wily aid of her grand-daughter Leonora. He recovers, thanks to a Welsh travelling preacher and to castor oil. And then, when the Welshman has left him, comes the climax and turning-point of the whole story, the great fight with Jem Bosvile, "the Flaming Tinman." The much-abused adjective Homeric belongs in sober strictness to this immortal battle, which has the additional interest not thought of by Homer (for goddesses do not count) that Borrow's second and guardian angel is a young woman of great attractions and severe morality, Miss Isopel (or Belle) Berners, whose extraction, allowing for the end sinister, is honourable, and who, her hands being fully able to keep her head, has sojourned without ill fortune in the Flaming Tinman's very disreputable company. Bosvile, vanquished by pluck and good fortune rather than strength, flees the place with his wife. Isopel remains

behind and the couple take up their joint residence, a residence of perfect propriety, in this dingle, the exact locality of which I have always longed to know, that I might make an autumnal pilgrimage to it. Isopel, Brynhild as she is, would apparently have had no objection to be honourably wooed. But her eccentric companion confines himself to teaching her "I love" in Armenian, which she finds unsatisfactory; and she at last departs, leaving a letter which tells Mr Borrow some home truths. And, even before this catastrophe has been reached, *Lavengro* itself ends with a more startling abruptness than perhaps any nominally complete book before or since.

It would be a little interesting to know whether the continuation, *The Romany Rye*, which opens as if there had been no break whatever, was written continuously or with a break. At any rate its opening chapters contain the finish of the lamentable history of Belle Berners, which must induce every reader of sensibility to trust that Borrow, in writing it, was only indulging in his very considerable faculty of perverse romancing. The chief argument to the contrary is, that surely no man, however imbued with romantic perversity, would have made himself cut so poor a figure, as Borrow here does, without cause. The gipsies reappear to save the situation, and a kind of minor Belle Berners drama is played out with Ursula, Jasper's sister. Then the story takes another of its abrupt turns. Jasper, half in generosity it would appear, half in waywardness, insists on Borrow purchasing a thorough-bred horse which is for sale, advances the money, and despatches him across England to Horncastle Fair to sell it. The usual Le Sagelike adventures occur, the oddest of them being the hero's residence for some considerable time as clerk and storekeeper at a great roadside inn. At

last he reaches Horncastle, and sells the horse to advantage. Then the story closes almost as abruptly and mysteriously as that of *Lavengro*, with a long and in parts, it must be confessed, rather dull conversation between the hero, the Hungarian who has bought the horse, and the dealer who has acted as go-between. This dealer, in honour of Borrow, of whom he has heard through the gipsies, executes the wasteful and very meaningless ceremony of throwing two bottles of old rose champagne, at a guinea apiece, through the window. Even this is too dramatic a finale for Borrow's unconquerable singularity, and he adds a short dialogue between himself and a recruiting sergeant. And after this again there comes an appendix containing an *apologia* for *Lavengro*, a great deal more polemic against Romanism, some historical views of more originality than exactness, and a diatribe against gentility, Scotchmen, Scott, and other black beasts of Borrow's. This appendix has received from some professed admirers of the author a great deal more attention than it deserves. In the first place, it was evidently written in a fit of personal pique; in the second, it is chiefly argumentative, and Borrow had absolutely no argumentative faculty. To say that it contains a great deal of quaint and piquant writing is only to say that its writer wrote it, and though the description of "Charlie-over-the-waterism" probably does not apply to any being who ever lived, except to a few schoolgirls of both sexes, it has a strong infusion of Borrow's satiric gift. As for the diatribes against gentility, Borrow has only done very clumsily what Thackeray had done long before without clumsiness. It can escape nobody who has read his books with a seeing eye that he was himself exceedingly proud, not merely of being a gentleman in the ethical sense, but of being one in

the sense of station and extraction—as, by the way, the decriers of British snobbishness usually are, so that no special blame attaches to Borrow for the inconsistency. Only let it be understood, once for all, that to describe him as "the apostle of the ungenteel" is either to speak in riddles or quite to misunderstand his real merits and abilities.

I believe that some of the small but fierce tribe of Borrovians are inclined to resent the putting of the last of this remarkable series, *Wild Wales*, on a level with the other three. With such I can by no means agree. *Wild Wales* has not, of course, the charm of unfamiliar scenery and the freshness of youthful impression which distinguish *The Bible in Spain*; it does not attempt anything like the novel-interest of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*; and though, as has been pointed out above, something of Borrow's secret and mysterious way of indicating places survives, it is a pretty distinct itinerary over great part of the actual principality. I have followed most of its tracks on foot myself, and nobody who wants a Welsh guide-book can take a pleasanter one, though he might easily find one much less erratic. It may thus have, to superficial observers, a positive and prosaic flavour as compared with the romantic character of the other three. But this distinction is not real. The tones are a little subdued, as was likely to be the case with an elderly gentleman of fifty, travelling with his wife and stepdaughter, and not publishing the record of his travels till he was nearly ten years older. The localities are traceable on the map and in Murray, instead of being the enchanted dingles and the half-mythical woods of *Lavengro*. The personages of the former books return no more, though, with one of his most excellent touches of art, the author has suggested the contrast of youth and age by a single

gipsy interview in one of the later chapters. Borrow, like all sensible men, was at no time indifferent to good food and drink, especially good ale; but the trencher plays in *Wild Wales* a part, the importance of which may perhaps have shocked some of our latter-day delicates, to whom strong beer is a word of loathing, and who wonder how on earth our grandfathers and fathers used to dispose of "black strap." A very different set of readers may be repelled by the strong literary colour of the book, which is almost a Welsh anthology in parts. But those few who can boast themselves to find the whole of a book, not merely its parts, and to judge that whole when found, will be not least fond of *Wild Wales*. If they have, as every reader of Borrow should have, the spirit of the roads upon them, and are never more happy than when journeying on "Shanks his mare," they will, of course, have in addition a peculiar and personal love for it. It is, despite the interludes of literary history, as full of Borrow's peculiar conversational gift as any of its predecessors. Its thumbnail sketches, if somewhat more subdued and less elaborate, are not less full of character. John Jones, the Dissenting weaver, who served Borrow at once as a guide and a whetstone of Welsh in the neighbourhood of Llangollen; the "kenfigenous" Welshwoman who first, but by no means last, exhibited the curious local jealousy of a Welsh-speaking Englishman; the doctor and the Italian barometer-seller at Cerrig-y-Druidion; the "best Pridydd of the world" in Anglesey, with his unlucky addiction to beer and flattery; the waiter at Bala; the "ecclesiastical cat" (a cat worthy to rank with those of Southey and Gautier); the characters of the walk across the hills from Machynlleth to the Devil's Bridge; the scene at the public-house on the Glamorgan Border, where the above-mentioned jealousy comes out so

strongly; the mad Irishwoman, Johanna Colgan (a masterpiece by herself); and the Irish girl, with her hardly inferior history of the faction-fights of Scotland Road (which Borrow, by a mistake, has put in Manchester instead of in Liverpool); these make a list which I have written down merely as they occurred to me, without opening the book, and without prejudice to another list, nearly as long, which might be added. *Wild Wales*, too, because of its easy and direct opportunity of comparing its description with the originals, is particularly valuable as showing how sober, and yet how forcible, Borrow's descriptions are. As to incident, one often, as before, suspects him of romancing, and it stands to reason that his dialogue, written long after the event, must be full of the "cocked-hat-and-cane" style of narrative. But his description, while it has all the vividness, has also all the faithfulness and sobriety of the best landscape-painting. See a place which Kingsley or Mr Ruskin, or some other master of our decorative school, has described—much more one which has fallen into the hands of the small fry of their imitators—and you are almost sure to find that it has been overdone. This is never, or hardly ever, the case with Borrow, and it is so rare a merit, when it is found in a man who does not shirk description where necessary, that it deserves to be counted to him at no grudging rate.

But there is no doubt that the distinguishing feature of the book is its survey of Welsh poetical literature. I have already confessed that I am not qualified to judge the accuracy of Borrow's translations, and by no means disposed to over-value them. But any one who takes an interest in literature at all, must, I think, feel that interest not a little excited by the curious Old-Mortality-like peregrinations which the author of

Wild Wales made to the birth-place, or the burial-place as it might be, of bard after bard, and by the short but masterly accounts which he gives of the objects of his search. Of none of the numerous subjects of his linguistic rovings does Borrow seem to have been fonder, putting Romany aside, than of Welsh. He learnt it in a peculiarly contraband manner originally, which, no doubt, endeared it to him; is was little known to and often ridiculed by most Englishmen, which was another attraction; and it was extremely unlikely to "pay" in any way, which was a third. Perhaps he was not such an adept in it as he would have us believe—the respected Cymmrodorion Society or Professor[1] Rhys must settle that. But it needs no knowledge of Welsh whatever to perceive the genuine enthusiasm, and the genuine range of his acquaintance with the language from the purely literary side. When he tells us that Ab Gwilym was a greater poet than Ovid or Chaucer I feel considerable doubts whether he was quite competent to understand Ovid and little or no doubt that he has done wrong to Chaucer. But when, leaving these idle comparisons, he luxuriates in details about Ab Gwilym himself, and his poems, and his lady loves, and so forth, I have no doubt about Borrow's appreciation (casual prejudices always excepted) of literature. Nor is it easy to exaggerate the charm which he has added to Welsh scenery by this constant identification of it with the men, and the deeds, and the words of the past.

Little has been said hitherto of Borrow's more purely literary characteristics from the point of view of formal criticism. They are sufficiently interesting. He unites with a general plainness of speech and writing, not unworthy of Defoe or Cobbett, a very odd and complicated mannerism, which, as he had the wisdom to make

[1] Afterwards Sir John and now dead (1923).

it the seasoning and not the main substance of his literary fare, is never disgusting. The secret of this may be, no doubt, in part sought in his early familiarity with a great many foreign languages, some of whose idioms he transplanted into English: but this is by no means the whole of the receipt. Perhaps it is useless to examine analytically that receipt's details, or rather (for the analysis may be said to be compulsory on any one who calls himself a critic), useless to offer its results to the reader. One point which can escape no one who reads with his eyes open is the frequent, yet not too abundant, repetition of the same or very similar words —a point wherein much of the secret of persons so dissimilar as Carlyle, Borrow, and Thackeray consists. This is a well-known fact—so well known indeed that when a person who desires to acquire style hears of it, he often goes and does likewise, with what result all reviewers know. The peculiarity of Borrow, as far as I can mark it, is that, despite his strong mannerism, he never relies on it as too many others, great and small, are wont to do. The character sketches, of which, as I have said, he is so abundant a master, are always put in the plainest and simplest English. So are his flashes of ethical reflection, which, though like all ethical reflections often one-sided, are of the first order of insight. I really do not know that, in the mint-and-anise-and-cummin order of criticism, I have more than one charge to make against Borrow. That is that he, like other persons of his own and the immediately preceding time, is wont to make a most absurd misuse of the word individual. With Borrow "individual" means simply "person": a piece of literary gentility of which he, of all others, ought to have been ashamed.

But such criticism has but very little propriety in

the case of a writer, whose attraction is neither mainly nor in any very great degree one of pure form. His early critics compared him to Le Sage, and the comparison is natural. But if it is natural, it is not extraordinarily critical. Both men wrote of vagabonds, and to some extent of picaroons; both neglected the conventionalities of their own language and literature; both had a singular knowledge of human nature. But Le Sage is one of the most impersonal of all great writers, and Borrow is one of the most personal. And it is undoubtedly in the revelation of his personality that great part of his charm lies. It is, as has been fully acknowledged, a one-sided, wrong-headed, not always quite right-hearted personality. But it is intensely English, possessing at the same time a certain strain of romance which the other John Bulls of literature mostly lack, and which John Bunyan, the king of them all, only reached within the limits, still more limited than Borrow's, of purely religious, if not purely ecclesiastical, interests. A born grumbler; a person with an intense appetite for the good things of this life; profoundly impressed with, and at the same time sceptically critical of, the bad or good things of another life; apt, as he somewhere says himself, "to hit people when he is not pleased"; illogical; constantly right in general, despite his extremely roundabout ways of reaching his conclusion; sometimes absurd, and yet full of humour; alternately prosaic and capable of the highest poetry; George Borrow, Cornishman on the father's side and Huguenot on the mother's, managed to display in perfection most of the characteristics of what once was, and let us hope has not quite ceased to be, the English type. If he had a slight overdose of Celtic blood and Celtic peculiarity, it was more than made up by the readiness of literary expression which it gave him. He, if any one,

bore an English heart, though, as there often has been in Englishmen, there was something perhaps more as well as something less than English in his fashion of expression.

To conclude, Borrow has—what after all is the chief mark of a great writer—distinction. "Try to be like somebody," said the unlucky critic-bookseller to Lamartine; and he has been gibbeted for it, very justly, for the best part of a century. It must be admitted that "try not to be like other people," though a much more fashionable, is likely to be quite as disastrous a recommendation. But the great writers, whether they try to be like other people or try not to be like them (and sometimes in the first case most of all), succeed only in being themselves, and that is what Borrow does. His attraction is rather complex, and different parts of it may, and no doubt do, apply with differing force to this and that reader. One may be fascinated by his pictures of an unconventional and open-air life, the very possibilities of which are to a great extent lost in our days, though patches of ground here and there in England (notably the tracts of open ground between Cromer and Wells in Borrow's own county) still recall them. To others he may be attractive for his sturdy patriotism, or his adventurous and wayward spirit, or his glimpses of superstition and romance. The racy downrightness of his talk; the axioms, such as that to the Welsh alewife, "The goodness of ale depends less upon who brews it than upon what it is brewed of"; or the sarcastic touches as that of the dapper shopkeeper, who, regarding the funeral of Byron, observed, "I, too, am frequently unhappy," may each and all have their votaries. His literary devotion to literature would, perhaps, of itself attract few; for, as has been hinted, it partook very much of the character of will-

worship, and there are few people who like any will-worship in letters except their own; but it adds to his general attraction, no doubt, in the case of many. That neither it, nor any other of his claims, has yet forced itself as it should on the general public is an undoubted fact; a fact not difficult to understand, though rather difficult fully to explain, at least without some air of superior knowingness and taste. Yet he has, as has been said, his devotees, and I think they are likely rather to increase than to decrease. He wants editing, for his allusive fashion of writing probably makes a great part of him nearly unintelligible to those who have not from their youth up devoted themselves to the acquisition of useless knowledge. There ought to be a good life of him. The great mass of his translations, published and unpublished, and the smaller mass of his early hackwork, no doubt deserve judicious excerption. If professed philologers were not even more ready than most other specialists each to excommunicate all the others except himself and his own particular Johnny Dods of Farthing's Acre, it would be rather interesting to hear what some modern men of many languages have to say to Borrow's linguistic achievements. But all these things are only desirable embellishments and assistances. His real claims and his real attractions are comprised in four small volumes, the purchase of which, under modern arrangements of booksellers, leaves some change out of a sovereign, and which will about half fill the ordinary bag used for briefs and dynamite. It is not a large literary baggage, and it does not attempt any very varied literary kinds. If not exactly a novelist in any one of his books, Borrow is a romancer, in the true and not the ironic sense of the word, in all of them. He has not been approached in merit by any romancer who has pub-

lished books in our days[1], except Charles Kingsley; and his work, if less varied in range and charm than Kingsley's, has a much stronger and more concentrated flavour. Moreover, he is the one English writer of our time, and perhaps of times still farther back, who seems never to have tried to be anything but himself; who went his own way all his life long with complete indifference to what the public or the publishers liked, as well as to what canons of literary form and standards of literary perfection seemed to indicate as best worth aiming at. A most self-sufficient person was Borrow, in the good and ancient sense, as well as, to some extent, in the sense which is bad and modern. And what is more, he was not only a self-sufficient person, but one very sufficient also to the tastes of all those who love good English and good literature[2].

[1] *I.e.* up to the end of 1885. As always, unless with special notice, I was comparing dead men with dead only (1923).

[2] As in some other cases the passage of years has added to our knowledge of the subject of this paper: but not so much, I venture to think, as to antiquate it.

IV

PEACOCK

In the year 1875 Mr Bentley conferred no small favour upon lovers of English literature by reprinting, in compact form and good print, the works of Thomas Love Peacock, up to that time scattered and in some cases not easily obtainable. So far as the publisher was concerned, nothing more could reasonably have been demanded; it is not easy to say quite so much of the editor, the late Sir Henry Cole. His editorial labours were indeed considerably lightened by assistance from other hands. Lord Houghton contributed a critical preface, which has the ease, point, and grasp of all his critical monographs. Miss Edith Nicolls, the novelist's granddaughter, supplied a short biography, written with much simplicity and excellent good taste. But as to editing in the proper sense—introduction, comment, illustration, explanation—there is next to none of it in the book. The principal thing, however, was to have Peacock's delightful work conveniently accessible, and that the issue of 1875 accomplished. The author is still by no means universally or even generally known; though he has been something of a critic's favourite. Almost the only dissenter, as far as I know, among critics, is Mrs Oliphant, who has not merely confessed herself, in her book on the literary history of Peacock's time, unable to comprehend the admiration expressed by certain critics for *Headlong Hall* and its fellows, but is even, if I do not mistake her, somewhat sceptical of the complete sincerity of that admiration. There is no need to argue the point with this agreeable practitioner of Peacock's own art. A certain well-known passage

of Thackeray, about ladies and *Jonathan Wild*, will sufficiently explain her own inability to taste Peacock's persiflage. As for the genuineness of the relish of those who can taste him there is no way that I know to convince sceptics. For my own part I can only say that, putting aside scattered readings of his work in earlier days, I think I have read the novels through on an average once a year ever since their combined appearance[1].

Peacock was born at Weymouth on 18th October, 1785. His father (who died a year or two after his birth) was a London merchant; his mother was the daughter of a naval officer. He seems during his childhood to have done very much what he pleased, though, as it happened, study always pleased him; and his gibes in later life at public schools and universities lose something of their point when it is remembered that he was at no university, at no school save a private one, and that he left even that private school when he was thirteen. He seems, however, to have been very well grounded there, and on leaving it he conducted his education and his life at his own pleasure for many years. He published poems before he was twenty, and he fell in love shortly after he was twenty-two. The course of this love did not run smooth, and the lady, marrying some one else, died shortly afterwards. She lived in Peacock's memory till his death, sixty years later, which event is said to have been heralded (in accordance with not the least poetical of the many poetical superstitions of dreaming) by frequent visions of this shadowy love of the past. Probably to distract himself, Peacock, who had hitherto attempted no profession, accepted the rather unpromising post of under-secretary to Admiral Sir Home Popham on board ship.

[1] Till my copy went with the rest of my library (1923).

His mother, in her widowhood, and he himself had lived much with his sailor grandfather, and he was always fond of naval matters. But it is not surprising to find that his occupation, though he kept it for something like a year, was not to his taste. He gave it up in the spring of 1809, and returned to leisure, poetry, and pedestrianism. The *Genius of the Thames*, a sufficiently remarkable poem, was the result of the two latter fancies. A year later he went to Wales and met his future wife, Jane Griffith, though he did not marry her for ten years more. He returned frequently to the principality, and in 1812 made, at Nant Gwillt, the acquaintance of Shelley and his wife Harriet. This was the foundation of a well-known friendship, which has supplied by far the most solid and trustworthy materials existing for the poet's biography. It was Wales, too, that furnished the scene of his first and far from worst novel *Headlong Hall*, which was published in 1816. From 1815 to 1819 Peacock lived at Marlow, where his intercourse with Shelley was resumed, and where he produced not merely *Headlong Hall* but *Melincourt* (the most unequal, notwithstanding many charming sketches, of his works), the delightful *Nightmare Abbey* (with a caricature, as genius caricatures, of Shelley for the hero), and the long and remarkable poem of *Rhododaphne*.

During the whole of this long time, that is to say up to his thirty-fourth year, with the exception of his year of secretaryship, Peacock had been his own master. He now, in 1819, owed curtailment of his liberty but considerable increase of fortune to a long-disused practice on the part of the managers of public institutions, of which Sir Henry Taylor gave another interesting example. The directors of the East India Company offered him a clerkship because he was a clever novelist

and a good Greek scholar. He retained his place ("a precious good place too," as Thackeray with good-humoured envy says of it in *The Hoggarty Diamond*) with due promotion for thirty-seven years, and retired from it in 1856 with a large pension. He had married Miss Griffith very shortly after his appointment; in 1822 *Maid Marian* appeared, and in 1823 Peacock took a cottage, which became after a time his chief and latterly his only residence, at Halliford, near his beloved river. For some years he published nothing, but 1829 and 1831 saw the production of perhaps his two best books, *The Misfortunes of Elphin* and *Crotchet Castle*. After *Crotchet Castle*, official duties and perhaps domestic troubles (for his wife was a helpless invalid) interrupted his literary work for more than twenty years, an almost unexampled break in the literary activity of a man so fond of letters. In 1852 he began to write again as a contributor to *Fraser's Magazine*. It is rather unfortunate that no complete republication, nor even any complete list of these articles, has been made[1]. The papers on Shelley and the charming story of *Gryll Grange* were the chief of them. The author was an old man when he wrote this last, but he survived it six years, and died on 23rd January, 1866, having latterly lived very much alone. Indeed, after Shelley's death he seems never to have had any very intimate friend except Lord Broughton, with whose papers most of Peacock's correspondence was long locked up.

There is a passage in Shelley's *Letter to Maria Gisborne* which has been often quoted before, but which must necessarily be quoted again whenever Peacock's life and literary character are discussed:

> And there
> Is English P——, with his mountain Fair

[1] Some additions have been made since: but nothing of much importance (1923).

> Turned into a flamingo, that shy bird
> That gleams i' the Indian air. Have you not heard
> When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
> His best friends hear no more of him? But you
> Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
> With his milk-white Snowdonian Antelope
> Matched with his Camelopard. *His fine wit*
> *Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;*
> A strain too learnèd for a shallow age,
> Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page
> Which charms the chosen spirits of his time,
> Fold itself up for a serener clime
> Of years to come, and find its recompense
> In that just expectation.

The enigmas in this passage (where it is undisputed that "English P——" is Peacock) have much exercised the commentators. That Miss Griffith, after her marriage, while still remaining a Snowdonian antelope, should also have been a flamingo, is odd enough; but this as well as the "camelopard" (probably turning on some private jest then intelligible enough to the persons concerned, but dark to others) is not particularly worth illuminating. The italicised words describing Peacock's wit are more legitimate subjects of discussion. They seem to me, though not perhaps literally explicable after the fashion of the duller kind of commentator, to contain both a very happy description of Peacock's peculiar humour, and a very sufficient explanation of the causes which have, both then and since, made that humour palatable rather to the few than to the many. Not only is Peacock peculiarly liable to the charge of being too clever, but he uses his cleverness in a way peculiarly bewildering to those who like to have "This is a horse" writ large under the presentation of the animal. His "rascally comparative" fancy, and the abundant stores of material with which his reading provided it, lead him perpetually to widen "the wound," till it is not surprising that "the knife" (the particular satirical or polemical point that he is urging)

gets "lost in it." This weakness, if it be one, has in its different ways of operation all sorts of curious results. One is, that his personal portraits are perhaps farther removed from faithful representations of the originals than the personal sketches of any other writer, even among the most deliberate misrepresenters. There is, indeed, a droll topsy-turvy resemblance to Shelley throughout the Scythrop of *Nightmare Abbey*, but there Peacock was hardly using the knife at all. When he satirises persons, he goes so far away from their real personalities that the libel ceases to be libellous. It is difficult to say whether Mr Mystic, Mr Flosky, or Mr Skionar is least like Coleridge; and Southey, intensely sensitive as he was to criticism, need not have lost his equanimity over Mr Feathernest. A single point suggested itself to Peacock, that point suggested another, and so on and so on, till he was miles away from the start. The inconsistency of his political views has been justly, if somewhat plaintively, reflected on by Lord Houghton in the words, "the intimate friends of Mr Peacock may have understood his political sentiments, but it is extremely difficult to discover them from his works." I should, however, myself say that, though it may be extremely difficult to deduce any definite political sentiments from Peacock's works, it is very easy to see in them a general and not inconsistent political attitude—that of intolerance of the vulgar and the stupid. Stupidity and vulgarity not being (fortunately or unfortunately) monopolised by any political party, and being (no doubt unfortunately) often condescended to by both, it is not surprising to find Peacock—especially with his noble disregard of apparent consistency and the inveterate habit of pillar-to-post joking, which has been commented on—distributing his shafts with great impartiality on Trojan

and Greek; on the opponents of reform in his earlier manhood, and on the believers in progress during his later; on virtual representation and the telegraph; on barouche-driving as a gentleman's profession, and lecturing as a gentleman's profession. But this impartiality (or, if anybody prefers it, inconsistency) has naturally added to the difficulties of some readers with his works. It is time, however, to endeavour to give some idea of the gay variety of those works themselves.

Although there are few novelists who observe plot less than Peacock, there are few also who are more regular in the particular fashion in which they disdain plot. Peacock is in fiction what the dramatists of the school of Ben Jonson down to Shadwell are in comedy —he works in "humours." It ought not to be, but perhaps is, necessary to remind the reader that this is by no means the same thing in essence, though accidentally it very often is the same, as being a humourist. The dealer in humours takes some fad or craze in his characters, some minor ruling passion, and makes his profit out of it. Generally (and almost always in Peacock's case) he takes if he can one or more of these humours as a central point, and lets the others play and revolve in a more or less eccentric fashion round it. In almost every book of Peacock's there is a host who is possessed by the cheerful mania for collecting other maniacs round him. Harry Headlong of Headlong Hall, Esquire, a young Welsh gentleman of means, and of generous though rather unchastened taste, finding, as Peacock says, in the earliest of his gibes at the universities, that there are no such things as men of taste and philosophy in Oxford, assembles a motley host in London, and asks them down to his place at Llanberis. The adventures of the visit (ending up with several weddings) form the scheme of the book, as

indeed repetitions of something very little different form the scheme of all the other books, with the exception of *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, and perhaps *Maid Marian*. Of books so simple in one way, and so complex in others, it is impossible and unnecessary to give any detailed analysis. But each contains characteristics which contribute too much to the knowledge of Peacock's idiosyncrasy to pass altogether unnoticed. The contrasts in *Headlong Hall* between the pessimist Mr Escot, the optimist Mr Foster, and the happy-mean man Mr Jenkison (who inclines to both in turn, but on the whole rather to optimism), are much less amusing than the sketches of Welsh scenery and habits, the passages of arms with representatives of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* (which Peacock always hated), and the satire on "improving," craniology, and other passing fancies of the day. The book also contains the first and most unfriendly of those sketches of clergymen of the Church of England which Peacock gradually softened till, in Dr Folliott and Dr Opimian, his curses became blessings altogether. The Reverend Dr Gaster is an ignoble brute, though not quite life-like enough to be really offensive. But the most charming part of the book by far (for its women are mere lay figures) is to be found in the convivial scenes. *Headlong Hall* contains, besides other occasional verse of merit, two drinking-songs—"Hail to the Headlong," and the still better "A Heel-tap! a heel-tap! I never could bear it"—songs not quite so good as those in the subsequent books, but good enough to make any reader think with a gentle sigh of the departure of good fellowship from the earth. Undergraduates and Scotchmen (and even in their case the fashion is said to be dying[1]) alone practise at the present day the full rites of Comus.

[1] Dead with both now, some say (1923).

Melincourt, published, and indeed written, very soon after *Headlong Hall*, is a much more ambitious attempt. It is some three times the length of its predecessor, and is, though not much longer than a single volume of some three-volume novels, the longest book that Peacock ever wrote. It is also much more ambitiously planned; the twice attempted abduction of the heiress, Anthelia Melincourt, giving something like a regular plot, while the introduction of Sir Oran Haut-ton (an orang-outang whom the eccentric hero, Forester, has domesticated and intends to introduce to parliamentary life) can only be understood as aiming at a regular satire on the whole of human life, conceived in a milder spirit than *Gulliver*, but belonging in some degree to the same class. Forester himself, a disciple of Rousseau, a fervent anti-slavery man who goes to the length of refusing his guests sugar, and an ideologist in many other ways, is also an ambitious sketch; and Peacock has introduced episodes after the fashion of eighteenth-century fiction, besides a great number of satirical excursions dealing with his enemies of the Lake school, with paper money, and with many other things and persons. The whole, as a whole, has a certain heaviness. The enthusiastic Forester is a little of a prig, and a little of a bore; his friend the professorial Mr Fax proses dreadfully; the Oran Haut-ton scenes, amusing enough of themselves, are overloaded (as is the whole book) with justificative selections from Buffon, Lord Monboddo, and other authorities. The portraits of Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Canning, and others, are neither like, nor in themselves very happy, and the heroine Anthelia is sufficiently uninteresting to make us extremely indifferent whether the virtuous Forester or the *roué* Lord Anophel Achthar gets her. On the other hand, detached passages are in the author's very

best vein; and there is a truly delightful scene between Lord Anophel and his chaplain Grovelgrub, when the athletic Sir Oran has not only foiled their attempt on Anthelia, but has mast-headed them on the top of a rock perpendicular. But the gem of the book is the election for the borough of One-Vote—a very amusing farce on the subject of rotten boroughs. Mr Forester has bought one of the One-Vote seats for his friend the Orang, and, going to introduce him to the constituency, falls in with the purchaser of the other seat, Mr Sarcastic, who is a practical humorist of the most accomplished kind. The satirical arguments with which Sarcastic combats Forester's enthusiastic views of life and politics, the elaborate spectacle which he gets up on the day of nomination, and the free fight which follows, are recounted with extraordinary spirit. Nor is the least of the attractions of the book an admirable drinking-song, superior to either of those in *Headlong Hall*, though perhaps better known to most people by certain Thackerayan reminiscences of it than in itself:

THE GHOSTS

In life three ghostly friars were we,
And now three friendly ghosts we be.
Around our shadowy table placed,
The spectral bowl before us floats:
With wine that none but ghosts can taste
We wash our unsubstantial throats.
Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—three merry
ghosts are we:
Let the ocean be port and we'll think it good sport
To be laid in that Red Sea.

With songs that jovial spectres chaunt,
Our old refectory still we haunt.
The traveller hears our midnight mirth:
"Oh list," he cries, "the haunted choir!
The merriest ghost that walks the earth
Is now the ghost of a ghostly friar."
Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—three merry
ghosts are we:
Let the ocean be port and we'll think it good sport
To be laid in that Red Sea.

In the preface to a new edition of *Melincourt*, which Peacock wrote nearly thirty years later, and which contains a sort of promise of *Gryll Grange*, there is no sign of any dissatisfaction on the author's part with the plan of the earlier book; but in his next, which came quickly, he changed that plan very decidedly. *Nightmare Abbey* is the shortest, as *Melincourt* is the longest, of his tales; and as *Melincourt* is the most unequal and the most clogged with heavy matter, so *Nightmare Abbey* contains the most unbroken tissue of farcical, though not in the least coarsely farcical, incidents and conversations. The misanthropic Scythrop (whose habit of Madeira-drinking has made some exceedingly literal people sure that he really could not be intended for the water-drinking Shelley); his yet gloomier father, Mr Glowry; his intricate entanglements with the lovely Marionetta and the still more beautiful Celinda; his fall between the two stools; his resolve to commit suicide; the solution of that awkward resolve—are all simply delightful. Extravagant as the thing is, its brevity and the throng of incidents and jokes prevent it from becoming in the least tedious. The pessimist-fatalist Mr Toobad, with his "innumerable proofs of the temporary supremacy of the devil," and his catchword "the devil has come among us, having great wrath," appears just enough, and not too much. The introduced sketch of Byron as Mr Cypress would be the least happy thing of the piece if it did not give occasion for a capital serious burlesque of Byronic verse, the lines, "There is a fever of the spirit," which, as better known than most of Peacock's verse, need not be quoted. Mr Flosky, a fresh caricature of Coleridge, is even less like the original than Mr Mystic, but he is much more like a human being, and in himself is great fun. An approach to a more charitable view of the clergy is discoverable in the curate

Mr Larynx, who, if not extremely ghostly, is neither a sot nor a sloven. But the quarrels and reconciliations between Scythrop and Marionetta, his invincible inability to make up his mind, the mysterious advent of Marionetta's rival, and her residence in hidden chambers, the alternate sympathy and repulsion between Scythrop and those elder disciples of pessimism, his father and Mr Toobad—all the contradictions of Shelley's character, in short, with a suspicion of the incidents of his life brought into the most ludicrous relief, must always form the great charm of the book. A tolerably rapid reader may get through it in an hour or so, and there is hardly a more delightful hour's reading of anything like the same kind in the English language, either for the incidental strokes of wit and humour, or for the easy mastery with which the whole is hit off. It contains, moreover, another drinking-catch, "Seamen Three," which, though it is, like its companion, better known than most of Peacock's songs, may perhaps find a place:

Seamen three! What men be ye?
Gotham's three wise men we be.
Whither in your bowl so free?
To rake the moon from out the sea.
The bowl goes trim, the moon doth shine,
And our ballast is old wine;
And your ballast is old wine.

Who art thou so fast adrift?
I am he they call Old Care.
Here on board we will thee lift.
No: I may not enter there.
Wherefore so? 'Tis Jove's decree
In a bowl Care may not be;
In a bowl Care may not be.

Fear ye not the waves that roll?
No: in charmèd bowl we swim.
What the charm that floats the bowl?
Water may not pass the brim.
The bowl goes trim, the moon doth shine,
And our ballast is old wine;
And your ballast is old wine.

A third song sung by Marionetta, "Why are thy looks so blank, Grey Friar?" is as good in another way; nor should it be forgotten that the said Marionetta, who has been thought to have some features of the luckless Harriet Shelley, is Peacock's first lifelike study of a girl, and one of his pleasantest.

The book which came out four years after, *Maid Marian*, has, I believe, been much the most popular and the best known of Peacock's short romances. It owed this popularity, in great part, doubtless, to the fact that the author has altered little in the well-known and delightful old story, and has not added very much to its facts, contenting himself with illustrating the whole in his own satirical fashion. But there is also no doubt that the dramatisation of *Maid Marian* by Planché and Bishop as an operetta helped, if it did not make, its fame. The snatches of song through the novel are more frequent than in any other of the books, so that Mr Planché must have had but little trouble with it. Some of these snatches are among Peacock's best verse, such as the famous "Bramble Song," the great hit of the operetta, the equally well-known, "Oh, bold Robin Hood," and the charming snatch:

> For the tender beech and the sapling oak,
> That grow by the shadowy rill,
> You may cut down both at a single stroke,
> You may cut down which you will;
>
> But this you must know, that as long as they grow,
> Whatever change may be,
> You never can teach either oak or beech
> To be aught but a greenwood tree.

This snatch, which, in its mixture of sentiment, truth, and what may be excusably called "rollick," is very characteristic of its author, and is put in the mouth of Brother Michael, practically the hero of the piece, and the happiest of the various workings up of

Friar Tuck, despite his considerable indebtedness to a certain older friar, whom we must not call "of the funnels." That Peacock was a Pantagruelist to the heart's core is evident in all his work; but his following of Master Francis is nowhere clearer than in *Maid Marian*, and it no doubt helps us to understand why those who cannot relish Rabelais should look askance at Peacock. For the rest, no book of Peacock's requires such brief comment as this charming pastoral, which was probably little less in Thackeray's mind than *Ivanhoe* itself when he wrote *Rebecca and Rowena*. The author draws in (it would be hardly fair to say drags in) some of his stock satire on courts, the clergy, the landed gentry, and so forth; but the very nature of the subject excludes the somewhat tedious digressions which mar *Melincourt*, and which once or twice menace, though they never actually succeed in spoiling, the unbroken fun of *Nightmare Abbey*.

The Misfortunes of Elphin, which followed after an interval of seven years, is, I believe, the least generally popular of Peacock's works, though (not at all for that reason) it happens to be my own favourite. The most curious instance of this general unpopularity is the entire omission, as far as I am aware, of any reference to it in any of the popular guide-books to Wales. One piece of verse, indeed, the "War-song of Dinas Vawr," a triumph of easy verse and covert sarcasm, has had some vogue, but the rest is only known to Peacockians. The abundance of Welsh lore which, at any rate in appearance, it contains, may have had something to do with this; though the translations or adaptations, whether faithful or not, are the best literary renderings of Welsh known to me. Something also, and probably more, is due to the saturation of the whole from beginning to end with Peacock's driest humour. Not only

is the account of the sapping and destruction of the embankment of Gwaelod an open and continuous satire on the opposition to Reform, but the whole book is written in the spirit and manner of *Candide*—a spirit and manner which Englishmen have generally been readier to relish, when they relish them at all, in another language than in their own. The respectable domestic virtues of Elphin and his wife Angharad, the blameless loves of Taliesin and the Princess Melanghel, hardly serve even as a foil to the satiric treatment of the other characters. The careless incompetence of the poetical King Gwythno, the coarser vices of other Welsh princes, the marital toleration or blindness of Arthur, the cynical frankness of the robber King Melvas, above all, the drunkenness of the immortal Seithenyn, give the humorist themes which he caresses with inexhaustible affection, but in a manner no doubt very puzzling, if not shocking, to matter-of-fact readers. Seithenyn, the drunken prince and dyke-warden, whose carelessness lets in the inundation, is by far Peacock's most original creation (for Scythrop, as has been said, is rather a humorous distortion of the actual than a creation). His complete self-satisfaction, his utter fearlessness of consequences, his ready adaptation to whatever part, be it prince or butler, presents itself to him, and above all, the splendid topsy-turviness of his fashion of argument, make Seithenyn one of the happiest, if not one of the greatest, results of whimsical imagination and study of human nature. "They have not"—says the somewhile prince, now King Melvas's butler, when Taliesin discovers him twenty years after his supposed death—"they have not made it [his death] known to me, for the best of all reasons, that one can only know the truth. For if that which we think we know is not truth, it is something which we

do not know. A man cannot know his own death. For while he knows anything he is alive; at least, I never heard of a dead man who knew anything, or pretended to know anything: if he had so pretended I should have told him to his face that he was no dead man." How nobly consistent is this with his other argument in the days of his princedom and his neglect of the embankment! Elphin has just reproached him with the proverb, "Wine speaks in the silence of reason." "I am very sorry," said Seithenyn, "that you see things in a wrong light. But we will not quarrel, for three reasons: first, because you are the son of the king, and may do and say what you please without any one having a right to be displeased; second, because I never quarrel with a guest, even if he grows riotous in his cups; third, because there is nothing to quarrel about. And perhaps that is the best reason of the three; or rather the first is the best, because you are the son of the king; and the third is the second, that is the second best, because there is nothing to quarrel about; and the second is nothing to the purpose, because, though guests will grow riotous in their cups in spite of my good orderly example, God forbid that I should say that is the case with you. And I completely agree in the truth of your remark that reason speaks in the silence of wine."

Crotchet Castle, the last but one of the series, which was published two years after *Elphin* and nearly thirty before *Gryll Grange*, has been already called the best; and the statement is not inconsistent with the description already given of *Nightmare Abbey* and of *Elphin*. For *Nightmare Abbey* is chiefly farce, and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* is chiefly sardonic persiflage. *Crotchet Castle* is comedy of a high and varied kind. Peacock has returned in it to the machinery of a country house

with its visitors, each of whom is more or less of a crotcheteer; and has thrown in a little romantic interest in the suit of a certain unmoneyed Captain Fitzchrome to a noble damsel who is expected to marry money, as well as in the desertion and subsequent rescue of Susannah Touchandgo, daughter of a levanting financier. The charm of the book, however, which distinguishes it from all its predecessors, is the introduction of characters neither ridiculous nor simply good in the persons of the Rev. Dr Folliott and Lady Clarinda Bossnowl, Fitzchrome's beloved. "Lady Clarinda," says the captain, when the said Lady Clarinda has been playing off a certain not unladylike practical joke on him, "is a very pleasant young lady"; and most assuredly she is, a young lady (in the nineteenth century and in prose) of the tribe of Beatrice, if not even of Rosalind. As for Dr Folliott, the author is said to have described him as his amends for his earlier clerical sketches, and the amends are ample. A stout Tory, a fellow of infinite jest, a lover of good living, an inveterate paradoxer, a pitiless exposer of current cants and fallacies, and, lastly, a tall man of his hands, Dr Folliott is always delightful, whether he is knocking down thieves, or annihilating, in a rather Johnsonian manner, the economist, Mr McQuedy, and the journalist, Mr Eavesdrop, or laying down the law as to the composition of breakfast and supper, or using strong language as to "the learned friend" (Brougham), or bringing out, partly by opposition and partly by irony, the follies of the transcendentalists, the fops, the doctrinaires, and the mediævalists of the party. The book, moreover, contains the last and not the least of Peacock's admirable drinking-songs:

> If I drink water while this doth last,
> May I never again drink wine;

For how can a man, in his life of a span,
Do anything better than dine?
We'll dine and drink, and say if we think
That anything better can be;
And when we have dined, wish all mankind
May dine as well as we.

And though a good wish will fill no dish,
And brim no cup with sack,
Yet thoughts will spring as the glasses ring
To illumine our studious track.
O'er the brilliant dreams of our hopeful schemes
The light of the flask shall shine;
And we'll sit till day, but we'll find the way
To drench the world with wine.

The song is good in itself, but it is even more interesting as being the last product of Peacock's Anacreontic vein. Almost a generation passed before the appearance of his next and last novel, and though there is plenty of good eating and drinking in *Gryll Grange*, the old fine rapture had disappeared in society meanwhile, and Peacock obediently took note of the disappearance. It is considered, I believe, a mark of barbarian tastes to lament the change. But I am not certain that the Age of Apollinaris and lectures has yet produced anything that can vie as literature with the products of the ages of Wine and Song.

Gryll Grange, however, in no way deserves the name of a dry stick. It is, next to *Melincourt*, the longest of Peacock's novels, and it is entirely free from the drawbacks of the forty-years-older book. Mr Falconer, the hero, who lives in a tower alone with seven lovely and discreet foster-sisters, has some resemblances to Mr Forester, but he is much less of a prig. The life and the conversation bear, instead of the marks of a young man's writing, the marks of the writing of one who has seen the manners and cities of many other men, and the personages throughout are singularly lifelike. The loves of the second hero and heroine, Lord Curryfin and

Miss Niphet, are much more interesting than their names would suggest. And the most loquacious person of the book, the Rev. Dr Opimian, if he is somewhat less racy than Dr Folliott, is not less agreeable. One main charm of the novel lies in its vigorous criticism of modern society in phases which have not yet passed away. "Progress" is attacked with curious ardour; and the battle between literature and science, which in our days even Mr Matthew Arnold waged but as one *cauponans bellum*, is fought with a vigour that is a joy to see. It would be rather interesting to know whether Peacock, in planning the central incident of the play (an "Aristophanic comedy," satirising modern ways), was aware of the existence of Mansel's delightful parody of the "Clouds." But "Phrontisterion" has never been widely known out of Oxford, and the bearing of Peacock's own performance is rather social than political. Not the least noteworthy thing in the book is the practical apology which is made in it to Scotchmen and political economists (two classes whom Peacock had earlier persecuted) in the personage of Mr McBorrowdale, a candid friend of Liberalism, who is extremely refreshing. And besides the Aristophanic comedy, *Gryll Grange* contains some of Peacock's most delightful verse, notably the really exquisite stanzas on "Love and Age."

The book is the more valuable because of the material it supplies, in this and other places, for rebutting the charges that Peacock was a mere Epicurean, or a mere carper. Independently of the verses just named, and the hardly less perfect "Death of Philemon," the prose conversation shows how delicately and with how much feeling he could think on those points of life where satire and jollification are out of place. For the purely modern man, indeed, it might be well to begin the

reading of Peacock with *Gryll Grange*, in order that he may not be set out of harmony with his author by the robuster but less familiar tones, as well as by the rawer though not less vigorous workmanship, of *Headlong Hall* and its immediate successors. The happy mean between the heart on the sleeve and the absence of heart has scarcely been better shown than in this latest novel.

I have no space here to go through the miscellaneous work which completes Peacock's literary baggage. His regular poems, all early, are very much better than the work of many men who have won a place among British poets. His criticism, though not great in amount, is good; and he is especially happy in the kind of miscellaneous trifle (such as his trilingual poem on a white-bait dinner), which is generally thought appropriate to "university wits." But the characteristics of these miscellanies are not very different from the characteristics of his prose fiction, and, for purposes of discussion, may be included with them.

Lord Houghton has defined and explained Peacock's literary idiosyncrasy as that of a man of the eighteenth century belated and strayed in the nineteenth. It is always easy to improve on a given pattern, but I certainly think that this definition of Lord Houghton's (which, it should be said, is not given in his own words) needs a little improvement. For the differences which strike us in Peacock—the easy joviality, the satirical view of life, the contempt of formulas and of science—though they certainly distinguish many chief literary men of the eighteenth century from most chief literary men of the nineteenth, are not specially characteristic of the eighteenth century itself. They are found in the seventeenth, in the Renaissance, in classical antiquity —wherever, in short, the art of letters and the art of

life have had comparatively free play. The chief differentia of Peacock is a differentia common among men of letters; that is to say, among men of letters who are accustomed to society, who take no sacerdotal or singing-robe view of literature, who appreciate the distinction which literary cultivation gives them over the herd of mankind, but who by no means take that distinction too seriously. Aristophanes, Horace, Lucian, Rabelais, Montaigne, Saint-Evremond, these are all Peacock's literary ancestors, each, of course, with his own difference in especial and in addition. Aristophanes was more of a politician and a patriot, Lucian more of a freethinker, Horace more of a simple *poco-curante*. Rabelais may have had a little inclination to science itself (he would soon have found it out if he had lived a little later), Montaigne may have been more of a pure egotist, Saint-Evremond more of a man of society, and of the verse and prose of society. But they all had the same *ethos*, the same love of letters as letters, the same contempt of mere progress as progress, the same relish for the simpler and more human pleasures, the same good fellowship, the same tendency to escape from the labyrinth of life's riddles by what has been called the humour-gate, the same irreconcilable hatred of stupidity and vulgarity and cant. The eighteenth century has, no doubt, had its claim to be regarded as the special flourishing time of this mental state urged by many others besides Lord Houghton; but I doubt[1] whether the claim can be sustained, at any rate to the detriment of other times, and the men of other times. That century took itself too seriously —a fault fatal to the claim at once. Indeed, the truth is that while this attitude has in some periods been

[1] Rather less now than I did in 1886 (see *The Peace of the Augustans*), but still to some extent (1923).

very rare, it cannot be said to be the peculiar, still less the universal, characteristic of any period. It is a personal not a periodic distinction; and there are persons who might make out a fair claim to it even in the depths of the Middle Ages or of the nineteenth century.

However this may be, Peacock certainly held the theory of those who take life easily, who do not love anything very much except old books, old wine, and a few other things, not all of which perhaps need be old, who are rather inclined to see the folly of it than the pity of it, and who have an invincible tendency, if they tilt at anything at all, to tilt at the prevailing cants and arrogances of the time. These cants and arrogances of course vary. The position occupied by monkery at one time may be occupied by physical science at another; and a belief in graven images may supply in the third century the target, which is supplied by a belief in the supreme wisdom of majorities in the nineteenth. But the general principles—the cult of the Muses and the Graces for their own sake, and the practice of satiric archery at the follies of the day—appear in all the elect of this particular election, and they certainly appear in Peacock. The results no doubt are distasteful, not to say shocking, to some excellent people. It is impossible to avoid a slight chuckle when one thinks of the horror with which some such people must read Peacock's calm statement, repeated I think more than once, that one of his most perfect heroes "found, as he had often found before, that the more his mind was troubled, the more madeira he could drink without disordering his head." I have no doubt that the United Kingdom Alliance, if it knew this dreadful sentence (but probably the study of the United Kingdom Alliance is not much in Peacock),

would like to burn all the copies of *Gryll Grange* by the hands of Mr Berry[1], and make the reprinting of it a misdemeanour, if not a felony. But it is not necessary to follow Sir Wilfrid Lawson, or to be a believer in education, or in telegraphs, or in majorities, in order to feel the repulsion which some people evidently feel for the manner of Peacock. With one sense absent and another strongly present it is impossible for any one to like him. The present sense is that which has been rather grandiosely called the sense of moral responsibility in literature. The absent sense is that sixth, seventh, or eighth sense, called a sense of humour, and about this there is no arguing. Those who have it, instead of being quietly and humbly thankful, are perhaps a little too apt to celebrate their joy in the face of the afflicted ones who have it not; the afflicted ones, who have it not, only follow a general law in protesting that the sense of humour is a very worthless thing, if not a complete humbug. But there are others of whom it would be absurd to say that they have no sense of humour, and yet who cannot place themselves at the Peacockian point of view, or at the point of view of those who like Peacock. His humour is not their humour; his wit not their wit. Like one of his own characters (who did not show his usual wisdom in the remark), they "must take pleasure in the thing represented before they can take pleasure in the representation." And in the things that Peacock represents they do not take pleasure. That gentlemen should drink a great deal of burgundy and sing songs during the process, appears to them at the best childish, at the worst horribly wrong. The prince-butler Seithenyn is a reprobate old man, who was unfaithful to his trust and shamelessly given to sensual indulgence.

