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## Selected Essays of Robert Louis Stevenson

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

*[Frontispiece.]*

SELECTED ESSAYS OF  
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

WITH INTRODUCTION BY  
H. G. RAWLINSON, M.A.

INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

*Second Impression*

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## R. L. S.

Thin-legged, thin-chested, slight unspeakably,  
Neat-footed and weak-fingered : in his face—  
Lean, large-boned, curved of beak, and touched with race,  
Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, mutable as the sea,  
The brown eyes radiant with vivacity—  
There shines a brilliant and romantic grace,  
A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace  
Of passion and impudence and energy.  
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,  
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,  
Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist:  
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,  
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,  
And something of the Shorter-Catechist.

W. E. HENLEY.

To miss the Joy is to miss all.

*The Lantern-Bearers.*



## PREFACE

THE Editor who sets out to make a representative selection from Stevenson's Essays is compelled to be ruthless. He must perforce harden his heart to the sacrifice of many old and treasured companions. And the question arises—which ? Fortunately, we have the author's own opinion to guide us. Writing to Sir Sidney Colvin from Vailima, he makes the following choice : ' I will accept *Child's Play* and *Pan's Pipes*. Then I want *Pastoral*, *The Manse*, *The Islet*. ' . . . Then the portrait of Robert Hunter. . . . *Beggars*, sections 1 and 2, *Random Memories* II and *Lantern Bearers*. ' To these I have added the first section of *A College Magazine*, on account of the light which it throws on Stevenson's apprenticeship in the profession of Letters ; *Books which have influenced me*, for a similar reason ; *Falling in Love* and *Aes Triplex*, without which no volume of selections could possibly be complete ; *A Christmas Sermon*, an epitome of Stevenson's philosophy of life and perhaps the most characteristic of all his essays ; *An Apology for Idlers* ; *Pulvis et Umbra* ; and *My First Book* : ' *Treasure Island*, ' because each one has something to teach us of Stevenson's art.

H. G. RAWLINSON.

DHARWAK,  
May 1923.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

### ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: AN APPRECIATION

#### I

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON was born in Edinburgh on November 13, 1850. On his father's side he came of a family of famous lighthouse builders, abiding memorials of whose skill and genius may yet be seen in the noble beacons dotted about on the Bell Rock, Skerryvore, Dhu Heartach, and many other points of the rugged Scotch coast. His grandfather, Robert Stevenson, had been a friend of Sir Walter Scott; his mother was a daughter of the Rev. Dr. Balfour of Colinton. Both of them are described with wonderful sympathy and insight in *Memories and Portraits*. From this stern, old-fashioned Presbyterian stock he inherited the moralizing tendency so apparent in all his writings. From his father he acquired \* the family evil, despondency' ; to his mother, on the other hand, he owed, along with, alas, extreme physical delicacy of constitution, a courageous and buoyant disposition, and fortitude in the face of suffering. To his remoter Celtic ancestry, as he tells us in *The Manse*, must be traced the imaginative temperament and wayward disposition which differentiated him so amazingly from his more immediate forebears. It was an odd, and in some respects incongruous, combination of opposite qualities.

He was educated at Edinburgh University, and after it had become evident that his health would permanently incapacitate him from following his ancestral profession, he was called to the Bar. But it was soon apparent that

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Stevenson was totally unsuited for a professional career. At college, he was the despair of his tutors. As he tells us himself, he was a pattern of idleness.<sup>1</sup> The hours which should have been devoted to lectures were spent in omnivorous reading, French and English; essays, *belles-lettres*, history, philosophy and poetry were indiscriminately devoured. At the same time Stevenson was assiduously engaged in practising the art of writing, imitating the models which came to hand with surprising facility.<sup>2</sup> In 1875, owing to lung-trouble, he was compelled to spend the first of many winters abroad. The following year he made his literary *debut* in the *Cornhill Magazine*, then edited by Leslie Stephen, contributing to its pages from time to time those delightful papers which afterwards appeared under the title of *Virginibus Puerisque*. About the same time he first made the acquaintance of his fellow-artist and collaborator, William Ernest Henley. In 1878, amid a mass of miscellaneous journalism, appeared two characteristic volumes—*An Inland Voyage*, recording a canoe-trip made two years previously in the company of Sir Walter Simpson, and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, inspired by a walking tour from Monastier in Velay through the mountains to Florae.