[1] The Ketch of the period (1923).

Dr Folliott, as a parish priest, should not have drunk so much wine; and it would have been much more satisfactory to hear more of Dr Opimian's sermons and district visiting, and less of his dinners with Squire Gryll and Mr Falconer. Peacock's irony on social and political arrangements is all sterile, all destructive, and the sentiment that "most opinions that have anything to be said for them are about two thousand years old" is a libel on mankind. They feel, in short, for Peacock the animosity, mingled with contempt, which the late M. Amiel felt for "clever mockers."

It is probably useless to argue with any such. It might, indeed, be urged in all seriousness that the Peacockian attitude is not in the least identical with the Mephistophelian; that it is based simply on the very sober and arguable ground that human nature is always very much the same, liable to the same delusions and the same weaknesses; and that the oldest things are likely to be best, not for any intrinsic or mystical virtue of antiquity, but because they have had most time to be found out in, and have not been found out. It may further be argued, as it has often been argued before, that the use of ridicule as a general criterion can do no harm, and may do much good. If the thing ridiculed be of God, it will stand; if it be not, the sooner it is laughed off the face of the earth the better. But there is probably little good in urging all this. Just as a lover of the greatest of Greek dramatists must recognise at once that it would be perfectly useless to attempt to argue Lord Coleridge[1] out of the idea that Aristophanes, though a genius, was vulgar and base of soul, so to go a good deal lower in the scale of years, and somewhat lower in the scale of genius, everybody who rejoices in the author of *Aristophanes*

[1] The first Lord (1923).

in London must see that he has no chance of converting any person who does not like Peacock. The middle term is not present, the disputants do not in fact use the same language. The only thing to do is to recommend this particular pleasure to those who are capable of being pleased by it, and to whom, as no doubt it is to a great number, it is pleasure yet untried.

It is well to go about enjoying it with a certain caution. The reader must not expect always to agree with Peacock, who not only did not always agree with himself, but was also a man of almost ludicrously strong prejudices. He hated paper money; whereas the only feeling[1] that most of us have on that subject is that we have not always as much of it as we should like. He hated Scotchmen, and there are many of his readers who without any claim to Scotch blood, but knowing the place and the people, will say,

> That better wine and better men
> We shall not meet in May,

or for the matter of that in any other month[2]. Partly because he hated Scotchmen, and partly because in his earlier days Sir Walter was a pillar of Toryism, he hated Scott, and has been guilty not merely of an absurd and no doubt partly humorous comparison of the Waverley novels to pantomimes, but of more definite criticisms which will bear the test of examination as badly. His strictures on a famous verse of *A Dream of Fair Women* are indefensible, though there is perhaps more to be said for the accompanying gibe at Sir John Millais's endeavour to carry out the description of Cleopatra in black (chiefly black) and white. The reader of Peacock must never mind his author trampling on his, the reader's, favourite corns;

[1] Especially now (1923).

[2] Written ten years before I had any reason to curry favour in North Britain (1923).

or rather he must lay his account with the agreeable certainty that Peacock will shortly afterwards trample on other corns which are not at all his favourites. For my part I am quite willing to accept these conditions. And I do not find that my admiration for Coleridge, and my sympathy with those who opposed the first Reform Bill, and my inclination to dispute the fact that Oxford is only a place of "unread books," make me like Peacock one whit the less. It is the law of the game, and those who play the game must put up with its laws. And it must be remembered that, at any rate in his later and best books, Peacock never wholly "took a side." He has always provided some personage or other who reduces all the whimsies and prejudices of his characters, even including his own, under a kind of dry light. Such is Lady Clarinda, who regards all the crotcheteers of Crotchet Castle with the same benevolent amusement; such Mr McBorrowdale, who, when he is requested to settle the question of the superiority or inferiority of Greek harmony and perspective to modern, replies, "I think ye may just buz that bottle before you." (Alas! to think that if a man used the word "buz" nowadays some wiseacre would accuse him of vulgarity or of false English.) The general criticism in his work is always sane and vigorous, even though there may be flaws in the particular censures; and it is very seldom that even in his utterances of most flagrant prejudice anything really illiberal can be found. He had read much too widely and with too much discrimination for that. His reading had been corrected by too much of the cheerful give-and-take of social discussion, his dry light was softened and coloured by too frequent rainbows, the Apollonian rays being reflected on Bacchic dew. Anything that might otherwise seem hard and harsh in Peacock's perpetual

ridicule is softened and mellowed by this pervading good fellowship which, as it is never pushed to the somewhat extravagant limits of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, so it distinguishes Peacock himself from the authors to whom in pure style he is most akin, and to whom Lord Houghton has already compared him—the French tale-tellers from Anthony Hamilton to Voltaire. In these, perfect as their form often is, there is constantly a slight want of geniality, a perpetual clatter and glitter of intellectual rapier and dagger which sometimes becomes rather irritating and teasing to ear and eye. Even the objects of Peacock's severest sarcasm, his Galls and Vamps and Eavesdrops, are allowed to join in the choruses and the bumpers of his easy-going symposia. The sole nexus is not cash payment but something much more agreeable, and it is allowed that even Mr Mystic had "some super-excellent madeira." Yet how far the wine is from getting above the wit in these merry books is not likely to escape even the most unsympathetic reader. The mark may be selected recklessly or unjustly, but the arrows always fly straight to it.

Peacock, in short, has eminently that quality of literature which may be called recreation. It may be that he is not extraordinarily instructive, though there is a good deal of quaint and not despicable erudition wrapped up in his apparently careless pages. It may be that he does not prove much; that he has, in fact, very little concern to prove anything. But in one of the only two modes of refreshment and distraction possible in literature, he is a very great master. The first of these modes is that of creation—that in which the writer spirits his readers away into some scene and manner of life quite different from that with which they are ordinarily conversant. With this Peacock,

even in his professed poetical work, has not very much to do; and in his novels, even in *Maid Marian*, he hardly attempts it. The other is the mode of satirical presentment of well-known and familiar things, and this is all his own. Even his remotest subjects are near enough to be in a manner familiar, and *Gryll Grange*, with a few insignificant changes of names and current follies, might have been written yesterday. He is, therefore, not likely for a long time to lose the freshness and point which, at any rate for the ordinary reader, are required in satirical handlings of ordinary life; while his purely literary merits, especially his grasp of the perennial follies and characters of humanity, of the *ludicrum humani generis* which never varies much in substance under its ever-varying dress, are such as to assure him life even after the immediate peculiarities which he satirised have ceased to be anything but history.

V

LANDOR

THERE might be a worse occupation for some proficient in the lighter kind of critical or miscellaneous writing than the drawing up of a list of opinions and sayings which, in other than Herodotean sense, it is not now lawful to utter concerning certain famous writers. Landor would come in for a good share of that list. That the critics admire the author of the *Imaginary Conversations* and that the public does not; that he is an example of classical as opposed to romantic writing; that he will dine late, but that the room will be well lighted and the guests select; that he was partly a philosopher and partly a schoolboy; that he was like Boythorn; that he was not like Boythorn; that he was a better writer of ornate prose than De Quincey; that he was not so good a writer of ornate prose as De Quincey: these and a good many other things require no more saying. If they are said, let us by all means take off our hats to them as the French wit did in similar case; but let us not repeat them, if we can help it. The dining-room saying especially, though it be Landor's own, is a most treacherous dictum. It necessarily begets in the quoter a secret sense that *he* is one of the select guests, that the room has been lighted for *him* at the late and sacred hour. The contrast-theory, too, of philosopher and schoolboy is to be avoided as much as possible, like all contrast theories, which are for the most part, if not universally, as delusive as they are tempting and as barren as they are facile.

It is an interesting, though perhaps in some little degree an idle, question to enquire whether that popu-

larity, at least that real popularity, which the critics prophesy and implore for Landor will ever come. It is some years now since Mr Crump's edition of the *Conversations* and of much of the *Poems* leaves none of the old excuses open to the slippery. It was true, till this edition appeared, that it was not easy to get at Landor's work. John Forster's edition of the *Conversations*—which is still the only complete or nearly complete edition of Landor's entire writings—was decidedly cumbrous and not very comely. Nor was it any longer to be easily or cheaply bought, having gone through all the three stages which the reluctance of Englishmen to buy library editions of classics is wont to occasion, the steps of "published price," dirt-cheap remainder, and rather expensive recovery to a price higher than the original. Mr Crump's edition of the *Conversations* is cheap, handsome, handy, and generally desirable. He has taken a great deal of trouble in giving many, if not all, of the numerous various readings, and there is no need to quarrel with his own introduction and notes which are not of the overwhelming kind lately brought once more into fashion. If people will not now read Landor, at least the *Conversations*, there must be something in him which does not easily let itself be read by the general, and which is only to be forgiven by the real student of letters. And if they will not read the *Poems*, it is not because almost the whole of those likely to recommend themselves to the general reader are not easily accessible.

In no purely critical disquisition on Landor can it be now necessary to say very much about his life. It is rather a pity that Mr Colvin[1] did not prefix a short biography to his excellent selection in the Golden Treasury Series, a selection which, while it may have

[1] Now Sir Sidney.

made Landor better known in a way, has also, I suspect, acted and will act as a bar to his being known in his complete works. It could have been done by abbreviating Sir Sidney's own biography of Landor in the English Men of Letters. Savagius, as Byron irreverently called him, came of Warwickshire folk, affluent and respectable, and he was the eldest son and heir of entail, having been born at Ipsley Court in 1775. I fear, that to call things by their plain names, he was but an ill-conditioned youth. He appears to have behaved at Rugby like a kind of Guy Livingstone whose forte should have been scholarship rather than flirting, though Landor was a bit of a flirt too in his way. Having gone up to Trinity College, Oxford, he was sent down, before he had been in residence a year, for firing into another man's windows. There is nothing very awful in that for an undergraduate, and I have known it done by persons of great excellence. But Landor did not make the matter better by equivocating when charged with the crime; or by excusing himself on the plea that the recipient of his shot was a "Tory who entertained servitors"; or by rejecting all overtures of restoration, like a sulky child. That his escapade brought him into difficulties with his father involves no discredit to either side; but the fact that the officers of the Warwickshire Militia threatened to resign their commissions in a body if he received one is more questionable, even though the alleged cause was merely the violence of the young man's political opinions. Of the intercessions of a fair Miss Lyttleton for him, and of his wanderings in Wales, of his foregatherings with Ianthe (that is to say Jane) and Ione (that is to say Miss Jones), of his coming into his property, and his volunteering (in 1808) to Spain, and his difficulties with the English representatives and the Spanish authorities

there, and his exchange of his inheritances in Warwickshire for a wilderness in Wales, there is no room here to speak. Yet one of his Welsh friendships—that with the Aylmer family—cannot be passed in silence, for it resulted in some of the most exquisite lines in the world's poetry.

He married, in 1811, a girl sixteen years younger than himself, and one cause of their subsequent dissensions (which broke out very soon) seems to have been her habit of reminding him of the difference. But his marriage had nothing to do with his troubles at Llanthony; though his troubles at Llanthony may have had not a little to do with those of his marriage, by substituting exile and wandering, with no very abundant means, for the easy affluent life which the bride may have promised herself. It would be hardly possible for any one to behave more foolishly than Landor did at Llanthony. That he burdened the estate heavily in order to possess himself of it, and then wasted money on its improvement till he was all but ruined, is nothing. That is the usual fate of men of letters when they take to managing estates. It is less pardonable that he went out of his way to quarrel with everybody, the bishop, the judges, the Lord Lieutenant, his own tenants, and his tenants' labourers, in a manner which it is almost too complimentary to call childish. I at least cannot see anything engaging in a man of ripe age, who, when the bishop had left a letter unanswered, magnificently remarked, "God alone is great enough for me to ask anything of twice"; who availed himself of the formal charge to the Grand Jury to present personally an attorney and tax-surveyor who had offended him; and who, when the Lord Lieutenant had after this exploit declined to put him on the Commission of the Peace, pestered the Lord Chancellor to do so and

wound up by saying that he "will now never accept anything that can be given by ministers or chancellors." This sort of thing—this sort of cross between imitation-Quixotry and the heroics of a Frenchman on the stage or in the tribune—is too petty to be even amusing, and too silly to be even pitiable.

Before long, however, Landor was duly filled with the fruit of his own devices. He fled the country under stress of both civil and (for he had thrashed one of his foes) criminal proceedings, and from 1814 to 1835 lived, save for a very short time, abroad and chiefly at Fiesole. The events of this long stretch of his life were much the same as before it began, and ended by serious, and ultimately final, quarrels with his wife; they were also diversified by other quarrels with his neighbours, with the meek if astute Italian authorities, with his friends, with everybody. When the final rupture with his family came he travelled for some time, and then established himself at Bath, where another sojourn of about the same length (1837–1858) was abruptly ended by yet another quarrel. The painful story of the way in which, as a man of eighty-three, he had to fly from England once more in order to escape the results of an action for a gross libel on a lady, has been told with somewhat unintelligible reticence by Mr Forster, and rather more clearly by Sir Sidney. The last stage of this long and strange history was comparative peace, thanks chiefly to Robert Browning. Landor was established in Florence under proper care, the breach with his family, except at the very last with his younger children, proving hopeless; and he spent his last lustrum pretty happily, though he suffered from some of the inevitable outrages of time. He died on 17th September, 1864, having nearly reached the age of ninety.

It is a curious but necessary postscript to the stormy

record of his domestic life that almost all his numerous friends (even those with whom he sometimes quarrelled) describe him with one accord as possessing one of the kindest, the most generous, and, when he was not in one of his furious rages, the gentlest and most considerate natures that ever man had. Nor is this testimony in the least limited to, or conditioned by, his circumstances. Just after his flight from Bath, when a comparison of his condition to Lear's might seem not extravagant, much earlier when his strength was unimpaired and he was in no sense, except for his own follies, an object of pity, the testimonials are quite as uniform, and are given by persons of the most diverse characters in every respect. If anybody who ever really knew Landor disliked him, I think that no literary record exists of the dislike.

He was indeed a perfect slave of impulse, when he offered to publish at his own expense any poem that Southey might write, as much as when he threw (or perhaps only threatened to throw) his cook out of the window. But there is no record that he ever repented his generous impulses, and he constantly made amends for his violent ones. He loved art, more well indeed than wisely, for he was apt to bestow much good money on many not seldom bad pictures. He loved literature nearly as well, though not quite so consummately as he practised it. He loved, with Attic taste and not grossly, good wine, delicate food, fair prospects, and most of all, fair women. Even in his sillinesses there was something not ignoble: even in his most provoking weakness something to reconcile and attract.

It is not easy, in reading over again Landor's voluminous poetical work, to decide on the exact reasons which have, with the large majority of readers, relegated it to the upper shelf. It is almost never bad;

it is at times extremely good. The famous passages which lighten the darkness of *Gebir* and *Count Julian* are unstaled in their attraction by any custom. You may read *Rose Aylmer* for the hundredth time with the certain effect of that "divine despair" which inspires and is inspired by only the greatest poetry. *Dirce*, and the companion passage which Aspasia sent to Cleone, are equally sure of their own effect. But Landor is by no means obliged to rely on half a dozen purple passages like these. His enormous total of verse, which if printed with the usual luxury of new poetry (a separate page for even the smallest piece, and not more than twenty lines or so of the longest on any), would fill volumes by the dozen or score, never for long fails to yield something altogether out of the common. From the unequal and motelike crowd of the Ianthe trifles to the long "Hellenic" and dramatic or semi-dramatic pieces, the same rule holds good. With Landor you can never read long before coming to the "flashing words, the words of light"; and the light of the flash is always distinct and not like that of any other poetical star. If he is too "classical," he is not more so than many poets of the seventeenth century, especially Jonson, whom he most resembles, and whom (perhaps from a vague sense of likeness) he rather undervalues and belittles. His quality, from its intense peculiarity, is exactly the quality which bribes the literary student. His passion is not unreal; his sense of beauty is exquisite; his power of expressing it is consummate; and yet he is not, at least to some readers, interesting as a whole. They have to gird themselves up to him; to get into training for him; or else to turn basely to the well-known pieces and re-read (he did not like "re-read," by the way, but I do not remember that he allowed us to "relege") these only.

The reasons of this are probably reasons of combination. Landor has accumulated, in a fashion which might seem to be allowable in one whose quest after unpopularity was so ostentatiously intentional, different and even contradictory claims to the honour of remaining unread. The very scholarly poets are usually rather scant producers; he is enormously voluminous. The dealers in epigrams and short lyrics rarely attempt long-breathed poems; Landor by turns rains epigram (using that word in its proper sense) with the copiousness of a whole anthology, and pours out a steady stream of narrative or dramatic stuff with the ceaseless flow of Spenser. Those two stout volumes, crammed with poems of all sorts and sizes, are full of delight for the few who really like to read poetry. Let us permit ourselves *Sortes Landorianæ* and open one of the pair without even looking to see which it is. We open on *Dry Sticks*, certainly not a promising place to open, and find these verses:

'Tis pleasant to behold
The little leaves unfold
Day after day, still pouting at the sun,
Until at last they dare
Lay their pure bosoms bare—
Of all these flowers, I know the sweetest one.

Quite trifling verses perhaps, but assuredly not written in a quite trifling style. You may open a hundred volumes of verse as they come fresh from the press and not find one with that style-mark on it. Yet somehow the stoutest devotee of style may be smitten with hideous moments of scepticism when reading Landor. Few men in our days, or in any days at all near them, have had such a faculty of embalming in the self-same amber beautiful things, things presentable, and things absolutely trivial and null. All the

defects of the classical and "marmoreal" style are perceived when we come to such a thing as this,

> Better to praise too largely small deserts
> Than censure too severely great defects.

That has most eminently the fault of phrase-making. It is a great question whether even what is true in it is worth saying, and it is a greater question still whether the larger part of it is not false. It is moreover especially liable to the pitiless treatment to which Thackeray subjected another aphorism of the same kind. Why not

> Better to praise too largely great deserts
> Than censure too severely small defects?

or

> Better to praise too scantly great deserts
> Than censure over mildly small defects?

or in short a dozen other truisms or paradoxes or what not of the same easy kind? It is the inevitable penalty of the "classical" form that it adapts itself with the most delusive submissiveness to almost any matter. The opposite style (call it Romantic, rococo, or what you will) is at least saved from this exasperating liability; and when Herrick or Donne is not superlatively good, the one or the other is frankly bad.

If we turn from Landor's shorter poems to his longer we shall find, in different matter and in different measure, the same merits and the same defects. The poet with whom it is perhaps most natural to compare him is Mr William Morris. It is indeed almost impossible for any one who knows the two not to think of the *Hellenics* and the *Acts and Scenes* when he reads the *Life and Death of Jason* and the *Earthly Paradise*. Nor is it a very difficult thing to separate the comparative merits and defects of the two. Mr Morris cannot pretend to Landor's dignity, precision, and lasting certainty of touch. He abounds in surplusage; he is often, if not exactly slipshod, loose and fluid; his

singing robe is not girt up quite tight enough, and he tends to the garrulous. But he is always interesting; he has the gift of story, he carries us along with him, and the journey is always easy and sometimes exciting. Landor, though nearly if not quite as voluble as the later poet, has an air of the utmost economy, proportion, and rigour. His phrase, if sometimes rather long, is screwed to concert-pitch; he never apparently babbles; there is an air, however modern his subject, of classical severity about him. Yet Landor can be exceedingly longwinded, and does not often succeed in being very interesting. Now there are kinds of literature, especially of poetry, in which interest is only a secondary consideration. But I can hardly conceive any one, except in the way of paradox, maintaining that either drama or narrative ranks among the kinds which possess and sometimes abuse this august and dangerous privilege.

The merits and defects of Landor's very different prose, are much the same; especially in the chief division of that prose, the vast aggregate of the *Conversations*, into which he preferred to throw such work of his as was not verse, while as has been seen even his verse-work had a tendency to assume the same guise. He seems indeed never to have been quite at home in any other. Perhaps he cannot in any case be ranked high as a critic, but his exercises in that kind which are couched in conversational form are at any rate much more readable than the so-called criticisms which appear in the eighth volume of his *Works*, and which are either desultory jottings in the nature of annotations, or else worked into a continuous form which is stiff and lifeless. In fact I doubt very much whether Landor could possibly have succeeded in regular history or essay, narrative or disquisition. His egotism (using

the word in no unfavourable sense) was so intense that only the egotistic forms of literature, as I think we may without unfairness call the Conversation and the Letter, really suited him. And I am not sure that the Letter did not suit him even better than the Conversation.

He himself, however, preferred the Conversation, and he has probably left us the largest, most varied and elaborate collection of the kind in existence. Lucian surpasses Landor as much in variety of literary excellence as he excels Plato in range and diversity of subject; but the whole bulk of Lucian's dialogues would not, I should think, exceed, if it would equal, a volume and a half of the size whereof Landor's fill five. Fontenelle (who for the last century and perhaps more has been too much undervalued) falls into a lower rank than any of the other three, while Erasmus (the only fifth to be set beside these) is, though a much greater man than Fontenelle and even than Landor, inferior to these two, and still more to Plato and Lucian, in intellectual and literary faculty. In these last and greatest respects Plato of course stands alone; and it is not a favourable symptom of Landor's own capacities in either respect that he evidently did not like him. Plato at any rate is the first of all those who have written or ever will write conversations. The only counter claim which Landor can put in against his superiority in dignity of matter and in mastery of style is the greater variety of his own subjects. There is indeed one other claim which he might urge, though it is an illegitimate one at best, the fuller revelation of personality. We know from the works that go under his name very little, hardly anything, of Plato. From the next, and, as it seems to me next greatest, series of dialogues we know a good deal, though in an indirect way, of Lucian. But from the third we know almost

everything of Landor. Given the *Conversations* as the authentic data, with such things as early troubles at college, an unsatisfactory marriage, ample means, uncongenial surroundings, foreign residence, and the like as conjectural assistance, any novelist who knew his business could depict the life of Walter Savage Landor almost exactly as it happened. Nay, he would from the *Conversations* divine most of the circumstances just referred to.

The caution of the author to the reader—"Avoid a mistake in attributing to the writer any opinions in this book but what are spoken under his own name" is interesting but infantile. We always know, we always should know if we knew nothing else about him, from the constant presence of a common and unmistakable form, when Landor is putting Landor's opinions in the mouth of no matter who it may be. If this to some extent communicates a charm to the various and voluminous work concerned, it must be admitted that it also imparts a certain monotony to it. Greek or Roman, mediæval or modern, political or amatory, literary or miscellaneous, the *Conversations* simply convey in stately English, the soon well known and not exceedingly fresh or wide-ranging opinions of the author on mundane things, with occasional and not particularly happy excursions into things divine. We know that when any person of the other sex, especially if she be very youthful, appears, she will herself deliver sentiments of an amiable but rather giggling and missish mixture of archness and innocence, while the interlocutor who more particularly represents Landor will address her and speak of her in the style of a more cultivated, gentlemanly, and gifted Mr Tupman. We know that if politics are in question, especially recent politics, the sentiments of a generous but republican

schoolboy will equally appear. If the subject is literature, woe to any one who speaks ill of Southey or well of Gifford. Woe again to any one who speaks ill of Milton; but let nobody speak good of him except in the particular way which is satisfactory to Walter Savage Landor. We must always speak well of Dr Parr, for he was a friend of ours; and we exchanged scholarship and politeness with him when the Warwickshire Militia would have none of us. But we must not speak ill of Dr Johnson, though he was a Tory and a churchman; for he was a man of the Midlands, and so a very honest fellow. Down with the wretch Pitt (against whom we took a grudge when we knew nothing about politics), with the ribald Canning (who was an Oxford man and a scholar like ourselves, but very successful when we were not quite that), with the villain George the Third (who was a king and whose countenance did not please us). We do not like lords, but if we happen to know any particular lord and he is polite to us, or has pretty daughters with euphonious names, or is related to or connected in some way with our own family, and has not quarrelled with us, let us speak of him and his with a sweet and rotund mouth. If anybody dares to interfere with our comfort whether at Llanthony or Fiesole, in Paternoster Row or elsewhere, let us attend to the sacred duty of literary justice by gibbeting the fellow in as Dantean a manner as we can manage. But when there is nothing of this disturbing kind concerned, and when our heart is full (as it very often is) of the milk of human kindness, and our head (as it generally is when it is not in a state of inordinate heat) of the great wisdom and the stately fame of the ancients, let us write with that pen which is always almost a golden one, as very few Englishmen had written before us, and as hardly one has written since.

I hope this summary is not too flippant; I am sure that it is not in the least unjust. But the only complete way of justifying it would be to go through all the *Conversations* and characterise each as we went. This would cost little trouble, and it would be very pleasant to do: but I fear it would occupy an inordinate amount of space. By far the more excellent plan is to send readers to Landor himself, in which case I have no fear of the result.

The *Conversations* are full of delightful things, and it is impossible for any fit reader to attempt them without discovering these things. Let the subject admit of any description of natural scenery, any dream-scene (Landor's dreams are very nearly if not quite unapproached), any passage dealing with the greater and simpler emotions, any reflection on the sublime commonplace of life, and Landor is almost entirely to be depended upon. It does not matter, it never with him matters much, what the nominal subject is; the best things written in connection with it are sure to be fine and may very likely be superb. In the "Pericles and Aspasia" (which indeed is not conversation in form but is hardly distinguishable from it) in "The Pentameron," in many of the classical dialogues, and in not a few of the "Literary Men" the author will be found quite at his best. The famous "Epicurus, Leontium, and Ternissa" probably shows him at almost his very best, and at very nearly his very worst. In the dialogues of "Sovereigns and Statesmen" I should say (and not in the least because I generally disagree with the political views there expressed) that he was at his very worst. For politics is after all an eminently practical science, and of the practical spirit Landor had literally nothing. His only plan was to put more or less odious or ridiculous statements in the mouths

of persons with whom he does not agree, to mop and mow at them, or to denounce them in Ciceronian strains of invective. The infallible test of a political writer, I think, is the reflection "Should I like to have this man on my side or not?" For my part whenever I read Landor's political utterances I say, "Thank Heaven, he is on the other!"

The dialogues of Famous Women are in the same way flawed by that artificial and namby-pamby conception of the female character which has already been touched upon; while the Miscellaneous Conversations obviously defy analysis as a whole. The author has left nothing better than some of them, such as the long, curious, unequal, but admirable "Penn and Peterborough"; while in others he sinks almost below the level of rational thought. "Lord Coleraine, Rev. Mr Bloombury and Rev. Mr Swan" is fully worthy of the author of the "Examination." It would be difficult to say of whom "The Duke de Richelieu, Sir Firebrace Cotes, Lady G——, and Mr Normanby" is worthy. "The Emperor of China and Tsing-ti" is probably the very worst of all the imitations of Montesquieu; and on at least some others as harsh a judgment would have to be passed if they were critically judged at all.

There are however few writers on whom it must be more repugnant to any lover of literature to pass harsh judgments, because there are few, if any, who have themselves combined such an intense love for literature with such noble practice in it. For the two things are by no means always combined, and Wordsworth is far from being the only great writer who may be said to have had a very lukewarm affection for any writings but his own. And the quality of production is in Landor's case of extraordinary strength and peculiarity. On all happy occasions when his hand is in, when the

right subject is before him, and when he is not tempted away from it into the indulgence of some fling, into the memory of some petty wrong, into the repetition of some tiresome crotchet, he manages language literally as a great musician manages the human voice or some other organ of sound. The meaning, though it is often noble, is never the first thing in Landor, and in particular it is quite useless to go to him for any profound, any novel, any far-reaching thought. The thought is at best sufficient, and it very frequently is that; but it seldom makes any tax upon even the most moderate understanding, and it never by any chance averts attention from the beauty and the finish of the vesture in which it is clothed.

The famous dreams which close "The Pentameron" are things of which it is almost impossible to tire. Nowhere else perhaps in English does prose style, while never trespassing into that which is not prose, accompany itself with such an exquisite harmony of varied sounds; nowhere is there such a complicated and yet such an easily appreciable scheme of verbal music. The sense is, as has been said, just sufficient; it is no more; it is not in itself peculiarly arresting. Although the sentiment is heartfelt, it is not exactly passionate. But it is perfectly and exactly married to the verbal music, and the verbal music is perfectly and exactly married to it. Again, it is a whole; if not perhaps quite flawless yet with flaws which are comparatively unimportant. It does not consist, as "fine" writing too often does, of a certain number of more or less happy phrases, notes, or passages strung together. It is, as I have called it, a "scheme,"—a thing really deserving those terms from the science of actual music which have been so frequently and tediously abused in literary criticism.

Moreover the qualities which exist pre-eminently in this and other great passages of Landor appear everywhere, on smaller scales, in his prose. It is never safe, except when he attempts the comic, to skip a single page. Anywhere you may come across, in five words or in five hundred, the great Landorian phrase, the sentence cunningly balanced or intentionally and deftly broken, the paragraph built with a full knowledge of the fact that a paragraph is a structure and not a heap, the adjective wedded to its proper substantive, not indulging in unseemly promiscuity, the clause proceeding clearly and steadily to the expression of the thought assigned to it. Whatever deficiencies there may be in Landor (and, as has been and will be seen, they are not few) he is seldom if ever guilty of the worst and the commonest fault of the ornate writer, a superabundance of ornament. Of his two contemporaries who tried styles somewhat similar in point of ornateness, Wilson constantly becomes tawdry, while De Quincey sometimes approaches tawdriness. Of this, nearly the worst of literary vices, Landor was constitutionally almost incapable; and his models and methods had converted his natural inaptitude into a complete and absolute immunity. He is sometimes, especially in his fits of personal dignity and scorn, a little too stately for the subject,—the jokes of our rude forefathers on the Castilian strut may recur to us. He is alas! when he unbends this pride, too often clumsily and even indecently gamesome. But with tawdriness, even with indulgence in literary frippery, he cannot for one moment be charged. In this respect, and perhaps in this respect only, his taste was infallible. His good angel was fatally remiss in its warnings on many points wherein such taste is concerned, but on this never.

If we set ourselves to discover the particular note in Landor which occasions these discords we shall find it, I believe, in a quality which I can only call, as I have already called it, silliness. There are other great men of letters who have as much or even more of the quality of mere childishness; but that is a different thing. Lafontaine and Goldsmith are the two stock examples of childishness in literary history; and childish enough they were, almost inexcusably so in life. But when we find them with pen in hand we never think of them as of anything but very clever men. Landor alone, or almost alone, has written like an angel *and* like poor Poll, and has written like both at once. Hazlitt was quite as wrongheaded as Landor and much more bad-blooded. Peacock was, at any rate in his earlier years, as much the slave of whimsical crazes. Coleridge was as unpractical. His own dear friend Southey had almost as great a difficulty in adjusting the things and estimates of the study to the estimates and the things of the forum. De Quincey was still more bookish and out-of-the-worldly. But even in passages of these men with which we least agree we do not find positive silliness, a positive incapacity to take the standpoint and the view of a full-grown man who has or ought to have mingled with and jostled against the things of the world and of life. We do find this in Landor. His apologists have admitted that he was always more or less of a schoolboy; I should say that he was always more or less of a baby.

The time-honoured Norman definition of a man is "One who fights and counsels." Landor had in almost superabundant measure that part of man which fights; he was abnormally deficient in the part which counsels. In some cases where taste (of certain, not of all kinds), scholarship, poetic inspiration, chivalry (again of

certain kinds), and the like could supply the place of judgment and ratiocinative faculty, he has done nobly, even without taking into account that matchless gift of expression which never deserts him for long together. But in any kind of reasoning proper he is as an infant in arms; and in that faculty which (though sometimes it be divorced from it) comes nearest to the ratiocinative —the faculty of humour, he is almost as defective. Here I know there is great difference and discrepancy between those who should agree; but I shall boldly avow that I think Landor's attempts both at humour and at wit for the most part simply deplorable, as deplorable as his idol Milton's. Some persons whom I respect, as well as others whom I do not, have professed to see a masterpiece of humour in *The Examination of William Shakespeare*. If by a majority of competent critics it is admitted that it is such, I must be a heretic, yet at least a heretic who can rejoice in Aristophanes (whom Landor did not wholly like), in Lucian (in whom he saw much banter and some wisdom but little wit), in Rabelais (of whom he knew little and whom he evidently did not like even so much as he liked Aristophanes), in Swift (at whom he is always girding and grudging), in Fielding (whom he seldom or never mentions), in Thackeray (of whom, though Landor was his contemporary and survived him, I think as much may be said), and in divers others. The fact is that the entire absence of proportion in matter, so strangely contrasted with his excellent sense of proportion in style, which characterised Landor appears in this matter of the humorous not perhaps more strongly but more eminently than anywhere else. It was not that humorous ideas did not visit him, for they did; but he did not in the least know how to deal with them. He mumbles a jest as a bull-dog worries

or attempts to worry a rat when he is set to that alien art. His three sets of models, the classics, the English writers of the seventeenth century, and the Italians (for of French, German, and, if I mistake not, Spanish, as well as of large tracts of English, he knew but little) had each in them certain evil precedent suggestions for a jester. Landor with unerring infelicity seized on these, combined them, worked them fully out, and produced things very terrible, things which range from the concentrated dreariness of the *Examination* and the "Pitt and Canning" conversation to the smaller flashes-in-the-pan of joking dulness which are scattered about his writings *passim*.

Another thing which is extremely noticeable about Landor is the marvellously small difference between his poetry and his prose. Except again Milton (an instance ominous and full of fear) and perhaps Wordsworth, I know no other English writer of the first class of whom this can be said. But Landor has versified, or almost versified, some of his actual conversations, and has left explicit declaration that not a few of his poems are simply conversations in verse. He would have us believe that verse was his amusement, prose his serious business; but it is certain that he began and for years continued to write nothing but verse for publication in any lasting form. And of the vast stores of work (forty or fifty thousand lines of verse and some three thousand large and closely-printed pages of prose) which remain to his credit, the verse might almost always be according to the old trick "unrhymed" and made into prose with but slight alterations: the prose, with certain allowances for greater exuberance and verbosity in parts, might with hardly greater trouble be arranged into Landorian verse. The sententious, intense, rhythmical phrase is the same in both; the

poetical intuition of sights and sounds, and other delights of sense, is not more obvious in one than in the other. The absence of continuous logical thought is not greater here than there; the remoteness from what may be called the sense of business is always the same, whether the syllables in a line be limited to ten at most, or may run on to as many as the limits of the page will admit. Although he was conscious of, and generally avoided, the mistake of introducing definitely poetic rhythm into prose, it is astonishing how close is the resemblance of a short stave of his verse to a sentence of his prose. It is owing to this, among other things, that his form of verse is as compared with that of others a rather severe form, while his prose is, compared with that of others, rather florid. It is owing to this that, while some of the very happiest efforts of his verse have the simplicity and directness of the ancient epigram, some of the most agreeable efforts of his prose have in the proper sense an idyllic character.

And so we have in Landor an almost unmatched example of the merits and the defects of style by itself. To attempt once more to narrow down the reasons of both, I should say that they lie in his having had nothing particular to say with a matchless faculty for saying anything. When the latter faculty is exercised sparingly on the former defect, we often get some of the finest things in literature. The writer's idiosyncrasy is not too hardpressed; it has no time to tire us; the freshness and savour of it remain upon our palate; and we appreciate it to the full, perhaps indeed beyond the full. But when the thing is administered in larger and ever larger doses the intensity of the flavour palls and the absence of anything else, besides and behind the flavour, begins to tell. Yet at his very best, and taken in not too large quantities, Landor is the equal of all

but the greatest, perhaps of the greatest themselves. And if, according to a natural but rather foolish fashion, we feel at any time inclined to regret that he lived so long and had so much time to accumulate indifferent as well as good work, let us remember on the other hand that his best work is scattered over almost every period of his life, except the very last and the very first, and that the best of it is of a kind worth wading through volumes of inferior work to secure. The true critical question with every writer is, "Could we spare him? Could we do without him?" Most assuredly, if we tried to do without Landor, we should lose something with which no one else could supply us[1].

[1] Some additional knowledge of fact has been supplied about Landor (especially by Mr Stephen Wheeler) since this was written: and a more detailed study of his prose *as* prose will be found in the present writer's *History of Prose Rhythm*, while another treatment by the same hand is available in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. But little if any alteration seems to be required (1923).

VI

THOMAS HOOD

Mr Swinburne, in his *Study of Ben Jonson*, has spoken severely, but by no means with extravagant severity, of the ordinary fashion in which English classics are edited. It is bad enough in all conscience: but I do not think I am acquainted with any example of it so bad as the accepted edition of the works of Thomas Hood. To no book known to me is Mr Carlyle's favourite phrase, "formless agglomeration," more applicable; and one's wrath and despair are not lessened by a preface in which the late Thomas Hood, the younger, announces that the arrangement is "deliberate," is "intended to be of interest to more than the general reader." For the sake of this *Lector plusquam generalis*, it would seem, Mr Hood "diligently traced the order" of his father's works, "added anything that he found of interest bearing upon them," and "left out nothing that may interest the thoughtful and studious." The thoughtful and studious, pleased at these attentions, turn to the text, and what do they find?

First of all three volumes and the greater part of a fourth filled with *Hood's Own, Whims and Oddities*, and what-not, served up regardless of "the order of our father's works," undated, and, as far as can be perceived, unannotated. Then, without any preface, the chronological order appears. From 1821 onwards, poems, essays, jests, trivial reviews are huddled together in order of publication, so that we get some sixpenny jokes for the *London* cheek by jowl with *Fair Ines*, and that the *Comic Annual* for 1839 and *Miss Kilmansegg* appear to be chapters of *Up the Rhine*. As there

is no general index a particular piece must be hunted for all over the ten volumes unless its date is known; while for some mysterious reason the original illustrations, which were in Hood's case inseparably connected with the subject, are stolen from Peter and given to Paul in the most bewildering fashion; the cuts of *Up the Rhine*, for instance, being taken out of it (an outrage unforgivable till death by those who know the original form) and scattered about *Hood's Own*. I do not, however, know that even this is quite so unpardonable either as the inclusion, not only of a vast quantity of trivial matter which Hood did republish, but of much that he did not, or as the higgledy-piggledy arrangement just described, by which work in its kind little short of the first rank, is practically thrown into the dustbin with work that is almost rubbish. This collection has been reprinted twice or thrice, and in the latest form that I have seen, no attempt has been made to remove the blemishes of the earlier. It may be said, of course, that the serious poems and the comic poems have been printed separately and are separately obtainable. But until very recently there was no separate reproduction of *Up the Rhine*, the best of all the children of *Humphry Clinker*, while separate editions of the comic poems are never complete and vary considerably. Besides, even if it were otherwise, a man ought to be represented best, not worst, in his *Collected Works*.

As a matter of fact, three or four small volumes at the most would contain all Hood's work that a judicious admirer would care to retain. *Tylney Hall* is by common consent worth but little: and no one can forget the burst of generous, if somewhat hasty, indignation with which Thackeray protested against Hood's wasting his time on the jokes of *Hood's Own*. It would not do

to banish that book entirely, for some of his best things are in it; but it may, or rather must be, admitted that there is a very great deal there which is not his best at all, which is hardly good at all. A volume containing all the serious poems, another containing a judicious selection of the comic pieces, *Up the Rhine* by itself with its own illustrations, and a fourth volume containing a selection (more "judicious" still) from the prose miscellanies, would set Hood in his right place, and silence the ignorant contempt with which he is sometimes spoken of by ill-read persons of the present generation. He never can be set in his right place by *omnium gatherum* reproductions of such merest pot-boilers as *The Last Shilling* and *The Contrast.*

Hood's special literary claim appears to me to be twofold, the first part resting on the extraordinary excellence of his comic vein, and the second on its combination, in a way nowhere else paralleled except in the very greatest men of letters (among whom, of course, he does not rank), with a vein of perfectly serious and genuine poetry. This combination has, as I have said, existed, though not uniformly, in the greatest men of all: and it may be contended that even in the smaller it is more often than not present in a certain degree. To take Hood's contemporaries, Praed has it, Barham has it ("As I lay a thinkynge," for all its Chattertonism of dialect is a beautiful thing). Although Thackeray's excellence in the serious kind is shown chiefly in prose, every one remembers touches of it in his verse, and generally it may be said that the keenest humour is always near if not to tears yet to thought. But the remarkable thing about Hood is that his serious verse would earn for him no mean place if he had never written anything else. Obliged as he was to turn ink into gold, to be "a lively Hood for a

livelihood," he did not pursue this vein far, the fact, though it seems to shock some people, being that no man can pursue serious poetry far if he has to earn a living by his pen in the modern way. Nobody ever has done it yet, and I dare swear that nobody ever will.

But between 1822 and 1828, pretty constantly, and afterwards till the end of his life at intervals, he did many delightful things in serious verse. *The Haunted House* stands as much alone as *The Red Fisherman*, and is still freer from any touch of burlesque; while the greatest poets have not excelled Hood in the peculiar gift he has here shown of creating what may be called a musical or rhythmical atmosphere suitable to and inseparable from the matter of the poem. The heavy and stifling air that hangs over the piece, the description just in keeping and not in the least exaggerated, the contrast of vivid touches and dark background, cannot be excelled. Lamb's stately eulogy on *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* is hardly pitched too high. *Fair Ines* I have mentioned, and if anybody laughs at it let him know that there is one note of poetry to which he is deaf. And even *Fair Ines* is exceeded in its own simple way by—

> It was the Time of Roses,
> We plucked them as we passed.

Lycus the Centaur, one of the earliest of all, and evidently written under the influence of Keats, has some false notes, but is admirable as a whole: and of even *Hero and Leander* it may be said that hardly shall any one come off better in vying with Christopher Marlowe. Here was a man who could write an *Ode to the Moon* without being ridiculous, and a *Hymn to the Sun* without being inadequate.

He wrote so little of the kind, and was so obviously

called away from it by common cares, that it is difficult to decide what he might have done had he been able to devote himself to poetry proper. I cannot quite agree with Thackeray that "The Bridge of Sighs, was his Corunna," by which I suppose we are to understand at once the crowning and fatal achievement of his life. That famous poem, as well as *The Song of the Shirt*, seems to me to be vitiated not only by some literary mannerisms, but by a certain sentimentality which is very apparent in much of the writing of that particular day, and which, after going out of fashion for a time, has reappeared of late. *Eugene Aram*, his principal serious piece between his early poems of the kind and the two great lamentations of his last year or two, shows, like *The Haunted House*, the faculty of creating music to fit words, while the *Bridge* and the *Shirt* themselves exhibit this same faculty almost unimpaired. Very few indeed save the greatest possess this faculty, the faculty of producing in fit readers when only a few lines of the poem have been read, a sort of prescience of the music of the whole, almost independent (in the case of one or two of Coleridge's and Shelley's fragments it is independent) of actual knowledge of the sequel and context. But Hood has it: and though undoubtedly there were some of the blemishes of the Cockney school upon him—an unchastened and sometimes flaccid style, lapses of grammar, confusions of "you" and "thou" and so forth—he belongs, beyond, I think, all question by those who are competent to judge, to the division of the poets who without being of the greatest, are poets undoubted and unimpeachable.

Of his life there is not much to say, though the *Memorials*, which contain the record of it, are by far the best executed as well as the pleasantest part of

the very faulty collection already referred to. He was the son of a bookseller, also named Thomas Hood, and was born in the Poultry on the 23rd of May, 1799. His mother was a sister of the not unknown engraver, Robert Sands, to whom, as well as to a better known member of the same craft, Le Keux, the poet was afterwards apprenticed. His father died when he was a boy, and his mother does not seem to have been very long-lived. Hood passed the years immediately before he came to manhood in Scotland with some relations. He did not feel much vocation for engraving; and when he was about one and twenty he had a chance, which he took, of changing the graver for the pen. The famous, but up to this very day constantly misrepresented, duel in which John Scott the Editor of the *London Magazine* fell, threw the magazine into the hands of Taylor and Hessey the publishers, and they (who were friends of Hood's and had probably had business connections with his father) offered him the sub-editorship. He contributed to the paper as well, and in both capacities became known to and in some cases intimate with its famous staff, the most brilliant perhaps that a young periodical ever had at one time. He was connected with the *London* for nearly three years; and it brought about a much more lasting connection, to wit, his marriage with the sister of one of the contributors, John Hamilton Reynolds.

He was not yet five and twenty, and from the *Memorials* (which frequently share the haziness of the rest of the work in which they appear) it is not quite clear what he lived upon when the *London* ceased to employ him. But he managed to publish the first series of *Whims and Oddities* in 1826, and the second next year, with some *National Tales* which are not good for very much. The then popular *Annuals* seem to have

yielded him profit, and in 1829 *Eugene Aram* appeared in one of them, the *Gem*, while his own *Comic Annual* began at Christmas, 1830. It was this that introduced him to the Duke of Devonshire, and so produced the somewhat well-known mock titles for dummy book-cases at Chatsworth. Some of these may not be so very well known now, and it is barely possible that one or two (such as *Bish's Retreat of the Ten Thousand*) may have become unintelligible without comment to more than the common ignoramus. The best of all (which Hood himself would have been obliged to me for mentioning just after "ignoramus") is *On Trial by Jury, with remarkable Packing Cases*, though perhaps *Pompeii: or the Memoirs of a Black Footman* is the most comical. *Boyle on Steam*, *Prize Poems in Blank Verse* and *Pygmalion by Lord Bacon* have survived better than most of them.

The Hoods seem to have lived chiefly at Wanstead —in comfortable friendship with Lamb and other famous people—till 1835, when there came upon them trouble vaguely described as "heavy loss by the failure of a firm." This was the genesis of *Up the Rhine*, for Hood set off for the continent, at once to economise and to prevent his greedier creditors from troubling, but fully intending to pay all that he owed. Except that it gave us a charming book and some letters scarcely inferior, this continental sojourn cannot be said to have been fortunate. Any saving in actual expenditure was balanced by the difficulty of managing literary work (*Hood's Own* was started during this period), by the still greater difficulty of disposing satisfactorily of that work while the writer's legal status was something dubious, and worst of all by bad health. Hood had never been a strong man, but there can be little doubt that the lung disease which

with complications killed him developed itself during his stay abroad, and perhaps in consequence of some of the conditions of that stay.

The exile, however, lasted for some five years, during which the family head-quarters were first Coblentz and then Ostend for greater nearness to England; though Hood made divers excursions, the best known and longest being that which he undertook, in the company of a Prussian marching regiment, to Berlin. He made many friends among German officers, the chief being a certain lieutenant Von (Hood calls him *De*) Franck, with whom he kept up after his return to England an extensive correspondence full of his own wildest quips and cranks. The chagrins of the exile were brought to a climax by the fact that, owing to legal difficulties, the profits of *Up the Rhine* which should have been considerable (for the first edition was sold off at once) were little or nothing. This as much as anything else seems to have determined Hood to return, and he became a resident Englishman (his heart untravelled had always been John Bullish to the core) once again in the year 1840. Another term of the same length was all the further life that was lent him. He passed it first at Camberwell, then in lodgings overlooking Lord's, and lastly in the Finchley Road. His gains were still very small, and his health became worse every year. But he was more and more recognised as the prince of his own literary province, he had numerous friends, and seems always to have taken life with an utterly unruffled temper, and with as much positive enjoyment as a man in the last stages of consumption, with little money and less leisure, can have. His domestic life had always been extremely happy, and the severest critic can only object to it that he used to play ruthless practical jokes on his wife, which is bad, and that she

called him "Hood," which would now be worse, though it was not necessarily so in those days.

At Theodore Hook's death he was appointed editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, and when after a year or two this post became distasteful to him he started a magazine of his own and named after himself. In command of this he died. Of his very last days and of Sir Robert Peel's kindness to him Thackeray's Essay in the *Roundabout Papers* gives a sketch which it would be very rash indeed for any one to attempt to rival or to paraphrase. The end came after months of heroically borne suffering on the 3rd of May, 1845, the same year that carried off his only but very different rival Sydney Smith, and but a few days after he had himself written the exquisite lines, "Farewell Life! my senses swim." He was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, where some years afterwards they set up a monument to him. It is decorated among other things with a grinning comic mask, into the mouth of which when I saw it last some years ago, the taste and fancy of the British Public had gracefully placed a half-bitten apple. One's disgust was a little mitigated by reflecting that nobody would have been less hurt or more amused than Hood himself.