In 1879 came the great crisis of Stevenson's life. He had met at Fontainebleau an American lady, Mrs. Osbourne, with her son and daughter. He now determined to follow her to California and marry her. Owing to straitened circumstances, Stevenson was compelled to travel by an emigrant ship; for a man of his health and temperament this decision was little less than heroic. His adventures on the voyage and subsequently in America are told in *The Amateur Emigrant*, *Across the Plains*, *The Silverado Squatters* and other papers. Mrs. Osbourne proved to be an ideal wife, a friend and companion who shared his tastes, helped him in his literary pursuits, and nursed him devotedly in his many illnesses. Hardly less beautiful was his friendship with his stepson, who became afterwards his collaborator.

<sup>1</sup> Of. *An Apology for Idlers*— autobiographical as usual.

<sup>2</sup> A *College Magazine*.

In 1880 Stevenson returned to Scotland, but a fresh attack, borne with his usual buoyant cheerfulness, drove the family to Davos, and later to Hyères :<sup>1</sup> indeed, the rest of his life, until he settled in Vailima, was little more than a ceaseless pilgrimage in search of health. Added to this was the menace of poverty, for before 1886 Stevenson seldom succeeded in making more than £200 a year by his pen.<sup>2</sup> Up to now, he had been recognized by the select few as an artist in words, a new force in literature. In 1883, however, he scored his first great popular success with *Treasure Island*, the most inimitable of sea yarns, which revealed at once his mastery of the art of story-telling. Amongst other novels of the period were *The Black Arrow*, a romance of the wars of the Roses, and *Kidnapped*, a Highland story. Stevenson was always a boy at heart, and all these were essentially boys' tales, robust, healthy and vigorous in tone. To another category belong *Prince Otto* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The latter took the public by storm, and Stevenson's reputation as a writer of fiction was now established. Other writings of this busy period were *A Child's Garden of Verses*, another volume of verse called *Underwoods, Memories and Portraits*, and a number of short stories. The latter branch of literature particularly suited Stevenson's genius, and he is acknowledged as one of the greatest story-tellers in the English language.

From 1885 to the death of his father two and a half years later, the Stevensons were in Bournemouth. After this, they returned to America and settled down in the Adirondack mountains. Here Stevenson wrote several of the essays collected in *Across the Plains* and began the *Master of Ballantrae*, the best of all his novels.

In 1888 Stevenson, still in quest of a climate suited to his health, set out with his family upon a prolonged cruise among the Pacific Islands. He was destined never to return. The necessary funds had been guaranteed by Mr. McClure, the American publisher, who had offered him £2,000 in return for a series of letters describing his

<sup>1</sup> *Ordered South in Virginibus Puerisque.*

<sup>2</sup> *My First Book*, p. 125.

experiences. The idea appealed strongly to Stevenson's love of adventure and romance. The party visited Honolulu and Samoa, and finally reached Sydney, where they stayed for a time, till a recurrence of his old malady once more drove him forth on his wanderings. His Odyssey finally ended at Apia in Samoa, where he decided to buy an estate of four hundred acres, to which he gave the name of Vailima (five rivers). 'Our place is in a deep cleft of Voea mountain, some six hundred feet above the sea,' he writes to Sir Sidney Colvin, 'embowered in forest, which is our strangling enemy, and which we combat with axes and dollars.' Stevenson threw himself with his usual boyish zest into the tasks of house-building, road-making and jungle-clearing. His mother joined the party in 1891. The last four years of Stevenson's life were perhaps the happiest he had ever known. They are pictured for us in the delightful *Vailima Letters* to Sir Sidney Colvin, a faithful chronicle of his doings.- Meanwhile, in the intervals of strenuous manual labour, his pen was even busier than ever. The books of this period are redolent of the atmosphere of his island-home, the atolls and the palm-trees, the long Pacific rollers, the blue skies and the white coral beaches. Most of his Pacific sketches appear in *The Island Nights Entertainments*, and *In the South Seas*. His novel, *The Ebb-Tide*, written in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, is an admirable bit of local colouring. Amongst other works belonging to the sojourn at Vailima may be mentioned *Catriona*, a sequel to *Kidnapped*, *The Wrecker* and *St. Ives* (neither of which added greatly to his reputation), and *Across the Plains*, a collection of earlier essays of the American period, containing some of his best writing in this direction. The ceaseless strain told upon his strength, and to a certain degree upon his creative power, and his health once more began to cause his friends serious anxiety. Stevenson's gaiety, however, never deserted him, and he stuck to his task with rare courage. His step-daughter, Mrs. Strong, was a devoted amanuensis. Part of his work was dictated, and when his voice failed him, he carried on by talking on his fingers. Stevenson's **rare charm** of manner, which capti-