In the two years preceding his death there had appeared the two poems which may be said to have made his reputation with the million—the *Song of the Shirt* and the *Bridge of Sighs*—the former in 1843, the latter in 1844. I have already said that I do not rate these quite so high as some persons seem to do; and I have hinted at the reason. There is a certain profanity in applying tests too narrowly and exactly critical to work which has produced the poetic effect on so many, which is so undoubtedly poetic, and which, in the case of the later and greater poem, has such remarkable

metrical beauty. But both are a little too long (the *Bridge* especially could be curtailed with great advantage), the poet occasionally loses sight of strict meaning in producing his metrical and other effects, and there is considerable abuse of the pathetic fallacy in both. There was force though some brutality in the answering gibe that however cheap and abundant the flesh and blood of shirt-makers and shirt-menders may be, it is very difficult and not at all cheap to get a shirt made or mended properly. And though it may be right to reply "Get thee behind me!" when He with the cock's feather and the queer-shaped boot critically remarks that most young women who throw themselves into the Thames do it in a fit of bad temper or of drink or else hoping to be fished out, there is force in that observation too. But to say this is to say little more than that Hood was not Shakespeare, and that the *Song* and the *Bridge* are not the last words of Charmian or of Othello. And it is most particularly to be remarked that Hood's humanitarianism had not a streak in it of the maudlin sympathy with crime which so often disgraces that amiable quality. One of his very last fragments, dealing with one of the recurrent epidemics of poisoning, ends with these excellent though unfinished lines:—

> Arrest the plague with *cannabis*
> And.....[1] publish this
> To quench the felon's hope—
> Twelve drops of prussic acid still
> Are not more prompt and sure to kill
> Than one good Drop of Rope.

One question of interest—the question of priority between Hood and Praed in the peculiar style of antithetical punning for which both are famous, is not an easy one to resolve. Most people resolve it in Hood's

[1] Blank in original.

favour off-hand; while *per contra* I have known an enthusiastic Praedite disable my judgment with the loftiest of sneers because I was not quite certain on the point of Praed's originality. The main facts are these. The *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy*, the most famous example of the style, is of 1824, while Praed's *School and Schoolfellows* is five years later. On the other hand, in Praed's early poems, dating before he left Eton and written in 1820 or 1821, when Hood had written or at least published nothing at all or nothing characteristic, there are distinct traces of the same style, such as *From Chords of Arcs to Chords of Fiddles*. I suppose it most probable that similar influences, which it should not be impossible or even very difficult to trace, worked on both; though very likely the definite crystallizing of the style by the more professional man of letters also worked on Praed's impressionable nature. For that *School and Schoolfellows* has no direct indebtedness to *Clapham Academy* is not in nature. On a former occasion I endeavoured to point out some of the differences between the work of these two men, so curiously alike in talent and so curiously different in fortune, and there is no need to repeat the attempt. I have only written this paragraph for the purpose of showing that the almost always silly charge of plagiarism would be sillier than ever in either case. It is practically impossible that Hood should have seen Praed's early work; and though Praed almost certainly saw Hood's finished examples, whatever he took from them only helped to develop and encourage a vein which had independently existed in himself. Whether the two ever met I do not know or remember: but their spheres of life lay far apart and it must have been something of an accident if they did.

This, however, is a matter rather of curiosity than

of importance. Other "problems" there are none in the admirable simplicity of Hood's character and art—a simplicity which actually explains, though it may at a hasty view seem to conflict with the co-existence in him of the deepest and most unforced pathos with abounding humour. The spectacle which his life presents of simple, natural, unpretentious enjoyment of such modest good things as fell to his lot, and of equally natural and unpretentious fortitude in bearing things not good (whereof he had plenty) is not more unbroken than the spectacle of native simplicity and strength presented by his work. To call him superficial would itself be a piece of superficial impertinence. The quality in him which might be thus misnamed belongs to those who, not being among the very greatest of the world in respect of variety of positive endowment, rise above the great mass of men and of men of letters by an almost absolute freedom from the mental disease which generally (some would say always) produces problems, contrasts of character and work, mysteries, inequalities, secrets. To Hood's infirm and frail body were united a heart and a mind of such flawless sanity and purity, that they were in the good metaphorical sense almost childlike. Despite his command of the regions in which *The Haunted House*, *The Elm Trees*, and parts of his other work have their being, he was absolutely destitute of anything that can be called brooding or morbid.

But he had, except for his great and natural metrical gifts, no faculty of elaborate art: and in particular he had hardly any art of constructing a story beyond the range of the merest anecdote. It is this which makes his prose tales (and especially the later of them) disappointing, and which disables them from competing in comedy or tragedy, as the case may be, with such

contemporary or nearly contemporary work as that of Maginn or of Poe. There are excellent good things in them: there is not unfrequently a happy single idea to start with. But this idea is seldom or never moulded into a real story, and the whole sometimes seems a mere bran-pie of scattered witticisms. To read *The Friend in Need*, founded on the sufficiently promising notion of transfusion of blood between a Quaker and a pugilist; and to think what it would have been in the hands of the author of *A Story without a Tail*—to read *A Tale of Terror* (a thing improvised to fill a sudden gap in a magazine) and to remember *The Man in the Bell* or *The Cask of Amontillado*, is, to speak unaffectedly, afflicting. Vast numbers of the casual jests which Hood threw off, and which have been so ruthlessly preserved, are equally trying, though no one can read far without coming to something as inimitable as the answer (said to be again a mere impromptu insertion to fill up a page) of the cat to the marsupial who asked her why she didn't carry her kittens in a pouch, "*non omnia possumus omnes*: we're not all 'possums."

In these jests, be they good or be they bad, there is this same quality of directness, of simplicity, of genuine reflection of the whim of the moment. It is sometimes the cause of their badness; it almost always gives an additional and peculiar flavour to their goodness. Everything is the first running, and often, if not always, a very sprightly running indeed. And it is at least capable of being contended that if Hood had been less under pressure or had been more naturally disposed to the labour of the file, the loss in freshness would have been more than equal to the gain from the discarding of inferior matter. The laboured joke is by no means very often the good joke. Now whatever may be said

for and against Hood's jokes they are at least not laboured. They slip away from him, even the most extravagant of them, as naturally as water from a spring. "Rose knows those bows' woes," itself an enormous puerility, a really blessed and Mesopotamian piece of nonsense, did not, I believe, cost him so much as a second thought for the fifth jingle. There is no effort about the suggestion in reference to forged autographs, "how easily a few lines may be twisted into a rope"; none in that other piece of really deep wisdom as to the unhappy political journalist the reward of whose consistency was that he grew so warped, mind and body, that he could only lie on one side; none in the disclaimer of any wish, despite the atrocious conduct of Americans as to copyright, to alter the phrase in the New Testament into "republicans and sinners." All these examples are taken from his least known work and on the whole his least happy, the prose tales or articles before referred to.

The verse jokes, who knows not? yet it may be noted as a curious thing that Hood is happier in what may be called the total effect of his verse-comedy than in that of his prose. The point, which in the prose stories is often lost or undiscoverable, seldom fails in the verse. Take, for instance, the admirable philanthropist's defence at the end of the *Black Job*, "We mean to gild 'em," or the pathetic and delightful catalogue of the drawbacks of family unity, with its climax in the impossibility of securing "Frederick B." for the whole unanimous sisterhood. I do not know whether it may seem fanciful or strained, but the puns and quips in these verses produce on my ear an effect not dissimilar to that of rhyme and rhythm in poetry generally—they make a sort of running accompaniment, a setting, as it were illustrative but to some extent independent,

of the actual meaning. In such a recension of Hood as I have suggested I should myself be very tender of even the lightest of the verse, while I confess I should slash with a very desperate hook at field after field of the prose.

There is one division of Hood's humorous work which has been perhaps as much admired as any other, and which certainly deserves the praise of being marvellously original and dexterous in an extremely difficult way. This is the division at the head of which is the famous *Miss Kilmansegg*, while other characteristic examples of it are *The Desert Born*, and that terrific ballad at the end of which the wrecked mariner finds himself on no demon ship but on the *Mary Ann* of Shields. This is the class in which the strongest possible contrast of the grotesque and terrible is used, the author being comparatively indifferent whether he leads up through a farcical prelude to a serious termination or *vice versâ*. I do not profess any extraordinary affection for this mixed kind (which was probably made popular first by Southey's *Ballads*); and if anything like it must be done I prefer the handling of *The Red Fisherman*, where there is no actual revulsion, no final change from laughter to terror, or from terror to laughter, but a sustained blending of the two. Nevertheless, Hood's handling of the style is superlatively adroit in its own way, and it would be superfluous to praise the incidental passages which it gives him opportunity to insert, such as those famous ones in *Miss Kilmansegg* and *The Desert Born* especially. But there is a good deal of mere trick in this whole class of verse—especially in the tragi-comic or happy-ending division of it—and whatsoever is mere trick can hardly be pronounced good in the highest sense. Perhaps the best thing to be said for it is that

it seems to have had the power of spurring the author on to the production of his best things, an effect not at all difficult to understand, and which he himself would have expounded with many whimsical illustrations, both verbal and figurative.

For Hood's illustrations (in the ordinary sense of the word) must never be forgotten in any account of his work. He had had, as we have seen, a regular education in a certain kind of art; but though I do not pretend to profound technical knowledge in that matter, I doubt whether this education had much to do with the peculiar character of the "cuts" with which he embellished so much of his work. They are avowedly caricature; and it is possible that the faults of drawing, which in them merely add to the effectiveness of the work, would have been equally present if the author had attempted things more ambitious. It is also possible that this would not have been the case. At any rate, Hood as an artist in line never to my knowledge produces the effect which Thackeray produces, and knew that he produced, in that character—the effect of a man trying to do what he cannot do. He hits his intended effect of grotesque perfectly and admirably. It is most natural to compare him with Cruikshank, but however far below that artist he may be as a mere draughtsman and as a composer, he is above him in the felicity with which he proportions his aims to his means. Everybody knows plates of Cruikshank's in which it is quite clear that the artist meant to depict ordinary human beings and in which he has merely depicted monsters. Hood always kept clear of this danger. Nor indeed do I know any artist in grotesque of this peculiar kind during the century who has far excelled him, except that admirable designer M. Caran D'Ache. The Polish-Frenchman is of course far Hood's

superior as a draughtsman and as an artist, but on the literary side, as artists are pleased to call it, in which he himself is so excellent, he does not go so far beyond the author and illustrator of *Up the Rhine*, of the *Whims and Oddities*, of *Hood's Own* and the rest. It would be difficult to find two artists more unlike in technique, and yet more similar in general spirit and conception.

Still, when all is said and done I confess my own preference for Hood as a writer of serious verse over Hood as a jester, admitting likewise and at the same time that the enjoyment of Hood as a serious writer of verse might be less if we did not know him as a jester. Life would be absolutely worthless without jest, without quip, without (let it be frankly avowed) punning, but fortunately the faculty of these things is not often wholly denied to men of brains who happen also to be of English birth. Borrow says, and as I fear it is true, that nothing is so low as a low Englishman. It might be said with equal truth that nothing is so dull as a dull Englishman. Yet there has been vouchsafed to our race in compensation a pretty general ability to giggle and make giggle. There has rarely been dearth of merriment in England till very late years indeed—till in fact England became, it may be better it may be worse, but certainly less English than it used to be. Nor can it be said that Hood's fun, good as it is and extraordinarily abundant as it is in measure, is in any similarly extraordinary way peculiar in kind. It is genuine but not remarkably distinct, fresh and original, but still not very full of idiosyncrasy. It does not touch Shakespeare or Swift or Thackeray or even Dickens. It is rather in our literature the nearest approach to that quality which in another received the rather unjustly stinted praise that its owner had more than any one else what everybody had. In other words, it is

perennially and in a superior degree what the cleverest undergraduate has sometimes at a very happy two o'clock in the morning.

In the serious verse a similar characteristic produces quite a different result. Here too there is nothing extraordinarily rare or far brought in kind. We shall not find in Hood anything like the notes, once heard and never forgotten, of *La belle Dame sans Merci*, of *Oh World! Oh Life! Oh Time!* of *All Thoughts, all Passions, all Delights*, of *Proud Maisie*. No poem of his attains quite the first rank as a lyric; and every poem of his which is not a lyric has more or fewer blemishes, tediousnesses, inequalities. Yet there is a singular variety in him and each of the lines which makes up the variety has a remarkable charm. It is as though a certain average kind of thought and feeling had suddenly been endowed with the faculty of presenting itself poetically, and had taken the widest possible range in doing so. Hood was not what is called a classical scholar, yet how many people who could give him considerable odds in the matter of Attic perfects could have written *Giver of Glowing Light*? He was not, as Moore was, a musician, and he does not seem to have had the natural song faculty of the Irishman. Yet what ballads of their class surpass *Fair Ines*, and *It was not in the Winter*, and *The Dead are in the Silent Graves*, and *The Stars are with the Voyager*? Of *The Haunted House* I have spoken, but how many poets even if they had been able to write *The Haunted House* could have paired it with such a pendant as *The Elm Tree*? In all these pieces the thing that particularly charms me is what I may perhaps be allowed to call the unusually close contact of the commonplace and the poetical—the fact that we have as it were in this poet got hold of the very meeting

or parting place, whichever phrase may be preferred, of the two temperaments as they are generally supposed to be. Scarcely any poet who was so much of a Christian or an ordinary man as Hood in all relations of life — who had so little of fine frenzy, who was so little sad or bad or mad, who was so far removed from Bohemianism, who lived such a steady-going, hard-working, when he could scot-and-lot paying existence—has left work of such poetical quality: none who had so little literary culture has such a flavour of literature properly so-called.

And in no poet is there a clearer instance on the one hand of the fact that poetry can touch any life to its own issues, and on the other, of the curious, the unmistakable, and yet the scarcely to be defined difference between what is poetry and what is not. It is no easy task, taking a piece of say Haynes Bayly's and a piece of Hood's to point out exactly what it is that makes one ridiculous and the other delightful. Yet there the difference is, and as there is still a tendency to look down on verse that is not elaborately embroidered (did not a critic once dismiss Lord Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* with kind approval as "homely"), it is always comforting and desirable to come back to such utterly unpretentious and yet such unmistakably poetical work, to work so simple, so pure, so strong, as Hood's. We might not care to have all Parnassus peopled with his likes; he has only his own place and only his own value. But that place and that value are secure as long as any one who at once knows poetry and can read English comes across the right divisions of his work.

VII

THREE HUMOURISTS

Hook, Barham, Maginn

Among writers of the second or lower classes there are few who hold their places in such a precarious fashion as humourists of the second or lower class. Their brethren of the first class occupy perhaps the surest position of all. More than two thousand years have failed to lessen in the very slightest degree the laughter-moving powers of Aristophanes, and nearly two thousand have not affected those of Lucian. But it may be that even the greatest, at shorter distances and intervals from their own time, are in danger of temporary eclipses; and all but the greatest are in danger of eclipses which are only too likely to be more than temporary.

On two, at least, of the three jesters whose names are written above, the curse has certainly come; and I have been told, though I hope it is not true, that even *The Ingoldsby Legends* have fallen somewhat from the pride of place which they held so long. It may be all the more interesting to survey them in a trio, a conjunction to which they lend themselves with unusual ease. They were all contemporaries in life and still more in literature; they all pursued a peculiar kind of humourous writing to which the institution, new in their day, of the lighter kind of periodical literature gave opportunities impossible before their date. All of them were distinctly convivial and not like their other contemporary, Hood, retiring and domestic in habits, though rollicking with the pen. Two of them were Bohemians in the fullest sense of the word. Two of them, but not the same two, were no mean scholars.

All had the natural and rarely absent temperament of the humourist which makes him sometimes a staunch and pronounced Tory, and almost always an opponent of innovations in Church, in State, in manners, and in literature. All wrote a peculiar kind of easy verse with extraordinary facility, and two, at least, could sometimes drop, or rather rise, into something not merely facile.

When the tale is of three men in one tub, biographical particulars must necessarily be given as sparingly as possible. Indeed no one of the three lives was in the ordinary sense eventful; and a few dates and facts will be all that is necessary to place them conveniently. Theodore Hook was born in London, on 22nd September, 1788, of a musical and theatrical family which, in the person of his elder brother and still more in that of his nephew, raised itself to high consideration in the Church. Theodore was sent to Harrow and to Oxford, but, as his official biographer says, "threw himself into the arms of the Muse," which would not, to an earlier generation, have conveyed the sense of "left the University with no degree and for no profession." Attracting the notice of the Regent by his convivial gifts he was appointed (in 1813) to a valuable place at Mauritius, in which he had Moore's ill-luck with, it would seem, much less excuse beforehand than Moore's and with very different consequences. Indeed conduct, as Mr Arnold would have said, was never even a hundredth part of Hook's life. Although when he came home (in 1818) both his baser and his nobler gifts brought him plenty of patronage and plenty of money, he never made any serious attempt to liquidate or compound his obligations to the Treasury, and at his comparatively early death (in 1840) a further *laches* (his omission to marry the mother of his children) caused everything that his family

might have had left to them to be swept away. He had filled the interval with journalism of immense vivacity and not a little scurrility, with popular novel-writing, and with the fabrication of a vast amount of mainly impromptu matter of the amusing kind, most, if not all, of which has necessarily perished.

The next person on our list, Barham, is one of the best known witnesses to the brilliancy of Hook's apparent or real improvisations in the way of dining-room and drawing-room entertainment, he himself being singer, player, and extempore librettist. But the testimony to this is unanimous; and the gift made him, till his health broke and his spirits flagged, a welcome guest in rich men's houses. Then the end came, and there was nothing left of poor Mr Wagg but his batch of printed jestings, the rapidly fading memory of his conversational and entertaining powers, a disapproval of his life which was not limited to Mrs Grundy, and one masterly piece of friendly but truthful criticism, Lockhart's article written for the *Quarterly Review*, and afterwards more than once reprinted alone.

Not so very different, though with fewer chances than Hook's, is the tale of the life of our second specimen—of "bright broken Maginn," as the same Lockhart, this time in a rhyming epitaph almost unmatched for humourous pathos, described him—of "the Doctor" of *Fraser's*, "the Ensign" of *Blackwood's*, the part originator at least of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, the part original of Captain Shandon, the staunchest of Tories, one of the best of fellows (for, like Lockhart, "I ne'er heard of a sin" of an odious type, except in some Pecksniffian insinuations made long years after by S. C. Hall) and alas! the most improvident of men. He was born in Cork in 1793, was thoroughly educated first by his father, a schoolmaster, then at Trinity

College, Dublin, and for some time followed his father's vocation. But *Blackwood's Magazine* came into being, and Maginn seems to have gravitated to it much after the fashion described in verses about another person:—

> How many wise ones for thy sake
> Have flown to thee and left off plodding!

Certainly Maginn was not an idle man even after this, nor did he immediately give up keeping school; but from about the middle of 1820, when he paid a visit to Edinburgh, his heart was in the lighter journalism and the Bohemianism which then accompanied it as a matter almost of course. He soon went to London; was introduced to Hook among editors, and Murray among publishers; took a hand in the *John Bull* and the *Representative* and the *Standard* (if not also in the *Age* and other downright blackguardly prints); quarrelled with Blackwood; set up *Fraser*; enraged and fought with Grantley Berkeley; translated Homer into ballads; received five hundred pounds from Thackeray; knew debts and duns and the Fleet; was more than once befriended by Peel, who whatever faults he may have had was good to men of letters; and died of consumption at Walton-on-Thames on 21st August, 1842.

The contrast between these two lives, unfortunate at the best and at the worst not easily to be defended from unkind adjectives, and that of the third, which is placed between them, is, as our fathers would have said, "odd and pretty," and withal very English. Neither Hook nor Maginn had, it is true, Barham's advantages to start with; but it is equally true that both were put in tolerably straight roads and chose to fall out of them. Richard Harris Barham, though as thorough a humourist as either of them, and of anything but an unsociable or unconvivial disposition,

found his feet set on the King's highway from the first and never seems to have been tempted to stray out of it. Whether the Barhams were really descended from Reginald Fitzurse and the Irish Macmahons I really do not know; the author of *The Ingoldsby Legends* is perhaps not the man from whom one would accept an unproved pedigree with implicit and childlike faith. But they were certainly a good Kentish family, and Tapton (the elongation to Tappington was venial) was an authentic manor-house. Barham himself, however, was not born there, but at Canterbury on 6th December, 1788; his father, a stout and cheerful person but a little of a spendthrift, making amends by dying and leaving his son to a minority of fourteen or fifteen years. This he spent at St Paul's School and Brasenose College, meeting at Oxford Theodore Hook, who for a short time was an undergraduate at St Mary's Hall. It would appear that Barham himself was a little volatile. A severe illness, however, sobered him; he took orders, married pretty early, and was presented to a living in Romney Marsh, the head-quarters of smuggling. Hence in 1821 he was transferred to a minor canonry at St Paul's, and from this time forward lived chiefly in London. His career was one of unostentatious, but real, work in his profession, varied by the writing of some novels (whereof the chief is *My Cousin Nicholas*) and of the famous verses by which he is still known. He died in 1845, the same year which was fatal to Sydney Smith, his friend and superior in the Pauline hierarchy.

And so turn we from the lives of these men to their works.

To one who begins the reading of Theodore Hook's novels for the first time, or with only a dim and distant remembrance of *Gilbert Gurney* and one or two more of the best, read at an easily amused period of youth,

I should judge from my own experience that a certain thing is like to happen. He will remember how when Pendennis came to London Mr Doolan informed him that Mr Wagg got "three hundther pound" for every volume of these novels, and how Arthur at once began to calculate whether he himself might not, on the same terms, make an income of about five thousand a year. To tell the truth it is almost, if not quite, impossible to rank most of these productions high from any point of view. The carelessness and slovenliness of the mere writing sometimes very nearly take away the breath even of a reviewer of novels in the present day. The matter is often not much better than the form; and when one remembers the flattering impromptu of Barham:

> Says I, "Gadzooks!
> That's Theodore Hook's,
> Whose *Sayings and Doings* make such pretty books,"

and that this represents a general opinion of our fathers, who were not fools, the thing becomes exceedingly surprising.

For clumsy sentences and slovenly constructions are not the only things to quarrel with. A more good-natured, a wider, and a less technical criticism will find endless faults and, perhaps, not very many merits. Take for instance these very *Sayings and Doings*. The three series of them contain ten stories of varying lengths: *Danvers*, *The Friend of the Family*, *Merton*, *Martha the Gipsy*, *The Sutherlands*, *The Man of Many Friends*, *Doubts and Fears*, *Passion and Principle*, *Cousin William*, and *Gervase Skinner*. Of these I do not believe that at any time during the last forty[1] years any one, except possibly *The Sutherlands* and certainly *Gervase Skinner*, would have had the slightest

[1] I can cheerfully say *eighty* now (1923).

chance of ranking as of even third-rate merit. *Danvers* is a pointless and characterless story of silly waste of money on the part of two very harmless parvenus, enlivened at the opening with one of those extravaganzas which from time to time catch the popular taste, the disturbance created in a quiet household by the menagerie of a rich nabob. *The Friend of the Family* is a little better, but alternately sentimental and boisterous, and much characterised by that weakness of Hook's which Thackeray satirised by the suggestion of "putting the characters up a step in the peerage all round." *Merton*, which is extremely long, tells how a decidedly foolish hero missed a good wife and married a bad one, without any happy ending. Hook, to do him justice, was ambitious enough to scorn the happy ending; but he was hardly strong enough to manage its opposite. *Martha the Gipsy* is the shortest of the whole, and was considered in its day a very effective tale of terror. I can only say that though I am rather fond of tales of terror, and, I believe, an indulgent critic of them, it brings me for all its shortness nearer to a yawn than to a shudder.

The Sutherlands is a distinct relief, though there is not very much substance in it, and its merits are, as Hook's merits generally are, rather dramatic than narrative and less of comedy than of farce. Still the two brothers, the headlong George and the careful James, who come equally to grief,—the one marrying a girl not in the very least better than she should be, and the other expending endless diplomacy and a considerable sum of ready money on securing an unattractive and illegitimate heiress to a small annuity—are contrasted amusingly enough and meet their fate in no disagreeable manner. Nearly as much may be said, though the thing is here even more directly

farcical and was indeed actually dramatised, of *Doubts and Fears*, where a roué and lady-killer, who is separated from his wife, makes coincident assignations unawares both with her and with his daughter, and all is gas and gaiters afterwards. *The Man of Many Friends*, which comes between the two, is one of the hardest of all to read. *Passion and Principle* is a strange compound of good and bad. Francis Welsted's sojourn at the Holborn Inn and in the Dalston Academy are full of lively touches which (as do most of Hook's best things) show us where both Dickens and Thackeray with others of their contemporaries found models; and they are good to read to this day. But the trials of Welsted's beloved Fanny with a nabob soldier of equally detestable temper and character, the patronage of that struggling usher by a noble family, and the lamentable but scarcely pathetic end are all naught. *Cousin William* is half society and half sentiment; but to me, at least, almost wholly uninteresting.

Only *Gervase Skinner* seems to me readable now-a-days with genuine amusement right through. Even here there is a good deal of that mixture of simple exaggeration and of caricature which is called in French *charge*, and which is Hook's main resource. The devices by which Gervase,—a country squire who is economical "on principle," a fully middle-aged bachelor whose pre-contract to a young and pretty girl does not prevent him from aspiring to illicit joys, and a simple bumpkin who tries to be knowing and see life—is fleeced, tormented, and almost ruined are scantily probable at times. But still the thing is amusing, and it is salted and spiced all through by Hook's ingenious use of his unquestioned familiarity with theatrical things and theatrical people. The Fuggleston couple,—the wife an adventuress and a baggage; the husband

full enough of apparent *bonhomie* but one of those particularly ugly persons for whom modern English has no name, but of whom Shakespeare's contemporaries were very fond, though Shakespeare himself would have none of him—are what Hook's men and women are too seldom, alive, hit off once for all, and added to the permanent strength of the establishment of the army of Fiction.

Here, too, that peculiar kind of interest to which I have alluded above comes in very strongly. I feel that I owe an apology to the blameless and peerless Emily Fotheringay if I say that I do not think she would have been precisely what she is if Amelrosa Fuggleston, who was not at all blameless and only appeared peerless to a bumpkin Lothario, had not preceded her. In the same way Kekewich, the manager, stammers the language of no less a person than Mr Jingle who, both for professional and chronological reasons, may quite probably have learnt it of him, though it is fair to say that there are traces of this kind of lingo in fiction much earlier, as far back, indeed, as the Mr Briggs of *Cecilia*. This quality of suggestion and ancestorship has, for those who read not merely for the story, a strong attraction. But of other attractions I must confess these *Sayings and Doings* seem to provide but a scanty and fragmentary banquet.

Nor are the other books much more remunerative. There is no doubt that tradition rather than positive acquaintance is right in holding *Gilbert Gurney* for the best of them. It is, if not a specially amiable or estimable, a sufficiently bright and cheerful example of the fiction of high jinks and high spirits—of, as Hook's great follower has it, the "British brandy and water" school of jollity. The things by which it is best, if not solely remembered,—the hoaxes of Daly, the mis-

taking of Gilbert for the Prince of Orange, the portrait of Tom Hill, and so forth,—are still relishing with a little good will even to rather difficult palates, and still delectable to boyish appetites and simple tastes generally. But even these are rather thin; and when they are left out of consideration the interest of the book is reduced almost to zero. There is scarcely any plot; the hero, though not a bad fellow, is a colourless nincompoop; the female characters (with the exception perhaps of Mrs Fletcher Green) have, in a less libellous sense than Pope's, no character at all: and the narrative jerks or joints itself along in unconnected fyttes which might nearly, if not quite, as well be presented separately as short stories.

Faulty as it is, however, it is at any rate better than *Gurney Married*, of which all that can be said is that Gilbert is a greater fool than ever, his brother in a different way a greater fool than he, and the humour of the Nubleys, the governess and the children, very tragical mirth for the most part. In *Jack Brag* matters are not much mended by the hero being an offensive cad instead of a chuckle-headed gentleman. *Maxwell* has attracted most attention from the portrait sketch of Godfrey Moss, which is known to be almost a photograph of George the Fourth's unlucky led-parson Cannon; and the picture is certainly at first vivid if rather disgusting. But Moss has very little to do with the story, and his mannerisms—his "Neddums" and "Kittums" and the rest—become after a time as tiresome as they are irrelevant. *Peregrine Bunce* can plead that it was written when its author was almost entirely broken down,—indeed I believe he never finished it. But all the rest, *Cousin Geoffrey*, *All in the Wrong*, *Precepts and Practice*, *The Widow and the Marquis*, etc., exhibit the same faults with perhaps

fewer merits than the books already noticed. Pictures of manners so stale and faded that it is impossible not to suspect the drawing of having been at first but superficial; characters lacking in the universal traits which alone give vitality; careless writing; construction which is often no construction at all,—these things meet one at every turn of leaf, at every change of volume, and even when the laughter does provoke an echo,

> Its voice is thin as voices from the grave.

With the best good will the reader is foiled; and he shuts the last book, agreeing more heartily than ever with the aforesaid Mr Pendennis, when he thought more than eighty years ago that these works were "not exactly masterpieces of the human intellect."

Are we then to conclude that our fathers were fools? That is about the last conclusion which I, for one, will ever willingly accept. Indeed the answer which makes such a conclusion quite unnecessary was practically given almost when Mr Pendennis spoke, and in reply to him, by Lockhart, whose critical dicta are never to be lightly passed over, and may often, as here, be extended and inferred from with advantage. In a note to his biographical essay on Hook when it was reprinted, the critic draws special attention to the *rise* of Thackeray as qualifying certain remarks which he had made on the merits of Hook's novels. The fact is that during the late twenties and the thirties, the years of Hook's fame and fortune, the country was very badly off for novelists, and especially for novelists of modern and contemporary life. Nearly all Scott's best were written, and Miss Austen had ceased to write, when Hook began; Dickens had but just appeared, and Bulwer not so very long, when Hook died. Scott's line was different: Miss Austen had made no school; and

though novels were being written in ever increasing numbers their writers were for the most part all abroad in the novel proper. They could not get out of the tradition of Fielding and Smollett, itself a survival of the picaresque romance. Although the life of their heroes and heroines was supposed to be modern and actual, it had to be spiced with adventures, and adjusted to a sort of Odyssey (comic or tragic as the case might be) watered with the tears of sensibility or roused by the guffaws of broad farce. Except Miss Austen and perhaps Miss Ferrier, nobody had yet dared with conspicuous genius and success to depict purely ordinary life: for even Miss Edgeworth's work at its best is of an older fashioned kind. Hook, for all his talent, all his faculty, all his experience of the world, was certainly not the man to strike out the new line. It is perfectly obvious, not merely from his carelessness of style and story, but from consideration of the life he led, that he must almost always have written in a scrambling hurry. He was in fact a born improvisatore, and I should imagine that the *Sayings and Doings* (which brought him even more than the sum named by Mr Doolan, inasmuch as for one of the series he is said to have received two thousand pounds) cost him very little more labour or, in proportion, more time, than the famous impromptu comediettas which he used to throw off at rich men's dinners by way of payment for the claret and retainer for a further invitation.

Nor was he by any means a man of such commanding genius that he could dispense with labour; though he had a certain amount of wit at will, a command of rather theatrical pathos, unlimited bustle and rattle, and sufficient familiarity with those whom the middle classes of his day called "high fellows" to

dazzle the said middle classes with titles and scraps of "silver fork" detail. It is also probable that his manners are truer to those of his time than we, to whom this time is only a tradition, quite know. In the very greatest works the essentially and eternally human is so married to the ephemeral that it makes this eternal too, and we have no difficulty in appreciating it for all its deadness. But the smaller men cannot fix the manner of the minute in this way, and their presentations appear to us, not as interesting preservations and preparations, but as worn-out stuff which is not alive to us now, and the vitality of which at any time we feel more or less inclined to doubt. It has amused me sometimes in reading contemporary work of the kind to try and separate the pieces which will have the first, and those which have the second effect on readers a hundred years hence. To a certain extent it can, I think, be done, but probably never completely even by the wariest critic, by him who has paid most attention to the abiding and the fleeting characteristics of literature respectively. But this is a digression. In Hook, let me only repeat, much is dead that may have once been alive; a little was alive and is so still; but much also, I think, never was properly alive at all, and was only accepted as being so in the absence of livelier studies.

Those who, as is not uncommon, maintain that the preservative just referred to is more easily applied, or at any rate is more commonly found, in verse than in prose, may derive confirmation for their opinion from the different fate of the second author on our list. Barham and Hook were friends and contemporaries, and, but for the differences noted above in their characters and fortunes, might be said to resemble each other in many ways, if not in most. They died

within a few years of each other, and at the time even of Barham's death there can be no question that his reputation was almost infinitesimal compared with Hook's. Yet the greater fame was doomed to decrease rapidly and continually, the smaller to increase at once and to hold its ground. I have been told indeed that *The Ingoldsby Legends* have shown of very late years a certain loss of grip on popular, at least on popular literary, estimation. They are not so often quoted; the young man of letters of the day does not appreciate, but rather disdains, them, and so forth. Even, however, if this were true (and I am rather doubtful of its truth), even if we were to suppose that the very amusing onslaught made upon the *Legends* some ten or a dozen years ago[1] by a person of the "æsthetic" persuasion (in very nearly the same terms as those which good Roger Ascham applied to the *Morte d'Arthur*), had some effect, it would remain certain that for at least an entire generation after their first collected appearance in 1840, and probably for an entire generation after their author's death in 1845, they enjoyed an almost unexampled and a certainly unexceeded popularity. They were reprinted again and again, in cheap editions and dear, with this man's illustrations and that man's, and without illustrations at all. They were the common delight of readers, and the common quoting ground of writers. Every schoolboy literally knew them, and did not neglect them when he ceased to be a schoolboy; girls who were good for anything were nearly as fond of them as boys. For thirty years at least hardly anybody who attempted light verse failed to imitate them, and for at least the same number, if not a much larger one, nobody who read light verse with any relish failed to enjoy them.

[1] Nearly 50 now (1923).

How far did they deserve this really extraordinary vogue, which to some extent still continues? The enemy, not merely in the person of the aforesaid "æsthetic" energumen, but long before his time, has always accused them of being an ignoble caricature of a noble period of history, of encouraging brutal and Philistine emotions, of being a hardly disguised and yet underhand and unworthy attack on the Oxford Movement, of drawing their piquancy from the subtle pleasure which the baser side of human nature feels in seeing great and holy things degraded and burlesqued. Is there anything in this? I think there is something, nay, a great deal; but I should have to apply very uncomplimentary language to the quality of it. It is sometimes impertinent, and not often thoroughly to the point, to give personal impressions and opinions as an argument; but occasionally it is well in place. Now I happen (which for the present matter, if for that only, is of consequence) to be a thorough sympathiser with the Oxford Movement, and an impenitent, hardened, incurable lover of the Middle Ages. So long as, and to the extent to which, Newman was loyal to the Church of England, I should have followed him without the slightest hesitation; and I know no reading which for pure delight exceeds that of thirteenth century romances in twenty thousand lines of verse or prose. But I have never found *The Ingoldsby Legends* jar in the very slightest degree on these tastes and opinions of mine.

Considering indeed that the Middle Ages liked nothing better than burlesquing and rallying their own raptures, their own mysticism, their own religion, I really do not know why we should be more sensitive for them than they were for themselves. There is a particular delight in making jests on one's own

emotions and their objects, which only humourists, who are also lovers, know. As for the argument of brutality, for that there is absolutely no excuse. It requires very little discussion and no mercy. It is merely part of the rubbish talked and sometimes believed by the average fool of an age which turns up its eyes over England's part in the Napoleonic wars[1], swoons at the idea of a man drinking a bottle of port or a magnum of claret, and while crowding to see any stupid and tasteless feat of acrobatism which gives a chance of a fatal accident, goes into fits at the idea of a cock-fight or a badger-drawing.

In the mere character, however, of the subjects, except that their quaintness and variety have no small charm, very little of the attraction of *The Ingoldsby Legends* seems to me to reside. Although the grotesque-supernatural, and the tragi-comic suited Barham most admirably, and were perhaps his special walk, his powers were in reality of very wide application. *My Cousin Nicholas* is no contemptible attempt in the school of Hook. He is not much less good in prose than in verse, and he manages his alternations of grave and gay in verse itself with a skill which is hardly smaller in amount, though less delicate, than that of Praed, who probably gave him some lessons. His beautiful last lines "As I lay a-thinking" do not require the not very authentic antiquity of their spelling to give them charm. He had scholarship, which, when it does not prevent a man from writing, is seldom without effect on the quality of what he writes; he had the wide vague reading which scholarship nowadays too often excludes; he had good humour, good feeling, good breeding, an immense sense of fun and an inexhaustible fund of rhymes and rhythms just suited for his pur-

[1] And others (1923).

pose. There is a fairly considerable class of books and writers between which and whom a peculiar relation exists, the book seeming to have been made for the man and the man for the book; and it need hardly be said that where it does exist the work is never valueless. In kind it may be high or low, an epic or an epigram, a romance or a riddle; but it always has the merits of supremacy in that kind. And in the kind of burlesque poetical narrative I am quite sure that Thomas Ingoldsby never has had a superior, and I think it extremely improbable that he ever will have one.

In the case of a writer whose best things are universally known it is, fortunately, considering space, unnecessary to enter into even as much detail as is here unavoidable about one who is half forgotten like Hook, or one who has never been wholly known like Maginn. It would even be dangerous, for when one began there would be no stopping. I really think I could repeat half the *Legends*; I am almost certain that I could with a cue here and there. And as no familiarity can dull, so no want of acquaintance ought to be proof against, the abundant and intense characteristics of this jovial microcosm in verse. The hackneyed metaphors of a fountain and a kaleidoscope are the only ones that are equal to its curious combination of variety and formal perfection. The rhymes and the metres flicker and vary just as the water does when the winds blow its upthrown masses; they glitter and group themselves unerringly just as the colours and shapes do in the turning tube. How much of the charm may be due to the steady background of good sense, of right feeling, even of tenderness, which is spread behind these fantastic combinations, may be matter of opinion; how much to the unfailing sun of wit and humour that

shines over the whole may be differently, though not very differently, estimated. But the total result can never fail of its effect except upon "bad prigs," upon persons of undue natural density, and upon those who, with amiable and estimable tastes as to what is in the fashion, are not capable of relishing what happens to be a little out of it. Few are the things that one can read at fourteen and at forty-eight[1] with delight equal in intensity and not very much altered in character. But of these, in the case of "this Recensent" (and he thanks the Upper Powers for it), are *The Ingoldsby Legends*.

Yet I am not certain that of our three, the last is not in certain ways the greatest. The work of Maginn, though easier to appreciate than it was a few years ago, is even yet hid as a whole from the general cognisance. I do not even know that it would be possible to recover it entirely; and I am quite sure that if it were so recovered it would suffer from the fatal drawback of being almost entirely Journalism, and of a consequent inequality all the greater that its author was the least gifted of all men with the senses of responsibility and hesitation. Barham, always in easy circumstances and restrained by his profession as well, wrote simply when it pleased him, and could hold back what he wrote till it pleased him. Even Hook had upon him the constraint of the book, slight as that was in his case. Maginn published little or nothing in book form. He was always a contributor or an editor, one who lived by contributions and editing; and he appears to have been as indifferent as Diderot himself to what became of his work after he had sent in the copy, and pocketed (a temporary process if ever there was one) the payment. Since the pious care of Mr R. W. Montagu

[1] And at seventy-seven (1923).

collected in 1885 his *Miscellanies* in two volumes, it has been possible by adding the letterpress of the "Fraser Gallery" to them to obtain something like a conspectus of Maginn's extraordinary faculty. It is not a complete conspectus: and yet it is a conspectus which shows us the flaws in the work and makes us pretty certain that they would widen if the area of collection were extended.

It shows us, however, at the same time the great and multifarious gifts of the man. In one respect I own I am a heretic. I cannot away with Maginn's Homeric translations in ballad form. Mr Gladstone, I believe, thinks their tone Homeric; I should say it was as much like Homer, though in a different way, as Pope is. Mr Matthew Arnold thought them "genuine poems in their own way," and he called the *Lays of Ancient Rome* pinchbeck! Mr Conington complimented Maginn on having realised that Greek ballads can only be represented by English, and Mr Conington was an Oxford man, and must have learnt sound doctrine about *petitio principii*! However, no more of this. In the case of such as Maginn it is important not to blame the small fragment of his work which for some reason or other has been unduly praised, but to bring forward the far greater part of it which has never been praised enough. It is astonishing how various and how vivid the lights of that part are.

As for the letterpress of the "Fraser Gallery," I own that, clever as it is, I have no great affection for it. It is one of the earliest and one of the best examples of a kind of journalism for which there has since been greater and ever greater demand,—the brief biography, smart in style and somewhat swaggering in manner, of "Celebrities of the Day," "Men of the Time," and what not. Maginn knew a great deal: he was sufficiently

on an intellectual equality with most of his subjects for his treatment not to be merely impertinent; and it is certain that he had at this particular time a coadjutor in Lockhart, whose knowledge and whose competency were even greater than his own, though Lockhart's actual literary faculty might not be quite so versatile. So the things are amusing enough and sometimes more than amusing; also, which is not common in this kind of thing, they contain a rather unusual amount of positive biographical and miscellaneous information, not no doubt to be accepted quite unverified, but often extremely useful in the way of setting one on tracks. It is unlucky that in addition to their other faults they contain a great deal of the tedious and obsolete newspaper mannerism of the time, a mannerism of knowing and braggart assumption, which had been started in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which was to obtain for many years, and which is not quite dead yet. It must, I suppose have appealed to some taste, have hit some cranny of the human mind, but it certainly seems very unengaging to me.

This defect and others appear, but are less notable, in the miscellanies of all kinds which Mr Montagu has collected. In so far as there is any direct original for the tricks which Maginn began to play directly he became one of *Blackwood's* contributors, I am rather disposed to see it in the notes to *The Anti-Jacobin* and the combinations of fanciful divagation, scholarly parallel, and scurrilous personal attack which distinguished that celebrated periodical. Mr Montagu (committing a crime too common, though always unforgivable in arrangers of selections and collections) omits to furnish the dates of the magazines from which he extracts, and to rout them out from complete sets of the originals requires time and opportunity. But

the *Memoirs of Morgan O'Doherty*, from the allusions to *Peter's Letters* and other things, must have been very early. There are in them all the traits which Wilson subsequently elaborated and perfected in the *Noctes*, —the interspersions of verse, serious and comic, the studied desultoriness, the critical, social, and literary vagaries. Indeed there is no doubt that this famous series did owe its origin to Maginn, who disputes the honour of suggesting the motto.

The *Memoirs* themselves are filled with parodies and patter songs of singular liveliness, and characterised, as Maginn's writings generally are, by odd, but by no means unhappy lapses into the serious. They also show that wide familiarity with literature, especially with classical literature, by which the author was honourably distinguished. Since the comparative disuse of a classical education, these Greek and Latin freaks of Maginn's have probably become something of a stumbling-block to the generation which is now sent into the world unfurnished with the keys to some of the world's best things. Indeed in the not very abundant comments made on Maginn's centenary, the British journalist not unfrequently had the honesty to confess the fact. But if the habit is thus to some a disqualification, it is, of course, to others an additional charm. And I do not know that any one has ever managed this particular style of academical wit better than Maginn. He may not have been an extremely profound or accurate scholar[1] but few men have had more knowledge of the classics after the fashion which delighted Professor Blackie,—the knowledge which enables a man to talk and write in "the tongues" almost as freely as in his own language, and which

[1] An Irish correspondent good-humouredly remonstrated with me on this admission. But the slip of "Nugæ Curialiæ" (v. *infra*) is not the only suspicious one to be found.

leaves him rarely at fault for a quotation from or a quip in them. Yet few men could be more vernacular; and in these very *Memoirs* "The Powldoodies of Burran" exhibits a command of the style which Swift invented for the purpose of putting it into the mouth of Mrs Harris, unequalled since Swift's own examples.

O'Doherty (Maginn himself spells it in one word, "Odoherty") also does duty as eidolon-author in another of "the Doctor's" most considerable productions, indeed his most considerable production taking length and merit together. The *Maxims of* [*Sir*] *Morgan O'Doherty* used to be procurable in a little pocket-volume which I have not seen for very many years. More people probably know them from one or two references of Thackeray's than in themselves, even since Mr Montagu's reprint; but they are very well worth knowing. With not a few of what seem now, and a few of what should surely have seemed at any time, breaches of good manners and good taste, they contain a great deal of wisdom on the first principles of literature, feeding, and philosophy, with a picture of Fourth-Georgian manners which, used with discretion, is instructive, and, used with or without discretion, entertaining. Maginn should not have spelt Château Grillet, Château *Grillé*[1], which is absurd; but it is greatly to his credit that he pronounced that too little known wine to be delicious. It shows that he had no vulgar taste.

His most serious and solid work in matter and manner, if not also in actual bulk, is the rather famous *Consideration of Farmer's Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*. With some quite astonishing slips (such as "Nugæ Curialiæ," which perhaps is due to careless-

[1] This was too hasty. Some time afterwards I found in my friend and colleague Professor Pringle-Pattison's vast cellars at The Haining, Selkirk, labels of this very Fourth-Georgian drink so spelt (1923).

ness in correcting his proofs) it contains probably as much sound learning, shrewd wit, and acute criticism as can be found in any single contribution to the enormous, and too often worthless library of Shakesperian comment.

His miscellaneous writings in verse and prose are too numerous to be considered here in detail. In both kinds there may be thought to be too much of the aforesaid exercises in parody and burlesque criticism. *The Rime of the Ancient Waggonere*, *The Third Part of Christabel*, *Mooreish Melodies*, and so forth, though all very well in their own way and in small doses, are apt to become a little tiresome when collected in volumes. Nevertheless Maginn did some of his best work in these forms. *The Pewter Quart* is an admirable thing, the most spirited and genuine drinking-song perhaps of this century, if not the most poetical. Nor are the burlesque commentaries on *The Leather Bottell* and *The Black Jack* which follow by any means ungracious fooling, though they may be thought to have been carried on a little too long. There is great merit, both political and sentimental, in the variations which he founded on that most beautiful old song which begins "Let's drink and be merry." Some of his Latin versions in *The Embalmer* and elsewhere are excellent, and indeed it is difficult to dip anywhere into this class of his writing without finding pasture, though perhaps it is not wise to browse too long at one time thereon, and though not all the herbs are suited to all tastes. For instance I have never been able myself to take much delight in his exercises in jargon and thieves' Latin; but they please others.

A gift which Maginn must have had in extraordinary measure, but which, for some reason or other, he seems to have left for the most part uncultivated, was his

talent for prose fiction in little. A long story I do not suppose he could ever have managed, and his longest known to me, *The Last Words of Charles Edwards*, is dreary enough. But the man who wrote three such masterpieces, by no means in the same kind, as *The Man in the Bell*, *Bob Burke's Duel with Ensign Brady*, and, best of all, *A Story without a Tail*, must have had it in him to write a great many more. There are many instances on record of men who have produced only one or two poems of value; very few I think of men who have produced one or two extraordinarily good prose-tales and no more. The sole explanation that occurs to me is that work of actual invention required a certain amount of planning and thinking, which Maginn's incurably reckless and random nature and habits refused to give. If it be so, the loss inflicted in this respect by his foibles is greater than any other. I have read *A Story without a Tail* literally scores of times and never without fresh enjoyment.

Indeed in "the chronicle of wasted time" (to play on words in his own manner) there are few more melancholy histories than Maginn's. Many of the greatest wits have had nothing like his learning; and hardly any man of very great learning has had anything like his wit; while it cannot be said that he wanted opportunity. Yet not only did he make a mess of his life, but he also, in a way which by no means necessarily follows, made a mess of his genius. It is hardly possible to open a page of his without finding something that seems like indisputable evidence of that quality; yet in twenty years of literary production he did no great thing, and not more than one or two small things that are perfect. Neither drink nor debts, neither want of method nor even want of industry, will fully account for this. And perhaps after all the truth is here, as in

so many other cases, that Maginn did give the best that was in him to give, that his talents were more showy and versatile than solid, that the appearance in him was greater than the real capacity, and that in furnishing forth the part of a brilliant journalist and improvisatore he performed his day's work as it was appointed for him. I have never been able to make up my mind whether this theory is a consoling one or not, but it is of wide application and pretty strongly supported.

It is not, however, necessary to argue for or against it in this brief survey of an interesting group of humourists,—of "amusers," as another language has it. With Hood, who surpassed them all in originality of wit and quality of poetry, and Praed, who in his smaller scale and sphere excelled them all in fineness of touch, they are perhaps the chief of all such as amused the town during the third and fourth decades of this century. Nothing that they did except *The Ingoldsby Legends* can be called individually important, and nothing with that exception is destined, I should suppose, to a long lease of life or a probable hope of resurrection. It is difficult to believe that Hook, at any rate in the bulk of his novels, can ever find many readers again, and the strongest of Maginn's claims,—the delusive and elusive air of genius frustrated which somehow clings to his work—is to be found chiefly in his mixture of classical learning and farcical humour, a mixture which I fear is less and less likely to be appreciated until the slow wheel of time has made a pretty long revolution. According to not the wisest part of old-fashioned wisdom we ought perhaps to lament that they did not employ their wits on something more permanent, devote their energies to worthier occupations, and so forth. *Dignissimus* if not *gratissi-*

mus error! With the rarest exceptions the plays and the poems, the sermons and the histories, which are not absolutely of the first class, die almost as fast as the novels and essays, the jokes and the journalism that deserve the same classification. They preserve indeed a specious kind of apparent vitality in some respects, but it is little greater in the way of being actually read, while to the deliberate enquirer the sermon is sometimes even duller than the skit, the peroration less exciting than the parody.

Yet the division of literature to which they belong can never be indifferent to the lover of literature both in itself and in its connection with humanity. Most of the work we have been surveying has

> ——————Sunk into the stream
> That whelms alike sage, saint, and martyr,
> And soldier's sword and minstrel's theme,
> And Canning's wit and Gatton's charter.

More perhaps will undergo the same immersion; till nothing but Ingoldsby remains above water, and even his head is vexed by the foam of the tides. But they were all very much alive once, which is more than can always be said of the sermons and the histories; and where there has been life there must always be, in degrees varying from the infinite to the infinitesimal, interest for those who live.

VIII
CORRECTED IMPRESSIONS

(REPRINTED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE ORIGINAL PUBLISHERS MESSRS HEINEMANN WITH A FEW CORRECTIONS AND NOTES 1923)

CORRECTED IMPRESSIONS

ESSAYS ON VICTORIAN WRITERS

BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1895

PREFACE

(1895)

THESE Critical Notes differ a little in scheme and aim from anything that their writer has hitherto attempted. The shape which they take was partly suggested, as is observed in one of them, by some remarks of Mr A. J. Balfour's[1] at the Literary Fund Dinner of 1893, in London. It occurred to me then that a kind of foreshortened review of the impressions, and the corrections of them, which the great Victorian writers had produced or undergone in my own case during the last thirty years might not be an absolutely uninteresting sample of "how it has struck a contemporary." It was not practically possible to execute this without some reference to the progress of general as well as of individual opinion. But care has been taken to maintain as far as possible the genuineness of the individual impression, past as well as present[2]. To do this it was necessary rather to give heads of a study of the authors than the completed study itself, and rather to say too little than to say too much; but at the same time not to refrain from a certain amount of personal detail. Some of the earlier papers have appeared in the *Indian Daily News*, and the four last in the *New York Critic*; but none have been printed in England.

G. S.

[1] Now Earl of Balfour.

[2] With the same object no alterations except mere corrections of misprints, etc. have been made *in the text* so as to keep the representation true to the date, 1895. Any substantial new impressions are recorded in the notes. But a person of distinction was kind or unkind enough to remark when the little book first appeared: "Corrected? I don't believe he ever changed a first impression in his life!" And perhaps "he" has not done so very often (1923).

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CORRECTED IMPRESSIONS

I. THACKERAY

In a certain now rather antiquated school of theology, the word "use" was employed with a special application, denoting the adjustment of a given text, fact, or other thing to beneficent moral purposes. I like to make a use of critical humility out of the fact that there was a time when I did not like Thackeray. It was a very short time in itself, and it was a very long time ago; but from about, so far as I can remember, my fifteenth year to my seventeenth, it existed. The circumstances were extenuating. It so happened that, almost ever since I could read, I had been brought up on Dickens, and had known little or nothing of his great rival in the English fiction of the middle of the century, except that he was his rival. I believe the first thing that I ever read of Mr Thackeray's was *Philip*, as it came out in the *Cornhill*; the next, *Vanity Fair*. Neither, it will probably be admitted, was the best possible introduction to the subject for a green taste. I now think considerably better of *Philip* than some professed Thackerayans do; but I should hardly quarrel very fiercely with anybody who failed to relish it. And I do not think that any boy—at least any boy who is genuine, and has not prematurely learnt to feign liking for what he thinks he ought to like—can really enjoy *Vanity Fair*. The full beauty of Becky (I can honestly say that I always saw some of it) is necessarily hidden from him; he cannot taste the majesty of the crowning scene with

Lord Steyne, or the even finer, though less dramatic, negotiations which avert the duel; his knowledge of life is insufficient to allow him to detect the magnificent thoroughness and the more magnificent irony of the general treatment. On the other hand, he is sure, if he is good for anything, to be disgusted with the namby-pambyness of Amelia, with the chuckle-headed goodness of Dobbin, with the vicious nincompoopery and the selfishness of George Osborne. For these are things which, though experience may lead to the retractation of an opinion that any of the three is unnatural, leave on some tolerably mature judgments the impression that they are one-sided and out of composition, if not of drawing.

But this could not last long: after a few months, *Pendennis* came in my way. I took it, I remember very well after thirty years, out of a certain school library, and I read it, or began to read it (an exceedingly reprehensible practice) on my way home, which lay through Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. If any of the persons into whose arms I walked are still alive, I humbly ask their pardon. Even if they had not now mostly been changed long ago for others, it would be superfluous to extend forgiveness to the Park seats which avenged these innocents on my own knees. It may to some people seem odd, and to others shocking, that *The Newcomes* threw me at first rather back. It had its revenge later, though. To this day I confess that I think Ethel rather shadowy, and not wholly attractive; Clive something of what his own day would have called a young tiger; and the Colonel himself, despite his angelic qualities and immortal end, now and then (it is dreadful, but it must be said) a very little silly. But *Esmond* and *The Virginians* together, with their incomparable picture of Beatrix,—

the only true picture of a woman conceived in nature and sublimed to the seventh heaven by art, in youth and age alike, that prose fiction contains,—made me live Mr Thackeray's Protestant to be. All my old prejudices vanished. "The wreck was total," as a celebrated epitaph of the last century has it. "There was no mistake about this fellow," to alter slightly a great phrase in one of the novelist's own very best scenes.

But when you have thus "got salvation" in matters literary, you do not, if the gods have made you at all critical, proceed to mere indiscriminate adoring. What you do proceed to is reading, at first indiscriminate, then tolerably discriminating, and to the enjoyment of analysing excellence, never without the possibility of admitting defect, but with a sure consciousness that the man you study is right in the main, and that it will be only in a way for his greater glory if you find out where and wherefore he is sometimes wrong. I shall endeavour to set out the chief results of thirty years' reading and re-reading of the books of Thackeray in this spirit, only mentioning further, in the same personal key, that, if there is one scene which finally made me his, it is that—slightly done in appearance, and left to produce its own effect, with the carelessness of supremacy—in which Harry Warrington fails to recognise the portrait of Beatrix. If it is not necessary to have read most of the good novels, I would fain persuade myself that it is not unhelpful to have read vast numbers of the bad, in order to see the grandeur of this. America, Russia, France (putting Flaubert out of the question), for thirty years and more, have been trying to beat Thackeray's record in this particular field, and they have never come anywhere near him.

To the corrupted modern man, what other people

say of his subject always has a good deal to do with his impressions of it, though, if he be critically given, he can generally get rid of any bad effect thereof. He takes account of the sayings, is rather grateful for them, owes to them sometimes certain initial points of view and lines of approach, but is not, strictly speaking, much biassed by them. What other people have said about Thackeray has gone through some three or four stages. There was the first, in which they gradually had him forced on their notice, as a man who wrote a good deal for the papers. Some, as we learn from the *Life of Lever*, thought he wrote for too many papers, and was not careful enough in his selection of those organs. Others, as we learn from a note to Lockhart's article on *Hook*, and those the acutest judges of the day, thought him a very remarkable person indeed. He had almost reached the last decade of his too short life before this opinion, or conflict of opinion, changed, —though it must always be remembered that these stages of critical opinion do not end each as the other begins, but overlap and interpenetrate one another. He was now recognised as one of the greatest writers and one of the greatest novelists of England; he had an ever wider and stronger influence on the coming generation of novelists and of writers; but it was said that he was dreadfully cynical. This stage too passed, at least as a prevailing and recognised stage, and he entered (as most men do who die comparatively young) by the gates of death into something like a full enjoyment of the fame which was his due. Of late years, I am told, and I can partly perceive evidences of it, he has entered yet another phase. His manner, his language, his atmosphere of society, are getting a little antiquated for younger readers. Some critics have persuaded themselves that they see more points in the

human soul than he did; his analysis is not quite thorough-going enough, and so forth. Augustus Z. from New York, and M. Jules from Paris (or Quimper), and Count Caviarovitch from Ostrolenko, have outstripped Mr William Makepeace. He is a little *rococo*.

Let us register these things, and all things. Perhaps, though it may seem an undue magnification of the critical office, it is never impossible for a competent critic to disentangle himself almost wholly from prejudices of all kinds, and to see his subjects, whether they be subjects two thousand years old, or subjects of yesterday, or subjects of to-day, in a fairly white light. The worst of it is that it is so very difficult to decide what other persons will agree to regard as a white light. If their own eye-pieces are not quite achromatic, the whitest light will seem to them coloured, and they will complain to that effect. But this difficulty has to be faced.

Of few writers can it be said with so much confidence as of Thackeray, that he is all of a piece. He wrote, as has been observed, at one time of his life rather miscellaneously, and a great deal of his miscellaneous writing has been preserved. He was a reviewer of all sorts of books, a satiric essayist, a literary critic on the great scale, a social historian, a lecturer, and a novelist. When he was a novelist, he was very generally all the other things which have been enumerated at the same time; and it not unfrequently happened that, in the discharge of his miscellaneous functions, he forgot the particular jacket he had on, and wrote in a character suitable to quite other garments. In *The English Humourists*, for instance, and the *Roundabout Papers*, he is everything by turns; and there is hardly one of his novels, from the immaturity of *Catherine* to the uncompleted promise of *Denis Duval*, in which the

reader who reads with his eyes open does not perceive that he has something much more than a mere novelist to deal with. Not that Thackeray was not a novelist first of all, for if there is one of the pretty numerous gifts which go to make up the novelist which is more indispensable to him than any other, it is the gift of conceiving and projecting character. And this was the essence, the centre, the mainspring, of Thackeray's genius. Whether it was, as a gift, separable from his other peculiar gift of style, is a very intricate question of criticism. But I think the style might have existed without it, and therefore is less distinctive. Alone among our novelists, if not among the novelists of the world, Thackeray simply could not introduce a personage, no matter how subordinate, without making him a living creature. He (or she) may be the central figure of a long and complicated novel, or may be introduced to say a couple of lines, and never appear again, but Thackeray has no sooner touched him than there is a human being,—an entity. Everybody knows the penalty which is said, in strict Mohammedan theology, to wait upon the rash men of art, that they will have somehow or other to find souls for their creations at the Day of Judgment, or it will go uncommonly ill with them. The prospect must be rather an alarming one for most "makers" of any kind. It need never have troubled Thackeray. He had done it beforehand. He could not introduce a footman, saying some half-dozen words, "My Lady is gone to Brighting," or something of that sort, without presenting the fellow for his trouble with life and immortality.

II. THACKERAY (*concluded*)

It is perhaps worth while to expand a little that general view of Thackeray's literary gifts which has been put above. It must be remembered that his literary history is decidedly peculiar. He died (as men go) young; and he began regular—not merely casual or amateur—literary composition very young indeed. He had dabbled in journalism at Cambridge, and there was not I think any time after his undergraduate period at which he did not more or less practise it. Yet he was getting on for his fortieth year when *Vanity Fair* in its complete form for the first time forced him upon the notice of the public as a person who could not be any longer neglected. Of course, looking backwards, we think nowadays that we can detect the excellence which the world then first recognised in much earlier pieces. The maddening practice of republishing works in collected editions without giving their original dates (a practice for which, if I were dictator, I would saw any editor or publisher through between two boards) makes it not always easy without elaborate researches to "place" his earlier works exactly. But he certainly had a good ten years' practice in regular harness to all sorts of vehicles, before in 1846 the first instalments of *Vanity Fair* proclaimed him as beyond all doubt or question a master.

There are few more interesting things than to survey all this early work,—the Tales, the Burlesques, the Christmas Stories, the Reviews, the Sketch Books, the what not. It is excessively difficult to decide whether it is real critical acumen or *ex post facto* wiseacreishness which makes one fancy that it is possible to detect the true Thackeray even in the very earliest period of the novitiate. But I do not think that I

myself ever read a single volume with greater interest than that which I felt in the supplement to his collected works published more than twenty years after his death under the title of *Miscellaneous Essays, etc.* It was not that there was anything exactly new in it, for probably all the faults and certainly all the merits could have been paralleled from the work previously issued with the author's own *reimprimatur*. But these were scattered in different volumes. Here they were all in juxtaposition; and as these papers are "impressions," it is not impertinent to add that the time of their appearance was particularly interesting as correcting and strengthening my own notions of Thackeray.

It so happened that for other purposes I had just been refreshing and extending my knowledge of the journalism and magazine work which immediately preceded or accompanied this similar work of his. I had been reading with some care the principal *Blackwood* and *Fraser* men, the latter Thackeray's own colleagues, the former beyond all doubt his and their models. It is only such a comparison and contrast as this which can ever bring out the real and independent value of a new writer. In the course of a good many years' critical reading of literature, I have constantly been struck by this or that trait in a man only to discover by fuller reading not so much that he borrowed or plagiarised it from somebody else (for instances of actual plagiarism are very rare and as a rule of very little importance) as that it was "in the air" at the time. But if you compare this miscellaneous work—originally undistinguished and at all times not much considered—of Thackeray with the work of Wilson, of De Quincey, of his own editor Maginn, and of others, you will very soon begin to make distinctions and mark

advances. There are of course many likenesses, many copyings of tricks and mannerisms, many condescendences of this kind and that. When Thackeray, in a very sound and agreeable article on "Greenwich and Whitebait" in *Colburn* for July, 1844, entertained his readers with a procession *nominatim* of landlords and waiters carrying certain dishes, he was consciously or unconsciously repeating an old trick of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* which had attained almost to years of discretion as he wrote. But in that very article (one by no means of his very best) the most careless reader who can take notice at all will remark evidences of an "eye on the object," of a satiric comprehension of life, which is nowhere in Wilson, nowhere in Maginn, nowhere in De Quincey, nowhere in their contemporaries, —which, omitting touches in Scott, had not been presented in English literature since Fielding. Such a reader will find, too, a style which is strange and new, —not indeed in Thackeray himself, for touches of it may be found seven years earlier in his very earliest work, but as compared with others,—a quiet faculty of saying remarkable things and leaving them to make their own effect, a sort of urbane ease, an unforced combination of the points of view of the man of letters and the man of the world. And perhaps it may be remembered that Fielding also wandered about in alien paths of literature long before he found his true way, and that in his *Miscellanies* also are the strangest anticipations and revealings of his future powers.

Although, therefore, these early works, including even the famous *Sketch Books* and such things as the *Hoggarty Diamond*, are amazingly unequal and contain some things almost bad, they also contain intrinsic attraction enough to content, I should say, the most uncritical reader who knows good things when he

sees them, while for critical attraction I think they positively grow on one.

But there are two ends, according to the proverb, to some if not all subjects; and it is not seldom asked whether there was not a decline as well as a growth of Thackeray's powers, and whether anything but *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, and *Esmond* can be considered to present that power at its height. It is impossible not to observe, in passing, what a genius that must be as to which it is matter of dispute whether anything has to be *added* to such a literary baggage as that of the four books just enumerated. The least of them would be a passport to and a provision for eternity; and we are inquiring whether the gentleman has any more titles and any more luggage than all four. Let me only say that I am more and more convinced that he has: that he has others even besides *The Four Georges*, *The English Humourists*, and the *Roundabout Papers*, which even his most grudging critics would in the same good-natured manner allow. I have never quite understood the common depreciation of *The Virginians*, which contains things equal, if not superior, to the very finest of its author's other work, and includes the very ripest expression of his philosophy of life. For though indeed I do not approve a novel more because it contains the expression of a philosophy of life, others do. So, too, the irregularity and formlessness of plot which characterised most of Thackeray's work undoubtedly appear in it; but then, according to the views of our briskest and most modern critics, plot is a very subordinate requisite in a novel, and may be very well dispensed with. Here again I do not agree, and I should say that Thackeray's greatest fault was his extreme inattention to construction, which is all the more remarkable inasmuch as he was

by no means a very rapid or an extremely prolific writer. But if both these faults were infinitely greater than they are, I should say that the perfect command of character and the extraordinary criticisms of life which *The Virginians* contains save it, and not merely save it, but place it far above almost everything outside its writer's own work.

Lovel the Widower, amusing as it is, falls admittedly on a lower plane, and I do not know that its earlier dramatic form, *The Wolves and the Lamb*, is not its superior. But *Philip* is, I believe, the great stumbling-block. I have owned that it was so to me in my green, unknowing youth. Nor in a rather gray and at least partially knowing age could I attempt to put it on a level with the others, despite a crowd of admirable scenes and incidents. Sometimes I have thought that Thackeray's infallible eye for life played him a trick from which less alert and more blear-eyed talents were free. His own generation was passing, but he could not help catching something of the way of the generation that was growing up. The consequence is that the manners and speech of Philip here are as bewildering as the actual chronology,—which refers to Mr Anthony Trollope as an object of the hero's admiration at a time when, comparing other things, it is certain that Mr Trollope had not even made his first literary ventures. Philip is neither a young man of 1830 nor a young man of 1860, nor, as Arthur Pendennis and Henry Esmond are in their different ways, a young man of all time adjusted to a particular date. He is neither one thing nor the other. And when he talks about "the kids and Char," I could almost call him —but what I could almost call him is too terrible to put to paper.

Yet even of this book, the most dubious of the later,

as of *Catherine*, the most dubious of the earlier, we may say, Who but Thackeray could have written it? and, even after thirty years' reading, How shall we be grateful enough to Thackeray for having written it? For here, as nowhere else except in Fielding himself, is a world of fictitious personages who are all alive, who cannot, for the very life of them, say or do anything unnatural. Why that should be permanently charming in art which is frequently tedious in nature is hard, is perhaps impossible to tell, and certainly there is no need to discuss the question here. But the fact is a fact beyond question, and it is in this fact mainly that the certainty of Thackeray's appeal consists. A favourable impression of him, once reached, whether by happy chance or sufficient study, is a *ne varietur*, something never more to be corrected or altered[1].

[1] These last words hold still, and the author had opportunity to expand and support them very materially some ten or a dozen years later in editing the "Oxford *Thackeray*" (17 vols. 1907 *sq.*). Some more on the continued and to some extent increased "unpopularity" of this great writer may perhaps find a better place elsewhere. (1923.)

III. TENNYSON

At the Literary Fund dinner of 1893 Lord (then Mr) Balfour, in an unusually interesting speech for that occasion, hinted that he was not himself able to take quite so much pleasure in what is called Victorian Literature—the literature of which the late Lord Tennyson in verse, and Mr Carlyle in prose, were the unquestioned chiefs—as some other persons appeared to do. He suggested that this might have been due to his being born a little too late. If the cause assigned is a *vera causa*, it is one of some interest to me. For I happen to have been born not quite three years before Lord Balfour, and therefore I ought to have been exposed to very much the same "skiey influences" in point of time.

Yet I do not think that any one can ever have had and maintained a greater admiration for the author of *The Lotos-Eaters* than I have. This admiration was born early, but it was not born full grown. I am so old a Tennysonian that though I can only vaguely remember talk about *Maud* at the time of its first appearance, I can remember the *Idylls* themselves fresh from the press. I was, however, a little young then to appreciate Tennyson, and it must have been a year or two later that I began to be fanatical on the subject. Yet there must have been a little method in that youthful madness,—some criticism in that craze. A great many years afterwards I came across the declaration of Edward FitzGerald, one of the poet's oldest and fastest friends, to the effect that everything he had written after 1842 was a falling off. That, of

course, was a crotchet. FitzGerald, like all men of original but not very productive genius who live much alone, was a crotcheteer to the *n*th. But it has a certain root of truth in it; and as I read it I remembered what my own feelings had been on reading *Enoch Arden*, the first volume that came out after I had enrolled myself in the sacred band. It was just at the end of my freshman's year; and I bought a copy of the book (for which there had been some waiting, and a tremendous rush) on my way home from the prize-giving of my old school. To tell the truth, I was a little disappointed. For *Enoch Arden* itself, as a whole, I have never cared, despite the one splendid passage describing the waiting in the island; nor for *Aylmer's Field*; nor for divers other things. *The Voyage* was of the very best, and *In the Valley at Cauterets*, and one or two other things. *Boadicea* was an interesting experiment. But on the whole one was inclined to say, Where is *The Lotos-Eaters*? Where is the *Dream of Fair Women*? Where is *The Palace of Art*?

Perhaps they were nowhere; perhaps only in the very best of the *Ballads* of 1880, and once or twice later, did the poet ever touch the highest points of his first fine raptures. But he never failed, even to his death day, to show that he was the author of these raptures, and that he could still go very near, if not absolutely up to them, when he chose. It has, however, been a constant critical amusement of mine to try to find out if possible whether this impression was a mere fallacy of youth, and if so how far. And some of the results of the inquiry which has been going on more or less ever since I turned through the Marble Arch into Hyde Park, and took *Enoch Arden* out of my pocket on that summer day, may not improperly form the subject of this and another of these papers. For the inevitable

post-mortem depreciation has set in in reference to this great poet already, and it may not be uninteresting to others to see how it strikes a contemporary who had prepared himself for it.

Readers, and I hope they are many, of Maginn's *Story without a Tail* will remember the various reasons assigned for taking a dram, until the candid narrator avowed that he took it "because he liked a dram." It is undoubtedly natural to humanity to disguise to itself the reasons and nature of its enjoyments; but I do not know that it exhibits this possibly amiable and certainly amusing weakness more curiously or more distinctly in any matter than in the matter of poetry. Men will try to persuade themselves, or at least others, that they read poetry because it is a criticism of life, because it expresses the doubts and fears and thoughts and hopes of the time, because it is a substitute for religion, because it is a relief from serious work, because and because and because. As a matter of fact, they (that is to say those of them who like it genuinely) read it because they like it, because it communicates an experience of half-sensual, half-intellectual pleasure to them. *Why* it does this no mortal can say, any more than he can say why the other causes of his pleasures produce their effect. *How* it does, it is perhaps not quite so hard to explain; though here also we come as usual to the bounding-wall of mystery before very long. And it is further curious to note that the same kind of prudery and want of frankness comes in here once more. It often makes people positively angry to be told that the greatest part, if not the whole of the pleasure-giving appeal of poetry lies in its sound rather than in its sense, or, to speak with extreme exactness, lies in the manner in which the sound conveys the sense. No "chain of extremely valuable thoughts" is

poetry in itself: it only becomes poetry when it is conveyed with those charms of language, metre, rhyme, cadence, what not, which certain persons disdain.

This being so, and the mere matter of all poetry—to wit, the appearances of nature and the thoughts and feelings of man—being unalterable, it follows that the difference between poet and poet will depend upon the manner of each in applying language, metre, rhyme, cadence, and what not to this invariable material. If the poet follows some one else's manner, he may be agreeable, but will not be great; if he is great, he will have a distinctly new and original manner of his own. It sometimes happens, too, that he will have a manner so new and so original that his time will be at first deaf to it. We have all heard of the strange objections which even Coleridge, who might have been thought most likely of all living men to appreciate Tennyson, made (though he did not fail wholly in his appreciation) to the new poet's manner. I knew a much lesser but even more curious and far more recent instance myself. A boy of eighteen or nineteen, altogether average except that he had, I think, some Eurasian strain in him, neither a dunce nor a genius and decidedly fond of reading, once took out of a library the *Poems*,—THE *Poems*, that is to say, the volume containing everything before the *Idylls* except *Maud*, *The Princess*, and *In Memoriam*. After a day or so he returned it, saying sadly to the librarian that "he could not read it. It was just like prose." Had he been Dr Johnson he would probably have said that "the rhymes were harsh and the numbers unpleasing," just as the Doctor did of *Lycidas*.

To us, of course, on the other hand, the whole or the greatest charm of Tennyson comes from the fact that he affects us in exactly the opposite way. But I

think there is a certain excuse for the laughers of 1830, for Coleridge, and for my Eurasian schoolfellow. I am sure at least that I myself read Tennyson and liked him (for I always liked him) for several years before his peculiar and divine virtue dawned upon me. It has never set or paled since, and I am as sure as I can be that if I were to live to be a Struldbrug (which Heaven forbid) one of the very last things of the kind that I should forget or lose my relish for would be this. But comparatively few people, I think, have ever fully recognised how extremely original this virtue of his is. The word "great" is most irritatingly misused about poets; and we have quite recently found some persons saying that "Tennyson is as great as Shakespeare," and other people going into fits of wrath, or smiling surprise with calm disdain, at the saying. If what the former mean to say and what the latter deny is that Tennyson has a supreme and peculiar poetic charm, then I am with the former and against the latter. He has: and from the very fact of his having it he will not necessarily be appreciated at once, and may miss appreciation altogether with some people.

The recent publication anew of the earliest *Poems by Two Brothers* has been especially useful in enabling us to study this charm. In these poems it is absolutely nowhere: there is not from beginning to end in any verse, whether attributed to Alfred, Frederick, or Charles, one suggestion even of the witchery that we Tennysonians associate with the work of the first-named. It appears dimly and distantly—so dimly and distantly that one has to doubt whether we recognise it by anything but a "fallacy of looking back"—in *Timbuctoo*; in *The Lover's Tale* quite distinctly, but uncertainly; and with much alloy in the pieces which the author later labelled as *Juvenilia*.

It is true that these *Juvenilia* have been a good deal retouched, and that much of the really juvenile work on which the critics were by no means unjustly severe has been left out. But the charm is there. Take the very first stanza of *Claribel.* You may pick holes in the conceit which makes a verb "I low-lie, thou low-liest, she low-lieth," and you may do other things of the same kind if you like. But who ever wrote like that before? Who struck that key earlier? Who produced anything like the slow, dreamy music of the variations in it? Spenser and Keats were the only two masters of anything in the remotest degree similar in English before. And yet it is perfectly independent of Spenser, perfectly independent of Keats. It is Tennyson, the first rustle of the "thick-leaved, ambrosial" murmuring which was to raise round English lovers of poetry a very Broceliande of poetical enchantment for sixty years to come during the poet's life, and after his death for as long as books can speak and readers hear.

IV. TENNYSON (*concluded*)

I believe that, in so far as the secret of a poet can be discovered and isolated, the secret of Tennyson lies in that slow and dreamy music which was noticed at the end of the last section; and I am nearly sure that my own admiration of him dates from the time when I first became aware of it. *Claribel*, of course, is by no means a very effective example; though the fact of its standing in the very forefront of the whole work is excessively interesting[1]. The same music continued to sound—with

[1] As is the fact that the author, much as he altered *Claribel's* companions, left her practically alone. (1923.)

infinite variety of detail, but with no breach of general character—from *Claribel* itself to *Crossing the Bar*. At no time was Tennyson a perfect master of the quick and lively measures; and in comparison he very seldom affected them. He cannot pick up and return the ball of song as Praed—another great master of metre if not quite of music, who preceded him by seven years at Trinity—did, still less as Praed partly taught Mr Swinburne to do. There is nothing in Tennyson of the hurrying yet never scurrying metre of *At a Month's End*, or the Dedication to Sir Richard Burton. His difficulty in this respect has not improved *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and it is noticeable that it impresses a somewhat grave and leisurely character even on his anapæsts,—as for instance in the *Voyage of Maeldune*. If you want quick music you must go elsewhere, or be content to find the poet not at his best in it.

But in the other mode of linked and long-drawn out sweetness he has hardly any single master and no superior:

> At midnight the moon cometh
> And looketh down alone.

There again the despised *Claribel* gives us the cue. And how soon and how miraculously it was taken up, sustained, developed, varied, everybody who knows Tennyson knows. *Mariana* is the very incarnation, the very embodiment in verse of spell-bound stagnation, that is yet in the rendering beautiful. The *Recollections of the Arabian Nights* move something sprightlier, but the *Ode to Memory*, by far the greatest of the *Juvenilia*, relapses into the visionary gliding. Even in *The Sea Fairies* and *The Dying Swan*, the occasional dactyls and anapæsts rather slide than skip; and the same is the case with the best lines in *Oriana* and (naturally enough) with the whole course of the *Dirge*.

All the ideal girl-portraits except *Lilian* (the least worthy of them) have this golden languor, which is so distinctly the note of the earlier poems that it is astonishing any one should ever have missed it. Yet, as I have said, I believe I missed it myself for some time, and certainly, judging from their criticisms, contemporaries of the poet much cleverer than I am never seem to have heard it at all.

When the great collection came it must have been hard still to miss it; yet how little the English public even yet was attuned is shown by the fact that both then and since one of the most popular things has been *The May Queen*, which, if anything of Tennyson's could be so, I should myself be disposed to call trumpery. *The Lady of Shalott* is very far from trumpery, and perhaps the poet's very happiest thing not in a languid measure; but even *The Lady of Shalott* does not count among the poems that established Tennyson's title to the first rank among English poets. *The Lotos-Eaters*, *The Palace of Art*, *A Dream of Fair Women*, *Œnone*, *Ulysses* (though perhaps it will be said that I ought not to include blank verse pieces), all have the trailing garments of the night, not the rush and skip of dawn; and though there are some exceptions among the rightly famous lyrics, such as *Sir Galahad* and the admirable piece of cynicism in *The Vision of Sin*, they are exceptions. Even *Locksley Hall* canters rather than gallops, and the famous verses in *The Brook* are but a *tour de force*.

But it would be impossible here to go through the whole of the poet's work. He can do many things; but he always (at least to my taste) does his best in lyric to slow music. And I doubt whether any one will again produce this peculiar effect as he has produced it. It must be evident, too, how much this faculty of slow

and stately verse adds to the effect of *In Memoriam*. If the peculiar metre of that poem is treated (as I have known it treated by imitators) in a light and jaunty fashion—to quick time, so to speak—the effect is very terrible. But Tennyson has another secret than this for blank verse. This is the secret of the paragraph, which he alone of all English poets shares with Milton in perfection. There is little doubt that he learnt it from Milton, but the effect is quite different, though the means resorted to are necessarily much the same in both cases, and include in both a very careful and deliberate disposition of the full stop which breaks and varies the cadence of the line; the adoption when it is thought necessary of trisyllabic instead of dissyllabic feet; and the arrangement of a whole block of verses so that they lead up to a climax of sense and sound in the final line. Almost the whole secret can be found in one of the earliest and perhaps the finest of his blank verse exercises, the *Morte d'Arthur*, but examples were never wanting up to his very last book.

These two gifts, that of an infinitely varied slow music and dreamy motion in lyric and that of concerted blank verse, with his almost unequalled faculty of observation and phrasing as regards description of nature, were, I think, the things in Tennyson which first founded Tennyson-worship in my case. And these, I am sure, are what have kept it alive in my case, though I have added to them an increasing appreciation of his wonderful skill in adjusting vowel values. His subjects matter little: I do not know that subject ever does matter much in poetry, though it is all important in prose. But if I have been right in my selection of his chief gifts, it will follow almost as the night the day that the vague, the antique, and to some extent the passionate, must suit him better than the

modern, the precise, the meditative. Not that Tennyson is by any means, as some misguided ones hold, a shallow poet; the exquisite perfection of his phrase and his horror of jargon have deceived some even of the elect on that point, just as there have been those who think that Plato is shallow because he is nowhere unintelligible, and that Berkeley cannot be a great philosopher because he is a great man of letters. But art, romance, distant history (for history of a certain age simply becomes romance), certainly suit him better than science, modern life, or argument. Vast efforts have been spent on developing schemes of modernised Christianity out of *In Memoriam*; but the religious element in that poem is as consistent with an antiquated orthodoxy as with anything new and undogmatic; and the attraction of the poem is in its human affection, in its revelation of the House of Mourning, and above all in those unmatched landscapes and sketches of which the poet is everywhere prodigal.

It is perhaps (if I may refine still further on the corrections of impressions which years of study have left) in the combination of the faculty of poetical music with that of poetical picture drawing that the special virtue of Tennyson lies. There have been poets, though not many, who could manage sound with equal skill; and there have been those, though not many, who could bring with a few modulated words a visual picture before the mind's eye and almost the eye of the body itself with equal sureness and success. But there have hardly been any, outside the very greatest Three or Four, who could do both these things at the same time in so consummate a fashion. The very musical poets are too apt to let the sharp and crisp definition of their picture be washed away in floods of sound; the very pictorial poets to neglect the musical accompaniment.

Tennyson never commits either fault. The wonderful successions of cartoons in the *Palace* and the *Dream* exhibit this in his very earliest stage. If any poet has ever, in this combination of music, draughtsmanship, and colour, equalled:

> One seemed all dark and red, a tract of sand,
> And some one pacing there alone,
> Who paced for ever in a glimmering land.
> Lit with a low large moon,

I do not know him. The first stanza of *The Lotos-Eaters* has the same power of filling eye and ear at once, so that it is almost impossible to decide whether you hear the symphony or see the picture most clearly. And at the very other extreme of the poet's poetical life, in those famous lines which united all competent suffrages (though one egregious person I remember called them "homely" and divers wiseacres puzzled over the identity of the "pilot" and the propriety of his relation of place toward the "bar"), this master faculty again appeared.

> With such a tide as moving seems asleep,
> Too full for sound or foam,

are words which make the very picture, the very foamless swirl, the very soundless volume of sound, which they describe.

No! In the impressions given by such a poet as this, when they have been once duly and fairly received, there can be no correction, except a better and better appreciation of him as time goes on. The people who have liked what was not best, or have not liked what was best, may grow weary of well admiring. Those who look rather at the absence of faults than at the presence of beauties may point to incongruities and mediocrities, to attempts in styles for which the poet had little aptitude, to occasional relapses from the grand manner to the small mannerism, and so forth. But those whose

ears and eyes (if not, alas! their lips) Apollo has touched, will never make any mistake about him. They may as in other—as in all—cases be more or fewer as time goes on: there may be seasons when the general eye grows blind and the general ear deaf to his music and his vision. But that will not matter at all. So long as the unknown laws which govern the presentation of beauty in sight and sound last, beauty will be discovered here just as we ourselves after two thousand years find it in the ancient tongues which we cannot even pronounce with any certainty that we are nearer to the original than Mr Hamerton's little French boy was when he tried to vocalise that very stanza of *Claribel* to which I have referred above[1].

[1] For substance—Ne Varietur, G.S. 1923.

v. CARLYLE

I BELIEVE it will be generally admitted that there is nowadays[1] no more distinct sign of a man's having reached the fogey, and of his approaching the fossil, stage of intellectual existence than the fact that he has an ardent admiration for Carlyle. I have collected this inference from a large number of observations; and, if I am not mistaken, have seen it more than once definitely laid down as a starting point and premiss by the younger sort. This is not only interesting in itself, but also and perhaps still more as an instance of the truth of the ancient saying that old age cometh upon a man without his perceiving it. For it was but, so to speak, the other day that to admire Carlyle was still a mark, not indeed of intense or daring innovation (that stage was over when the present writer was in his nurse's arms), but yet of heresy and opposition to the settled precepts of the sages. It cannot be said that up to Carlyle's own death the constituted authorities in things literary and intellectual were ever fully reconciled to his style, his thought, or his general attitude; and great as is the influence which—especially perhaps during the third quarter of the century—he exercised over individuals, no party in politics, no school in letters or philosophy, ever could claim him or stomach him, as a whole stomachs a whole.

It is the proudest memory of my own life that a person of distinction once said to me in a rage, "You like Carlyle because he has made you more of a Tory than the Devil had made you already." But without

[1] And "*now*adays" (1923) much more also.

admitting or denying the justice of this soft impeachment in the individual case, it is quite certain that Tories as a class did *not* like Mr Carlyle, nor he them. They did not like him because of his flings and crotchets on separate parts of their creed; he did not like them because, I think, he knew himself to be one of them and yet would not confess it. The average mid-century Liberal, on the other hand, could not help—unless he was a very dull or a very clever man indeed—regarding Mr Carlyle as something like Antichrist, a defender of slavery, a man whose dearest delight it was to gore and toss and trample the sweetest and most sacred principles of the Manchester school; a stentorian scoffer who roared sarcasms over Progress and Perfectibility, and to whom Houses of Commons, manufacturing centres, Great Exhibitions, and so forth, were only different kinds of filthy and futile bauble shops. It was impossible, I say, that the mid-century Liberal, whether his Liberalism was of the common-sense type of Macaulay, or the doctrinaire type of Mill, or the sentimental type of Dickens, should do anything but regard Carlyle as a kind of hippopotamus, ravaging and trampling the fair fields of promise.

But the curious thing is that no reaction of the usual kind has come to his rescue. The parties, or the names (for I own that I see uncommonly little difference between Tories and Liberals now), that represent the modifications of public opinion by the results of the Second and Third Reform Bills, have not gone as a rule nearer to, but farther from Carlyle's ideal[1]. It is impossible to imagine anything more anti-Carlylian than the washy semi-Socialism, half sentimental, half servile, which is the governing spirit of all but a very few politicians to-day. Nor is it surprising that a world

[1] And a great deal farther still now (1923).

which, whether with tongue in cheek or not, praises, blesses, and magnifies "democracy," should be enthusiastic in favour of a prophet whose relation to democracy was pretty exactly the relation of Elijah to Baal. Add to this the existence of a considerable literary class which takes very little interest in politics, a good deal in art (for which Carlyle cared absolutely nothing), and most of all in mere literature (which he always attempted to scorn and snub), and it is not very surprising that Carlyle is not popular nowadays with our youth, and that to admire him is, as I have said, the mark of a fogey and a fossil.

So be it. Yet the fossil is a thing that abides, and has not even Mr Thackeray sung the joys of being a fogey? At any rate, as for me and my intellectual house, we intend to continue to serve Carlyle. Whether it be due to those preliminary operations of the Devil, to which my friend referred, or to some other reason, I cannot remember a period at which the reading of Carlyle was not to me as the reading of something that one had always thought but had never been able to express. It was a lucky accident, no doubt, that I began at the beginning, to wit, with *Sartor Resartus*, which I remember reading at so early an age that a great part of it must have been the merest Abracadabra to me. But there is nothing like providing children (accidentally, if possible) with good abracadabras which as they grow up shall become clear to them. If anybody had preached Carlyle to me, I dare say I should have been much longer before the honey in that lion won my tongue, but as it was the process of discovery was sure, if not excessively rapid. The *Cromwell* did indeed a little stick in my gizzard until I was old enough to discover the truth that Carlyle's particular fads and fancies are, as a rule, matters of no particular importance, and that

his general attitude is the pearl of price. And by some happy chance the *Latter Day Pamphlets* did not come in my way till I had already begun to take a considerable interest in politics. That book, with all its divagations, all its extravagances, all its occasional lapses of taste and unadvised speaking about things which Carlyle miscomprehended, partly owing to education and partly owing to pride, seems to me the very gospel of English politics in modern times, a sort of modern "Politicus" in the spirit and tone of which every Englishman should strive to soak and saturate himself. It seemed to me so then: it has never failed to seem so since[1].

It is, I think, the mistake of demanding a positive gospel instead of negative warnings in the first place, and in the second the inability to appreciate "the humour of it" to the full, which have been at the root of most recent depreciation of Carlyle, though no doubt also reaction from the violent mannerisms of his style and a not ungenerous but rather unintelligent disgust at the inordinately voluminous and very ill-managed personal revelations of his life must also be allowed for. People have insufficiently appreciated the symbolism which plays so very large a part in his work. The two largest individual parts of that work are occupied, the one with an apotheosis, from the point of view of a denouncer of cant, of a man who canted against despotism his way to the headship of the Commonwealth of England, and then continued to cant as a despot to the day of his death; the other with the glorification of a selfish and sordid scoundrel whose chief merits were that he had an indomitable will, and could have written a sincere and forcible treatise *De Contemptu Vitæ*. But, by a paradox which I have never been able

[1] And it seems so more than ever (1923).

to make up my mind whether to attribute to a completely or a partially humoristic view, the Cromwell and the Frederick of Carlyle, though he has delineated them for the benefit of other people with a fidelity and a vigour of biographical art beside which even Boswell, even Lockhart, are tame and shadowy, are as objects of admiration pure symbols. The unctuous butcher of Tredagh, who pretended to revenge the massacres committed by the Irish of 1641 on a garrison which he knew to consist very largely of pure English troops, the filibuster of Silesia and the fribble of Rheinsberg, who had all vices but those that are amiable and hardly any virtues but those which are unattractive, live as they lived in his pages. Nobody but a mere idiot can accuse Carlyle of garbling out a damning or foisting in a flattering trait. And yet all the while he is glorifying and extolling in the one a symbol of upright humanity, in the other a symbol of patriotic heroism.

These apparent contradictions run throughout not only these books, but a great part of Carlyle's other works, and they seem to have been too much for many. "Am I to admire a brute like Frederick?" says, and says not ungenerously, the neophyte. "I won't do anything of the kind!" And he does not see that what he is required to admire is—not the actual Frederick who was a kind of crowned bandit in public life, and in private a harsh master, a fickle friend, a stingy patron, a man of the worst possible taste in æsthetics and ethics, spiteful, treacherous, mean—but a Frederick who is a kind of abstraction of the Ruler, a personified and incarnate Government. Indeed, the fact of this being practically Carlyle's last book, and the only one which he wrote for a very large public, with the further facts of its enormous size, of its being written in a sort of short-hand of mannerism and of its containing besides

the panegyric of Frederick himself, the apology at least of his father, must be admitted to have been unfortunate, and to have accounted to some extent for that sudden falling off of Carlylians which has been noted. For it so happened that the very generation which in the natural course of things grew up prepared to be his admirers was, to speak vernacularly, choked off by the issue of this huge and not altogether grateful history for years running. No book probably could be worse to begin a study of Carlyle upon.

And this, I think, is a pretty full account of the various adverse influences to which the Carlylian impressions of a man who began Carlyle, as I did, thirty or five and thirty years ago[1], have been exposed in the mean time. It will take another paper to say something of the effect, whether of correction or confirmation, that they have undergone in consequence.

VI. CARLYLE (*concluded*)

It will perhaps have appeared already from what was said in the last paper that, after having passed through, or at least been contemporary with, all the fluxes and gusts of opinion there mentioned, I am[2] an impenitent and hardened Carlylian. Of course a great deal has to be added to Carlyle, and, as has been already admitted and asserted, something has to be taken away from him—in the sense that no man in his senses would attempt to indorse every particular Carlylian utterance. He was often bilious; he was not seldom blind; and as for that strange contemporary and counterpart across the Channel, who for half a dozen years less at the beginning, and half a dozen more at the end, represented the French genius just as Carlyle did the

[1] Full sixty now. (1923.)

[2] And remain. (1923.)

English, it was almost impossible for him not to caricature and reduce to the absurd his own views and formulas, though he and Victor Hugo achieved this result in very different ways. The Carlylians pure and simple, though they included some men of genius such as were at different times Kingsley and Mr Ruskin and Mr Froude, were apt to be rather terrible as well as brilliant examples. When they were not brilliant they were terrible purely. They are not very rampant now, and it would be unkind to specify them by name; but it may be most frankly confessed that "middle-class Carlylese" was one of the worst dialects ever known, both in form and in matter.

Indeed, there are not inconsiderable regions of interest where Carlyle does not count. For the whole domain of the plastic arts he seems to have had no kind of fancy or faculty. Even in literature, though at his best and in his earlier days, when he had not begun to "pontify" and in the solitude of Craigenputtock took real trouble to master his subjects, he attained the very first rank as a literary critic, there were large gaps and rents in his faculty of appreciation. He seems to have wanted—a want which I fear is more common than is allowed to appear—all affection, all sense of any kind for poetry as poetry. Some of the greatest expression on things which he did care for is to be found in poets, and then he cared for them; but it was not as poets. The same exactly may be said of his attitude to prose fiction. Except on the purely mathematical side, he did not, I think, care much for science. For all forms of theology he had a disdain which was partly ignorant and a mere expression of personal distaste, partly, I fear, a form of personal arrogance. In philosophy itself I do not know that he was very great on the purely metaphysical side. But, like

Henry the Eighth, he "loved a man," and I am not quite sure that (in this respect not resembling that sovereign) he qualified the affection by any others. Such a historian on the biographical and anthropological side the world has never seen. To his own contemporaries he was often foolishly and scandalously unjust; and probably nothing has done him so much harm with those who are apt to fly off at tangents when special points of their own fancy are touched, as his posthumous depreciations of Lamb, of De Quincey, of Newman, and of others as different in their different ways as these. But when he got hold of "a man" in history, it seems to me that it was absolutely impossible for him to miss hitting off that man to the life. And he could in the same way seize a period, a movement, a set of incidents, with a grasp of which I am sure it is enough, and I do not think that it is too much, to say that the result was Gibbon without his apparent superficiality, and Thucydides without his disappointing asceticism in rhetoric and eloquence.

Take, for instance, *The French Revolution*. It has been to me an inexhaustible joy for twenty or thirty[1] years past to read the excellent persons who, in English and French and German, have undertaken to "correct" Carlyle. They have demonstrated in I dare say the most sufficient and triumphant way that he sometimes represents a thing as having happened at two o'clock on Thursday when it actually happened on Tuesday at three o'clock. They have, I believe, made some serious emendations in the number of leagues travelled and the *menu* of the meals eaten by Louis the Sixteenth on his way to and from Varennes. But have they to the satisfaction of the *phronimos*, the Aristotelian intelligent person, altered or destroyed one feature in the Carlylian picture of the uprising and of the Terror?

[1] Say now "fifty or sixty."

Not they. On the contrary, the greatest of them all, M. Taine, after protesting against Carlyle in his youth, came to tread in Carlyle's very steps in his age. And it could not be otherwise. The French Revolution of Carlyle is the French Revolution as it happened, as it was. The French Revolution of the others is the French Revolution dug up in lifeless fragments by excellent persons with the newest patent pickaxes[1]. I do not know whether this extraordinary historico-biographical faculty can be in any way connected, after the fashion of cause and effect, with his other great quality, his peculiar way of treating ethics and politics, the only subjects in which he seems to have taken a thorough interest. Man to him was indeed a "political beast" in the old phrase, extending the meaning to ethics as the Greeks themselves would have done. Here again there were no doubt gaps, especially that huge one of his complete incapacity to enter into the very important division of human sentiment, which is called for shortness love. Of "the way of a man with a maid" Carlyle never showed much comprehension, nor in it much interest, which is doubtless a pity. But of the way of a man in political society he showed a very great comprehension indeed, as well as of that other way which his forefathers would have called "walking with God," that is to say, of personal conduct and attitude towards the fortunes and mysteries of life.

It is here that his gift of many-coloured and many-formed language was applied most remarkably and perhaps most profitably. As has been said, or hinted, above, it is not to Carlyle that you must go for positive precepts of any kind. But as a negative teacher he has few equals. "Don't funk; don't cant; don't gush; don't whine; don't chatter;"—these and some others like

[1] I apologise to Mrs Webster, who has added much in an excellent spirit. But I do not think she has in any sense "altered or destroyed" Carlyle's picture. (1923.)

them were his commandments, and I do not know where to look for a better set of their kind. But they were elementary and trivial in reference to certain larger and vaguer precepts of the Carlylian decalogue or myriologue. The two greatest of these, as it seems to me, are, "Never mistake the amount, infinitesimal if not *minus*, of your own personal worth and importance in this world," on the one hand, and "Never care for any majority of other infinitesimals who happen to be against you," on the other. Ever since 1789 at least, the idol from which men should have prayed to be kept, and which has been growing year by year and decade by decade, is the worship of the majority; and the cream, the safest and soundest part of the Carlylian doctrine is: "Don't care one rap, or the ten-thousandth part of one rap, for the majority. You may be—you very likely are—a fool yourself; but it is as nearly as possible certain that the majority of the majority are fools, and therefore, though you need not necessarily set yourself against them, you are absolutely justified in neglecting them." "Do your duty," which he also preached, is of course a more strictly virtuous doctrine, and it is also a much older one. But it is open to the retort, "Yes, but what *is* my duty?" which is never specially easy and often extremely difficult to answer. Nor is it more specially suited for this day than for any other. But "Don't worship the majority" is the very commandment needed in the nineteenth century, and likely, it would seem, to be needed still more in the twentieth. Even if, as it rarely may be, the majority is right, the fact that it is the majority does not make it so, and when there is no reason for believing it to be right except that it is the majority, then that is reason sufficient for electing to regard it as wrong.