vated all who came in contact with him, had a great effect upon the natives of Samoa. Their simplicity, picturesqueness and fidelity strongly attracted him, and a bond of affection was welded between them which was only broken by death. Among them he was familiarly known as Tusi Tala, the 'teller of tales.' He took an active part in local politics. His sense of justice, which had once before flamed out in passionate indignation against the wretched maligner of Father Damien, was keenly aroused by the conduct of two German officials, Mr. Cedercrantz and Baron Senfft, and his letters to *The Times* on their misdeeds led to their subsequent removal.<sup>1</sup> One of his last undertakings was the unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston*, a tragic story of the Scottish border, which shows all the signs of the return of his old power.

The end came unexpectedly, though Mrs. Stevenson confesses to have been haunted by a strange foreboding of approaching ill. Stevenson's health had lately shown a marked improvement, and one day in December 1894, he was sitting on the verandah, apparently in the best of spirits, chatting gaily to his wife. Suddenly, putting both hands to his head, he exclaimed, 'What's that?' Then he asked quickly, 'Do I look strange?' and dropped senseless at her feet. He never spoke again. A blood-vessel had snapped in the busy, overtaxed brain. The same evening, the gallant spirit passed peacefully away. He was only just forty-four. All night the old Mataafa chiefs and retainers for whom he had laboured watched his body, chanting songs and prayers, and covering with fine mats the Union Jack in which it had been wrapped. Next day they bore him on their shoulders along the path which they had hewn through the dense tropical jungle to his last resting-place on a lofty peak of Mount Voea. On his tomb was engraved the epitaph which he himself had written:

Under the wide and starry sky,  
Dig the grave and let me lie,  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I lay me down with a will.

<sup>1</sup> A Footnote to History,

This be the verse you grave for me :  
 ' Here he lies where he longed to be,  
 Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
 And the hunter, home from the hill.'

' Whom the gods love, die young.' And in this, at least, they were kind to Robert Louis Stevenson. It was the end which he himself had most desired.

' To the English-speaking world,' says Sir Sidney Colvin, ' he left behind a treasure which it would be vain as yet to attempt to estimate ; to the profession of letters, one of the most noble and inspiring of examples ; and to his friends, an image of the memory more vivid and more dear than are the presences of almost any of the living.'

## II

What will be the permanent place of Stevenson in Victorian literature? The question is a fascinating one, and though thirty years have now elapsed since Robert Louis Stevenson passed away from our midst, it is still unanswered. The Victorian age was rich in prose-writers, richer, perhaps, than any period in our history. There were giants in those days. A moment's reflection, and the great names come surging up to the memory—Carlyle and Ruskin, Froude and Macaulay, Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot, Meredith and Thomas Hardy, to say nothing of a host of lesser luminaries—less only by comparison—Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, Huxley and Leslie Stephen and Bagehot and Morley, Austin Dobson and Oscar Wilde. And it is with the latter, rather than with the intellectual giants of his generation, that Stevenson will be ultimately classed. In his own days and shortly after his death, Stevenson undoubtedly suffered at the hands of enthusiastic hero-worshippers, and the resulting reaction was inevitable. His contemporaries were fascinated by the man himself, his romantic life in his distant tropical home and his untimely death. The least scrap of his writing brought before their eyes vivid memories of the tall, thin, restless figure, with its picturesque, unconventional garments and wonderful brown,