This anti-democratic tone and temper—enforced and

fed, it may be, in his own case, by too much indulgence in the luxury of scorn, by too much contempt for his fellows, by too unsocial a view of life—was, as it seems to me, what Carlyle had to teach and did teach. His applications of it in particular may not always have been wise, but they were made always with the most astonishing *diable au corps*, and in a style which, though I should be very sorry to see it generally imitated, and though it was sometimes very nearly bad, was at its best surpassed by no style, either in English or in any other language, for pure force and intense effect,—full of lights and colours, now as fierce as those of fire, now as tender as those of fire also,—full of voices covering the whole gamut from storm to whisper. Whether the great volume of his work, the exceptions, the inequalities, the crotchets and lacks of catholicity in it, will seriously injure that work with posterity is of course very difficult to say. Work which requires, as this does, a certain initiation and novitiate, perhaps also a certain pre-established harmony of temper and taste, is always heavily weighted in competing for the attention of posterity. But I hope at least that Carlyle will continue even in the evil days to inspire some with determination *malignum spernere vulgus*; and I feel nearly sure that when the tide turns, as it must some day, and the rule of the best and fewest, not of the most and worst, again becomes the favourite, his works will supply texts for the orthodox as they now do for heretics. At any rate, I am sure that no one who ever goes to them will miss the splendours of pure literature which illuminate their rugged heights and plateaus, and that some at least will recognise and rejoice in the high air of love for noble things and contempt for things base which sweeps over and through them[1].

[1] If one could only have heard or read him on "Labour" in the nineteen-twenties!

VII. MR SWINBURNE

I DO not suppose that anybody now alive (I speak of lovers of poetry) who was not alive in 1832 and old enough then to enjoy the first perfect work of Tennyson, has had such a sensation as that which was experienced in the autumn of 1866 by readers of Mr Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*. And I am sure that no one in England has had any such sensation since. The later revelation had indeed been preceded by more signs and tokens than the earlier. Tennyson's first work had passed unknown or had been laughed at; at least two remarkable volumes (not to mention *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamond*) had already revealed to fit readers what there was in Mr Swinburne. The chorus in *Atalanta*, "Before the beginning of years," had attracted the highest admiration from impartial and unenthusiastic judges, while it has simply swept younger admirers off their legs with rapture; and the lyrics of *Chastelard* had completed the effect in the way of exciting, if not of satisfying, expectation.

Now we were told, first, that a volume of extraordinarily original verse was coming out; now, that it was so shocking that its publisher repented its appearance; now, that it had been reissued, and was coming out after all. The autumn must have been advanced before it did come out, for I remember that I could not obtain a copy before I went up to Oxford in October, and had to avail myself of an expedition to town to "eat dinners" in order to get one. Three copies of the precious volume, with "Moxon" on cover and "John Camden Hotten on title page, accompanied me back that night, together with divers maroons for the

purpose of enlivening matters on the ensuing Fifth of November. The book was something of a maroon in itself as regards the fashion in which it startled people; and perhaps with youthful readers the hubbub did it no harm. We sat next afternoon, I remember, from luncheon time till the chapel bell rang, reading aloud by turns in a select company *Dolores* and *The Triumph of Time*, *Laus Veneris* and *Faustine*, and all the other wonders of the volume. There are some who say that after such a beginning critical appreciation is impossible,—the roses bloom too aggressively by the not at all calm Bendemeer when it is read again, and the pathetic and egotistic fallacies hide the truth from sight. If it were so, it were little use attempting to "correct impressions" in this or any similar matter. But I do not think so meanly of the human intellect. There is practically nothing for which it is impossible to "allow," nothing which may not be "ruled out." And though I feel that the maroons and the memories would make me a shamefully biased judge of Mr Swinburne personally, that I should if I were on a jury let him off on any accusation, and if I were a judge give him the smallest possible sentence the law allowed, a critical opinion of his works is a different matter. Everybody must keep a conscience and mind it somewhere; and, for my part, I pride myself on keeping and minding it here.

Yet I have no hesitation in saying that after these years I find myself disposed to alter very little of the estimate which I made of the *Poems and Ballads* as we read them "midst triptychs and Madonnas," as another poet sings, on that November Tuesday. Mr Swinburne has done a very great deal of work since, and I suppose not his wildest admirer would maintain that it has all or most of it been at the level of the best parts of the

Poems and Ballads. There are even, I believe, as there usually are, archaics in Swinburnianism who hold that it has never been really merry since *Atalanta* itself; and, on the other hand, there are more sober Swinburnians who perhaps question whether the poet's very best has been seen except at intervals and in somewhat small proportion since the second *Poems and Ballads* of 1878. Nor is it necessary to spend much time in displaying the faults of this most captivating of the poets of the second half of the nineteenth century in England. The danger of them, and to some extent the damage of them, was seen in his very earliest work. The astonishing fertility of his command of language and of metre, the vast volume and variety of his verbal music, were almost perilously near to "carrying him away" then, and no doubt have more and more actually done so. I do not think that Mr Swinburne has ever written a single piece of verse that can be called bad, or that does not possess qualities of poetry which before his day would have sufficed to give any man high poetical rank. But he has always wanted discipline who never wanted music or eloquence; and the complaint that his readers sometimes find themselves floating on and almost struggling with a cataract of mere musical and verbal foam-water is not without foundation. Of late years, too, his extraordinary command of metre has led him to make new and ever new experiments in it which have been too often mere *tours de force*, to plan sea-serpents in verse in order to show how easily and gracefully he can make them coil and uncoil their enormous length, to build mastodons of metre that we may admire the proportion and articulation of their mighty limbs. In other words, he has sometimes, nay, too often, forgotten the end while exulting in his command of the means.

And yet, if we take the very latest of his works, how vast an addition to the possibilities of poetical delight do we see in it when compared with what English readers already had forty years ago, or even thirty! Although Mr Swinburne's indebtedness to the late[1] Laureate is of course immense, as must have been that of any man born when he was born, it happened most fortunately that his natural genius inclined him to the mode exactly opposite to Tennyson's. I have already endeavoured to show in these papers that, though that great poet could sing in divers tones, he always most inclined, and was most happily inspired when he did incline, to the mode of slow and languid singing. Mr Swinburne's most natural gift is exactly the other way. His muse can "toll slowly" when she chooses; but she has always an impulse to quicken, and is almost always happiest in quick time. Take, for instance, that famous poem already referred to, the great *Atalanta* chorus. It is stately enough, and certainly not very frolic in tone. But what a race and rush there is about it! What a thunder and charge of verse! It is almost impossible even to read it slowly. Take again the not less exquisite song in *Chastelard*, "Between the sun-down and the sea." Here there is an appearance of languor; there are no trisyllabic feet, none of the extraneous aids to, or signs of, rhythmical speed. And yet the measure hurries rather than lags, the rhymes seem to invite each other to respond and speed the response, the beginnings of the lines catch up and send on the ends, the ends generate fresh beginnings almost before they have ceased. So in the two magnificent pieces that come almost on the threshold of the *Poems and Ballads* the same irrepressible impulse may be observed. The quatrain in which *Laus Veneris* is

[1] In 1895.

written is one of the least lightly moving in appearance of all English measures, and yet it too grows tumultuous; while the intricate and massive stanza of *The Triumph of Time* swells and swings like a wave.

In these cases the poet's idiosyncrasy is to some extent working against and subduing forms which do not lend themselves readily to it. But where the forms are congenial, the effect is too remarkable to have escaped even the most careless remark: and these pieces have in consequence supplied the most popular if not the most characteristic of Mr Swinburne's poems. In that wonderful metre of *Dolores* and the Epilogue to the first *Poems and Ballads* which Mr Swinburne adapted from Praed by shortening the last line, "the sound of loud water" and "the flight of the fires" both embody themselves in words. The mighty rush of the *Hymn to Proserpine*, the galloping charge of the *Song in Time of Revolution*, the dancing measures of *Rococo*, and many others, attain what, speaking in jargon, one might call the maximum velocity of any British poet. It is sometimes, as, for instance, in *A Song in Time of Revolution*, very nearly impossible to make speech accompany the words at the rate which seems as if it were required. You gabble and stumble in trying to keep up with the poet's speed. And by degrees Mr Swinburne developed and perfected that faculty of his which has been already noticed,—the faculty of arranging his measures in a sort of antiphony, where, as in very quick chanting, the alternate lines seem to catch up their forerunners almost before these have finished.

The two best examples of this curious gift known to me, and two of the very best things he has ever done, are the poems in the second volume of *Poems and Ballads*, entitled *At a Month's End* and the "Dedica-

tion to Captain Richard Burton." I have sometimes had a fancy that I should like to hear

> The night last night was strange and shaken,
> More strange the change of you and me,
> Once more for the old love's love forsaken
> We went down once more towards the sea,

with those unmatched passages which follow the lines,

> As a star sees the sun and falters,
> Touched to death by diviner eyes,
> As on the old gods' untended altars
> The old fire of withered worship dies,

sung by alternate semi-choruses, the second tripping up the first a little. Nor is such a motion as this,

> Nine years have risen and eight years set
> Since there by the well-spring our hands on it met,

to be found anywhere in English poetry earlier. The verse does not merely run, it *spins*, gyrating and revolving in itself as well as proceeding on its orbit: the wave as it rushes on has eddies and backwaters of live interior movement. All the metaphors and similes of water, light, wind, fire, all the modes of motion, inspire and animate this astonishing poetry.

VIII. MR SWINBURNE (*concluded*)

Now if there is any truth in the view which was given in the last paper of Mr Swinburne's poetical virtue, it will be seen at once that there is a special danger of uncritical admiration of him. The charm of the latest —let us hope not the last[1]—of the Laureates is not an impetuous charm: it does not take you by a *coup de*

[1] These words were not at the time a mere banality: for there had been considerable talk of doing away with the office at Tennyson's death. It cannot be said that the actual appointment when it came was (despite such merits as the person actually appointed possessed) exactly fitted to put such talk to shame. But fortunately another vacancy has since caused a more fortunate succession, and rebuked the chatterers (1923).

main; but it never lets you go when it has once taken you. Has this other kind of poetical assault, this *ivresse de M. Swinburne*, (to borrow the phrase *ivresse de Victor Hugo* already long ago used of the great French poet who was the God of Mr Swinburne's idolatry,) the opposite defect of its opposite quality? Does it hold you with a grasp as insecure as the first onset of it is tempestuous? Is Mr Swinburne a poetical Prince Rupert? There are some who say so. I seem to remember words of a very distinguished person, my own contemporary, about a man's "forgetting the *Poems and Ballads* he used to spout." All I can say is that I myself do not do anything of the kind. There are, as I take it, three kinds of literary lovers, as perhaps of other. There are those who only love one or a very few things and cleave to it or them. Perhaps this is the most excellent way, though I own I do not think so. There are the inconstants who love and who ride away. And there are those who are polygamous but faithful; that is to say, who constantly add to their loves, but never drop, forget, or slight the old. I boast myself to be of the last. In fact, why should a rational lover of poetry ever tire of Mr Swinburne? That poet may have done things not wholly worthy of him, but no one is obliged to read them. He may have, even in his best things, been sometimes led astray by want of judgment in politics or religion or philosophy, by undue flux of language or of verse. But these things can be ignored or skipped. The virtue of the virtuous part remains; and I dare swear that it will be found at the second reading and the tenth and the hundredth as distinct as at the first by those who can get beyond and above mere novelty.

It is, if not the most philosophical, one of the most effectual of tests to consider a very strong literary

mannerism or manner in its imitations. Mr Swinburne, Heaven knows, has been imitated enough[1]. Kingsley says somewhere that Amyas Leigh's companions proved the presence of mosquitoes on the Magdalena "as well as wretched men could." Reviewers did the same with the influence of Mr Swinburne. For years his metres, his phrasing, his alliteration, his repetition of words, were the very *cophinus* and *fœnum* of the poetaster, the sole equipment and furniture with which he started his dreadful trade. And did one poetaster or poet during all these years achieve anything with them that was not either designed or unconscious parody and that was worth anything? Not one stanza, not one line. Some of the designed parodies were very funny; some of the undesigned ones funnier still. But that is a proof of excellence, not of inferiority. It is when a thing is imitable, not when it is parodiable, that it stands confessed as second-rate. And Mr Swinburne, like other poets on the right side of the line, is not imitable,—at any rate, he has not been imitated. They have gotten his fiddle but not his rosin: they can pile on alliteration, and be biblical in phrase, and trench on things forbidden in subject, and make a remarkably dull Italian into a god, and a great but not rationally great Frenchman into a compound of Shakespeare and Plato. They can write lines in twenty-seven syllables or thereabouts if necessary; but they can't write poetry. Mr Swinburne can and does.

There are, no doubt, several differences between poetical and other intoxication, but perhaps the chief difference is this. You can test the strength of the

[1] I think (and I anticipated this correction in a short article for the *Times Literary Supplement's* coming of age) that, sore from then recent sufferings, I rather exaggerated here the *amount* of serious Swinburnian *pastiche*. What is here said of its character and qualities remains perfectly true. (1923.)

liquids odious to Sir Wilfred Lawson[1] in two ways,—by dipping a Sykes's hydrometer in them, or by actually imbibing and waiting to see whether they "get you forrarder." In the case of poetry, only the latter test is available: you are yourself the hydrometer. Consequently it is exceedingly difficult to refer matters to any common standard. "This is this to me and that to thee." And it is nowhere so difficult as in the case of a poet like Mr Swinburne, whose poetical appeal consists wholly or mainly in this quality of impassioning and exhilarating. He does not tell a story very well; his strictly dramatic faculty is not, I think, put by better judges of drama than I am very high. He is not a poetical schoolman and a poetical satirist like Dryden, nor a poetical epigrammatist and conversationalist like Pope. What is more remarkable considering his century, he is not by any means consummate or even eminent as a painter in words. His sea-pieces put aside, it may be said of his descriptions that, beautiful as they are, they are rather decorative or conventional than strictly pictorial, they do not bring the actual sights before the eyes with the simple force of Tennyson, or with the elaborate and complex force of Rossetti and Mr Morris. What he is first of all is an absolutely consummate artist in word-music of the current and tempestuous kind, and an unfailing player on those moods of passion or of thought which are akin to his own. And if he fails in either of these two branches of his appeal, I should say that it must be not so much his fault as that of his audience. Music requires an ear to hear as well as a voice to sing it; and when Mr Guppy remarked that "there are chords in the human breast," his aposiopesis might have been filled as well as in any other way by the words "which, if their quality be not

[1] With altered time, and obeying the order "Place aux Dames!" perhaps one should now say "to Lady Astor." (1923.)

of the right kind, will fail to respond to the very deftest player." It may possibly be a fault of Mr Swinburne's that he lends himself rather ill to mere dispassionate admiration. I doubt myself whether any poet of a very high class can be dispassionately appreciated: but certainly he cannot. You must, to quote one of his own finest passages, be somewhat in the mood to

> Hear through star-proof trees
> The tempest of the Thyades,

or you must be in the mood of reaction after such a hearing, in order to enjoy him fully. "And what for no?" There is no *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* as far as books are concerned; and I confess a certain contempt for any one who cannot get excited over print and paper.

And after all there is a vast residuum when this merely personal excitement (which from my own experience I should say is quite as likely to be felt a little after sixty[1] as a little after twenty) has subsided. There is the astonishing revelation of the metrical powers of English: for, though we knew them to be infinite before, this of itself does not take the very least thing off from the blush of each fresh instalment of the infinite surprises. There is the endless amusement of analysing the means (as to a certain limited effect is possible) by which these musical and emotional effects are produced. There is the pleasure of tracing what is, in so literary and scholarly a poet as Mr Swinburne, the great and complicated indebtedness to the masters of Greece and of Rome, of Italy and of France, but most of all to those of England. And there is what is most delightful of all to the true lover of poetry and literature, the delight of finding out how much it is impossible to account for.

For to this we always come, and in this I believe

[1] This might read now "before eighty." (1923.)

consists the greatest and most lasting enjoyment of every kind of beauty. If you ever could find out exactly why it is beautiful, the thing would become scientific and cease to be interesting. But you cannot, and so there is at once the joy of possession and the ardour of the unattained. You read for the first, the twentieth, or the hundredth time *The Garden of Proserpine*, or *Ilicet*, or *A Wasted Vigil*. There is the first stage of pleasure, a purely uncritical enjoyment. Then there is the second stage, in which you sit down and take your critical paper and pencil, and put down: metre so much; alliteration so much; ingenious disposition of vowel sounds so much; criticism of life so much; pathetic fancy so much; to having read it when SHE was present, or absent, or cross, or kind, or something, so much; literary reminiscence so much. And then there is the third, when you have totted these items up and found that they do not come to anything like the real total, that there is an infinite balance of attraction and satisfaction which you cannot explain, which is fact, but an unsolved, unanalysed, ultimate fact. The poetry which has come to mean this to a lover of poetry never gets stale, never loses charm, never seems the same, or rather, always being the same in one way, is always fresh in another.

Among such poetry I, for my part, rank a very large proportion of Mr Swinburne's earlier work, and not a very little of his later. If it were ever going to pall on me, I think it pretty certainly must have palled by this time. And what is more, there is the comforting reflection that anything in which one has taken delight so long is secure from palling by the very fact. The accumulation of delighted remembrance is a delight in itself: what has been has been, and therefore must ever continue to be.

IX. MACAULAY

THERE are not many deities who find a place in every Pantheon or are represented by attributes in every system of monotheism. But of these is Nemesis; and of Nemesis I do not hesitate to proclaim myself a devout and fearful worshipper. The great name which stands at the head of this paper is perhaps in literary history something of an example of her power. Such a hero-of-Dr-Smiles, such a *Selfelpista* (as the Italians I believe call it), has never been known since the lucky literary men of the Age of Anne, whom he himself described in some of his boldest and most effective strokes. Macaulay, though not low-born, was born quite in the middle-class; he inherited nothing worth speaking of; and he did not devote himself to any of the ordinary paying professions. Whether—a circumstance over which his biographers skim rather lightly—he did definitely rat at an early period of life from Toryism to Liberalism does not very much matter. He was born a Liberal of the type which he was to do so much to multiply and foster; and if his hoisting of that flag was a little prompted by considerations of probable profit, we may very well set the thing off against a very similar incident in the career of Canning in the generation before, and agree to say nothing about it.

From almost his earliest manhood Macaulay's life was a sort of cascade of fallings on his feet. He came just at the period when clear, brilliant, confident, and rather shallow review-writing was at its best paid and most honoured apogee. He came at the time when there were still rotten boroughs to bring forward a

young man of talent, and when a young man of talent could make his position sure by denouncing the rotten boroughs on which he had risen. In the Reform Bill debates there was no young man of anything like his talent on the other side, and the one young or youngish man who would have been too much for him in position and natural eloquence, as well as a fair match for him in scholarship and knowledge, Stanley, was by historical accident on the same side. In society he coincided with the period of breakfasts, and belonged to a party in which there was nobody to match him as talker except Sydney Smith, who was getting old. When it was necessary to provide for himself solidly, the least troublesome and most paying of all appointments left for any one to obtain came in his way. He stayed in India long enough to pick up a competence and not long enough to damage his health. He had no tastes, either domestic or luxurious, which could interfere with this independence, or impose on him a longer servitude. He came home and settled down to his own ideal life: a little politics, a great deal of historical literature, and as much society as he chose, without any obligations of family estate or office to force more on him. His great history fell on the very nick of time to suit its merits, and the famous twenty thousand pound cheque symbolised at once those merits and their reward. And then too he had the crowning felicity of an opportune death. Had Macaulay lived to the age of Lord Sherbrooke, something like Lord Sherbrooke's fate might—indeed I think must—have been his, though the few years' difference between them must have given him a slight advantage. It is almost terrible to think of the feelings of the man who prophetically described Mr Gladstone half[1] a century

[1] Now "all but." (1923.)

ago, when he found himself face to face with the choice of ceasing to be a Liberal or becoming a Gladstonian.

Yet Nemesis has been even with him (as she always is) for all these good things, and for the enormous popularity which was partly their result and partly their complement. Almost immediately after his death began a steady dead set of critical depreciation, which, unhasting, unresting, has attacked him ever since and which for some years past has spread from the critics to the vulgar. The decriers of Macaulay have been a strangely miscellaneous band. It was not to be expected that the Tories whom he affected to despise should like him; or that the Evangelicals, who regarded him as a renegade, and the Dissenters, who looked on him as the inheritor of the wicked wit of Sydney Smith, should love him. But he managed to attract hosts of enemies of the most heterogeneous kinds. It used to be a tradition in Oxford (I never saw the passage and I apologise to Mr Smith[1] if it is not true) that Mr Goldwin Smith even in the fullest days of his Liberalism called Macaulay "a shallow scoundrel." Mr Matthew Arnold, as is well known, exhausted his elegant quiver on the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, and was evidently often thinking of Macaulay when he denounced the British Philistine. The tribe of Dryasdust hated him because he was not merely an omnivorous reader but a brilliant writer; and the devotees of historical philosophy could not forgive him his obstinate superficiality and the calm assumption which accompanied it that there was nothing beneath the surface. Although one considerable Mediævalist, Mr Freeman, used to take his part, for reasons not very difficult of discovery, it was impossible for any other student of the older ages not to resent the bland ignoring of something like a thousand

[1] Now "to his memory." (1923.)

years of English history which made Macaulay constantly infer, and sometimes almost say, that nobody need look beyond the Great Rebellion.

Also I am afraid it must be said, though it will[1] make one devoted Macaulayan who is[1] a great friend of mine wroth, that the number of Macaulay's enemies in a certain sense is sure to increase by just so many people as undertake a serious study of any person or period with whom or which he has dealt. It is the general if not the universal result in such cases that the inquirers declare that Macaulay, if not thoroughly dishonest, is at least thoroughly untrustworthy. It is not that he is a partisan,—history without partisanship is to my fancy, in the old phrase of King Henry the Fifth, like "beef without mustard." Nor is it that he is, in history, deliberately unfair. In his anonymous work, where a man ought to be most careful, I fear he sometimes was. Some of the imputations on Croker in the "Boswell" Essay are utterly inexcusable, even if we did not know, as we do, that the reviewer took up the book he intended to review with a determination to "slate" it. But having had occasion to examine more than one part of the *History* carefully and documents in hand, I do not think that this sort of unfairness is often to be found there. Unfortunately, another sort which is common in the *Essays* is common also in the *History*. I do not hold that Macaulay, unless (as in the Warren Hastings case) he was himself misled by his authorities, ever advances against his "black beasts" anything which is positively untrue. I do not urge that he often suppresses, in a way with which much fault can be found, anything which makes in their favour. But he has a less gross, perhaps, but a worse and more

[1] Now alas! "would have made" and "was," for the friend was the late Mowbray Morris. (1923.)

dangerous fault than any of these. He is constantly misleading by innuendo suggestive of the false, by epithets, by generalisations, by rhetorical extensions of the actual fact or text. He finds in his document, let us say, that A. on not certain authority was accused on a particular occasion of doing or saying such and such a thing. This translates itself in the pages of the *History* into a general charge against A. of being notoriously in the habit of saying or doing it. A particular phrase is reported of a particular person: Macaulay always turns it to "men began to say," or something of that kind. In short, the most careful student, the most experienced critic, never quite knows where to have this great historian on a subject which he, the student or critic, has not yet examined for himself; and when he does examine for himself he too often has to ask himself, Is it possible that these colourings and baits to the unwary, these suppressions by dint of shading, and suggestions by careless scattering of adjectives and adverbs, can have been made without a deliberate *parti pris*, without the aim of the advocate whose admitted and professional privilege it is to throw dust in the eyes of the jury if he possibly can?

Something else has to be added. They have made Macaulay into school-books, and it is well known that, if it be possible to instil disgust and horror of an author into all but the few whom the not perhaps quite equal Jove of literature has specially loved, it can be done most easily and completely by setting them to learn him at school.

And so my Lord Macaulay of late—though I do not know that the great heart of the people has yet been affected about him, or that that Australian book-shelf of which we have all heard has yet been denuded of the *Essays*—has begun to fall rather on evil days. The

set against him has spread from the highest to the lowest rank of critics; the lady novelist has lifted up what it may be almost improper to call her heel against him; you see superior gibes to his address in those curious periodicals of scraps and patches which appear more than anything else to satisfy the literary hunger and thirst of the end of the nineteenth century. It is whispered, apropos of the miserable Montgomery, and in connection with the present influentially supported movement for roasting all reviewers gratis, that Macaulay was one of the wicked critics who delight to "slate" good authors. Fond as we are nowadays of rehabilitations, the rehabilitator has not come to him. In short, Nemesis is upon him: the deferred discount of that twenty thousand pound cheque has to be paid, and it is heavy.

X. MACAULAY (*concluded*)

I do not know that there have been any very striking vicissitudes in my own opinions of Macaulay. I used to delight in the *Essays* when I was a young boy, and I do not delight in them much less now that I am neither a boy nor young. But I think I always had a kind of inkling of the defects, which has gained in precision and definiteness, but has not, I think, deepened much. I still think that, on any subject which Macaulay has touched, his survey is unsurpassable for giving a first bird's-eye view, and for creating interest in the matter. Of course for those readers who have what is called "the faith of the charcoal-burner," who must be permitted to repose absolute implicit reliance on every detail of the narrative, every clause of the creed set before them, or who else will be miserable, Macaulay is the most dangerous of all possible guides. But it

must be an exceedingly moderate intelligence which does not pretty quickly perceive the classes and kinds of subject on which he is to be taken with grains of salt, an exceedingly sluggish and clumsy intellect which cannot apply these grains with sufficient discretion.

And he certainly has not his equal anywhere for covering his subject in the pointing-stick fashion. You need not—you had much better not—pin your faith on his details, but his Pisgah sights are admirable. Hole after hole—a very sieveful of holes indeed—has been picked in the "Clive" and the "Hastings," the "Johnson" and the "Addison," the "Frederick" and the "Horace Walpole." Yet every one of these papers contains sketches, summaries, *précis*, which have not been made obsolete or valueless by all the work of correction in detail. As a literary critic, again, Macaulay is far from impeccable. His sympathies were not very wide, and they were apt to be conditioned by attractions and repulsions quite other than literary. Although he had had a strictly classical education, although he early showed remarkable mastery of literary form himself, it cannot be said that this form was ever the object of any but a very subordinate share of his attention. It is amazing, when one has long been familiar with his essay—an extremely interesting one—on Temple, and then comes to be familiar with Temple's own work, to find how little Macaulay seems to have relished or realised Temple's purely literary excellence. He was a good Italian scholar and something of a Dantist; yet his remarks on the second of the three great poets of the world are woefully narrow and inadequate. I feel morally certain that he could not have been the Miltonian that he was if Milton had been a Cavalier and a Churchman; and I doubt whether it was not necessary for him to make up his mind (as he did on

next to no evidence) that Bunyan served in the Parliamentary army before he could give a voice to his admiration of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Even when politics did not interfere, it is obvious that his interest in literature as a round of sketches of ethics, of manners, of political life in the wide sense, altogether overtops his interest in it as literature. On Spenser, he has, as everybody knows, fallen into one of his rare blunders of fact. He had read, as he had read everything, the minor Elizabethans; but they excite no rapture in him. It is admitted that he has made Bacon, no very deep metaphysician at best, shallower and more exoteric still in his exposition of him. It is "man in relation to the Town" that he, like his beloved Addison, really cares for.

Enough was said in the former paper on this subject of the defects of Macaulay as a historian; and indeed they are not deniable by any competent judge who is not for the nonce a mere advocate. But the merit which has been allowed to his *Essays*, that of extraordinarily vivid presentation of the subject, must be allowed here to a still greater degree, inasmuch as it is shown on a far greater scale and in much more difficult matter. With part of the period which Macaulay's *History* covers I happen, as has been said, to have acquainted myself in considerable detail and by going to the original authorities. Nobody can possibly be more opposed to Macaulay's general views on the politics of that period than I am. And yet I am disposed to think and say, without the least conscious intention of paradox and with much deliberate guarding against it, that of no other period of English history does an idea so clear, vivid, and on the whole accurate exist in so large a number of people, and that this is due to Macaulay. The fact is that the power of making

historical periods and transactions real and living is an exceedingly rare power, and that Macaulay had it. Since his day we have had a numerously attended school of historians who have gone beyond even Macaulay in book-devouring, who have as a rule confined themselves more than he did to single periods, and who have sometimes exhausted their powers of picturesque writing and their readers' patience in severely accurate detail. Not one of them, to my thinking, has achieved the success of making his period living and actual as Macaulay has. The picturesque people hide the truth with their flashes and their flourishes. The Dryasdusts dole it out in such cut and dried morsels, with such a lack of art, such a tedious tyranny of document and detail, that the wood almost literally becomes invisible because of the trees.

As for the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, and the not very numerous but very remarkable minor verse which completes them, the history of that division of Macaulay's works is the most startling and the best known of all. When the *Lays* first appeared, they took the world by storm, and they held it for many years pretty well unquestioned. Nobody in his senses, of course, ever took them for the highest poetry: they cannot in that respect pretend to vie even with their own author's curious fragment on *The Last Buccaneer*, or his exquisite *Jacobite's Epitaph*. But in one of the kinds of poetry just below the very highest they exhibited accomplishment and mastery quite wonderful, and gave the poetical satisfaction to thousands, and probably millions, who were not fitted to receive it from higher things. Then arose Mr Matthew Arnold and denounced them as "pinchbeck," and the large number of persons who about five and twenty years ago were convinced that to get "culture" you must go to

Mr Arnold, at once echoed "pinchbeck," and vowed that they had never thought them anything else. Those, however, who had not exactly waited for Mr Arnold to form their opinions of classical and romantic perfection, were not, I think, much disturbed by this contempt. And in fact "pinchbeck" is about the unluckiest epithet that Mr Arnold could have selected. Pinchbeck in the literal sense pretends to be gold, and pinchbeck in the transferred sense means anything which pretends to be something it is not. Now the *Lays* pretend to be nothing that they are not; they aim at nothing more than a rattling spirited presentation in easy ballad rhyme of picturesquely told incidents. There is no doubt plenty of pinchbeck in English verse. There is the pinchbeck that imitates Greek tragedy and the pinchbeck that imitates mediæval imagery; there is pinchbeck which would fain be French and pinchbeck which would fain be philosophical. I am not quite certain that some of Mr Arnold's own verse, exquisite as is the best of it, is not pinchbeck in its affectation of a sort of pseudo-philosophic attitude dashed with sceptical modernism, and corrected by classic form. But there is no pinchbeck in the *Lays*, because there is no pretence. Gold perhaps they are not; silver I think they are; copper an unkind or partial judgment may call them. But not twenty Mr Arnolds shall ever persuade me that they are base metal,—metal which shams a higher stuff.

I think the publication of Sir George Trevelyan's excellent life of his uncle began a reaction in favour of Macaulay, and I think that reaction, though not very sudden or violent, is solidly founded and will go on. The pedants indeed are, I hear, raging at him more than ever; but they can do little harm; and the average

half-educated journalist has begun to leave off thinking it fine to sneer at him. He will never of course regain the position that he held during the last decade of his own life and for a few years afterwards: and I should be sorry if he did. For his thought was no doubt distinctly *borné* and sometimes almost vulgar; his style was sometimes flashy and almost always deficient in the finest distinction; he was a terribly partial historian; and in every department of literature he was insensible to, and incapable of recognising, *nuances*, half-tones, delicate contrasts, subtle gradations. But on the other hand he had that rarest and most precious power of attracting his readers to, and interesting them in, subjects that were not merely frivolous or ephemeral; his mental attitude was sturdy, honest, shrewd; he had a stout and noble patriotism; his very partisanship, his very advocacy, had something manly and downright in its unfeigned and unmistakable character; and fatiguing as his "snip-snap" sometimes is, utterly disgusting as are imitations of it, yet any one who speaks of Macaulay's style with contempt seems to me to proclaim himself fatally and finally as a mere "one-eyed man" in literary appreciation. Of the merits and defects of that curious generation of middle-class Liberalism which flourished in England from 1830 to 1860, he is probably the most striking example; and even if he were not this, he is a very great man of letters, and an almost unsurpassed leader to reading[1].

[1] Additional "evidence against" Macaulay may be thought to have been put in the Devil's Advocate's hand by the blows recently dealt at one of the greatest of England's accomplishments—the conquest of India—by inheritors of a policy which he may be said to some extent to have initiated. But impartial literary or biographical criticism must not allow this to count retrospectively. (1923.)

XI. BROWNING

WHENEVER it happens to me to write about Robert Browning, I am always a little apprehensive of the fate of the Trimmer. I have loved and admired his work for full thirty years; but I do not belong to any of the four parties wherein most of mankind are included as regards him. There are those who were Browningites from the first, or almost the first, and have been faithful all through,—a race now naturally diminishing by efflux of time. There are those who began to like him after he himself began to be fashionable, and who, whether they have gone the whole way with the Browning Society or not, regard him as one of the greatest of poets and philosophers. There are those who, from the sturdy English standpoint, have always been unable to tolerate him at all, at whatever time he was presented to them. And there are those who, though chronologically contemporaries of the rage for him, either had other rages which kept them from appreciating him, or are young enough (not necessarily in years) to think him already *vieux jeu*. All these are more or less "prevailing parties," as Lord Foppington says, and can encourage one another by dint of fellowship.

But my case is a little different. It so happened that Browning never fell in my way when I was a boy, except in very small and casual extracts. These I owed, I think, chiefly to that godsend to the youth of the late fifties and early sixties, Dr Holden's *Foliorum Silvula*, which, if it was the occasion of much deplorable Greek and Latin verse, must have laid the foundation of acquaintance with the very best of English. I

cannot remember reading a single volume of Browning as a volume before I became an undergraduate. But the collected edition of his *Poems* appeared almost directly afterwards, and I got it, while no long time passed before the appearance of *Dramatis Personæ*. Then I became very much addicted to Browning, and used to read him night and day. I have never myself quite understood what people meant and still sometimes seem to mean by the "obscurity," the "difficulty" of *Sordello*. It is distinctly breathless and it is unduly affected; but if anybody has got a brain at all, that brain ought not to be very much exercised in following the fortunes of Sordello and Taurello, Alberic and Ezzelin, Adelaide and the rest. It appeared to me that *Paracelsus* didn't prove much, and like *Sordello* was breathless, while I did not and do not care much more for Aprile than for Paul Dombey. But who could miss the splendid, and for its date, wholly novel poetry of it? The plays were mainly a bore—I have scarcely ever read a serious play younger than the seventeenth century that was not more or less of a bore to me—but there too the poet appeared. And as for *Men and Women*, and the *Lyrics*, and so forth, there was no possible mistake about them, when they were at their best. I never loved the most popular pieces much. *Ghent to Aix* is only a *tour de force*, and I can remember that when as a boy I first heard of it I thought that the good man rode to Aix in Provence (which would have been something like a ride), and was desperately disappointed at the actual achievement. In *Count Gismond* there is a passage of four and a half lines which is good enough for anything, but the rest is no great matter. *The Glove* contains other lines which stick in the memory, but the moral is mainly rubbish, and Marot *was* a poet.

And so on and so on. But I had never read, and I have never read, anything like even the least of half a hundred of the others in its best parts. *Christina* (what devil ever tempted Mr Browning to run the double lines of the earlier version into single ones?); *In a Gondola* and *The Last Ride together*, which I will uphold for two of the best love poems of the century, be the others what they may, the last named being perhaps the very best that we have produced for two hundred years; *Mesmerism* and *Porphyria's Lover*, a pair on a plane only a little lower; the first stanza of *Meeting at Night*, in which Browning has for once met and matched his great contemporary and rival on his own ground; the delightful rococo of *Women and Roses*; yet another pair, *Life in a Love* and *Love in a Life*; *Love among the Ruins* and *Two in the Campagna*, which ought, like so many of Browning's poems, to be taken together; *Prospice*, great among the greatest, and such a quiet essence of heroic combativeness that I never could understand how my friend Mr Henley failed to include it in his *Lyra Heroica*; *Childe Roland*, best of its own class, though *The Flight of the Duchess* runs it hard; and crowning the whole *Rabbi ben Ezra*;—these were things (and I have not mentioned a quarter of my own favourites) to set the blood coursing rarely. And yet, though I believe I love and loved them with a sum that twenty thousand members of Browning Societies could not make up, I never could and cannot now call myself exactly a Browningite. Even then, even in his heyday, the man (it is surely permissible to use slang of one who used so much) "jawed" at times; he was not to be depended upon for certainty of taste or touch; he would drop hideous negligences or more hideous outrages of intention in the middle of a masterpiece; it was clear that he wanted to teach; and so forth.

The works which followed *Dramatis Personæ* were not very well suited to convert a half-hearted though at times intense worshipper of this kind into a whole-hearted one. I am told that *The Ring and the Book* did actually bring about that change which its author anticipated in the famous address to the British public who "might like him yet." I cannot say that it brought about a contrary change in me. A man does not once appreciate to the full *The Last Ride together*, or *Love among the Ruins*, and get tired of them afterwards. But I own that this huge poem itself gave me little pleasure. Of course there are fine things in it, and the traits of "criticism of life" as well as the achievements of poetical expression are often admirable. But it is so tyrannously long without any action; so mercilessly voluble without much justification for the volubility; it has such a false air of wisdom and philosophy which is after all not particularly recondite or novel,—that I remember thinking of *Porphyria's Lover*, and wishing that some one had applied that person's drastic procedure to the poet on his own principles.

Nevertheless I persevered, much enduring, and except[1] *Red Cotton Nightcap Country*, which I do not believe I have ever read through yet, and *People of Importance*, which I missed by accident and have never picked up, I do not believe there is a volume or a line of Browning's that I have not read. It was tribulation mostly in those days, but there was comfort sometimes. *Fifine* is really a great book (the Browningites, I am told, do not like it), and there are gleanings even in

[1] These "exceptions" were picked up very shortly after this volume appeared for the purposes of my Chair and my Histories of *English* and of *Nineteenth Century* literature. There is also in the other later *History of English Prosody* much to supplement, though I think nothing to contradict, the papers here on Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne and Morris. I had not wished to include here anything that could be called merely technical. (1923.)

the volumes where Mr Browning thought to make up for a not wholly perfect knowledge of Greek by calling a Nymph a "numph." And at the evening time there was light. Even in the darkest days of the *Conciones ad Vulgus Browningense* appeared flashes of the old splendour, never seen on any other land or sea; the final poem of *Pachiarotto* was an almost flawless gem, and the latest volumes of all, especially *Asolando*, showed a wonderful recovery. It was a case of *eripitur persona, manet res.* The mask that the Browning Society had admired, and that had been constantly touched up and made more mask-like to please it, fell off, and Browning—not in his first vigour, not as when he wrote *In a Gondola* or *After*, but still Browning—reappeared.

It is of course a very great misfortune to be thus constitutionally unable to be "in the tune." In 1863 one ran the risk of being thought an affected and presumptuous youth for saying that, whatever faults *Sordello* might have, it was not half so obscure as even then one of Mr Gladstone's speeches was, and that *The Last Ride together* was worth the weight of the lady and her lover and their horses in gold. In 1883 one ran the risk of being dismissed as a grizzling fossil because one failed to admire volume after volume of blank-verse "jaw," where for the most part mannerism took the place of thought and facile ruggedness that of originality. I am not sure that in 1894 the light, light wheel is not already on the point of turning again, and that anybody who admires Browning at all will not be soon despised as something or other—it really does not much matter what. Nevertheless, as there are nearly always the seven thousand or thereabouts who have not bowed the knee to the Baal of any particular moment, who do not take their admirations

or their dislikes at the stall which happens to be prescribed by fashion, it may not be impertinent to examine a little further the reasons which have made one person of the class a lover of Browning who was never a Browningite,—a critic of Browning, who never would join in the cry about "harshness" and "obscurity," and all the rest of it. If outsiders do indeed see most of the game, such a one should at any rate have been able to see a little of it; and perhaps even his enthusiasm may cease to be suspected when it is taken in conjunction with his objections.

XII. BROWNING (*concluded*)

I do not know that there is any English writer to whom the motto *Qualis ab incepto* may be applied with more propriety than to Robert Browning,—any whose works are more intimately connected with his life. I am not one of those who take a very great interest in the biography of poets, and I think that its importance as illustrating their works has been as a rule exaggerated. But certainly, if a tolerably instructed student of books and men were set the problem of Browning's works without any knowledge of Browning's life, it would not give him much trouble to lay down the main lines of the latter. A man who had had to write for a living, or to devote himself to writing in the intervals for any regular occupation, could hardly have produced so much and have produced it with such a complete disregard of the public taste and the consequent chances of profit. A man who had had the advantages of that school and university education which as a rule happens to the upper and upper-middle classes of Englishmen would hardly have produced his work with such an

entire disregard of authority as well as of popularity. The first influence was no doubt wholly good, for, copy-books notwithstanding, the instances of men who without private means or practical sinecures have produced large quantities of very fine poetry are very rare, and for the last couple of centuries almost non-existent. The circumstances of Browning's education, on the other hand, no doubt had a good influence as well as a bad. It is open to any one to contend that his natural genius was too irregular, too recalcitrant to the file, to have admitted the labour of that instrument; and that therefore, if he had had a classical and critical taste implanted in him, the struggle of the two would have condemned him to silence. But it is quite certain that his worst faults are exactly those of a privately educated middle-class Englishman, and it is of the very highest interest to compare his career and performance in this respect with the career and performance of Mr Ruskin, who was in many respects his analogue in genius and circumstances, but whose sojourn at Oxford gave just the differentiating touch.

Allow however, as we may, less or more influence to these things, I think it will hardly be denied that the effect manifested itself very early, and that even by the appearance of *Bells and Pomegranates* prediction of their author's characteristics and career as a whole was pretty easy. It certainly had become so by the time that I myself, as I have said, was "entered" in Browning. It was obvious on the credit side that here was a man with an almost entirely novel conception of poetical vocabulary and style, with a true and wonderful lyrical gift, with a faculty of argument and narrative in verse which, diametrically as it was opposed in kind to the Drydenian tradition, had been in kind and volume unsurpassed since Dryden, and

with an enormous range and versatility of subject. He could, it was clear, not merely manipulate words and verse in a manner almost suggesting prestidigitation, but was also much more than a mere word- and metre-monger. On certain sides of the great problem of life he could think with boldness and originality, if not with depth: the depth of Mr Browning's thought belongs to the same mistaken tradition as his obscurity, and reminds me of those inky pools in the limestone districts which look and are popularly reputed to be bottomless till somebody tries them and finds them to be about nineteen foot two. He had above all a command of the most universally appealing, if not also the loftiest, style of poetry,—that which deals with love,—hardly equalled except by the very greatest, and not often excelled even by them.

But these great merits were accompanied by uncommon and sometimes very ugly defects. It was obvious that his occasional cacophonies and vulgarities were not merely an exaggeration of his recognition of the truth that the vernacular can be made to impart vigour, and that discords and degradations of scale and tone heighten and brighten musical effects. They were at any rate sometimes clearly the result of a combination of indolence and bad taste,—indolence that would not take the trouble to remove, bad taste that did not fully perceive, the gravity of the blemishes that wanted removing in his very finest passages. There was also that most fatal defect which the ill-natured fairy so often annexes to the gifts of vigorous and fertile command of language,—an excessive voluminousness and volubility. Lastly there was the celebrated "obscurity," which taken to pieces and judged coolly was simply the combined result of the good and bad gifts just mentioned. Mr Browning had plenty to say on what-

soever subject he took up; he had a fresh, original, vigorous manner of saying it; he was naturally inclined to and had indulged his inclination for odd and striking locutions; he was very allusive; and he was both impatient of the labour of correction and rather insensitive to the necessity of it. Hence what he himself has rather damagingly called in a probably unintentional satire and caricature of himself the "monstr' inform' ingens-horrendous demoniaco-seraphic penman's latest piece of graphic" which occurs so often in his work, which the admirers take for something very obscure but very precious, requiring the aid of Browning dictionaries and so forth, which the honest public gapes at, from which the primmer kind of academic critic turns away disgusted, and which more catholic and tolerant appreciation regards, if not exactly with disgust, certainly with regret and disapproval.

Now it was practically certain that when, from such a man, the very last restraining or dissuading checks in the shape of public disapproval or (more powerful still) indifference were removed, he would take the bit in his teeth and run away with himself. This was what Browning practically did in the score of volumes in improvised blank verse chiefly, but also in other metres, which he poured forth after 1868. The greater part of this matter I feel tolerably confident that futurity will relegate to the same shelf with Southey's epics and Dryden's plays. Indeed, I myself would much rather read the worst of either group than *Prince Hohenstiel Schwangau*, or the *Balaustion* books. But if the said posterity is well served by its editors, from time to time certain things will be rescued from even this part, and, added to the earlier harvest, will form a poetical *corpus* not by any means contemptible in respect of bulk even when ranked with the sheaves of pretty

fertile poets, and full of admirable if rarely perfect poetry. Few philosophical poets have lived long—Lucretius and Dante are the only great exceptions—and I am as certain as it is not rash to be that Mr Browning in his philosophical pieces will not rank with these. Indeed, it was not much of a philosophy, this which the poet half echoed from and half taught to the second half of the nineteenth century. A sort of undogmatic Theism heightened by a very little undogmatic Christianity; a theory of doing and living more optimist than Carlylism and less fantastic than Ruskinism, but as vague and as unpractical as either; a fancy for what is called analogy and a marvellous gift of rhetorical exposition,—these made it up. It looks vast enough and various enough in form and colour at a distance; it shrinks and crumbles up pretty small when you come to examine it.

But a poet is always saved by his poetry, and of that, thank Heaven, Mr Browning had plenty to secure his salvation. Those volumes of selections by which in an even narrower compass than that already hinted at he is perhaps destined to live most securely and longest (though the second wants refreshing and rearranging) display a perfect Aurora Borealis of poetical flashes of the intensest luminosity and the most endless variety of colour. The sabre-and-stirrup clang of the *i* rhymes in *Through the Metidja*; the astonishingly various music and imagery of the songs of *In a Gondola*; the steady hopeless swing—too full of passion for rant—of *The Last Ride*; the strange throbbing measure of *Mesmerism*; and a hundred other things which I must not mention lest after the string given in the last paper I be accused of mere catalogue-making;—these are the things which generation after generation of lovers of poetry will read and rejoice in, just as we now read and

rejoice in Donne and Marvell, and the rest of the seventeenth century lyrists. Indeed, I sometimes wonder whether on one of their sides Browning did not come nearer to these than Coleridge or Shelley, Keats or Tennyson. For if he had not the finest seventeenth century magic in remoteness of matter and melody of form, he had the odd ups and downs, the queer admixture of ore and dross, the want of criticism, the incompleteness which mark all but one or two of our seventeenth century men.

And if any one must needs, to complete his idea of a great poet, have something more than poetry and passion, than music and moonlight, I shall at least allow that Browning's life philosophy, if exposed to the criticisms made above, did once or twice, notably in the above-mentioned *Rabbi ben Ezra*, receive a very noble and lasting enshrinement and expression. A little optimist perhaps, but certainly not with the optimism which blinks the facts of life; a little pantheistic, as perhaps are all the great religions and all the great philosophies when you come to examine them from certain points of view and mood; a trifle unsubstantial, as divine philosophy must always be. But full of a generous and indomitable spirit, free from the whining and cavilling to which poetic philosophy so often inclines; throbbing with that remembrance of delight which is perhaps better than any delight itself; not covetous but not despairing of more; content to comprehend as far as may be, to labour as much as need be, to hope as much as is rational,—the philosophy in short of a poet who is also a man, which duplicate advantage poets have not always possessed.

XIII. DICKENS

THERE are few comparatively recent writers about whom it is more difficult to write at the present moment than it is to write about Dickens. Current public opinion about him seems to have got into a kind of tangle, and there are as many as four or five distinct views regarding him, all of which are held by considerable parties, each including some who deserve consideration quite independent of the numbers of their companions. There are—perhaps least numerous at the moment, but including, I fancy, a larger genuine number of genuine adherents than some of the other parties would admit—the old thorough Dickens-worshippers, who more or less represent the public that Dickens himself took by storm. These have a relish for his fun, and are not too critical over his pathos; they are not revolted by, or at least can pardon, and sometimes they directly sympathise with, his eccentric and ill-reasoned politics and sociology; they do not care to inquire too curiously into his formal peculiarities of plot and management; they do not cavil at, perhaps they enjoy, his style. Some of them indeed, who have literary gifts, follow him more or less directly to this day. Then, to take as nearly as I can their chronological successors, there are those who, admitting that he was a genius, feeling a genuine enjoyment of his humour, and allowing him a great amount of credit for marvellous inventive power, dwell strongly on all the excepted points just hinted at, and in addition resent not merely the extraordinary topsy-turvyness and the sharp limits of his power of delineation of

character, but also that quality in him which can only be called vulgarity, though I admit all the objections which are often urged against the use of that word as itself vulgar. This class is not by any means a homogeneous one, and the degrees in which its members allow the positive or credit side to overcome the negative or debit in their general estimate are extremely various.

But independent of these two parties, at least three more, among men mostly, but not always, younger than the members of the other two, admit of definition more or less exact. There are those who are simply "tired of Dickens," who resent the frequency with which his characters have passed into the range of newspaper quotation and parallel, who would like to "turn the page," who are in fact bored by him. There is a still larger body among the very young who think him out of date in more than time, and who wonder how anybody can even think of Dickens when he might read Mr Hardy and Mr Meredith. And there is a small body again, very heterogeneously composed, but including some persons of wit if also of crotchet, who would if they could exalt Dickens as a great democratic genius, as one who made his way without and in spite of education, fashion, powerful connections, and so forth, and vindicated the rights of the faculties of genius pure and simple.

There is something of an egg- or sword-dance in the attempt at a criticism of Dickens amid these delicate and dangerous differences of opinion. But perhaps we shall find that adherence to the personal and historical side of the matter here, as elsewhere, will help us not a little. It has, I believe, been held by the fanciful, that a man of tolerably healthy mind, who does not allow himself to be hampered by pre-

judice or crotchet, usually goes through a kind of microcosm of all possible opinions about his subject; and though this may be something of an exaggeration, it is also something of a truth.

I began myself very young (at ten or twelve years old, I should think) with *Pickwick*, and I own that I should not to this day think much of any one who began at about that age with *Pickwick* and did not adore it. I will add, that I should not think very much of any one who materially altered his opinion of *Pickwick*, however many years he might live and however many times he might read it afterwards. Years will indeed bring the philosophic mind to this extent, that one perceives more and more the extremely artificial character of the Pickwickian world. But then a boy does not take the Pickwickian world for a natural one. He simply does not think of it either as natural or unnatural; and when the sense of its artificiality comes on him, it destroys nothing, it brings about no disillusion, it only adds a certain condition to his view. I do not think that to this day I ever allow more than a year or two to pass without reading *Pickwick* through from beginning to end; and I cannot perceive any marked diminution in the satisfaction with which I do so. As Mr Boswell, in one of his inimitable compromises between the simpleton and the sage, somewhere remarks, "I seldom experience less disappointment in any scheme of happiness I trace out." And this, I think, is the very hardest test to which anything, literary or other, can be put. It is all very well to say that youthful enjoyment induces a strong delusion, and that we rather refuse to acknowledge a diminution than actually experience an equality. If this be so, why do other things in which I used to take quite as much delight as in *Pickwick* fail to give me the same

pleasure now? No; I shall maintain that this impossible and burlesque epopee of the four friends has a quality in it which belongs only to the literature which is pre-eminently good in a kind just short of the highest.

But, it will be said, *Pickwick* is not all Dickens, and all Dickens is not *Pickwick*, both of which propositions are most undeniably true. In leaving them one leaves the only spot of ground in the subject where a perfectly fair and equal fight is possible between admirers and contemners. You like *Pickwick* or you do not, and there's an end on't. Except as regards some of the inserted stories, it is all of a piece. But this could never be said again of any of the author's later works. I am not old enough to have been contemporary, at least in a state of intelligence, with any of the greater of these as they are generally reckoned. I do, indeed, remember seeing the parts of *Bleak House* in the book-sellers' windows; but I did not read it till long after. I remember distinctly failing to appreciate *Hard Times*, which I think rather better of now; and *A Tale of Two Cities*, which I like worse every time I manage to read it. Of *Great Expectations* I thought as a boy, and I think as a man, much better than most people did, or I believe do; and though I cannot believe that we lost much by the non-completion of *Edwin Drood*, there is no doubt "the true Dickens" in parts of *Our Mutual Friend*. But for that true Dickens in its quiddity we must no doubt look farther back even than *Bleak House*. He achieved indeed in the latter days with Louisa and Estella something more like live girls than the wax models which under the names of Rose Maylie and Kate Nickleby, and so forth, he had been contented to exhibit in the earlier. The life-philosophy of *Great Expectations*, though not very extensive or thorough, is the sanest and the truest he has expressed. The dreary

mannerism which appears in *Bleak House*, which simply floods *Little Dorrit* and *Hard Times*, and which seldom retires for long in any of the later books, is relieved by Mr Guppy and his friends, by Affery Flintwinch, by Joe Gargery and by Herbert Pocket, by the dolls' dressmaker, by a dozen other persons and a thousand or a myriad touches and flashes. But when we think of Dickens and do not think of *Pickwick* only, we do not think of these. It was in the forties and earliest fifties that he made his fame with *Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, with *Barnaby Rudge* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, with *Copperfield* and *Dombey*, and it is with these that he must keep or lose it.

And yet how difficult it is to arrive at any settled and connected view, much more at any view that shall command anything like a general assent about even these books! In looking, for instance, for a date just now, I found in a most respectable book of reference the statement that "Agnes is perhaps the most charming character in the whole range of fiction." *Agnes!* No decent violence of expletive, no reasonable artifice of typography, could express the depths of my feelings at such a suggestion[1]. It is an observation almost too hackneyed to be repeated that our fathers thought Little Nell and Little Paul almost excruciatingly pathetic, while the whole of my own generation has chiefly yawned over them. I am told that the weeping time is coming again soon; but this I take leave to doubt. As a terrorist and a manufacturer of Villains with a capital V, Dickens has I believe from the first been exposed to the doubts and sneers of callous heretics. Marks and Ralph Nickleby, Barnaby Rudge's rather incomprehensible and very murderous

[1] This is extravagant. Agnes is not "delicious" but she is exceedingly "good," to adopt the terms of the French satirist's libel on marriage. (1923.)

father, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Carker the impossible, have never had the first good fortune of Paul and Nell, though they have fully shared their later decadence.

And the case of the novelist's social satire is not very different. Dickens was so essentially the middle-class Englishman of his own generation *plus* genius, that he could not fail to carry great numbers of his readers with him in his onslaughts on workhouses and public offices, on Chancery and the manufacturing system. But some at least of those readers would have been abnormally stupid if they had not perceived from the first the exaggeration and the one-sidedness which pervaded these attacks, and the astonishingly vague and unpractical character of the optimism which inspired such alternatives as the novelist suggested or seemed to suggest. Reading in parts might obscure the frequent incoherence and improbability of the stories. But except among those readers who had themselves no more knowledge of the subject than their author, it was impossible that many, even from the first, should not be struck with the almost inconceivable ignorance of all the upper and a large part of the middle class of society which his books displayed. The so-called lower classes and part of the shop-keeper rank he knew, as the French say, "like his hand." Of actors he could tell and of attorneys, and he knew a barrister in court, though hardly out of it. But his soldiers, I mean his soldier-officers, his clergymen, his scholars, his miscellaneous gentlemen, much more his baronets and his peers, were like nothing that lives and moves on any part of the earth except the boards of the stage. And so from the very earliest times there was dissidence about him, dissidence from which I must if I can in another paper endeavour, if not to extract some argument, at any rate to make clear my own view.

XIV. DICKENS (*concluded*)

I remember reading a good many years ago, in a description (doubtless intended to be sarcastic) of an academic critic by a critic who was not academic, the item, "He likes the fun of Dickens." A person who only "liked the fun of Dickens," it was hinted (indeed I am not sure that it was not subsequently inculcated explicitly), was a nasty cynic, a superfine and unsympathetic disdainer of pathos and popular sentiment. I am afraid that I underlay then, and must still underlie, the ban of this condemnation. I should indeed not be disposed to deny now that Dickens has other claims besides mere fun. I say "now," because there was a period when I was younger and more unbalanced in judgment, and when, reserving appreciation of *Pickwick* and the Pickwickian parts of its fellows, I was disposed to place their author unduly low. At this period I once sold a complete set of the paper-bound issue of the works which came out in the late sixties for half a crown,—ostensibly and to some extent really as a testimony of opinion as to the literary value of the matter. This was fantastic, if not positively foolish; but it was even at the time not quite sincere, and such sincerity as there was in it vanished very soon.

What may be said, I think, with perfect critical truth, about Dickens is, that although he has a good deal besides "his fun," nothing that he has is of unalloyed excellence except that fun. I have seen him praised for wit; but I should say that when he is really funny he is always humorous, but never witty. When he attempts wit it is apt to land him in the dreary regions of the Circumlocution Office and other dry places wherein an over-strained satire prowls and barks. But in his own region of partly observed, partly exaggerated humour of the fantastic kind, his felicity

is astonishing. Although his subjects are often technically "low" enough in all conscience, he never here deserves the epithet "vulgar" from those who know how to use that dangerous adjective. It is only when he approaches the delineation of gentility or attempts the attitude of philosophic satire that he exhibits traces of the one unpardonable thing; and his vulgarest book, his one book tainted with incurable and hopeless vulgarity, is his *Child's History of England.*

But though this terrible fault—a fault awkward to speak of inasmuch as the mere mention of it infuriates those who do not themselves feel its presence—does exist in Dickens to a most unpleasant extent, the strange alloy which, as has been noted, pervades all his work except that in pure fantastic humour, is by no means wholly due to it. The cause thereof, however, is perhaps something which aggravated his vulgarity, to wit, his unfortunate want of early education and training except of the most haphazard and self-helping kind. He appears to have been, as an editor, an extremely severe critic of other men's work, and he certainly did not take his own lightly. Yet he seems to have been more destitute of the faculty of self-criticism than any person of whom I can think who possessed anything like his powers of creation. It is evident from the storm passage in *David Copperfield*, and some others, that he was quite capable of writing a kind of half sober, half ornate, and distinctly old-fashioned style, which has very considerable merit and is not justly exposed to any reproach on the score of tawdriness, want of elegance, or absence of proportion. Yet for once that he will content himself with this, he will indulge a score of times in a kind of trumpery strained melodramatic rant, which is as little impressive, as completely disgusting, as the antics of a North Asian or North American sorcerer. He will spoil the admirable

vigour of his descriptive faculty at crises by plastering and daubing this rant over the scenes, and change a shudder to a yawn by simply overdoing it. It is this inability to know where to stop which in like fashion has brought discredit on his pathos. He really had pathos; but he could not be content with a moderate dose of it, and must needs froth and whip and be-devil it till it becomes half insipid, half fulsome. Just the same, again, may be said of his mere mannerisms of style and figure, though it is fair to allow that in his very last years, unless we may suspect a probable relapse in *Edwin Drood*, he made a rather remarkable recovery from the depths to which he had fallen in *Little Dorrit* and *Hard Times*. In these the damnable iteration about Panks the "tug," and the figure of Louisa as Mrs Sparsit sees it going down the descent, and other similar things, are almost enough to make the gorge rise. In his political and social satire, in his amiable optimist life-philosophy, in his marvellous egotism, in a dozen other characteristics of his, this same utter absence of the sense of limit appears, and is the secret of his failures. He will put on the stage a clumsy lay figure like Sir John Chester and a perfectly human being like Mrs Varden with equal composure, and with an equally undoubting faith that both are quite as they should be.

There are, I believe, some people who would extend this unreality even to his humorous creations. I cannot do this. Of course in his later years the stream naturally ran with a good deal less of volume and with somewhat less sparkle and sprightliness than it showed at first. But I, at least, can discover no very great decline in strict quality between Mr Jingle and the dolls' dressmaker's papa, between Dick Swiveller and Joe Gargery. There may be something of the "irreparable outrage of years" in the later figures, but they

are of one kith and one kin with the earlier. No doubt such things as the machinations of Mr Boffin, and the exclamations he utters in the effort to carry them through, are inexpressibly tedious and dull. But then it is a grave error to class these with the efforts of Dickens's own native humour at all. They belong to the Panks business noticed above,—to the strange, mechanical, wooden-legged method of dot-and-go-one progression with which he chose at all times to alternate the easy flight of his natural wings. They belong to the false Dickens, the black horseman, the Mr Hyde of the organism, as distinctly as do the Markses and the Ralph Nicklebys, the washy pathetics and the windy politics, the leather-and-prunella peers, and the good-young-person heroines.

It is quite different with the group, or rather army, of immortal grotesques, who, with the elder Mr Weller for their general, and his son for chief of the staff, have now travelled the Journey from this World to the Next for a good many years, and are, I think, tolerably safe of their journey's end. Although, or because, extravagance is of their essence, we seldom—I hardly ever —feel them to be extravagant. So unerring has been the genius of their author, so perfectly has he arranged them in the particular key to which they belong, that the jars and false notes which alone could throw them out never occur. It is true, and is perhaps a necessary complement and corollary of this other truth, that they are never completely human. They have admirable human traits, they utter the wisest saws and the most modern instances, the touches of nature which their author gives them and which they exhibit are of the finest. Certainly they are not inhuman, but they are, I think, decidedly extra-human. They belong to a world not much, but definitely and unmistakably, different from the actual. It has been pointed out

before now that the two great contemporaries, Dickens and Balzac, each possessed this singular gift as it may be called from one point of view, this singular failing as it may be called from another. They both draw with unerring faithfulness characters which they have themselves invented; they fill a universe which they have themselves created. The creation of Dickens is indeed somewhat fantastic and shadowy beside that of Balzac, a magic lantern show rather than a human comedy; but, on the other hand, individual figures of the English master's have a vividness and vigour of life exceeding anything in the French. Yet in Dickens, even more than in Balzac, we feel the constant presence of the theatre,—of the boards and the lamps,—the property man and the prompter. Take, for instance, the guests of the immortal "Swarry" in *Pickwick*, one of the greatest and liveliest things that Dickens has done. They have the most delightful touches; they act their parts with remarkable *verve*; and yet we feel that they are not real footmen. None of them—nobody at all like them—ever opened a door to us or took away a coat from us. Whereas Thackeray with much less elaborate effort has created more than one of their brethren,—J. J.'s papa, the precious footman of Sir Francis Clavering who objected to and avoided a "holtercation," and others—whom we know to have been—to be—alive. They are hanging on behind carriages at actual drawing-rooms, and carrying with or without a sense of offended dignity actual coals to real fires. Those about Mr John Smauker never did anything of the sort except in the Theatre Royal, Kennaquhair.

Yet this, as it seems to me, has a certain advantage. I was surprised to see it suggested the other day that *Pickwick* is losing its propriety of atmosphere. I should have thought that, except to the very oldest men now living, it had long lost all that it ever had.

I am not young, and, as I have said, I began to read *Pickwick* very early. But, by that time, the coaches and the hackney coaches, the domestic suppers and the London taverns that were not mere gin palaces, were things of the past. Nor even when they were not can I think that to close observers Dickens can ever have seemed a realist. He was too glaringly fantastic, phantasmagoric, theatrical, for that. Save in a few externals and in his politics, which, thank Heaven, hardly appear in *Pickwick* itself at all, he is of no particular time, though his knowledge of part of human nature is enough to make him sufficiently of all. His peculiar variety of humour has often been described as, or attributed to, animal spirits. This does not seem to me fully adequate, for there is something much more than mere animal spirits therein. There is a quaint and fantastic habit of brain, an immense observation of the ways of men, even a certain though a limited sense of the irony of life. And the zest and character of this are perhaps heightened by the exclusions and the short-comings which accompany it. There is no sense of poetry, none of mystery, hardly any of religion, in Dickens. Passion has a merely rudimentary and infantile expression; art and literature next to none; philosophy none at all; history, science, many other things, hardly any. And perhaps these lacks, these absences, helped to concentrate the force and presence of what is present, so as to intensify its marvellous humoristic quality[1].

[1] I like these two papers less than any others of the group, not because I have changed my own opinion, which will be found expanded, and reasoned out with a complete survey of the subject, in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. But they are too jaunty in manner. I have, however, reprinted them because I think the beginning gives a true account of the attitudes towards the subject common at the time of writing. They have cleared up a good deal since and Dickens perhaps holds his place to-day as securely as ever and more securely than he did then. How much of this is due, however, to the increase of that political sympathy on which I have touched in both instances we need not perhaps enquire. (1923.)

xv. MATTHEW ARNOLD

Among the subjects of these papers there is hardly one in regard to whom I can speak in the tone of "How it struck a contemporary," to the same extent as I can with regard to Mr Matthew Arnold. Not of course that I can claim to have been a contemporary of Mr Arnold's in the strict sense; for he had taken his degree before I was born, and was an author before I was able to spell. But I can lay claim to having seen the birth of his popularity, its whole career till his death, the stationary state which preceded and succeeded that death, and something like a commencement of the usual depreciation and spoliation which so surely follows. For Mr Arnold's reputation made no very early or general way with the public, however high it may have been with his private friends, and with a small circle of (chiefly University) readers of poetry. A University Professorship has not very often been the occasion of attracting public attention to a man in England; but it may be said with some confidence that the remarkable *Lectures on Translating Homer* were the first which drew to Mr Arnold the notice of the world. He was then nearly forty, and he was several years over that Age of Wisdom when the *French Eton* and still more the *Essays in Criticism* fascinated the public with a double mannerism of speech and thought in prose, and set it inquiring about the author's verse.

Most young men of twenty who had any taste for English letters when the *Essays* appeared fell in love with them, I believe, at once and desperately, with the

more or less natural consequence of getting tired of them, if not positively disliking them, afterwards. My own admiration for them was, to the best of my remembrance, a good deal more lukewarm at first; and though it has never got any colder since, and has, I think, a little increased in temperature, it never has been, and I do not think it ever will be, at boiling point. I may give some reasons for this later, for the moment let us be historical.

It was undoubtedly one of those happy coincidences which, according to the optimist, happen to all of us who really deserve them, that just after the reading public had awakened to the sense that there was a very piquant and remarkable writer of English prose wrapped in the coat of one whom it had hitherto regarded, if at all, as a composer of elegant, but rather academic verse, the great political change of 1867 happened, and a reign of sharp social and political changes began. I do not think myself that the revolution of 1868–1874 has ever been fully estimated, and I have always thought it half an advantage and half a disadvantage that I was myself resident out of London during the whole of that time. The looker-on sees the drift of the game more clearly, but he appreciates the motives and aims of those who take part in it less fully than the players. During these years Mr Arnold seemed to have a great part before him. Everything (following his father's famous definition of Liberalism) "was an open question," and the Apostle of Culture with his bland conviction, first, that most things were wrong in England, and, secondly, that he was born to set them right, and with a singularly stimulating and piquant style to help him, had an unusually clear field.

As a matter of fact, Mr Arnold did help to produce a considerable effect on the public. But it was an effect

chiefly negative as far as that public was concerned, and it cannot be said to have been altogether happy as regards himself. To the finest flowers of his production, such as the delightful whimsy of *Friendship's Garland*, little attention was paid: the good public, Populace, Philistines, and Barbarians alike, could not make out what the devil Mr Arnold was driving at. His formulas, after pleasing for a while, were seen to be rather empty things; his actual politics, if he had any (a point on which I have always entertained doubts), appeared to be totally unpractical; and he had not the chance which Mr Mill and Mr Morley enjoyed or suffered, of showing whether a sojourn in the House could practicalise them. Unluckily too for him, he allowed his energies to drift almost wholly into the strange anti-theological kind of theology which occupied him for nearly ten years, which at first brought on him much odium and never attained for him much reputation, which appears to me, I confess, to have palpably stiffened and dulled his once marvellous lissomeness and brilliancy of thought, and which is now abandoned to cheap beginners in undogmatism alike by the orthodox and the unorthodox of some mental calibre.

Then for another ten years Mr Arnold settled slowly back again, under the disadvantages just referred to, into his proper line of poet, literary and miscellaneous essayist, and mild satirist of society. Once in verse, in the exquisite lines entitled *Westminster Abbey* (I would they had had a better subject, not than the Abbey, but than Dean Stanley), once or twice in prose, as in the famous charge on the Shelleyites and other things, the Apostle of Sweetness and Light appeared at his very best; and perhaps he was never, except in the wondrous muddle-headedness of the *Irish Essays*,

far below it. But in all the works of this time, though the positive dulness of the phase of which *St Paul and Protestantism* is perhaps the Nadir never reappeared, there is, to me at least, a sense of two drawbacks. There is a failing *fineness* of power in a man whose power had at its best been nothing if not fine, a growing heaviness of touch, a sleight of words that becomes a trick, a damnable iteration, an occasional passage from agreeable impertinence to something else that is not agreeable. And there is, on the other hand, an obvious disgust and dissatisfaction at the very results which he had hoped and helped to attain. It was impossible that Mr Arnold should accept democracy with anything but the wryest of faces; and he must have found the new Pharisees of undogmatism whom his religious musings had brought about suggestive of another work by the same author as *Religious Musings*,—the *Ode to a Young Ass*. The Young Ass has begun to kick at Mr Arnold now, I see, as the fashion of him passeth away.

But it was never possible for any competent person, however much he might find to dislike in this fascinating and irritating writer, to fail in recognition of his extraordinary powers. One might wince at the almost unbelievable faults of taste which he, *arbiter elegantiarum* as he was, would not unfrequently commit; frown at the gaudy tricks of a mannerism quite as bad as those which he was never weary of denouncing; demur to his misleading and snip-snap phrases about "criticism of life," "lucidity," "grand style," and what not. There were a great many things that he did not know or did not fancy; and like most of us, no doubt, he was very apt to think that what he did not know was not worth the knowing, and that only very poor and unhappy creatures could like what he did not fancy.

Now all these things are specially bad preparations for the task of the critic; and perhaps Mr Arnold's critical abilities, if not overrated, were wrongly estimated. It was difficult to praise too highly the expression of his criticism when it was at its best; but it was easy to set the substance too high. Even his subtlety and his acuteness, two faculties in regard to which I suppose his admirers would put him highest, were rather more apparent than real, and were constantly blunted and fettered by the extraordinary narrowness and crotchettiness of his range of sympathies. He was always stumbling over his own formulas; and he not unfrequently violated his own canons. At least I am myself quite unable to reconcile that doctrine of confining ourselves to "the best," which it seems rules out the *Chanson de Roland* and makes Shelley more remarkable as a letter-writer than as a poet, with the attention paid to Senancour and the Guérins.

The real value of Mr Arnold as a critic—apart from his indirect merit of providing much delightful English prose shot with wit and humour, and enclosing endless sweetmeats if not solids of sense—consisted chiefly in the comparative novelty of the style of literary appreciation which he adopted, and in the stimulus which he accordingly gave to literary study. Since Hazlitt, we had been deficient in critics who put appreciation before codification; and Hazlitt himself was notoriously untrustworthy through caprice. The following of Sainte-Beuve saved Mr Arnold from both errors to some extent, but to some extent only. Though well read, he was not extremely learned; and though acute, he was the very reverse of judicial. He had fortunately been brought up on classical literature, to which he pinned his faith; and it is impossible that

anyone with this advantage should be a literary heretic of the worst description. But he constantly committed the fault of Shylock in regard to his classics. What was not in the classical bond, what "was not so expressed," could not be good, could not at least be of the best. Now I will yield to no man in my respect for the classics; and I do not think that, at least as far as the Greeks are concerned, anyone will ever do better the things that they did. But it is absurd to suppose or maintain that the canon of literary perfections was closed when the Muses left Philemon's house.

Mr Arnold, then, as a critic seemed to me at first, and has always seemed to me, flawed with those very faults of freak and crotchet against which he was never tired of protesting, and, though a very useful alternative, stimulant, and check, not a good model, and a still worse oracle. I should say of him, and I think I have always recked my own rede from 1865 to the present day in this respect, "Admire, enjoy, and be thankful for Mr Arnold as a critic; but be careful about imitating him, and never obey him without examination." Of Mr Arnold as a poet there is much more to be said.

XVI. MATTHEW ARNOLD (*concluded*)

The book in which I first made acquaintance with any considerable quantity of Mr Arnold's poetry was the so-called second edition of the *Poems*, containing the first issue of the celebrated Preface: perhaps the best piece of criticism (though I do not agree with its main position) that the author ever did. The book in which one has first made full acquaintance with a poet is like no other book; it has the charm of one of the two kisses celebrated by the Spanish folk-song. Yet I

venture to think—divorcing criticism as much as possible from any pathetic or egotistic fallacy—that the collection was and is an extremely favourable one for the purpose of doing full but friendly justice to Mr Arnold's poetical talent. For it was the selected collection of a good deal of separately written and published work, made by a man who was in the very prime of his intellectual strength, who was "commencing critic" after a youth of poetry, and who was not yet tempted by any excessive public favour to spare his critical faculty on himself. A few excellent and many interesting things were written afterwards, and there is of course a certain historical attraction in *juvenilia*, such as the full form of *Empedocles*, and other things which were only restored later. But the best things of all are there,—the best sonnets, *Requiescat*, *The Church of Brou*, *Tristram and Iseult*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, *The Forsaken Merman*, *The Strayed Reveller*, and *Switzerland*,—this last without its most unfortunate *coda*, *The Terrace at Berne*. When I find myself ranking Mr Arnold higher as a poet than some do whose opinions I respect, I always endeavour to make sure that the cause is nothing illegitimate connected with this first acquaintance. And I do not think it is. For, though he himself would not have admitted it, a poet is to be judged by his best things, by his flashes, by his highest flights; and there are more of these to be found in this volume than in all the rest of Mr Arnold's verse.

It is on the whole, however, that we must correct our impressions if necessary, and a very curious and interesting study "the whole" is in Mr Arnold's case. I still like to try first to raise and then to correct the impressions of a newcomer, taking the standard edition as it too comes. He must, I should think, be staggered

and disappointed by the respectable but imitative Wordsworthianism of the first two sonnets, *Quiet Work* and *To a Friend*. But the Shakespeare piece is truly magnificent, and as Dryden's famous sentence has said the best and most final thing about Shakespeare in prose, so has Mr Arnold said the best and most final thing in verse. Then we relapse heavily, to be uplifted again after pages by the strains, a little Wordsworthian still but freed from Wordsworthian woodenness, of *Mycerinus* with its splendid close. But the problem and puzzle—a problem and a puzzle which in thirty[1] years I do not pretend to have solved—of the Arnoldian inconsistency and inequality meet us full in *The Church of Brou*. Part I is prosaic doggerel which any smart boy of sixteen could have written at any time during the century. Part II is a little better. And then Part III is poetry,—poetry not indeed free from Wordsworthian and Miltonic echoes, but poetry indisputable, marmoreal, written for all time. *A Modern Sappho* drops to Moore, and not very good Moore; and then with *Requiescat* we are in upper air again. It is not faultless; it has lapses, flatnesses, *clichés*, but it is one of the great lyrical dirges of English.

I should have no room to go through the rest of the Poems, especially of the Early Poems, with this minuteness. It must suffice to say that everywhere we find these strange ups and downs;—now rhymes almost descending to the cockney level of Mrs Browning at her unintelligible worst, now curious little pedantries of expression, now things that show that the poet's craftsmanship altogether fails him, now affectations and imitations of every sort and kind. And hard by we shall find nobilities of thought and phrase that could only be the work of a poet, and almost a very great poet.

[1] Or in sixty. (1923.)

In considering the longer narrative poems we must remember Mr Arnold's pet theory that "all depends on the subject," that the epic and the drama stand high above all other forms of poetry, and so forth. I own that they do not interest me greatly, despite the magnificent close of *Sohrab and Rustum*, or that sudden lyric burst which lightens the darkness of *Tristram and Iseult*:

> What voices are these on the clear night air?
> What lights in the court? what steps on the stair?

The truth is that Mr Arnold had neither the narrative nor (to take in *Merope*) the dramatic gift. For to possess either you must possess the other power of "keeping your own head out of the memorial," and that he could never do. Nevertheless it is something wonderful that he should be as bad as he sometimes is. And the inequality is the same in his ballads. *St Brandan*, with a magnificent and not wholly unsuccessful strain in it, is yet not quite a success. *The Neckan* is not much above Mrs Hemans. But *The Forsaken Merman* is very nearly supreme. It is not popular now, I believe, and certainly it might not have been written if there had been no Tennyson; but it is good,—good all through, good in sentiment, good in music, good (which is the rarest thing in poetry) in composition, not easily surpassable in finale. The man who wrote *The Forsaken Merman* was a poet *sans phrase*.

"Then," says the Advocatus Diaboli, "how did he come to write some other things, or at least to print and publish them?" And to this question I can give no answer. *Switzerland* is to me the same insoluble puzzle that it was a quarter[1] of a century ago, and more, because of the *coda* above referred to. It contains one unsurpassed and not often matched piece of poetry,

[1] Read now "more than half." (1923.)

the famous *Isolation*, or *To Marguerite continued*, which begins:

Yes; in the sea of life enisled.

It contains flashes and scraps elsewhere not far below this. And it also contains commonplace coxcombry, second and tenth hand rhetoric, cheap philosophising, indistinct description, enough to damn half a dozen minor poets.

Once more the filling of the sheets warns me that I must not proceed in this analysis. *The Scholar Gipsy* I would fain think nearly faultless, and fain hope that it is not old Oxford prejudice that makes me think it so. *Faded Leaves*, *Growing Old*, and a dozen other sad descants of the later time, have a real and not only an affected strain of the true, the great Melancholia. *Dover Beach*, though I do not in the least agree with it, and though the metaphor of the retreating tide is a singularly damaging one for the poet's meaning (for *qui dit* ebb *dit* flood), has a majestic music. And there are many others I could mention. But of mentioning there must be an end, that we may conclude somewhat more generally.

What then were the causes which made the work of a man of, as it seems to me, undoubted and real original poetic faculty, of great scholarship and apparently severe taste, a professed critic and undoubtedly a lover of much that is best in poetry, so unreal, so trivial often, so rarely spontaneous and inevitable? I have already said that in repeated readings I have never been able quite to satisfy myself about these causes. I cannot quite make out why the critic did not say to the poet, "It will never do to publish verse like this and this and this and this," or why the poet did not say to the critic, "Then we will make it worth publishing," and proceed to do so. I cannot (for the other recorded instances, the chief of which is

Gray, are not quite to the point) understand how a poetic faculty which could yield *The Forsaken Merman*, the best things of the *Switzerland*, the Shakespeare sonnet, the finales of *Mycerinus* and *Sohrab and Rustum*, with not a little else, should have been such a barren and intermittent spring. The only possible explanation—which is rather a statement of the facts than an interpretation of them—is that Mr Arnold's spring of poetry though fine was actually faint, that he was from the very outset a thoroughly literary writer, more sensitive to influences than fertile in original impulse, and that the considerable though somewhat late access of popularity after he had come to forty years turned his head a little, and induced him to disinter and refather things which, after the wise example of Lord Tennyson and the threat of Sir Anthony Absolute, he would have done well to unbeget, utterly refusing to rebeget them.

Be this as it may, Mr Arnold's poetical position is remarkable in our literature, and not wholly benign in its influence. He provides for those who know and love letters an interesting and admirable example of a literary poet. He provides for those who can appreciate poetry some exquisite notes nowhere else heard, and not to be resigned even if the penalty for hearing them were twenty times as great. But he provides also a most dangerous model. For he may seem to suggest, and has, I think, already suggested to some, that the acquisition by dint of labour of a certain "marmoresque" dignity of thought and phrase will atone for the absence of that genius which cometh not with labour, neither goeth with the lack of it[1].

[1] A year or two later a book in Messrs Blackwood's Series enabled me to work out these views on this subject pretty fully. The recent centenary of Arnold's birth seemed to elicit from younger critics a still lower view of his criticism, an almost entire neglect of his theology, but an estimate of his poetry certainly higher than that which prevailed in 1895 though scarcely higher than mine. (1923.)

XVII. THREE MID-CENTURY NOVELISTS

CHARLOTTE BRONTË. GEORGE ELIOT. ANTHONY TROLLOPE

THERE are, I suppose, no Victorian novelists, putting very recent names with whom I do not here meddle out of the question, who have approached the popularity of Dickens and Thackeray more nearly than Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. They are at the present moment in three different stages of the experience which popular novelists go through when they die, and it may be a little interesting to examine their case from the point of view of the present papers.

The author of *Jane Eyre* has had one indisputable reward for the shortness of her brilliant career. She has become a classic; she has been recently reprinted as such with authors the youngest of whom was her senior by nearly half a century; and though it cannot be said that she had ever quite fallen out of even popular knowledge, any one with a tolerably sharp eye for criticism must have perceived that not a few readers come to her, as they come to a classic, with a more or less respectful ignorance. She was protected from that most ungracious stage of depreciation which attacks many of her kind immediately after, if not even before, their death, first by the earliness of that event in her case, and secondly by the fact that it happened at a peculiar period. In 1855 the English world had not yet become literary; and though I do not know that the quality of the best literary criticism was much better or much worse than it is now, the volume of it

was infinitely smaller. There were far fewer newspapers; and the young person who, on the strength of a modern education, a comfortable confidence in his own judgment, and a hand-book or two of authorities quotable and pillageable, commences critic, existed in smaller numbers, and had very much fewer openings. Moreover, Currer Bell had held one of those literary positions which expose the holder to more hardships at first than afterwards. She belonged to no school; she was not involved in any literary parties; she rose with few rivals, and she died before she had time to create any. So that, though she had great difficulties in making her way, and was subjected to some unfair and ungenerous comments at first, when she had begun to make that way she had little direct detraction to fear.

I do not think that she was exactly what can be called a great genius, or that she would ever have given us anything much better than she did give; and I do not think that with critical reading *Jane Eyre* improves, or even holds its ground very well. It has strength. or at any rate force; it has sufficient originality of manner; it has some direct observation of life within the due limits of art; and it has the piquancy of an unfashionable unconventionality at a very conventional time. These are good things, but they are not necessarily great; and it is to me a very suspicious point that quite the best parts of Charlotte Brontë's work are admittedly something like transcripts of her personal experience. It is very good to be able to record personal experience in this pointed and vivid way; and perhaps few great creators, if any, have been independent of personal experience. But they have for the most part transcribed it very far off; and they have intermixed the transcription with a far larger amount of direct observation of others, and of direct imagina-

tion or creation. Those who have not done so fall into the second or lower place, and do not often rise out of it. This is an experience for confirmation of which I can, I think, confidently appeal to all competent reviewers and most competent editors. A book appears, or an article is sent in, wherein this or that incident, mood, character, what not, is treated with distinct vigour and freshness. The reviewer praises, and looks with languid interest tempered by sad experience for the second book; the editor accepts, and looks with eagerness tempered by experience still more fatal for the second article. Both come, and lo! there is either a distinct falling off from, or a total absence of, the first fine rapture. I think Charlotte Brontë is the capital example of this familiar fact, in a person who has actually attained to literature.

Not that she never did anything good after *Jane Eyre*. I think better than most people seem to have done of *Shirley*, somewhat less well perhaps of *Villette* and *The Professor*. But in all, from *Jane Eyre* itself downward, there is that rather fatal note of the presence and apparent necessity of the personal experience. It is portrait painting or *genre*, not creative art of the unmistakable kind, and in the one case where there seems to be a certain projection of the ideal, the egregious Mr Rochester, even contemporary opinion—thankful as it was for a variation of type from the usual hero with the chiselled nose, the impeccable, or, if peccable, amiable character, and the general nullity—recognised at once that the ideal was rather a poor one. It was as much of a schoolgirl's or a governess's hero as any one of Scott's or Byron's. It is quite true that Rochester is not merely ugly and rude, but his ugliness and his rudeness are so much of him! And though Jane herself is much more than an underbred little

hussy, I fear there is underbreeding and hussyness in her, where she is not a mere photograph. I used to think, years ago, that the finest touch in all Miss Brontë's work is where the boy in *Shirley* makes up his mind to ask Caroline for a kiss as the price of his services, and does not. I am not much otherwise minded now.

Twenty[1] years ago it required, if not a genuine strength of mind, at any rate a certain amount of "cussedness," not to be a George-Eliotite. All, or almost all, persons who had "got culture" admired George Eliot, and not to do so was to be at best a Kenite among the chosen people, at worst an outcast, a son of Edom and Moab and Philistia. Two very different currents met and mingled among the worshippers who flocked in the flesh to St John's Wood, or read the books in ecstasy elsewhere. There was the rising tide of the æsthetic, revering the creator of Tito. There was the agnostic herd, faithful to the translator of Strauss and the irregular partner of Mr G. H. Lewes. I have always found myself most unfortunately indisposed to follow any fashion, and I never remember having read a single book of George Eliot's with genuine and whole-hearted admiration. Yet an experience which I once went through enables me, I think, to speak about her at least without ignorance. When *Daniel Deronda* appeared, my friend, the late Dr Appleton, asked me to review it for the *Academy*. My hands were the reverse of full at the time, and as there were some books of the author's which I had not read, and others which I had not read for some time, I thought it might be worth while to get an entire set and read it through in chronological order, and so "get the atmosphere" before attacking that Ebrew Jew. I have spent

[1] Fifty! (1923.)

many days with less pleasure and less profit than those which I spent on this task. And when I had finished it, I came to an opinion which I have since seen little reason to change.

Something of what has been already said about Charlotte Brontë will apply also to this very different contemporary and craftsfellow of hers. Neither of them seems to have had in any great degree the male faculties of creation and judgment. Both, and Miss Evans especially, had in no ordinary degree the female faculty of receiving, assimilating, and reproducing. During a long and studious youth she received and assimilated impressions of persons, of scenes, of books. At a rather belated crisis of feeling she experienced what I suppose must be called Love, and at the same time was exposed to a fresh current of thought, such as it was. She travelled and enriched her store; she frequented persons of distinction and was influenced by them. And then it came out in novels, at first pretty simple, and really powerful; then less simple, but ingeniously reproductive of certain phases of thought and sentiment which were current; last of all reflective of hardly anything (save in scattered and separate scenes where she always excelled) except strange crotchets of will-worship, which she had taken up to replace the faith that she had cast out, but that was evidently more or less necessary to her.

She began with those *Scenes of Clerical Life*, which some very fervent worshippers of hers, I believe, put at the head of all her work in merit as in time, but which I should rank decidedly below the best parts of *Adam Bede* and the wonderful opening of *Silas Marner*. Then came the great triumph, *Adam Bede*, itself. Of course it is extremely clever; but no one who calls himself a critic can afford to forget the circumstances

in which it appeared. Dickens's best work was done, and his mannerism was already disgusting some readers. Thackeray, though at his very best, had not reached full popularity, and was entirely different in style and subject. Charlotte Brontë was dead or dying, —I forget which; there was nobody else who could even pretend to the first class. How could *Adam Bede* fail?

The Mill on the Floss was not likely, the circumstances being still the same, to diminish the author's vogue, and I suppose it is her best book, though it may not contain her best scenes. The objection which is often made and still oftener felt to the repulsiveness of Maggie's worship of a counter-jumping cad like Stephen, is somewhat uncritical. I suspect that most women resent it, because they feel the imputation to be true: and most men out of a not wholly dissimilar feeling which acts a little differently. *Silas Marner* again has qualities of greatness, though the narrative and characters are slight for a book. But between these earlier novels and the later batch a great gulf is fixed. Hardly after *Silas* do we find anything, except in patches and episodes, that is really "genial" in George Eliot's work. *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* are elaborate studies of what seemed to the author to be modern characters and society,—studies of immense effort and erudition not unenlightened by humour, but on the whole dead. *Romola* is an attempt—still more Herculean, and still more against the grain—to resuscitate the past. As for *Daniel Deronda*, it is a kind of nightmare,—a parochial and grotesque idea having thoroughly mastered the writer and only allowed her now and then to get free in the character of Grandcourt and (less often) in that of Gwendolen. I think *Theophrastus Such* has met with rather undeserved contempt, due to the fact that *Deronda* had already begun

to sap the foundations of its author's popularity. The poems are laboured and thoroughly unpoetical expositions of crotchet and theory. The essays are neither better nor worse than a vast number of essays by quite second-rate authors.

I must collect, in the old sense, the results of this in another paper, which will also give me room to speak of Mr Trollope.

XVIII. THREE MID-CENTURY NOVELISTS (*concluded*)

The brief sketch of the history of George Eliot's work from the outside which was given at the end of the last paper might almost carry with it, to a wary and experienced mind, a forecast of the progress of George Eliot's reputation. But there was another influence of the first importance which has not yet been noticed. I never knew anything personally of Mr G. H. Lewes. But he was certainly a very clever man: and as a literary trainer, with a view to the present success of the still more clever companion whom accident threw in his way, he was really consummate. I think George Eliot might possibly have occupied a higher place in literary history if she had never met him at all; but it is rather more probable that she might have occupied none whatever. As it was, he managed to put her literary faculties in a kind of forcing-house. The anonymity which was maintained over the *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, may have been at first unintentional, but its effect both on the public and the producer was no doubt stimulating in the highest degree. When it had been dropped, Mr Lewes fell at once with extraordinary tact into the way of life which best suited the forte and the foible of Miss Evans. He gave her assiduous personal attention and a sort of sham position as the head of a family. He did not over-

work her, and he administered plenty of the foreign travel and home atmosphere of literary society which she liked. He fended off all but favourable reviews, and while dexterously surrounding her with a court of faithful devotees protected her from any rough contact with the give-and-take of the world. All these things worked together with her own unquestioned endowments, not merely to bring her money and fame, but actually to stimulate her productive faculties to the highest possible point in a certain way.

In a certain other way the result was disastrous. She never lived in the open. Her first intellectual expansion had taken place in a narrow clique of Unitarian Nonconformity; and she had but exchanged it for one little wider, of agnostic and anti-theological journalism. Her last twenty or five and twenty years were spent in a close conservatory, receiving adulation from others, and brooding over her own negative creed. The nearest analogue that I can think of to her among the greater names of fiction is Richardson, to whose work hers has indeed a striking resemblance in more ways than one. But even Richardson lived in a healthier time and was exposed to healthier influences. Nobody "rattled her shutters," to take Thackeray's excellent metaphor, as Fielding rattled Richardson's. She had no experience of active business, such as the printer had, with ruthless customers, prosaic workmen, and the like, to give her a taste of the actual world. And so there was, even from the first, a taint of the morbid and the unnatural upon her. The flowers forced from her in this non-natural atmosphere and by this non-natural treatment had, as is customary in such cases, no small *éclat* and attraction at first, but their colour and their form grew less and less lifelike as time went on, and their inherent weakness caused them to fade sooner and sooner. That this would have been the

case anyhow I do not doubt, but the Nemesis of the *liaison* with Lewes exhibited itself in an even more unmistakable fashion than this. The scientific phraseology to which he himself was more or less sincerely devoted invaded his companion's writing with a positive contagion, and what many independent critics had been saying for years became the public voice on the appearance of *Daniel Deronda*. Coterie admiration lasted a little longer; and that popular reflex which a well-engineered fame always brings with it, a little longer still. And then it all broke down, and for some years past George Eliot, though she may still be read, has more or less passed out of contemporary critical appreciation. There are, of course, a few obstinate and "know-nothing" worshippers; perhaps there are some who kept their heads even in the heyday, and who can now say *sunt lachrymæ rerum*, as they contemplate a fame once so great, in part so solidly founded, and yet now to a greater extent than strict justice can approve almost utterly vanished away.

The vicissitudes of Mr Anthony Trollope's reputation are less striking and perhaps less instructive than those of George Eliot's, for there can be very little doubt that Miss Evans had genius, and I never met more than one competent critic (a personal friend, by the way, of the author of *The Warden*) who thought that Mr Trollope had. But he had immense fertility, and if not immense, very great talent; and his career is in consequence something of a warning. Unless I mistake very greatly, no novelist towards the end of the sixties was in greater demand at the circulating libraries, and by the editors and publishers of magazines which published serial novels, than Mr Trollope; and certainly no one ever set himself to satisfy that demand with greater energy or in a more business-like spirit. He probably

did himself no good with the public or the critics by the quaint frankness of his avowals in his Autobiography as to the strictly professional fashion—so many hours per day, and so many words per hour—in which he did his "chores." And certainly there was a time when the public altogether failed to respond to his endeavours to please them. His last half-dozen, if not his last dozen novels, were I believe indifferent pecuniary successes; and I remember very well the difficulties under which I found myself when I had to criticise more than one of them. For it is, I think, a law of the Medes and Persians, "Never speak evil of man or woman who has given you pleasure," and I admit that in the days of the *Chronicles of Barset* Mr Trollope gave me a very great deal of pleasure. But it is also a law of honest criticism never to say what you do not think, though it is by no means necessary to say all that you do think, and it was not easy to reconcile these two laws in the late seventies and early eighties with regard to Mr Anthony Trollope.

He seems indeed to me to be the most remarkable example we have yet seen of a kind of writer who I suppose is destined to multiply as long as the fancy for novel-reading lasts. Only a few months ago it fell to my lot to read through the work of a famous *amuseur* of this kind in the generation before Mr Trollope's, a man as famous as himself in his own day, and of gifts certainly more varied and perhaps not less considerable. And the resemblance between Theodore Hook and Anthony Trollope struck me, I own, forcibly and rather terribly. Hook is of course at a much greater disadvantage with a reader of the present day—at least with a reader of my standing—than is Trollope. Much of him is positively obsolete, while in Trollope's case the mere outward framework, the ways and language of society, the institutions, customs, and atmo-

sphere of daily life, have not had time to alter very strikingly, if at all. Trollope too, did not attempt the purely comic vein, as did Hook; and the purely comic vein, unless it be absolutely transcendent, and of the first class, is that which dries soonest.

But still they are of the same general kind, and their motto, the motto of their kind, is *Mene, Tekel.* I do not even think that any one is ever again likely to attain even so high a rank in it as Mr Trollope's. Most have got the seed, and the flower has become common accordingly. I do not know that I myself ever took Mr Trollope for one of the immortals; but really between 1860 and 1870 it might have been excusable so to take him. In *Barchester Towers*, especially, there are characters and scenes which go uncommonly near the characters and scenes that do not die. Years later the figure of Mr Crawley and the scene of the final vanquishing of Mrs Proudie simulate, if they do not possess, immortal quality. And in the enormous range of the other books earlier and later it would not be difficult to single out a number—a very considerable number—of passages not greatly inferior to these. From almost the beginning until quite the end, Mr Trollope—whether by diligent contemplation of models, by dexterous study from the life, or by the mere persistent craftsman's practice which turns out pots till it turns them out flawlessly—showed the faculty of constructing a thoroughly readable story. You might not be extraordinarily enamoured of it; you might not care to read it again; you could certainly feel no enthusiastic reverence for or gratitude to its author. But it was eminently satisfactory; it was exactly what it held itself out to be; it was just what men and women had sent to Mudie's to get. Perhaps there is never likely to be very much, and still less likely to be too much, of such work about the world.

And yet even such work is doomed to pass—with everything that is of the day and the craftsman, not of eternity and art. It was not because Mr Trollope had, as I believe he had in private life, a good deal of the genial Philistine about him, that his work lacks the certain vital signs. We have record of too many artists, up to the very greatest, who took no romantic or sacerdotal view of their art, and who met the demand of the moment as regularly and peaceably as might be. You will no more avoid failure by systematic un-business-likeness, than you will secure success by strict attention to business. The fault of the Trollopian novel is in the quality of the Trollopian art. It is shrewd, competent, not insufficiently supported by observation, not deficient in more than respectable expressive power, careful, industrious, active enough. But it never has the last exalting touch of genius, it is every-day, commonplace, and even not infrequently vulgar. These are the three things that great art never is; though it may busy itself with far humbler persons and objects than Mr Trollope does, may confine itself even more strictly than he does to purely ordinary occurrences, may shun the exceptional, the bizarre, the *outré*, as rigidly as Miss Austen herself. Indeed, there is a very short road to vulgarity by affecting these last three things; and I think since Mr Trollope's time it has been pretty frequently trodden by those who are hastening to the same goal of comparative oblivion which, I fear, he has already reached[1].