flashing eyes ; his wit, vivacity and sudden outbursts of quaint, unexpected humour. ' The irresponsible Lewis,' Henley calls him, \* the friend, the comrade, the *charmeur* . . . I shall ever remember him as that. The impression of his writings disappears : the impression of himself and his talk is ever a possession. . . . For as much as he was primarily a talker, his printed works, like those of others after his kind, are but a sop for posterity—a last dying speech and confession (as it were) to show the world that not for nothing were they held rare fellows in their day.' But now the glamour of his personality has passed away, and a new generation has arisen that knew not Stevenson, to whom his morality seems a little commonplace, his epigrams a trifle obvious, his style slightly mannered and artificial. Stevenson essayed every species of writing, and, as Dr. Johnson remarked of Goldsmith, he touched none of them without adorning it. Yet he never produced any supremely original work. Even had he lived, there is little likelihood that he would have added to his reputation. *Weir of Hermiston* is only a successful return to an earlier manner. The great writer writes because he must. He is constructive, creative : he curbs within the bounds of literary form the teeming product of his imagination. The highest art is unconscious. Stevenson, on the other hand, is deliberately self-conscious. He is an exquisite artificer, a skilled worker in mosaic, rather than a great creative artist. He pours, as some one has said, the somewhat attenuated matter into exquisitely constructed moulds. He makes no secret of this. In his own frank, disarming way he tells us how he acquired his style, with notebook and pencil, playing the 'sedulous ape' to the great masters of prose. But after all, as Henley remarks, his style is so perfectly achieved that the achievement gets obvious, and when achievement gets obvious, is it not by way of becoming uninteresting ?

It is as an essayist that Stevenson will probably live. He was temperamentally unsuited to constructive effort on a large scale, and the essay was peculiarly adapted to his genius." Into it he put the bulk of his most characteristic and finished writing. The essay is defined by Dr.

Johnson as 'a loose sally of the mind; an irregular undigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition,' but it is a studied negligence, an 'admired disorder,' concealing the highest art. Miniature work of this polished kind particularly appealed to Stevenson. Another characteristic of the essay is its personal note. Personality, self-revelation, has been the keynote of the essay from the days of the genial *Sieur de Montaigne* down to those of *Hazlitt* and *Leigh Hunt* and *Charles Lamb*. And it is to this class of writers that Stevenson belongs. He loves to take his reader completely into his confidence. Self-portraiture, a genial egotism, was a passion with him. 'He was of his essence,' to quote *Henley* once more, 'what the French call *'personnel*. He was, that is, incessantly and passionately interested in Stevenson. He could not be in the same room with a mirror but that he must invite its confidences every time he passed it; to him there was nothing obvious in time and eternity, and the smallest of his discoveries, his most trivial apprehensions, were all by way of being revelations, and as revelations must be thrust upon the world; he was never so much in earnest, never so well pleased (this were he happy or wretched), never so irresistible, as when he wrote about himself.' 'Belonging to the race of *Scott* and *Dumas*, of the romantic narrators and creators,' says *Sir Sidney Colvin*, 'Stevenson belongs no less to that of *Montaigne* and the literary egoists.' Without any further materials, it would be possible to reconstruct *R. L. Stevenson* from his *Essays, Memories and Portraits, Across the Plains* and *Virginibus Puerisque*. 'These papers,' he himself says, 'are like milestones on the wayside of my life.' Of no writer can it be said, with the same truth as of *Stevenson*, that 'the style is the man'; from every line he writes, peeps out the whimsical, kindly face of the *Nerli* portrait.

And yet in *Stevenson* there is none of the morbid self-analysis, the sickly introspection, of works like *Rousseau's Confessions*. He does not even, like his friend *Henley*, stop to thank God for his unconquerable soul. Yet few people have laboured in more depressing circumstances.