[1] I have nothing much to say as to the sections on Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. But I confess—and I hope a much later paper reprinted in this volume will carry amendment as well as confession with it—that I now regard that on Trollope as very inadequate if not positively unjust. My excuse must be that I had been unlucky in having some of the worst of his later books to review, that I had missed one or two of the best, and that the reprinting of his finest work as it fell out of copyright was only beginning. Moreover, as will be seen, I was honestly thinking of others of his class far inferior to himself. (1923.)

XIX. MR WILLIAM MORRIS

I THINK it probable that no long poem has for many years—indeed, since the disuse of buying such poems by tens of thousands in the days of our grandfathers—sold so well as *The Earthly Paradise*; and I believe that, though none of Mr Morris's subsequent works has equalled this in popularity, they have none of them lacked a fair vogue. Yet it has always seemed to me that not merely the general, but even the critical public ranks him far below his proper station as a poet.

The way in which I made my own first acquaintance with him was very odd; and I have never been able fully to explain it. As a boy of certainly not more than fourteen I used, like other boys, to take in periodicals addressed *pueris* if not *virginibus*, and in one of these, the title of which I cannot remember, I can very distinctly mind me of seeing an editorial notice of a poem which had been sent in, dealing with a "tall white maid" and other things and persons. This poem was, as I afterwards found out, and as all Morrisians will recognise, *The Sailing of the Sword*, which must just have appeared, or have been just about to appear, in Mr Morris's first volume, *The Defence of Guinevere*. This volume came out in 1858,—an *annus mirabilis*, in which some of the best wine of the century was made on the Douro, and in the Gironde, and on the Côte d'Or, and which seems to have exercised a very remarkable influence on the books and persons born in it. The persons of 1858[1] had a singular knack of being

[1] I remember an odd mistake made by a not at all unfriendly reviewer as to this phrase "the persons of 1858." He thought it meant generally the persons then existing. *I* meant as I think the context shows unmistakably those who then *came into* existence. (1923.)

clever or charming, or both; and the books (as biographers and bibliographers have before noticed) were unusually epoch-making.

Of these I do not myself rank *The Defence of Guenevere* least high. *The Sailing of the Sword*—the manner of the insertion of which in my *Boys' Magazine*, or whatever it was called, remains an insoluble mystery to me—is, no doubt, not one of the best. But I remember when some years afterwards I bought the little brown book—nightingale-colour—from Slatter and Rose's counter at Oxford for a price which would not buy it now, that I took it back to my rooms and read it straight through with an ecstasy of relish not surpassed by anything I have ever known of the kind. Persons of sober and classical tastes fought very shy of *Guenevere* at her first appearance; and even some of those who loved her then have fallen off now. Why should a man speak about a "choosing-cloth"? What were these strange scraps of mediæval French? Who could make sense of *The Blue Closet* or *Two Red Roses across the Moon*? Indeed, this latter very harmless and spirited ditty—of which I once offered to write a symbolic defence in any required number of pages, and which I still love wildly—had the faculty of simply infuriating the grave and precise. Oxford and Cambridge have not in my time produced better scholars, who are also humourists, or humourists who are also scholars, than two friends of mine, great in law and divinity respectively, about whom I believe it to be no improper revealing of secrets to say that they both at least used to abominate it. Perhaps (I hope so) they do not now. As for the incident, when the orange fell "And in came marching the ghosts of those who were slain at the war," I should like to bring up the men from the south gate and have a fleet horse

ready at that postern, before setting it even now before some very respectable persons. And then it would have been more dangerous still.

For my part I loved the book at once with a love full-grown and ardent; nor do I think that that love has decreased an inch in stature or a degree in heat since. Of course there are very obvious faults and foibles. The archaic mannerism may be here and there overdone, even in the eyes of those who are well enough inclined thereto; the attention to pictorial and to musical effect may sometimes seem paid at the expense of sense. The title-poem is in parts obscure and wordy; *Sir Peter Harpdons End*, another most important piece, would gain a great deal by cutting down; the expression sometimes lacks crispness and finish; the verse is sometimes facile and lax. But all this is redeemed and more than redeemed by the presence of the real, the true, the indefinable and unmistakable spirit of poetry. And this spirit wears, as it does at all its more remarkable appearances in the world, a distinct and novel dress. Although the so-called Romantic movement had been going on more or less for a hundred years—had been going on vigorously and decidedly for sixty or seventy—when Mr Morris wrote, only one or two snatches of Coleridge and Keats had caught the peculiar mediæval tone which the Præ-Raphaelites in poetry, following the Præ-Raphaelites in art, were now about to sound. Even *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, that wonderful divination in which Keats hit upon the true and very mediæval, as elsewhere upon the true and very classical spirit, is an exception, a casual inspiration rather than a full reflection. And let it be remembered that when Mr Morris began to write, the brother poets (who afterwards a little eclipsed him, perhaps, both with the

public and the critics) had published nothing (though Mr Rossetti's sugared sonnets might be handed about among his private friends), and that the painter who is more than any one Mr Morris's yoke-fellow, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, was hardly out of leading-strings.

The Defence of Guenevere, indeed, was not Mr Morris's first, not even his first published, work. He contributed largely to that very remarkable and now very inaccessible[1] miscellany, *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, his chief work being, I believe, a delightful romance called *The Hollow Land*, which I read, all unknowing its authorship, at the age of sixteen, and liked, but not to loving. *The Hollow Land* was, as I remember it, after more than thirty years, a little, a very little, incoherent and apocalyptic—with painters who painted God's judgments in purple and crimson, and a heroine of the appropriate name of Swanhilda. I decline to recognize any real incoherency in *The Defence of Guenevere*. The whole book is, of course, saturated with the spirit of the Arthurian legends, of which I believe Mr Morris was even then a great student, both in French and in English. Nor do I think that any one who does not know the originals, and has not gone through a considerable study of mediæval romance, can fully estimate the marvellous manner in which he has not merely galvanized or copied, but revivified and recreated the tone and sense of them. For—the warning has often been given, but it wants repetition still—it is quite a mistake to think that either Scott earlier, or Lord Tennyson later, effected this revivification, magnificent as the work of both is. Scott was an ardent lover of the Middle Ages; but he was, after all, a man

[1] Less so now, owing to a reprint of Morris's contributions even before the general collection of his *Works*. When I read the former I came much nearer, if I did not reach, "loving." (1923.)

born well within the eighteenth century. Tennyson had read his Mallory faithfully; but he was not born much within the nineteenth. It took the work of these very men to create the atmosphere—to get ready the stage—in which and on which Mr Morris and Sir Edward Burne-Jones could appear.

That stage, that atmosphere, must always, I suppose, find a public either enthusiastic in welcome or vehement in refusal. It is not easy to be merely indifferent to the works of these artists, though it is possible merely to gape at them in uncomprehending wonder. "Pastiche" will cry the one side; "unmeaning and overdone archaism; sentimental maundering; indifference to the gains and the aims of modernism; art too literary; literature too pictorial; illiberal and pusillanimous relapse on a mainly imaginary past; deficiency in realism; reliance on trick and *cliché*." I may be excused from setting in array against these terms of excessive and uncritical depreciation a counter list of equally excessive appreciation and praise. But I think myself that the school in question—especially the poet and the painter just coupled—have discovered, or rather rediscovered, the way to one of the Paradises of Art, of which I shall not say much more in this place than that to my judgment it seems a true and genuine Paradise, and, to my taste, one delicious and refreshing to an extent not excelled by any other. To me personally, no other division of literature or of art has the qualities of a Vale of Rest as mediæval literature and mediæval art have; while the renaissance of both, at the hands of Mr Morris and his friends, seems to me a true renaissance, not by any means a copy, possessing the qualities of its originals in a slightly altered and perhaps even more effective form.

It has a fashion of delight, standing in the most

marked and interesting contrast with those fashions which may be noticed in other poets of the period. Like the Tennysonian charm, it is dreamlike; but the character of the dreams is distinct. There is more action, more story, in them; and at the same time there is a double and treble dose of the vague and the mystical in colour, form, and sound. In Tennyson there is still a sort of remnant of eighteenth-century *netteté*, of classical clearness of outline. It is only with Mr Morris and his friends or followers that we get into the true Romantic vague. When Mr Lang selected Mr Morris as the chief English example of poetry which oversteps the border line between mere sound and sense, he did justly. But it is also necessary to take count in Mr Morris of that extraordinarily decorative spirit which always makes him accompany his music with limning. He is the very embodiment of mediæval poetry as we meet it in the well-known opening of the *Romance of the Rose* and a thousand other places,—a noise of musical instruments accompanying an endless procession of allegorical or purely descriptive imagery. Between William of Lorris and William Morris there are six hundred years of time, a single letter in spelling, and in spirit only a greater genius, the possession of a happier instrument of language, and a larger repertory of subject and style in the later singer.

XX. MR WILLIAM MORRIS (*concluded*)

There are certain of one's literary as of one's other loves the progress of which is not wholly satisfactory to a person of sensibility. There may be no actual "writing out"; no positive and undeniable deterioration; but "the second temple is not like the first," later pressures do not repeat the effect of the first

sprightly runnings. I at least have never felt this with Mr William Morris. I never met him in the flesh, or exchanged letters with him, or heard very much about him personally; and *si quid id est*, I think his politics very nearly childish, and much more than very nearly mischievous. But I know no man of letters of my time who has been so thoroughly satisfactory all through to the critical lover of letters. To the critical lover, I say advisedly. And yet it must be not quite the ordinary sort of critic who shall do Mr Morris full justice. For his faults are exactly of those which the critic who looks only at the stop-watch will least pardon; and his merits are perhaps of those which the critic who looks only at the stop-watch will least appreciate.

In the last division of this paper I have given some remarks on his work as it appeared up to and including *The Defence of Guenevere*. His next stroke was a stroke of genius, and it was, also, as strokes of genius are not always, a stroke of good luck. The hubbub about Mr Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* had made general and popular what had before been only partial and esoteric,—an interest in the new schools of Præ-Raphaelite art and letters which had already fixed in various ways strong holds on the Universities, especially Oxford. But "*The Life and Death of Jason*, a Poem by William Morris, London, Bell and Daldy, 1867," which lies beside me with its red buckram weathered to orange on the back, but otherwise much as I bought it at its earliest appearance, hit the bird on both wings. It gave a perfect Romantic treatment. It chose a perfect classical subject. It was not possible, as it has been since, for any one to accuse the artist of too much archaic mannerism in the mediæval and Scandinavian manner; it was not possible, on the other side, for any one not to recognize that here was an

almost entirely new fashion of telling a story in verse. It was new, but it was not ancestorless; few things are. It had in its genealogy not merely Keats, but Wither and Browne. But the result, as happens sometimes in well-bred steeds, was a far more spirited and individual product than any of its forbears. Mr Morris did to the heroic couplet what Milton and Wordsworth did to blank verse. He broke it up, changed its centres of gravity, subjected it to endless varieties of *enjambement* or overlapping. It was his main care to end a paragraph, to begin a speech, in the middle of a couplet or a line. Yet he never was harsh, and he was seldom —he was sometimes—over fluent. The thing took by storm that portion of the public which has scholarship as well as taste. And it deserved to take it. I do not think myself that there is any one passage quite so exquisite in it as the "Nymph's Song to Hylas," which Mr Morris (either desirous not to let it be whelmed in a long narrative, or trying experiments on the public memory) republished twenty years after in *Songs by the Way*. But it is all more or less exquisite, and it was then all more or less novel.

It was soon to be to a certain extent antiquated by a more splendid production from the same hand. I really do not know that anything combining bulk and excellence to the same extent as *The Earthly Paradise* had appeared since Dryden's *Fables*, and the *Fables* are but small in bulk compared to the *Paradise*.

A Paradise it certainly is. It had been heralded on the fly-leaves of *Jason*, and again in its own earlier volumes, not quite in the form which it finally assumed. I have been told that all the defaulting tales exist, and I would I had them. For nothing is wrong in this enormous work. If it is sometimes voluble, it is never prosaic; the setting-pieces, intercalated prefaces, and

epilogues for the several months, are as they should be, of the very best; the proem is noble; and the general contents are sublime. It is hard to seek among the two dozen for the best where all are good. For mere personal liking I should choose, I think, "The Man born to be King" (which is worth comparing with the simplicity of the old French story), "The Doom of King Acrisius," with the gorgeous sweep of its rendering of the Perseus legend, "The Watching of the Falcon" (a great sermon on a great text), "The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon" (an ideal Romantic tale), its immediate forerunner, "The Death of Paris" (which will bear comparison with the early and late work of Tennyson himself), and lastly "The Ring given to Venus" and "The Hill of Venus," the first of which pair contains, in the procession of the dead Gods from sea to land, perhaps the very finest thing that Mr Morris has ever done. If only Sir Edward Burne-Jones would take it for a subject!

I suppose there is no douce and reasonable Morrisian who will deny that *The Earthly Paradise* marks the apogee of its writer's talent. But it is really surprising to find how flat the trajectory of his genius is, how little he has declined from this its culmination. I have myself heard "Love is Enough" criticised in the statement that "Love isn't enough"; but this is a clear *ignoratio elenchi*. The translations, prose and verse, have perhaps attracted more unfavourable criticism than any other part of the work; and although I am not competent to decide whether Mr Morris's sagas are or are not unfaithful to their original, I can most frankly admit that Mr Morris's *Æneid* is not exactly Virgil, and Mr Morris's *Odyssey* still less exactly Homer. But it really seems unnecessary to fight over again the endless battle of Translation *v.* Original. The transla-

tion is never the original, and Mr Morris's substitutes are a great deal better than most. But *Sigurd*, at a time of life when the poetic tide often runs low in a man, showed that Mr Morris was as good at practically original work as ever. Indeed, I hardly know another instance of a poet well advanced in years, if not old, who attempted a new and very dangerous metre with such extraordinary success. Once get the secret of this cunning mixture of anapæsts and trochees, and the varying and voluble melody of it will simply amaze you.

The last collection of poems proper, *Songs by the Way*, contains chiefly gleanings of older years; and with many delightful things (especially the incomparable "Meeting in Winter") includes a good deal of Mr Morris's very Colonel-Newcome-like politics. But a few years ago the indefatigable poet entered on a new course. It must be admitted that the most ingeniously perverse undergraduate could not have selected anything more likely to "disgust the examiners" than the types, etc., of *The House of the Wolfings*. Whenever —which is often—I have a mind to read over the "Wood Sun's" perfectly exquisite forecast of Thiodulf's fate,—the best piece of English poetry published for these ten years past except *Crossing the Bar*,—I have to lay my account with a pair of smarting eyes for the rest of the evening. But in this, and in "The Roots of the Mountains," and most of all in "The Glittering Plain," we have what before Mr Morris even Kingsley never quite achieved, true sagas, not in the least mosaics or *pastiches* from the sagas proper, but "sets" or "cuttings" from them, instinct with genuine life, and reproducing with due variation the character of the parent stock.

In other words, we have in Mr Morris what we have

not had since Chaucer, and what no other nation has had since a time older than Chaucer's, a real *trouvère* of the first class—a person of inexhaustible fertility and power in weaving the verse and the prose of romance, and with a purely lyrical gift which even Chaucer did not often show. It is the quality of poetry —much more than the particular forms or the agreeable volume in which it manifests itself—that has always attracted me, and attracts me now as much as ever to this very remarkable writer. The quality of poetry is apt to be, if not strained, drowned when it comes to be written by the ten, the fifty, the hundred thousand verses. I have made no laboured calculation; but I really think that Mr Morris cannot be very far off, if he has not actually reached or passed, the hundred thousand limit. He cannot be said to be quite free from the faults of such prolixity, the loose fluent phrase, the easy amble of movement, the watered and undistinguished description. And yet you shall never read many pages, seldom many lines of his, without finding side by side with these negligences the unmistakable marks which a poet, and only a poet, impresses on his work. From *The Defence of Guenevere* to the snatches in his latest prose works he has these marks, in phrase, in music, in suggestion. And still, charming as are many of the detached pieces to be culled from him, the atmosphere and the tenor of the whole seem to me to be more poetical than any of the parts. All over it is that "making the common as though it were not common" which is the best if not the only existing definition of this indefinable quality.

So, when I see in the work of certain writers whom it is unnecessary to name, and whom I do not allude to otherwise than for the sake of honour, the falling back on strained expression, on flashes of poetical epigram

and conundrum, on scrambles after the grand style and fumblings after the marmoreal, I turn with relief once more to the lambent easy light, the misty lunar atmosphere shot with faint auroral colours, the low and magical music, the ever-varying panorama of poetical description and passion and thought that I have known so long, and loved so much, in the writings of the author of *The Earthly Paradise*.

XXI. MR RUSKIN

AFTER the havoc that has been made during the last four or five years in the ranks of the great seniors of English Literature there is, perhaps, but one name left, if indeed there be one, who shares the first class, in merit and seniority combined, with that of Mr Ruskin. There is certainly none which has seen, during the lifetime of its owner, such curious vicissitudes of popular repute. It will soon be, if it is not already, fifty years since *A Graduate of Oxford* arose to admonish the British nation of its sins and shortcomings in the matter of art and appreciation of art. For some ten years or more after that, Mr Ruskin was a voice crying in the wilderness, but attracting more and more younger voices to go and cry after him. For about twenty subsequent to this first decade he was a power, in some of his innumerable lines sweeping public taste more or less with or before him. And then the inevitable reaction which generally waits till after a man's death, but which in his case was hastened by certain oddities of his own whereon more must be said hereafter, set in with more than its usual severity. Young England, once Mr Ruskin's disciple in art, has accomplished in regard to him the denial of St Peter without St Peter's repentance. It knows not the man; it will have none of him; it calls his favourite ideas "the Ruskinian heresy," and labours to set up some quite different thing from Ruskinism. And all the while, to those outsiders who can look coolly at the game, it is perfectly obvious that the blasphemers of Mr Ruskin never could, metaphysically speaking, have come into

existence but for Mr Ruskin himself; and that they are, according to the well-known custom of certain savage tribes, eating their father.

I think I may speak without too great presumption for these outsiders. I have never been a Ruskinite, though I have always thought that nobody in our time has touched Mr Ruskin at his very best as an artist in the *flamboyant* variety of English prose; and I have never been an anti-Ruskinite, though I know perfectly well what the anti-Ruskinites mean by their fault-finding, and even to a certain extent agree with it. When Mr Ruskin began, as above remarked, to cry in the wilderness, it must be admitted by every one who gives himself the trouble to know, that he had a very great and terrible wilderness to cry in. I have never, being as has been said a hopeless outsider, been able to acquiesce in the stereotyped opinion (accepted docilely by a dozen generations of young would-be rebels) that Paris is an artistic Jerusalem, and London an artistic Samaria. But in the second quarter of this century we were in rather a bad way artistically. We had Turner (who was certainly a host, though a very undisciplined host, in himself), we had Etty (who has always seemed to me the prophet in art who has had least honour in this his own country), and we had some others. But for sheer ugliness and lack of artistic feeling in almost all respects, the reign of William the Fourth and the first twenty years or so of the reign of her present gracious Majesty made what has been subsequently termed a "record" in English history. Architecture had begun to feel a well-intentioned but by no means always wisely directed revival; music, painting, most sculpture, almost all books, furniture, plate and domestic *supellex* generally exhibited a perfectly hopeless level of middle-class

banality. I do not know that matters have in all ways improved since. With some things that are much better we have had many things that are much worse. We have had the vicious popularisation of cheap machine-made art; we have had execrable vulgarities, we have had cant and affectation and *pastiche*. But, whereas from the thirties to the sixties, it was almost impossible to buy anything new that was not complacently hideous, from the sixties to the nineties it has always been possible to buy something new that was at least graceful in intention.

And this was more the doing of Mr Ruskin than of any single man. Of course, nothing of the kind is ever the doing of any single man. The Oxford Movement, the Pre-Raphaelites, the '51 Exhibition,—a horrid thing in itself—the increasing custom of travel abroad, and a dozen other things not only helped, but did much more than any man could do. But Mr Ruskin did as much as any man could do; and that is a good deal. He had perfect leisure, a considerable fortune, a wonderful literary faculty, an intense love for art. He was gifted by nature with what is the most fortunate gift for a man of genius, the most unfortunate for another, an entire freedom from the malady of self-criticism. It has never during his long career once troubled Mr Ruskin to bethink himself whether he knew what he was talking about, whether he was or was not talking nonsense, whether he was or was not contradicting flatly something that he had said before. This is a great advantage for a prophet in these or any times; and Mr Ruskin had it.

With such gifts he set himself to work to beat up the quarters of British Philistia, first in the department of art, and then in many another. At first he used Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites for his battering-

rams; then he was for a season wholly Venetian; then he spread himself widely into political economy and philosophisings of all kinds; then he erected a sort of private pulpit, and in *Fors Clavigera* and other things made almost a religion of his own idiosyncrasy; then, as all men know, he established himself at his own University and led men captive, as an irreverent one phrased it, by "road-making and rigmarole." Then a fresh band of Philistines, masquerading as the circumcision of Art itself, set upon him and cried shame upon his version of æsthetics, and found fault with the imperfection of his technique, and urged Millet against Turner, and flung studio jargon against lecture-room mysticism. And meanwhile, oddly enough, his despised, and I must say I think rather despicable, Political Economy won the ground that his æsthetics had lost; and all or half of our socialists and semi-socialists nowadays talk *Unto this Last*, without its mysticism or its eloquence, and with twice its unreason.

A most odd career: not exactly paralleled, so far as I can remember, and chequered by many things which in this rapid sketch I have had to leave out, such as the singular and very important relations of Mr Ruskin to Carlyle. A career on which, no doubt, the anathema of the most distinguished of Mr Ruskin's own Oxford contemporaries may be pronounced to the effect that it is "fantastic and lacks sanity"; which may be called (if anybody likes) a kind of failure; but which has influenced England in a vast number of different ways as the career of no other man living or lately dead has influenced it.

It is extremely difficult to criticise Mr Ruskin, if only for the very simple reason that, as has been remarked already, he has never condescended to criticise himself. He once characteristically boasted

that he "had never withdrawn a sentence, written since 1860, as erroneous in principle." In 1860 Mr Ruskin was nearly forty, and we are to suppose (which, indeed, is self-evident from the complete recasting of the earlier volumes of *Modern Painters*) that there was a good deal to withdraw before that. But the fact is that, disowned or not disowned, all his work in reality bears the same marks,—an intense love of beauty; a restless desire to theorise on beautiful objects; a vivid imagination; a rather weak logical gift; a strong but capricious moral sense; a knack of succumbing to any tempting current theory; a marvellous command of eloquent prose; and, as must be constantly repeated, an utter absence of critical faculty properly so called.

Such a combination with such faculties of expressing it must needs produce work as disconcerting as it is stimulating. In his inequalities of style Mr Ruskin is very much at one with all practitioners of prose during this century, and with most during others. But where he is almost unique is in his inequalities of thought and matter. Landor, who is his most easily suggested analogue in this, is not really a parallel: for Landor's thought is never good for much, it is at best not contemptible, and presents a decent standard tradition from the classics. Mr Ruskin's is, for the most part, purely original (with the suggestions and adoptions above noted), and at times it has really marvellous vigour, felicity, and truth. At others, and just as often, it borders on sheer nonsense. It is customary to sneer at the mystico-allegorical theology and philosophy of the Middle Ages. But those who sneer forget that the men of the Schools were justified by the simple and massive theory that their scheme of divinity, cosmology and anthropology was eternally and unavoidably true, and that everything not merely might, but must, be

brought into harmony with it. Mr Ruskin's standards, on the other hand, are often mere "will-worship," ideas which he has casually picked up in the state of hypothesis from other men, and which he erects into eternal truths.

He has, for instance, been reading Mr Max Müller, and he promptly reels off that marvellous compound of ingenuity and folly, *The Queen of the Air*. He has been reading somebody else, and he produces that astonishing mixture of namby-pamby guess-work and suggestive thought entitled *The Ethics of the Dust*. Although he is scarcely ever wrong in admiration, his dislikes are so capricious and so unreasonable, that one is almost safe in saying, "When Mr Ruskin passes from praise to blame he may, as a rule, be neglected." Nothing is too wild for him to say when he is in his altitudes, and he will gravely propose that certain goods, such as coals and petroleum, shall be sent about only by canal traffic, and the canal boats only towed by men, because "it cannot matter whether they get to their destination sooner or later." He forgets, of course, or rather disdains to consider, first, that in certain circumstances men won't tow; and, secondly, that if some coals or petroleum get to their destination slower than other petroleum or coals, they will sell for less money or not sell at all. Although the youngest school which finds most fault with him has not, I think, much *locus standi* for objecting to him, as whimsical and one-sided, he is himself undoubtedly compact of whim, and it would not need the courage of a Euclid to define him as "a body with one side only." A crotcheteer with a tongue of gold; an enthusiastic lover of art who systematically ignores some of the first laws of the artist; a political economist who would bankrupt Eldorado and unsettle Sparta; a moralist who does

not know the meaning of fairness; and a critic who does not know the meaning of balance,—such is Mr Ruskin[1].

XXII. Mr Ruskin (*concluded*)

Enough must have been said in the last paper of the singular weaknesses and contradictions which meet us everywhere in Mr Ruskin. It remains to say something of their probable causes, and of the merits which accompany, and, as I think, far outweigh them, everywhere but in his dabblings with economics.

The sources of Mr Ruskin's peculiarities, both in merit and defect, appear to me to have lain as usual in his nature, and to have been developed as usual by his education. This latter (as in the case of that other eccentric Camberwell man, Mr Browning) was of a home-keeping and haphazard kind, very different from the usual up-bringing of well-to-do middle-class youth in England. It is true that Mr Ruskin, unlike Mr Browning, went to a University, though, like him, he went to no school; and his comparative chastity of form may be partly ascribed to this frequentation of the Muses. But Christ Church, which does not like to be called a "college" at all, is even now[2] probably the college of both Universities in which the University and, strictly speaking, collegiate influences are weakest; while for a gentleman-commoner in Mr Ruskin's time they were weaker still. The shaping, moulding,

[1] I could write this and the next paper to-day with little or no change. Anti-Ruskinism in art has of course increased with the varieties of new theory and practice therein—especially with the love of ugliness which permeates so much of them. For Mr Ruskin, whatever the failings on his part, did love Beauty everywhere outside political economy. If wheresoever he is now he reconciles himself to Ugliness by the spread of his economic ideas themselves I am sorry for him—for it looks as if his place were not such a good one as I should wish to the author of the picture of St Mark's and the Perseus-like flight over Europe. (1923.)

[2] That is to say in 1895: of its present condition I know nothing. (1923.)

training influence of the ordinary English liberal education has been abused as well as lauded, and I suppose that it may to a certain extent and in certain cases act as a cramp and a restraint; but it certainly acts in a far greater number as a beneficial discipline. Discipline is what Mr Ruskin has always lacked; as well in methods of expression as in the serene self-confidence which has enabled him to deliver himself on any and every subject, without any suspicion that he is talking ill-informed nonsense. Discipline Oxford did not give, had indeed no full opportunity of giving, to Mr Ruskin; but she gave him, there can be no doubt, additional inspiration. She nourished in him that passion for architecture which no single city in the United Kingdom is so richly dowered with the means of exciting and gratifying; and she, no doubt, also strengthened in him the general Romantic tendency of which he is so characteristic an exponent.

For the other part of the matter it has long ago seemed to me—I do not know that I have seen it noticed or suggested by anybody else—that the central peculiarity of Mr Ruskin is a singular and almost unparalleled union of two main characteristics, one of which is usually thought of as specially French, the other as specially English. The first is an irresistible and all-pervading tendency to generalise,—to bring things under what, at any rate, seems a law, to erect schemes, and deduce, and connect. The other is the unconquerably ethical tone of all his speculations. To follow out the ramifications of this strangely crossed nature of his would take a very great deal of space, and would partake more of the style of abstract criticism than would perhaps be suitable to this book and plan. But one or two applications and corollaries of what has just been said may be indicated.

Thus it may be pointed out that Mr Ruskin's extraordinary insensibility to the ludicrous hangs on to both the un-English and the English sides of his intellectual temperament. His mania for generalising blinds him to the absurd on the one side, as we constantly find it doing in Continental thinkers; his insatiable appetite for moral applications, and his firm belief in his moral mission blind him, as we find these things do often in Britons. When Mr Ruskin says that a square leaf on any tree would be ugly, being a violation of the law of growth in trees, we feel at once that we are in the company of an intellectual kinsman of the learned persons whom Molière satirised. He deprecates expenditure on plate and jewels (while admitting that "noble art may occasionally exist in these") because they are matters of ostentation, a temptation to the dishonest, and so on,—a moral paralogism which would be almost impossible to any one not of British blood.

But I must leave this key to Mr Ruskin in the hands of the ingenious reader, who will find it do a great deal of unlocking. A man with an ardent sense of duty combined with an ardent desire to do good; eager to throw everything into the form of a general law, but eager also to give that general law, directly or indirectly, mystically or simply, an ethical bearing and interpretation; extremely fond of throwing his discourse into an apparently argumentative form, but probably more prone than any man of equal talents who has lived during this century to logical fallacies and illicit processes of every kind,—grasp the man as this, and the works will cease to be a puzzle or an irritation, because the reason of them will at once be plain.

And it would be a very great pity, indeed, if the Book of Ruskin were to remain to any one merely a closed book, as irritation or as puzzle. For, if these

curious volumes are taken with a due amount of rational salt, they cannot fail to enlarge and exercise the tastes and powers of the reader; while, if read simply for enjoyment, they will be found to contain the very finest prose (without exception and beyond comparison) which has been written in English during the last half of the nineteenth century[1]. The great merit of this prose is that it is never, as most of the ornate prose styles of a more recent day are, affected and unnatural. Great pains have been spent on the writing of English prose during the last twenty years—greater, I think, than had been taken for several generations. But the result has almost always had (to my taste at least) something too much of the lamp—a too constant reminder that here the gentleman did take great pains, that he turned the sentence this way and that to convey an air of distinction, that he picked his words so as to give them, if not quite a new meaning and collocation, at any rate a collocation and meaning as different as possible from that which they had usually had. One thinks far too often of the story of Paul de Saint-Victor (a real artist, too) scattering single words about a paper, and then filling in and writing up to them. Our latter-day prose of this kind is sometimes eloquent, but it is rarely elegant; it is sometimes splendid, but it is seldom or never at ease; it is often quaint and rare in embellishment, but it is seldom or never unconscious of its dress.

Now, Mr Ruskin's purple patches—despite a rather too great tendency to run not merely into definitely rhythmical, but into definitely metrical forms—are never laboured, they never suggest effort, strain, or trick. He warms to them naturally, he turns them out

[1] "And," I am not afraid to add, "the first quarter of the twentieth to date."

without taking his coat off. They are to be found, it is true, mainly, though by no means wholly, in his earlier books. The practice of alternately chatting and scolding, to which he unfortunately betook himself some five-and-twenty years[1] ago, is not favourable to the production of fine English, unless the writer can rise to the level of a real *sæva indignatio*. This Mr Ruskin can seldom do; and, as has been already noted, his weaknesses never betray themselves so much as when he is talking of what he does not like.

But in his early days of enthusiasm he was often magnificent—no lesser word will do. It was some time before I could bring myself (well knowing what the the comparative result would be) to compare the second of the two recent volumes of selections, which cover his whole work, with the early and now precious volume which was published in 1861, and which was perforce confined to the greater and earlier books—the *Modern Painters*, the *Stones of Venice*, the *Seven Lamps*, the *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, and a very few others. In this older volume you will, no doubt, find the crochet and the waywardness, the paralogism and the undue preaching, not, as he once put it, of "the connection between art and human passion" (which is perfectly true and important), but of that between art and its influence on the life of the artist (which is chiefly not to the point). But you will also find far more frequently than later—indeed, in this volume on almost every page—a phrasing so admirable, a selection of imagery so fertile and felicitous as to compel admiration, even if the matter, instead of being almost always noble (if not always quite sane), were purely wrong-headed or purely unimportant. For more than forty[2] years artists in flamboyant prose have been writing

[1] Nearer sixty now. (1923.)

[2] Nearer eighty now. (1923.)

after and after the famous description of the Falls of Schaffhausen in *Modern Painters*. Mr Swinburne, in his *Blake*, once very nearly, if not quite, equalled it; all the rest are nowhere[1]. The *Stones of Venice* is crammed with similar passages; in fact, it is *the* book of descriptive prose in English, and all others toil after it in vain.

For happier expressions of crotchety fancy, where shall we look than in the rather numerous passages where Mr Ruskin sets forth his favourite craze that bright colours are virtuous, dark and neutral tints wicked? The thing is false, it is almost silly; but it is so charmingly put that you chuckle at once with keen pleasure and mild scorn. Also, the man can observe, which is the most uncommon of all gifts. The fault of our modern impressionists lies in just this—that the artist seems to think he must empty out of his representation everything but the mere individual impression itself, so that he does not really give what he sees, or what anybody sees, but what is or might be seen with an arbitrary subtraction of allowance for the seer's presumed idiosyncrasy. This is as bad as the most slavish convention or the most exaggerated personal crotchet. Now, Mr Ruskin certainly does not minimise the personal element; yet he can, when he chooses, keep it to its lowest terms.

But I am outrunning my limits. To sum up the impression side of the matter,—when I was young, Mr Ruskin's crotchets used to irritate me more than they ought; they now irritate me hardly at all, and only bore me a little. But I think I like his beauties more than ever; and I am disposed to think, also, that he has brought more folk to art than he has ever bitten with his own heresies about it.

[1] Except perhaps Kingsley in *Yeast*, on the weir at Whitford Priors.

IX

TROLLOPE REVISITED

A good many years, and even more than one or two decades, ago, the present writer, in a little book now for some time out of print and forgotten[1] attempted a "Corrected Impression" of Anthony Trollope's novels, with which he had then been acquainted for an even longer period than that which has elapsed since. But a man had need to possess a curious and perhaps rather unenviable opinion of his own immutability, who thinks that any critical judgment of his is itself immutable. It so happens too that I—for though the third person is mannerly as an introduction the first is more convenient for continuance—have recently had considerable occasion for again revising judgment of this amazingly prolific, and at the same time singularly substantial, novelist. In writing not long ago of the French novel I found myself more often comparing French novelists of the middle and later nineteenth century with him than with any other English writer.

And when that task was finished, and I had more time on my hands, I occupied some of it with picking up those later novels of Trollope's with which I was less acquainted than with his earlier. I think there is hardly one that I have not read now. Even in correcting my impressions for the first time I had deliberately ignored some, out of a fear that I might find them too inferior to the Barsetshire cycle and others of their forerunners. But, like so many other fears, this turned out to be vain. Not that there are not some of these

[1] Revived here (*v. sup.* pp. 284–7).

later books of which I think far from highly; but that I do not find this low opinion of them so damaging as I feared it might be to my general estimate of their author's position. So perhaps, even in this place, there may be room for another valuation which is pretty sure to be final in one sense, if not in another.

It may even seem to be worth doing from a point of view rather higher than any that can be said to be reached in a mere survey and appreciation of an "amuser" who was popular in bygone times. For Trollope may, I think, claim to be, in the fullest Emersonian sense, a "representative man" of one of the most populous as well as popular constituencies in the body politic of modern literature—that consisting of very prolific and as it were professional writers of novels. Excluding Dickens and Balzac (the only novelists of exceptional and individual genius who can be said to have written voluminously since the first third of the nineteenth century) and Dumas père (representing rather a special division of romance than the modern novel generally), I can think of none among English and French novelists except George Sand who can fairly be set against him; of no one among English novelists who can be set against him at all. Now the prolific and professional novelist, if not the most precious, has been undoubtedly the most characteristic literary growth of the last three generations. So the "highest browed" student of literature —"comparative," superlative, or even positive—need not disdain a study of such a type.

It is from no puerile or perfunctory intention of referring to something already written that I think it best to begin where I formerly left off. It is rather in pursuance of the good old rule "Get what you have to say against your subject over first." And although more

goodness than was formerly allowed has been already granted to the work of Trollope's last decade and a half, nobody but a mere paradoxer could deny that putting aside his very commencements—when he did not know how to tell a story at all—this part of his work does lay itself most open to unfavourable criticism. When we have seen what is to be said against and also for him here, it will be both pleasanter and more profitable to consider him at his best.

The point at which decadence, real or alleged, begins, is perhaps itself a matter of some controversy. I have known some very good judges—though perhaps judges a little biassed by the fact of having begun with it—who see nothing decadent in *Phineas Finn*. I own that I see a sort of gap and drop between it and *The Last Chronicle*—which preceded it by not very many months—a gap and drop almost equal to a landslip—and that I do not think the higher level was ever recovered. It is true that Trollope did not now lose—that in fact he never lost—his remarkable faculty of telling a story. Subject to a distinction to be drawn presently, he retained this to the very last. One of his latest—a book which, as it fell to the writer's lot to review it when it came out, frightened him off its neighbours for a time lest he should have to beat a former idol—*Marion Fay*, is perhaps the weakest of all in this respect, though its predecessors by a year or two, *An Eye for an Eye*, *Cousin Henry*, and *Dr Wortle's School*, are very far from strong. But a practised and judicial novel critic will perceive in even the weakest of these something quite different from the case of the common circulating-library tale-teller who can't tell a tale. If you go back to *Is he Popenjoy?* or *John Caldigate* they will give you, though in changed degree, fresh evidence, and you may carry investiga-

tion further still through others including the "Phineas-Eustace-Palliser" group itself, and, what is more, right back to weaklings of the greater period, always strengthening your provisional conclusion as you go. This conclusion will have been—at least if it agrees with the present critic's—that Trollope's novel-writing faculty, at its best of little below first-class quality, went through much the same vicissitudes as the mere physical faculties of other men, but that his economy or administration of it was peculiar and not always judicious. Before *The Warden*, and in that story and *The Three Clerks* to some extent, he did not know how to manage it at all, or how to direct it into his books. In *Dr Thorne* he made a great advance. From *Barchester Towers* to *The Last Chronicle* he had it in fullest command and play in his greater books—*Barchester Towers* itself, *Framley Parsonage*, *Orley Farm* (not quite throughout), *The Small House*, *Can you forgive her?*, *The Chronicle*—less according to me in *The Bertrams*, *Castle Richmond*, and *The Claverings* (some good judges differ from me here but Trollope himself rather agreed), and least in the *Rachel Ray* group. With regard to these last there is something rather curious to add, and it should be noted in connexion with what is sometimes still more noteworthy in the last group of all.

Although Trollope has left a fair number of short stories he was not a good short-story-teller; and the slightly commercial view which he took of his art probably found support in a secret consciousness of this disability. The result was that he regularly made a short novel out of matter the substance of which was only enough for a short story; while the quality of it was not always suitable even for that. Now it may be doubted whether anybody ever said anything

truer about fiction (though many people have said things more original) than that a long story is not a short one pulled out, nor a short story a long one crushed in. Perhaps a born short-story-teller might have made short stories of *Rachel Ray*, *Miss Mackenzie*, and *The Belton Estate* (out of which Trollope, in another sense of the vast verb, made only some five thousand pounds). But nobody could have made a good long or even short novel out of their material, nor out of that of *Sir Harry Hotspur*, *Lady Anna*, and others mentioned or to be mentioned in the later batches. The "unekality" (as the elder Mr Weller had it) of the spirit and the water in these compositions was too great. But the spirit itself remained. It gave itself in almost satisfactory quality in *Ayala's Angel* only a year or two before the close; and in the actual concluding pair—the finished *Mr Scarborough's Family* and the unfinished, remarkable, and just at this time really valuable *Landleaguers*—it ought not to be missed by any intelligent reader. Indeed, in these two it is "left to itself" in an almost uncanny fashion, more particularly in *Mr Scarborough's Family*. You don't care in the least for the clever, heartless "schemer" who gives it his name, or for the foolish *jeune premier*, or for the two sons (one a schemer like himself and the other a typical "prodigal son"), whom Mr Scarborough plays off against each other, or for the heroine, or for anybody else. You don't very much want to know what is going to happen. And yet if you have any sense of the particular art you can't help feeling the skill with which the artist wheels you along till he feels inclined to turn you out of his barrow and then deposits you at his if not your destination. You have only perhaps *beaux restes* of that skill; but the *restes* are *beaux*.

In respect, therefore, of the mere story, it may be possible to reply with some effect to the Devil's Advocate; in regard to all the weaker and not merely the later novels—let us for the moment pass from story to character. Here Trollope had always shown a curious inequality and uncertainty; an inequality and uncertainty which, let it be said at once, disqualifies him for the absolute front rank of novelists. Nothing distinguishes the members of this front rank so much as their unerring, or scarcely ever erring, grasp in creating and projecting personality. It is in fact in this, first and last of all, that the novelist proper separates himself from the romancer as such. This is where Fielding and Thackeray, where Flaubert and even Maupassant never or hardly ever go wrong. But even in his early days Trollope had in this respect been unequal and uncertain. In almost all the books from the time when he made his mark with *The Warden* till *The Last Chronicle*, he maintains a high standard, though in *The Three Clerks* and *The Warden* itself he is by no means sure of hand. But in *Castle Richmond*, in *Miss Mackenzie*, in *Rachel Ray*, in *The Belton Estate*, all of them written before the Barsetshire series ceased, there is again a curious absence or at least relaxation of this grasp. Had Trollope's work ceased with *The Last Chronicle* there would have been a pretty opening for critics who like such things. In the cases where the command of character did not appear, was it real uncertainty of command or was it merely that the artist had not taken sufficient pains? If at this period, not merely had the work ceased, but the rather unfortunate *Autobiography* had appeared, the latter explanation would certainly have been the more popular. "Of course," people would have said—they actually did say it when the later revelations came—"a man who

writes novels as if he were hewing coal or planting cabbages—so much work in so many hours *per diem*—will sometimes merely 'potboil,' will even sometimes allow the pot never to come to the boil at all."

Something, nay a good deal, may no doubt be allowed for this; but it is doubtful whether it completely meets the facts. If it had been merely failure to take trouble now and then, there would have been also, now and then, instances where "the fire kindled" and the pot not merely turned out not uneatable food but boiled as merrily as ever. But it is scarcely too much to say that there were none. And the most cold-blooded of artists cannot always keep such a constraint upon his genius or talent as to maintain it steadily at thirty degrees under proof like the spirits of the ever-to-be-execrated Board of Control. But there were no doubt some minor reasons besides positive failure or exhaustion of power for the falling off. It may have been wise for Trollope to kill Mrs Proudie (the death certainly produced some of his finest work) and even to turn off almost entirely the "Chronicle" tap of that fortunate county. But to some extent at the same time he drove himself out of Eden. The "new faces, other ways" did not inspire him as the old ones did. It is very curious to see how, when he does allow himself and us renewal of old acquaintance, there is a momentary brightening up of the character-interest. Earlier, one had taken no great interest in Mr Palliser, except in his brief and ever-agreeable attempt at forbidden Paradises with Griselda Grantly, and as a foil to his delightful wife; now one greets his reappearances, as a person if not as a politician, with something like enthusiasm. There is some pleasant bittersweet in the notion of Frank Gresham, *père de famille* and a county worthy (but no doubt still cherishing the whip which

admonished Mr Moffat), preventing as far as he can a row in the streets of Silverbridge. Even later still, and among a lower class of connexions, one of the best parts of not the worst work, *Ayala's Angel*, is when it revives for a moment the personages of *The American Senator*. Even the cross touches in the "Phineas-Eustace" group, and radiations into others from that rather dreary book *The Way We Live Now*, serve to illuminate and inspirit. But the majority of the characters of the new books were themselves new; and it must be a very odd taste indeed which does not decide that the old were better.

Again, there is a cheerful theory that our faults always grow upon us, and Trollope had certain weaknesses which were likely to do so. One was, not coextensive with but a part result of, his fancy for dealing largely with love. In this fancy itself there was nothing reprehensible. Only very pretty or very ugly young ladies, very stupid or portentously clever young gentlemen disdain, or far more probably in two of the classes would pretend to disdain, love the motive. In fact a novel without love is, to adopt King Henry the Fifth's simile for the second time, "like beef without mustard." And Trollope had always recognised this truth: though even in his earlier days, as we may have to notice, his treatment of the subject was not impeccable. It grew much worse later. John Bold, Lucius Mason, and even Felix Graham, had been prigs; Mr Slope was the modified villain for whose flogging at the gangway we cheerfully cheered; Mr (afterwards Dean) Arabin was but so-so; Crosbie another villain; Johnny Eames, though much the best of the lot as a lover, not perfect. But they all (except the prigs) played their parts sympathetically enough (for it shows real sympathy in the villain to get himself

flogged); and even the prigs were not quite despicable. Phineas Finn himself at the beginning of the decadence, and Lord Silverbridge in *The Duke's Children* near its end, are very despicable creatures indeed. Nothing short of kicking could fitly reward the Irishman for making Lady Laura Standish a confidante of his love (if you call it so) for Violet Effingham; kicking would perhaps be too much for Silverbridge's desertion of his first love—one of the most remarkable of Trollope's later characters—in favour of an American girl of whom we are told that she was pretty and rich, but who is not made actually attractive in any way whatever. Still, he deserves at least infinite contempt. On the other side of the account, it is undeniably true that women do manifest an inexplicable leaning towards "bounders." But, once more, the way in which *such* a bounder as Mr Lopez in *The Prime Minister* made himself attractive to such a girl as Emily Wharton, and took in so acute a personage as that Lady Glencora whom one hardly cares to call "the Duchess," is never even suggested. Now these failures all show a lost command of character-touches. There is almost nothing so bad or so disagreeable that a novelist may not make his personages do it if he can fix our attention on the naturalness and necessity of their doing it. It is when this naturalness and necessity do not make themselves felt that criticisms of the kind just made are justified.

Having made them, however, it is time, even in regard to this period of comparative twilight, to add something to the praise for mere readableness which has been already given, before we turn to the work of those remarkable twelve years from 1855 to 1867 which gave Trollope his real place among English novelists. The singular familiarity with the ways not merely of law-courts but of the High Court of Parliament itself,

which our author displays, has been commented on by Mr Frederic Harrison, to whom one may be quite content to "say ditto" without endeavouring to better his commendation. It may, however, be observed that it is an instance of that larger and almost singular faculty for "getting up a subject" which Trollope possessed. He does not appear to have, as Thackeray, Charles Reade, and many lesser men did, taken much trouble to "fag" his subjects up from books. In respect of one of his earliest acknowledged and greatest successes in this way—clerical life—he has declared—and he was not at all the sort of man to declare such a thing falsely, though the habit is not unknown among men of letters—that when he reclined in Salisbury Close and thought of *The Warden* he knew hardly anything at all about this life. Hunting, another of his fortes, he certainly did learn by hard and constant practice. But he never was in Parliament, though he learnt a good deal about the ways thither (and not thither) in his candidature at Beverley; and he cannot have had much time to attend Westminster Hall or the Old Bailey. So he must have had a knack of what we may perhaps call imaginatively living his way into things; in one respect he certainly justified Mrs Malaprop as to the excellence of beginning with aversion. Among his by no means few crazes was an almost monomaniacal disapproval of the English theory of an advocate's duty: to wit that it is not his duty to ask himself "Is my client innocent?" but to use every permissible means to get that client pronounced Not guilty. To this view—the only one consistent with common sense and the conditions of possible human existence—Trollope was frantically opposed. He might, if he had been less of an artist, have written dreary purpose-novels against it. But as a matter of fact, whether Art

made a Balaam of him or not, Mr Chaffanbrass in *The Three Clerks*, the same redoubtable person and Mr Furnival in *Orley Farm*, are triumphs; and the last appearance and last triumph of Chaffanbrass himself in *Phineas Redux* is also one of the last appearances of the true Trollope in the whole shelf of his works.

The unlucky and eccentric *Brown, Jones, and Robinson*, which appeared as a book in 1870, had been contributed to the *Cornhill* nearly ten years earlier: and the few aged people who remember its appearance may also remember how much and how unfavourably it surprised most readers. It was indeed said at the time (though Trollope's own very frank remarks on it do not support this) to have been cut short at the publisher's request. This might by no means have spoken its character, for Lever's *A Day's Ride* was by common repute equally unfortunate, and there are no small merits there. But certainly the "below stairs" or rather "behind the shop" humour of *B., J., and R.* was not quite happily brought off. On one book of length which preceded this as a book, and of another a little later—*He knew he was Right* and *Ralph the Heir* —their author is even more refreshingly candid. He thought the first "nearly altogether bad," and the second "one of the worst novels he had ever written." Curiously enough I read these two for the first time comparatively recently but before I undertook this complete re-survey; and having then never looked at the *Autobiography* since its first appearance a quarter of a century ago, I had entirely forgotten what he said about either: but I believe, if anybody had asked my opinion, I should have used almost his very words. He got nearly six thousand pounds for the two. I think if they had been first novels and a publisher had asked me to read and appraise them I should have said,

"They can be read and will pass through a circulating library well enough: but they have no literary value whatsoever." *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, which came between them, is very much better than either; but it is odd that Trollope should have regarded it as chiefly a study of "One more unfortunate" in Carry Brattle. He had few or no gifts for such a study, and in reading the book again—without reference to, or remembrance of his words—I scarcely thought of her as anything but a "super." The failure of *Ralph the Heir* and the slightness of *The Golden Lion of Grandpère* were made up in 1873–4 by *The Eustace Diamonds* and by *Phineas Redux* (which is almost more a sequel of the "Eustace" book than of its own predecessor in title). It is true that there is no reversion to the actual heights; and I do not know that I want to read either book again. But the monkey tricks of Lizzie Eustace are amusing, and sufficiently (though not superlatively) real; one feels it to-day to have been almost unfair that her remarkable second husband should not have lived a generation later and had a chance of rounding off the Duumvirate of Petrograd into a Triumvirate, for which he would have been admirably qualified by nationality and character; and the last appearance of Mr Chaffanbrass already spoken of is, what last appearances by no means always are, a great success. There was nothing so good later, though I at least think better of *The American Senator* than its author did. There are some admirable touches in it, as where the visitor, asked his opinion of his host's priceless claret, good-naturedly admits that it is a pity that his own country "does not drink more of *these light wines*." On the other hand I have already differed from his opinion of *The Prime Minister*.

The Way we Live Now, with some good things, is

hardly one of the rare instances in which an author's attempt to "bring himself up to date" has been successful: and if there were nothing else to say (something has been said) against *The Duke's Children*, it would weigh against it that Lady Glencora had to be killed to make it possible. Trollope was rather fond of this kind of murder. One cannot blame him for killing off John Bold between *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*, for John had already been much luckier than he deserved, and his sole reason for existence had been to start the theme of *The Warden* itself. The murderer confessed the wantonness of his marrying Phineas Finn to an Irish girl (much too good for the creature!) and then in the same way oublietting her in a book interval. But the butchery of Lady Glencora—even of the somewhat faded "Duchess" of *The Prime Minister* —for no other reason than the same, is really sad; for she had been perhaps the most *delightful* of all his heroines.

If it has seemed to anybody that our revisiting of Trollope has hitherto been not very prolific of blessings on him, let the last sentence of the last paragraph serve as a hinge for turning the table of judgment. If one deplores, almost resents, the death of Lady Glencora it is because one has recognised and rejoiced in the fact that she lived. And this is, for her creator, the highest possible praise in kind, though the question of degrees may remain. We have often—since the time when Lesage first took novel-writing seriously both by precept and example—had some, and as time went on more and more, discussion of what fiction ought to be. Some of our Zarathustras, especially those coming over the sea, have spoken so that they were very little understood of the people, though much revered by their sectaries. For the present writer the ultimate

questions have been much simpler. Is the romance such that you see the perilous seas and ride the *barrière* as in your own person? Are the folk of the novel such as you have met, or feel that you might have met them, in your life or in theirs? If so the work passes; with what degree of merit is again a second question.

If there be any soundness in this view Trollope has "passed" already, and it only remains to turn attention to the part of his work in which his passing carries "class" with it. The way of romance he does not take with any success, nor as a rule does he attempt it; still less that highest way of all where the adventurer tries and wins the combined event, romance *and* novel; though it is to his credit that when he saw in *Esmond* a success of this kind, he knew it and saluted it. But the novel-prize, if not in the highest possible degree, he takes.

That it was some time before he showed himself worthy of it; that he stumbled and fumbled along before he got his feet straight on the way and his hand firm on the tools, is of course unquestionable. From that almost more than autobiographical autobiography, the "Charley Tudor" part of *The Three Clerks*, as well as from the *Autobiography* itself, it is clear that he made many false starts. And even when he got off and ran some sort of a course, it was a rather woeful exhibition of "selling (or not selling) plater"-ism. He pleads for the plot of *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, he even calls it "a good novel"; but the present writer remembers it only with a kind of shudder, as one of the numerous justifications of Matthew Arnold's remarks on the artistic hopelessness of dull and undistinguished misfortune and ill-success. *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* is livelier, and, not only for that reason, better; but it again quite lacks distinction. I do not

know that anyone has ever said a good word for *La Vendée*, which I myself found simply unreadable. And then, nearly ten years after *The Macdermots*, and when the author had himself "come to forty year," came *The Warden*. I have never, when I could have done so, taken the trouble to read original reviews of this little book; and am not now in a position to do it. He says there were some not unfavourable. It would have been very easy to have found fault with it. There is a great deal too much "talkee-talkee"; the author has not even yet got his characters clear in his mind; the going out of his way to present Archdeacon Grantly with three sons (who had to be discarded or transmogrified later) in order to satirise the three then famous bishops of London, Exeter, and Oxford was as inartistic in one kind of taste as in another; the Warden himself is nearly as much of a coward as of a conscientious martyr, etc., etc. But even among the divagations the parody on Carlyle was extremely clever; and in the pure novel work the scenes between John Bold, Mr Harding himself, the Archdeacon, Tom Towers, etc. were such as no novelist then writing could have done except Thackeray, and though not up to Thackeray's mark in universal and eternal verity, were closer to date and to actual atmosphere. The funniest thing in it is the author's apology for Archdeacon Grantly at the end, where he begs pardon for faults that he has not really made the man commit, and assures us of virtues whereof we have been quite aware all the time. But, as has been hinted, he as yet only saw the characters he had devised "in a glass darkly." By diligent practice he was to make them perfect, and by steadily fixing his attention, to see them in that perfection.

After all, however, the chief interest of *The Warden* is that it served as a shoe-horn to draw on *Barchester*

Towers. Trollope's own remarks on this masterly book are some of the most curious to be found in that album of curiosities which is, or might be, filled with the opinions of literary fathers on their book-children. He says no evil of it, but thinks that it would hardly be well known had there been no *Framley Parsonage* and no *Last Chronicle of Barset*. In one sense, of course, this is a truism—for the readers of *Barchester Towers* certainly include some who have been sent to it by its sequels. And the immense popularity of the *Cornhill* opened the knowledge of Trollope's novel-writing powers proportionately. But it can hardly be wrong to construe into the ruling something like an assertion or admission of inferiority in the entire book. This inferiority, on sound principles of criticism, I can by no means admit. The admission is most likely to find supporters in the case of *The Last Chronicle* perhaps; and something will have to be said on it in reference to both the later books. But in regard to *Barchester Towers* itself I should say that for originality of character- and manners-drawing, economy and yet opulence of material, and close observance of the rigour of the game, it is emphatically its author's best novel. If there is a greater volume of interest in *Framley Parsonage*, and a still greater one in the other admirable story, it is because the author has thrown the interests of two or three novels into one.

This book is really and purely a "prose comic epic" of the rise, decline, and fall of the Rev. Obadiah Slope. And yet we never feel the monotony and "thinness" which observance of the Unities is sometimes, and by no means without reason, supposed to bring with it. The book has an abundant "company," a rich store of apparent episodes, delectable conversation, etc. None of these things forces Mr Slope on us; but they are all

connected with him. The Bishop and his immortal wife (her future mortality was to make her more immortal in two ways, but she is so already here) would be admirable anyhow, but they are indispensable as Mr Slope's introducers. The amiable folly of Mr Harding is aroused and set off once more by Mr Slope's machinations. The wrath of the Archdeacon (himself much raised and purified by this generous passion) has Mr Slope and Mr Slope's patroness for object. The tribulations and triumphs of the Quiverfuls are equally concerned with this Obadiah. His affair with Eleanor Bold (one may not care for her, but she is natural to the *n*th) gives most of the body of the book, and controls its crowning scenes, or one of them. For his other affair and the other crowning scene with the Signora has given us the Stanhope family, one of Trollope's greatest successes. I have sometimes thought "the Signora" his very best and most original invention, though not his most elaborate.

Of course the book is not faultless. When Longman's reader wanted to cut it down to two-thirds he showed himself—what enraged authors have too often called publishers' readers. But you might cut out a little "talkee-talkee"—perhaps the odd 37 pages of the 737 of the cheap one-volume edition before me—without loss. Those who do not suffer even amiable fools gladly may wish that both Mr Harding and his daughter were a little less liable to this description, though they are "natural" in the best as well as the worst sense of the word. And undoubtedly it is possible, if one may use an admirable French word which has no succinct English equivalent, to *crosser*—to say disagreeable, but not violent, things about—Mr Arabin. That he is brought down to Barchester to fight with Mr Slope and that the fight doesn't come off—for though he does

get the Deanery and Mr Slope does not, this is no more Mr Arabin's own doing than the Man in the Moon's, much less according to some old theories—need not matter. Thackeray, or even a less master of the irony of human things than Thackeray, could have made an actually great thing out of this very fact. But Trollope has no notion or intention of such treatment. On the other hand he tells us that Mr Arabin is a master of sarcasm and brilliant conversation, and never puts into his mouth anything but the most commonplace utterances; he makes him behave like a mere nincompoop with both his young women; he infects him with what for once the enemy may justly call "Victorian sentimentality"; and he crowns this edifice by representing him as having somebody else's baby put into his arms by that one of the young women with whom he has just been having a rapturous first-love scene—author and actors both seeming to regard this as a triumph of combined passion and propriety.

Nevertheless, once more *Barchester Towers* seems to me its author's best novel, all things considered, and one of the best of English novels short of the absolute "Firsts."

Of neither of the two that followed it could this be said; though both have great, and curiously different, attractions. Trollope's own extreme partiality for *The Three Clerks* is perfectly and, to all but curmudgeons, pleasantly intelligible. For "Charley Tudor" is Anthony Trollope himself—entrance into the Civil Service; somewhat disorderly novitiate therein; sufferings from importunate money-lenders, etc., being clearly "lived" things, and afterwards explicitly confessed as such in the *Autobiography*. What is more (though it would not have done to confess this) we may take it as certain that Norah Geraghty had at

least one and probably more than one model, while Katie Woodward—the "buttercup" of that day, the "flapper" of this—almost certainly had *one*. Here is not merely what we may call the synthetic life-blood of all novel characters that are good for anything but the thing itself, drawn from the vein and transfused into the book. And there is much else that is good, especially Undy Scott the villain, and the great instrument of vengeance on him, Mr Chaffanbrass. But the book has also considerable faults. Of Charley's elder and more respectable companions Norman is a virtuous, sulky prig, and Alaric, though not disagreeable, rather despicable. Their chop-and-change loves, the elder Woodward girls, have little character or attraction. The "old salt" uncle is not very good. The satire on the apostles of Competitive Examination (though Heaven knows both it and they lent themselves to satire!) is clumsy. And there are many minor absurdities—the most glaring of which, if not the most important, is the name of the dancing Frenchman, Victoire Jaquétenape. Yet it is a pleasant book on the whole, and a very critic of critics ought to be interested by the way in which the artist alternately advances and backslides in his not yet perfected art.

There is very much more of this art in *Dr Thorne*, the popularity of which seems rather to have surprised its author. He tells us that the "plot"—by which one supposes (for he does not exactly say so) that he means the suspense about Sir Roger Scatcherd's will, and its influence on the fortunes of Frank Gresham and Mary Thorne—was supplied to him by his brother, T. Adolphus, the well-known writer of historical Italian stories. But does one think very much about the "plot" in *Dr Thorne*? It seems, to me at any rate, to be much less regular than that of *Barchester Towers*.

In fact Trollope by this time was getting, consciously or unconsciously, at that fortunate combination of several interests which gave us his biggest (in more senses than one) books: *Framley Parsonage*, *The Small House*, *Can you Forgive Her?*, and *The Last Chronicle*. But we know from the first that Frank will not marry Miss Dunstable and will marry Mary, if we don't know from the first that Miss Dunstable will marry Dr Thorne: and are perhaps, even at the last, not very ready to say *why*, in a later book, they married each other, though we don't forbid the banns. There is still too much "talkee-talkee," but this can be skipped; the rather unduly long narrative overture can be, if anybody chooses, treated in the same way; and then you have abundant material for the literary equivalent of the process which is Homerically described as "taking out your desires" of drinking and eating—Frank's coming-of-age dinner and that at Gatherum Castle; his flirtations with Miss Oriel and Miss Dunstable and Mary herself; his flogging of Mr Moffat; the election; the character of Lady Arabella throughout; the re-appearance of the Proudies and the preparation for later books in the De Courcy men and girls—all this and much more is opened out bountifully, and you have only to fall to it. The actual "Scatcherd" part is less interesting but still interesting enough.

After *Dr Thorne* Trollope immediately diverged into travel-writing (which he did fairly, but which, like his later ancient and modern biographies, was but truancy from his proper business) and then, returning to that business, "came," as he frankly confesses, two "croppers" in it. The first of these, *The Bertrams*, is not entire cropper; the Littlebath business, Sir Lionel Bertram, and Miss Todd (a variant on Miss Dunstable) are far from unrefreshing. But it has a rather "strawy" hero,

a disagreeable heroine, and a half melodramatic, half dull-gloomy conclusion. These last things were quite out of Trollope's reach. *Castle Richmond*, more unrelieved, is worse.

With *Framley Parsonage* he came home again, and the home-coming was a great success. It is true that the most prominent personage, if not exactly the hero, is a very poor creature. The Rev. Mark Robarts is something of a snob, a good deal of a fool at first (one cannot imagine a man going through Oxford in those days and not knowing that if he signs a second bill without securing or seeing the destruction of the first he will be liable for both), and later either a fool positive or a bit of a rogue in not seeing that the acceptance of a prebendal stall, through the influence of a man whose bills he has backed, is about as near simony as anything not formally simoniacal can be. But people are and do all these things; so that the book cannot be barred for that. All the rest of it is capital. Lady Lufton is one of Trollope's best characters; and her mute duel with the Duke of Omnium is only the keystone of an admirable arch of creation. Mrs Proudie, who had been somewhat "occulted" in *Dr Thorne*, blazes again in the Great Interruption "And Christianity!" and is of considerable magnitude elsewhere. Mr Sowerby and his sister and his brother-in-law would make the fortune of a very fair novel by themselves; and the apparition of Mr Crawley—he had been indicated, but only indicated, as far back as *Barchester Towers*—does much and promises more. Nor does the love part discredit the rest; for Lord Lufton at least plays his part well, Lucy Robarts is one of Trollope's most satisfactory heroines, and Griselda Grantly (her sister killed off to give her more play) deserves as much admiration as she does little love. Mr Crawley's

blessing in this book on Lucy Robarts for the care of his wife is one of the few good blessings of fiction. It is only inferior (if it is that) to the Gypsy Madge's in Henry Kingsley's *Geoffrey Hamlyn*.

There is no doubt that this book, which was already handsomely paid for ("the details were very interesting" as he characteristically says somewhere) made Trollope's popularity through the widely-read medium of the *Cornhill*, and procured him the much larger profits which for many years he received—sometimes, as noted above, for work of by no means high class. Of his *Tales of all Countries* published now and later, as of his other short stories, we need say little or nothing. They are rarely good, and never first rate. But *Orley Farm* is a book of great critical interest. He thought very highly of the central story—that of Lady Mason, who has forged a will (or codicil) in her son's favour, has her cause espoused and herself proposed to by a baronet of old lineage, confesses to him, is acquitted at a second trial (for perjury at the first), but gives up both suitor and booty. As in some other places I am unable to follow him here, as the situation does not seem to me fully "brought off." The book is further burdened with two prigs—Lucius Mason, the son, who is nearly intolerable, and Felix Graham, a barrister who shares Trollope's fads as to advocacy, and is most improperly rewarded with the hand of a very nice girl. But even Graham's previous entanglements with a young person of the lower class (whom he has taken into his head to educate with a view to marriage) are good fun; the family and household of his future father-in-law, Mr Justice Staveley, are delightful; the trial with Mr Chaffanbrass *redux* and a new light of the bar, Mr Furnival, who is almost his equal, and contributes a third family underplot, is as good as it

may be; and, lastly, the book has a crowd of low-comedy personages, bagmen and their belongings, who are of the author's best. The scene where the Attorney Dockwrath, Lady Mason's enemy, usurps the privileges of a commercial room and routs its proper occupants, is "almost the true Dickens" or rather a worthier and not imitative parallel: and the Chief Bagman, Mr Moulder, would do credit to any novelist. Here too are almost the first of Trollope's admirable hunting scenes—things enjoyed, I believe, equally by those who do hunt and those who do not. Still I cannot rank *Orley Farm* with the main Barsetshire edifice, or with its two "wings," as we may call them, *The Small House at Allington* and *Can You Forgive Her?*

On these two, which were written practically together and finally published in the same year, Trollope with his usual and not disagreeable frankness prides himself not a little. And he had good reason for doing so. There are of course many greater novels than either; and, as has been said, the present writer would put above them both *Barchester Towers* and *The Last Chronicle*, the one for excellence *à peu de frais* and the other for good results on more lavish consumption of means. But they themselves, in the last category, come very little short of *The Last Chronicle* itself; they by no means repeat each other in any way, and altogether present an extraordinary amount of "fine" and by no means "confused feeding" to the hungry novel-devourer. Of course fault may be found with both, and especially with *The Small House*. The half-hero half-villain Crosbie is not only an immeasurable cad but a very great fool, and that too in a kind of folly inconsistent with the first "specification" of him. For he is presented as a man of rather unusual brains and much more than usual familiarity with the world.

There was admittedly little or nothing in Lady Alexandrina de Courcy's age, person, manners, or conversation to make a man fall desperately in love with her for herself; and Crosbie had had time to grasp what attractions she had. He must have known that Lord de Courcy would probably give him no—or no immediate—money; would pretty certainly do nothing for him; and would be an extremely disagreeable father-in-law. Whatever youthful critics of Victorian things may think, there was nothing in the middle of the 'sixties so rapturously intoxicating in the idea of having a peer's daughter for your wife as to throw a not very young man of considerable experience off his balance. Again, Lily Dale—who is confessedly his own favourite heroine—pretty, lively, and ill-treated as she is, is not exactly sympathetic. Some very wicked people have even discovered in her slight approaches to something distantly resembling vulgarity—a frightful disease which earlier Trollope had not always entirely escaped. One does not know quite what to make either of her apparent combination of the "once in love always in love" notion for Crosbie with her (no doubt very sensible) refusal later to give him a chance of repentance; or of that minor but, according to Trollope, existing affection for Johnny Eames, which again later could not stand the supposed rivalry of Madalina Demolines. Bernard Dale does not cut a very good figure either as lover or as "big brother's" *locum tenens*. Bell and her Doctor are rather null; and the Squire is not fully "brought off," though very nearly so. But this discounting leaves plenty to credit. Johnny Eames himself is very good—an improved Charley Tudor, *décrotté*, to begin with, and supplied with a touch and not too much of the hero of romance. Lord de Guest and his sister are capital secondary

characters, and the introduction of "Planty Pall" with the great scene of his attempt on Lady Dumbello—Joseph turned Lothario and writing a Zulika of ice—gives a *clou* to the whole book like his uncle's duel with Lady Lufton in *Framley Parsonage*. Miss Dunstable, albeit married, is not in the least done for; though she has quite swallowed up her excellent husband. The official scenes are better than ever; the boarding house is capital; and the whole book is thoroughly readable.

Curiously enough, though as has been said there is no kind of repetition in story, and very little of character, between the two books, it is again with the hero, or heroes, and the heroine of *Can You Forgive Her?* that most fault can be found. Here the last named must come first, not merely on the principle of *place aux dames*, or of the title, but because of the high estimation in which the author held her. Indeed he tried to dramatise her as "The Noble Jilt." Jilt she is no doubt; but where the nobility of Alice Vavasour comes in, on any score but that of long descent on both sides, it is extremely difficult to say. She has broken her engagement—he makes her deny "engagement," but himself speaks of it as a "broken-off match"—to her cousin (of whom more presently), as we are told, on moral grounds. She has entered on another engagement—in a "sort of kind of as it were" way—with another lover of whom also more presently. But she goes with the rejected suitor alone (save for his sister who is avowedly trying to get her back for him) on a continental tour, submits to a *redintegratio amoris*, and throws over No. 2. The cousin then proceeds to behave abominably badly—bullying her not in the moral way this time but by requisitioning and and spending her money, etc., and before long she jilts

him for the second time, and finally, after vicissitudes, reaccepts and marries No. 2. Now no one experienced in novelry—or in life—will pronounce this off-hand to be impossible or even certainly disgusting. But in order that we may "forgive her" she must be a creature of impulse, hot-blooded, imaginative, etc. Alice Vavasour is the reverse of all this. She is a politician, a Suffragette before Suffragettism, given to much deliberation before acting. In such a person the act of going on what is certain to be a sort of ante-nuptial honeymoon with a rejected lover who still retains the privilege of cousinhood is rather less excusable than some positive misconduct which is due to passion. In fact Alice, though never exactly "naughty" in one sense of that word, is never once anything like "nice." Again Trollope has made the once and again successful cousin, George Vavasour, far too much of an unmitigated ruffian; and the temporarily unsuccessful one, John Grey, far too much of an unmitigated prig. And one sometimes wonders whether even robbing your intended bride of funds is, except in law, much worse than, when you are rejected, clandestinely providing the said funds out of your own pocket. A gentleman no doubt would not do the first; but would he do the second? In his code a liberty is worse than a crime, and an obligation which, being secret, cannot be repudiated, is the worst of liberties. However, once more the "condolences and vails" are ample. Indeed I have known more than one very good judge who thought *Can You Forgive Her?* for range and variety of interest the best of all Trollope's books; and from the same point of view I should put it only below, and not very far below, *The Last Chronicle.* All the usual minor parts are good; Mr Palliser, his wife Lady Glencora, and her lover Burgo Fitzgerald, are very

nearly first rate; the hinge-on, to this and to George Vavasour's doings, of some of the best of Trollope's hunting scenes is excellently craftsmanlike; the farce-episodes of Kate Vavasour's widowed aunt and her lovers, though a little overdone, are laughable enough; and Kate herself is a good part rather wasted. Though she ought not to have backed her brother quite as she did, she gets well punished for it, and is a much nicer girl than Alice. Also there are still other details unnoticed. It deserves the old praise of being "an *abounding* book."

But more, far more, abounding still is *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, while any objections to which it may be subject are of very much less importance than those which have been allowed against *The Small House* and *Can You Forgive Her?* In fact these objections can be got over very rapidly indeed. Henry Grantly, who is in a manner the hero, is a rather ungracious son, though a good lover, for which latter characteristic, in spite of his ungraciousness, one does not grudge him his good end. Lily Dale in her reappearances is distinctly ungracious too; and though Johnny Eames no doubt did not experience "a set grey life and apathetic end" because of her fractiousness, he wanted her and should have got her. That is about all—and perhaps some judgments worth attention would even say it is too much—to debit. It has been already admitted that severely technical criticism may rank the book as inferior to *Barchester Towers* in simplicity and economy, not excluding sufficiency, of plot-interest. But this *is* technical and almost, in the unfavourable sense, "academic." It leaves innumerable good things to say of the book, which indeed I should myself put in a small class of selected novels just short of the greatest, and by novelists themselves possessing

qualities just short of the greatest likewise. The main thread of interest—the question of the guilt or innocence of Mr Crawley—is kept well twisted throughout. Just at the end a persistent Devil's Advocate may say that the victim of Mrs Arabin's intolerable folly (she had been a fool from the very first, except when she boxed Mr Slope's ears) and of her husband's slack forgetfulness (he always was a "slacker" despite the flourish of trumpets with which he was introduced) is allowed a little too much credit for heroic conduct in refusing to question the Dean's statement. At any rate we have been earlier, and more than once, told that he himself did *not* know exactly where he got the cheque. But this is the merest knot in a reed. The character itself, though by no means an attractive one, is quite natural and very original; while Mrs Crawley is one of the *not* offensive angels of fiction. Of the contrasted second plot (or main second plot, for there is more than one) the Dobbs-Broughton household and the "Bayswater Romance," one may say that as a contrast, it could hardly be bettered. The intrinsic as distinguished from the relative and necessitated interest of the Jael picture-business may not be great; but Madalina Demolines, and her machinations and her flirtations, and the rendering of her generally, approach the first rate in their own kind. The final defeat and death of Mrs Proudie would save any book; and if it really happened to be brought about as Trollope says, I think the Committee of the Athenæum should mark the floor of the room with a bronze tablet —only there are so many other spots in that building which would call for similar identification! All the scenes and episodes of Mr Crawley's purgatory are famously done; the Toogood passages are among the most life-like of his intimately *felt* sketches of middle-

class society that is "not *quite*"—a famous phrase in the history of that society which he himself has stereotyped here. Mr Crosbie is had up for judgment twice over—in purse and in person—very satisfactorily; and the various episodic details, if not arranged with absolutely Aristotelian propriety, are never merely dragged in or tacked on. For the present writer's part, he takes hardly more pleasure in anything than in the final scenes of the presentation of Archdeacon Grantly. It is true, and it adds to the pleasure of the thing, that Trollope hardly to the last gets over his habit of apologising for the Archdeacon, when no apology whatever is necessary. But whether he meant to do so or not he shows us more and more how superfluous his apologies were; and nearly the last scene of all, where the Archdeacon "hits on both wings" that very shy and woodcock-like Crawley-bird—with his great speech on the equality of gentlemen and his father's annotated sermons—is something thoroughly enjoyable and thoroughly craftsmanlike. There are, of course, characters in fiction that one adores, or at least loves, and others (it is an equal compliment to their authors) that one hates. There are yet others that one admires, laughs at, would like to quarrel with, and in a dozen other ways recognises as rightly created under the conditions of novel creation. But there are few *men* in fiction I *like* better, and should more like to have known, than Archdeacon Grantly.

I am, of course, aware (there has indeed been a previous reference) that there have been and are critic novelists—as well as novelists who were not critics and critics who are not novelists—all of whom if they do not absolutely reject this criterion of the production of personages capable of being loved, hated, admired, despised—"lived with" in short—think little of it. And

I am further aware that some of the dischargers of the double function have proved their sincerity and thoroughness by never producing a creature, alive and to be lived with, at all. But I am pleading for Trollope only before courts of which I recognise the jurisdiction. Before these courts I have no doubt of his case. I do not think that he will, by the best judges, ever be thought worthy of the very highest place among novelists or among English novelists. He has something no doubt of the "*for* all time," but he is not exactly "*of* all time." Or, to put the calculus the other way, he is by no means only "*for* an age"; but he is to a certain lowering though not disqualifying degree "*of* an age." If you compare him with the really great novelists of his own century, all of whom were in actual drawing of breath his contemporaries, he cannot vie with Miss Austen in that quietly intense humanity which contends with and transcends a rather narrow scheme of manners and social habits; or with Scott in largeness of distinct romantic conception. In absolute universality of "*this*-worldliness" Thackeray towers above him; as in a certain fantastic command of not impossible *other*-worldliness does Dickens. But short of these four I do not know any nineteenth-century English novelist whose superiority to him in some ways —Kingsley's in romance; Charles Reade's in a certain strange infusion of positive genius; George Eliot's in appeal to the *intelligentsia*—is not compensated by their inferiority in turning out personages and fitting them with incidents of the kind indicated in the foregoing survey—the personages and incidents, that is to say, of actual contemporary life, touched, if not to supreme, at any rate to more than competent freedom from commonplaceness of the disqualifying kind in one way and mere eccentricity in another.

There is, of course, one thing left for "the other fellow" to say. "Yes; I dare say you see this life-likeness in Trollope. You 'were there,' and you recognise it. We were not there and we don't." But this plausible and now very common argument is an utter and a very serious fallacy. I was not "there" (except in my very earliest years, "muling and puking in my nurse's arms") with any of the great novel-writers in and of the first half of the nineteenth century; or at all with those of the eighteenth. I have never been familiar with the inside of French society even during the time when I was competent to be so. But I find no difficulty in being at home not merely with the scenes and characters of the greatest French and English novelists of past and present times but with those of the second and, as far as they preserve any value at all, those of lower rank. I have not such a good conceit of myself as to suppose that this is due to any personal cleverness. Those of us who were born about the middle of the nineteenth century were undoubtedly fortunate in our generation. There were so many men of nearly or quite the first order in various kinds of letters that there was no danger of narrow school-partisanship; and their merit was so decided that we had no need to run down earlier generations, schools, and periods, to put them up. They put *us* so high themselves that we had in the present a Pisgah sight of the past, and could compare it with our own surroundings. Moreover the classical education, which we had practically all enjoyed, had acquainted us so early with non-existent states of thought, manners, beliefs, circumstances, styles, that nothing startled or puzzled us merely because it was not of to-day in time and of our own *milieu* in condition. I saw the other day some one's congratulations—apparently not in the least ironical—

addressed to a young writer of the moment because, having been brought up on certain slightly older writers of that moment, he could yet appreciate Miss Austen. Can one imagine a novice, similarly situated fifty years ago, and being, except in joke, congratulated because having been brought up on Thackeray and Dickens he could still appreciate Fielding?

This may seem a digression rather than a conclusion, but to show that it is not merely the former let me end by commending Trollope, as a first step backwards, to any one who has the praiseworthy desire to free himself from the most degrading of intellectual slaveries—that of the exclusive Present.

X

ON WRITING OUT & HENRY KINGSLEY

THE complaint that an author has written, or is writing, himself "out" is no doubt as old as criticism. It is an obvious way of putting yourself in a superior position: and what is more, a not unnatural, nor even very unforgivable, succumbing to the natural effect of familiarity on the average human being. If there had been reviews in Jerusalem, and if *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* had been published at some interval, it is pretty certain that the latter of the two, whichever it happened to be, would have been found to show sad signs of this affection on the part of the author. If *Ecclesiastes* itself—one of the shortest as well as greatest books of the world, and one which grows steadily greater to its close—had appeared in parts, and not continuously, somebody would certainly have said "Ah! you should have seen the earlier chapters. The poor fellow hasn't been able to keep it up." Even great critics have not been strong enough to free themselves from this tendency; for did not even Longinus see old age in the *Odyssey* though he admitted that it was "the old age of Homer"? And did not Dryden talk of Ben Jonson's "dotages"?

One has therefore to be chary of accepting a charge so common, and in a way so inevitable; but, as it is certain to be made, so it is at least not entirely unlikely to be deserved; and there is perhaps no division of literature in which it is more certain to be made, and more likely to be deserved, than the novel, and especially the modern novel, when it comes to be pro-

duced in scores and fifties by the same person. It is not very common for poets who *are* poets to write themselves out in the worst sense; for they are apt to retain, to the last, that incomprehensible power of transforming any thought into musical and unforgettable language which constitutes the poet. Indeed some swan-songs have shown, in the very words of one of them, that:—

> The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.

But the novelist, as he has need of less exalted art, requires much more, and what is still worse, much more varied, material, apparatus, and disposition of both, than the poet: and at least some "invention" of a certain kind with no glamour of verse to help him. The "lonely word" which will save his brother in verse, will be of little good to him in prose. He must have a story—and each time a fairly new story—to tell; characters true, lively, and each time again fairly new, to work it out; conversation, again fresh and lively, to put in their mouths; and a faculty of miscellaneous description that may give them scenes to work in, and business to get through. The demand on him, both for accumulation and invention, is thus pretty severe: and it has been made infinitely more so by the raising or lowering of novel-writing to a regular profession or business, and the demand on the writer for biennial, annual, or even quarterly, supplies of his work. Richardson was let off with three novels only, long ones it is true, but the invention necessary for a novel is by no means in proportion to its individual size; Fielding with four; Smollett with barely half a dozen. It was not until Scott's time that the dozen and the score became the measure of novels to be expected

from a novelist of distinction; and Scott had the immense advantage of not beginning to write novels till he had accumulated a vast store of reading from books, and of observation from life, besides his previous practice in verse-narrative. Dickens, it is true, began pretty early, and was prolific enough for a time: but for the last ten years of his life he produced comparatively little in the novel kind; while Thackeray again began rather late as far as regular novel-writing was concerned, never hurried himself, and was alas! forced to leave off early. But without entering upon a tedious catalogue of other and minor novelists, it may be said succinctly that the curse of "writing out" has come upon many of them; and that it perhaps never visited any one more severely and more surprisingly than in the case of the author who halves the title of this paper.

I do not propose to say much on the contentious, and here nearly irrelevant, question of the comparative genius of Charles and Henry Kingsley. In some respects their brotherhood was evident; in others, not so. Charles had a much more various literary gift, especially on the poetical side; and, as a matter of style, his brother could not touch him. I see in Henry none of the gift of essay-writing which Charles possessed, but Henry had perhaps more aptitude for novel —as distinct from romance—writing than Charles, and he undoubtedly began his career with two books which are among the very best examples of the mid-Victorian novel of all but the very highest class. *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* exposes itself, no doubt, to some criticism, but chiefly, if not exclusively, to criticism of that not very fatal kind which complains of the absence, not of the presence, of something. It has no

heroine, and the autobiographic personage who recounts it all, and himself plays not such a very small part in it, is made rather unnecessarily unheroic. "Sleepy Hamlyn" someone calls him: and though his narrative is by no means soporific, one can imagine his personality being more amiable than impressive. It has no heroine, though it has more than one or two more or less important feminine characters, or rather personages. For (to continue the negative examination) character in the more intensive sense is again not one of this book's strong points. Its plot, though not non-existent, is of the chronicle order: and except in the "justification" of George Hawker, comes to no very definite conclusion.

But on the other hand this chronicle-plot is concatenated out of a series of the liveliest scenes, admirably "set" and decorated. The opening Devonshire ones are almost as good as they can be, and as for those in Australia, I have never read any autochthonous Australian novel which came up to them in my humble estimation. The meeting of the conspirators (against society and each other) on the vividly pictured Dartmoor wilds; the explosion of the forgery, and the blessing of Madge on the Buckleys—this and the rest of the part owe some royalty no doubt, but not too much, to Meg Merrilees—are really memorable things in the early chapters. In the later there is hardly a weak section. The best, no doubt, are the mainly still-life picture of the squatter's home when Sam comes to meet his fate in Alice; and the quickly avenged raid of the bush-rangers which is the "run in"; but all is good. And it is really curious to compare these Australian scenes with those of *It is Never too Late to Mend*. Charles Reade carried heavier metal than Henry

Kingsley; but the advantage of actual personal knowledge of, not book-acquaintance with, your country or sea has seldom been better illustrated.

It is, however, an important point in the criticism of this very curious novelist that his second novel is at once greatly superior to his first in some respects, and distinctly inferior to it in others. In mere "setting" and description the two are fairly equal: though the freshness of the Australian *décor* may prefer one to some and the homeliness of the Devonshire scenes the other to others. But whereas *Geoffrey Hamlyn*, as observed already, carries out its own not elaborate but sufficient system of story regularly enough, *Ravenshoe* is, as regards any kind of architectonic, a chaos of disjointed improbabilities. It is not merely that its main *donnée*—the substituted heir who turns out not to have been substituted after all—is one of the bad possible-improbables, nor would it be just, as yet, to urge the disastrous repetition of something like the same situation in later books. All through, the people are doing unlikely things in an unlikely way; the undoubtedly possible casualties and mishaps of real life are extravagantly and inartistically relied upon: and the episodes, which really have nothing to do with the story, are carelessly poured out, and stuck in. Among novels that deserve any consideration at all I know no such instance of chaotic management as *Ravenshoe*: among those which deserve much, none. The most flagitious contemner of the Unities and of Decorum may be somewhat aghast at it, unless he possesses "don'tcareadamnativeness" in proportion to his other crimes.

But he, if he does possess this solace of his sin—and the very much more numerous and perhaps happier

folk who are not even aware that something ought to be somewhere and is not, while many things ought not to be anywhere and are—can nevertheless enjoy themselves very much with *Ravenshoe*. It is difficult even for expert analysts of the novel and its qualities to say exactly where the attraction of the book lies, for it is almost everywhere diffused and evasive. The author avowed his own affection for the hero. Would it had never induced him to resuscitate Charles Ravenshoe "not" as Mr Carlyle would have said "in dog's likeness," and for no earthly reason, later! Frankly, one shares it. Without being one of the great characters of fiction, Charles is one of the most human, and what is more, pleasantly human, without being in the least milk-and-watery or romantically heightened or anything else objectionable. If anything, his creator is rather too hard on him for the recklessness of despair in which—love and fortune and almost identity lost at the same moment—he flings himself away. The nobler villain, Lord Welter, though less elaborately is almost as well drawn: and he has put to his author's credit one of the great sayings of fiction, "There are some things a fellow *can't* do." Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot owe, no doubt, something to Thackeray: but, as was observed above in regard to another matter, the debt is still kept within reasonable limits. None of the minors is bad, with the possible exception of the other villain, the Jesuit Mackworth, who really *is* a villain, and who is certainly stagy and conventional besides being not quite a whole "at that." The comic flashes of the Hainault children, the street scenes, etc., are not overdone; the Crimean passages are well made and well put in; the Ravenshoe (that is to say Clovelly) panorama could hardly be bettered; and one has left

out much else that is good. There are few novels not actually masterpieces that have been longer favourites, or more frequently returned to for actual reading with and by the present writer—a testimonial subject of course to the *quantum valeat* discount: but perhaps more to the point in the case of novels than any other.

At any rate here was a man who, neither suspiciously early nor perilously late, could produce two diploma-pieces in novel-writing of quite exceptional merit. He was indeed at the very age—just before thirty in the one case, just after it in the other—when there is least probability of such work being a mere flash in an afterwards empty pan, or the result of bottled-up experience which does not renew itself. But did he ever do anything of real merit again? If one looks only at his very latest novels—those of the seventies—it would hardly be uncharitable or rash to return a plump negative to the question. I myself began novel-reviewing a few years before his death: and several of this latest batch came into my hands. I venture to think that at no time was my criticism much tinged with that cubbish desire to "down" established reputations which Johnson affected (and one hopes only affected) to approve. And I have never, to use Sir Philip's inversion "called virtue ungratefulness": while I had then been for years a warm admirer and frequent reader of the two *coups d'essai*. I remember vividly (and have indeed been able to refresh my memory by unearthing an old book of cuttings) the disappointment and annoyance with which I read *Reginald Hetherege*, *Number Seventeen*, etc. In regard to the book last named, I have indeed a story to tell which I hope it is not senile to think rather curious. Quite recently I obtained *Number Seventeen*, which I remembered as having caused the

acme of my disappointment, with others of his books from the London Library, and read it. To my surprise I could not recognise the story at all—a very rare thing with me notwithstanding the myriads of books I have read. But when I had finished it I sketched in my mind a fancy review: and then and not till then looked up what I actually had said nearly fifty years ago. With differences of phrase of course, the two verdicts were exactly of the same tenor: and the very same passages, utterly forgotten as they were when I read them a second time, had attracted my censure.

I believe Henry's more thoroughgoing but still not uncritical partisans plead for his third (and second Australian) novel, *The Hillyars and the Burtons* as at any rate not quite unworthy of the author of *Geoffrey Hamlyn* and *Ravenshoe*. No doubt some of the Australian scenes have kept the earlier freshness: and Old Chelsea, which the writer knew as intimately as Devon, supplies a new home-parallel. But I have never myself been able to take much interest in the book: and the fatal *crambe repetita* makes its appearance, hardly ever alas! to disappear thereafter. The wicked hero, Sir George Hillyar, is simply the George Hawker of *Geoffrey Hamlyn*, baronetted, and with a sort of general misbehaviour substituted for positive crime. His Australian wife Gerty is not introduced as the utter fool she afterwards becomes. The heir-business, slightly altered, returns. Of the lower class title-family on the other hand, James Burton is a most unnatural blacksmith's boy, saying and doing things that the author would himself have said and done: and his sister Emma a more unnatural blacksmith's daughter besides being a kind of *fausse martyre*, at

once victimising and spoiling Erne Hillyar to nobody's good. Finally, the Antipodic shifting of scenes between Australia and England, though quite unobjectionable in itself—for various persons from Ariosto to Anthony Trollope have done similar things very well—is ill-managed. Almost the only satisfaction derived from the book by me, is connected with Miss Lesbia Burke, of whom one did not see, or rather hear, enough, in *Geoffrey Hamlyn*, and whom one is glad to meet in the flesh.

He himself, if he did not like *Mlle Mathilde* and *Ravenshoe* best of all his books, has confessed that the hero of the one and the heroine of the other were his favourite children. The French girl is attractive, and her martyrdom does not irritate like Emma Burton's. But there appears in the book that fatal suggestiveness of other books—not merely of the author's own—which marks so much of his later work. One endeavours not to think too often of *A Tale of Two Cities*, but it constantly occurs, and Mathilde is ill-supported: for her father is too clever by at least half for his folly, and too foolish by nearer three-quarters for his cleverness: while the mother is an impossible termagant. I should put before both these books, as a "saved" third, the much later *Valentin* in which the author incorporated—as he did elsewhere much less happily—his experiences of war-correspondence in 1870–1. It may be dismissed as "only a boy's book," but the story, though not very solid, is well told; some of the scenes are vivid; and the way in which the varied and beautiful country, where France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and Prussia meet, is described, gives the thing a special character.

Allowing, then, for a party in favour of *The Hillyars*,

and for the character of Mathilde, one need not cavil too much at the recognition of these five books as fair up-and-down work for a novelist; not justifying any serious charge of "writing out." But in the dozen last years of his life their author composed some half-score other novels, collections of short stories, etc.; and in these one may certainly perceive a remarkable inferiority. The first of them, *Austin Elliot*, did indeed receive a still more remarkable testimonial. It was selected by a French writer, M. Forgues, for translation as a "Scène de la Vie Aristocratique." There certainly are lords and ladies in it, and clubs, and Parliament and Ministers and so forth; while the author, as indeed one would expect from his birth, breeding, and education, does not show any sign of ignorance of the "upper circles." But of *special* acquaintance with them, or of specially vivid portrayal of their ways, there is nothing. The *Harveys* is almost rubbish. *Stretton* is much more readable, but full of reduplications of his own other work and of reminiscences of the work of others. "Miss Eleanor," though more of a technical lady, and romanticised to the point of a late marriage with an early lover, could hardly have existed without Miss Betsy Trotwood before her; and even acknowledges the relationship by frequently rubbing her nose!

It might be teasing to the reader, even if more space were here available, to go through the whole list, though all have been carefully read and some re-read for this occasion. Something of the old fire sometimes flashes out: for instance *Hetty* among the half-long stories is nearly a success. On the other hand *Old Margaret*, another half-length, recalls *The Cloister and the Hearth* with a challenge which is quite hopeless in its rashness. You can read *Leighton Court* (one of the

earliest of the middle batch) without great difficulty: but even here a fatal question which we shall put presently insists on suggesting itself. *Silcote of Silcotes* opens well and has a promising hero, or at least name-giver, who possesses the unusual joint qualifications of a squire "of that ilk" or nearly so, and a professional lawyer. But he allows himself to be possessed by an almost insane suspicion of his wife; behaves in a manner further suggesting insanity; and inspires his author with two disastrous ideas. One is that of bringing back old figures at the end, as already noticed, and the other a still stranger one, of resuscitating a certain Miss Lee from *The Harveys* in circumstances different from and incompatible with those of her first appearance. Of *Number Seventeen* and *Reginald Hetherege* we have spoken; of *Oakshott Castle* and *The Grange Garden* it is unnecessary to speak at length. In almost all there are, as admitted, occasional flashes; but in absolutely none is there any "composition," and in hardly any are the readable pages concatenated by even that intangible but easily recognisable string of union which almost all novelists who retain any command of their craft generally contrive to insert. His essays, "Tales of Travel" etc., do not directly concern us; but they exhibit something of the same loss of "grasp." They are sometimes not bad journalism; they often show that admirable spirit and temper of which *Ravenshoe* is the central magazine or reservoir. But, like the novels, they too often give the uncomfortable impression that the writer, in the slang phrase "does not know where he is": that he is putting down things at random or half-remembering other people's putting of them.

Few things would annoy me more than any suspicion, on the part of readers, of an ungenerous desire on my

part to detract and utter evil speeches about Henry Kingsley. Not only have I always had, as I have here freely confessed, a sincere admiration for, and enjoyment of, his first two books, but I have combined with it, though I never had the slightest personal acquaintance with him, something very like a personal affection for the traits of character shown in his work generally. He must have been a thorough gentleman; he had a true and not seldom understanding love of beauty in art and literature, and an almost invariably understanding love of it in nature. I should like to be able to praise him "stock, lock, and barrel," but it is unfortunately the fact that I can find—in ransacking a fair memory of a much more than fair reading of novels —no other novelist who exemplifies the curious disease or defect, which I have taken as the title of this paper, to the same extent and with the same intensity as he does. There have been some—indeed since novel-writing became a regular business very many—novelists who cannot be said to have written themselves out because they never had anything particular in them. There are others, in initially happier case, who have by voluminous production thinned the amount of fresh matter they can put in their books, but have never exactly gone bankrupt. But the first of these classes give us mere matter of course, and the second only exemplify human imperfection. To neither of these does Henry Kingsley belong. He had, at first, virtue enough in him to produce a *coup d'essai* of very much more than average merit and to follow it up with another slightly different kind, which, though open to more criticism was, in its best parts, better still. He could put in yet others, for a time, some stuff that was not every-day stuff, yet for the remaining and longer part

of his career he could only turn out (with the possible exception of *Valentin*) books which the ungenerous might have called mere botches, and which the most liberal could not deny to be unworthy of the author of *Geoffrey Hamlyn* and *Ravenshoe*.

It will be further observed by those who take a real interest in the phenomena of literature, that this is a case again to be distinguished from "single-speech" instances in novel-writing, and from those even more curious chance-medleys, as they may almost be called, which sometimes occur in the course of a long and mostly unsuccessful course of production. It bears no resemblance to the case of Fromentin with *Dominique*, or of Prévost with *Manon Lescaut*, or yet again to that of Beckford with *Vathek*. Whether Fromentin could have repeated his success with other subjects may be a matter of somewhat decided opinion, but can be nothing more. *Manon* remains, and probably always will remain, unique as a "windfall of the Muses" to a well-meaning and very hard-working but somewhat unprofitable servant. If Beckford had had the mind and the inducement he could undoubtedly, as the minor fragments show, have done more. But in our present subject there were present very considerable achievement at first, and long continued and varied effort, with plenty of inducement to it, afterwards; this long continued effort only resulting as has been shown.

There remains but one element of uncertainty in the problem. Suppose that, instead of trying to get annual results out of his faculty, Henry had been contented with biennial or triennial, would things have been better? There are instances in the history of novel-writing which are in favour of the supposition. The most striking perhaps, is that of Smollett, who after

Roderick Random and *Peregrine Pickle* distinctly "went off" but after a subsequent rest or diversion to other kinds of work did, at once, his last and his best in *Humphry Clinker*. And of course Nature supplies an obvious analogy in the way in which trees drained of their sap require time to fill up again, or springs emptied faster than they flow show a similar necessity. On the whole, however, I am inclined to doubt whether anything like this recuperation would have taken place, under the most favourable circumstances, with our present author.

His seems to have been a case where excellent general ability and education; a moral (in the widest sense) temperament of the best; and some remarkable powers of description as a more special gift, were set to work upon what, in mining phrase, we may call a "pocket" of invention, rich while it lasted, but definitely exhaustible, and before long exhausted. His descriptive powers found certain material, especially Devonshire and Australian, with the scenery of the Lotharingian border later, which they could exploit with advantage. He could reproduce certain types of society and even character with effect, and make them talk naturally. But in all these respects the "end of the tether," the "bottom of the sack" was reached before very long, and then there was nothing for it, or for him, but rehashing of previously used situation and material; reminiscence of the work of others; or else what is called mere journalism of the most indistinguished kind, or nearly so.

The thing is not uncommon in verse, as distinguished from the poetry proper mentioned before: but the form of verse—which still frequently passes for poetic substance and sometimes almost avails to create some-

thing like it—covers the bankruptcy there to some extent. Besides some poets at least have had the wit or the strength of mind, or the sheer luck, to stop when they could not really go on. It is unlikely to occur in men of any ability with prose literature of the non-inventive kind; because there the material is supplied from without, and only the power of dealing with it is required. But in prose fiction, under the circumstances of modern life, there is always a danger of it, and that danger is most frequently avoided in the paradoxical way of never doing anything good enough to make the failure of goodness felt. That was not Henry Kingsley's fortune: and so he remains in part a source of pleasure to mere literary hedonists, in part a painful but instructive example to those who study as well as enjoy literature.

END OF VOLUME TWO

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