'For fourteen years,' he writes to George Meredith, 'I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary, and have done my work unflinchingly. I was made for a contest, and the Powers have so willed that my battlefield should be the dingy, inglorious one of the bed and the physic-bottle.' Stevenson's was the truest kind of courage, the kind that comes from conviction and effort. Occasionally, as in *Pulvis et Umbra*, 'the lights are turned a little low'; but they are soon up again. Courage, good humour, patience in the face of adversity, are at the bottom of all Stevenson's teaching. 'Gentleness and Courage, these come before all morality: they are the perfect duties.' 'Help us to perform our duties with laughter and kind faces,' he prays in the Vailima prayers. 'As we dwell,' he writes in the noble passage which closes *Pulvis et Umbra*, 'we living things, in our isle of terror and under the imminent hand of death, God forbid it should be man the erected, the reasoner, the wise in his own eyes—God forbid it should be man that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy: Surely not all in vain.' The shadow of death is over much that he writes, but his spirit remains undaunted. 'When the Greeks made their fine saying,' he says prophetically in *Aes Triplex*, 'that those whom the gods love die young, I cannot help believing they had this sort of death also in their eye. For surely, at whatever age it overtake the man, this is to die young. Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a-tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land.' 'This world appears a brave gymnasium, full of sea-bathing, and horse exercise, and bracing, manly virtues' he tells Henley in the preface to *Virginibus Puerisque*. 'In each and all of these views and situations, there is but one conclusion possible, that

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a man should stop his ears against paralysing terror, and run the race that is set before him with single mind.' 'By all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week. It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending.' 'To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour,' is another fine saying from *El Dorado*. 'There is no cutting of the Gordian knots of life; each must be smilingly unravelled.'

The other article of faith in the Stevensonian creed is Charity. 'We are not damned for doing wrong, but for not doing right; Christ would never hear of negative morality.' 'To be honest, to be kind - to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim condition, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy.' And the conclusion of all his teaching is summed up in the *Christmas Sermon*. 'Life is not designed to minister to a man's vanity. . . . When the time comes that he should go, there need be few illusions left about himself. *Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, jailed much*: surely that may be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed. . . . Give him a march with his old bones; there, out of the glorious sun-coloured earth, out of the day and the dust and the ecstasy—there goes another Faithful Failure!' Stevenson has been called an incurable moralist. And such to a certain extent he is. 'He was fond of preaching, so am I,' he says of his grandfather. 'I would rise from the dead to preach,' he laughingly declares. Yet it is a wholesome, manly, noble creed; there is nothing sanctimonious or priggish about it. Even morality, as such, does not claim the foremost place in it. 'If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong,' is a saying which would have shocked an elder generation

of Stevensons ! Another aspect of Stevenson's character which lends so much charm to his writings is his invincible boyishness. The boyish spirit, the sympathy with the child-mind, so prominent in *Treasure Island* and *The Child's Garden of Verse*, is equally apparent in *Child's Play*, *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured* and *The Lantern-Bearers*. Some one called Addison 'a parson in a tye wig.' The phrase might well be applied to his great successor in the art of essay-writing.

It is impossible to conclude this brief sketch without a further allusion to Stevenson's style. With all its artificiality, it has a rare distinction, an exquisite charm of its own, which will always remain the most prominent feature of Stevenson's work. As he tells us himself, it was not a natural gift : it was no inspiration, but laboriously evolved by imitation, assiduous reading and constant practice. Choice of the essential note and the right word ; rhythm, harmony "in construction and co-ordination of its various parts ; above all, an elaborate and studied simplicity ; these were his avowed aims. No striking outbursts of gorgeous eloquence, such as meet us at every turn in Oscar Wilde or Walter Pater, will be found in Stevenson. But some of his finest passages, for instance, the inimitable conclusions to the essays on *The Lantern-Bearers* or *On Falling in Love*, are a possession for ever, and will, it is safe to prophesy, live as long as the English tongue endures.

*The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man, help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces. Give us to go blithely on our business all this day, bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep.*

*Vailima Prayers*

# SELECTED ESSAYS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## 1

### A COLLEGE MAGAZINE

ALL through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler ; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words ; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use, it was written consciously for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me ; and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself. Description was the principal field of my exercise ; for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also ; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts ; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory.

This was all excellent, no doubt ; so were the diaries I sometimes tried to keep, but always and very speedily

discarded, finding them a school of posturing and melancholy self-deception. And yet this was not the most efficient part of my training. Good though it was, it only taught me (so far as I have learned them at all) the lower and less intellectual elements of the art, the choice of the essential note and the right word : things that to a happier constitution had perhaps come by nature. And regarded as training, it had one grave defect; for it set me no standard of achievement. So that there was perhaps more profit, as there was certainly more effort, *in my secret labours at home*. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful. And always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks which was called *The Vanity of Morals* : it was to have had a second part, *The Vanity of Knowledge* ; and as I had neither morality nor scholarship, the names were apt; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghostlike, from its ashes) no less than three times : first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne. So with my other works : *Cain*, an epic, was (save the mark !) an imitation of *Sordello* : *Robin Hood*, a tale in verse, took an eclectic middle course among the fields of Keats, Chaucer and Morris : in *Monmouth*, a tragedy, I reclined on the bosom of Mr. Swinburne ; in my innumerable gouty-footed lyrics, I followed many masters ; in the first draft of *The King's Pardon*, a tragedy, I was on the trail of no lesser man than John

Webster ; in the second draft of the same piece, with staggering versatility, I had shifted my allegiance to Congreve, and of course conceived my fable in a less serious vein—for it was not Congreve's verse, it was his exquisite prose, that I admired and sought to copy. Even at the age of thirteen I had tried to do justice to the inhabitants of the famous city of Peebles in the style of the *Book of Snobs*. So I might go on for ever, through all my abortive novels, and down to my later plays, of which I think more tenderly, for they were not only conceived at first under the bracing influence of old Dumas, but have met with resurrections : one, strangely bettered by another hand, came on the stage itself and was played by bodily actors ; the other, originally known as *Semiramis : a Tragedy*, I have observed on bookstalls under the *alias* of *Prince Otto*. But enough has been said to show by what arts of impersonation, and in what purely ventriloquial efforts I first saw my words on paper.

That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write ; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was so Keats learned, and there was never a finer temperament for literature than Keats's ; it was so, if we could trace it out, that all men have learned ; and that is why a revival of letters is always accompanied or heralded by a cast back to earlier and fresher models. Perhaps I hear some one cry out : But this is not the way to be original ! It is not ; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality. There can be none more original than Montaigne, neither could any be more unlike Cicero ; yet no craftsman can fail to see how much the one must have tried in his time to imitate the other. Burns is the very type of a prime force in letters : he was of all men the most imitative. Shakespeare himself, the imperial, proceeds directly from a school. It is only from a school that we can expect to have good writers ; it is almost invariably from a school that great writers, these lawless exceptions, issue. Nor is there anything here that should astonish the considerate. Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the

student should have tried all that are possible ; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales ; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it.

And it is the great point of these imitations that there still shines beyond the student's reach his inimitable model. Let him try as he please, he is still sure of failure ; and it is a very old and a very true saying that failure is the only highroad to success. I must have had some disposition to learn ; for I clear-sightedly condemned my own performances. I liked doing them indeed ; but when they were done, I could see they were rubbish. In consequence, I very rarely showed them even to my friends ; and such friends as I chose to be my confidants I must have chosen well, for they had the friendliness to be quite plain with me. 'Padding,' said one. Another wrote : 'I cannot understand why you do lyrics so badly.' No more could I ! Thrice I put myself in the way of a more authoritative rebuff, by sending a paper to a magazine. These were returned ; and I was not surprised nor even pained. If they had not been looked at, as (like all amateurs) I suspected was the case, there was no good in repeating the experiment ; if they had been looked at—well, then I had not yet learned to write, and I must keep on learning and living. Lastly, I had a piece of good fortune which is the occasion of this paper, and by which I was able to see my literature in print, and to measure experimentally how far I stood from the favour of the public.

BOOKS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED ME<sup>1</sup>

THE Editor<sup>2</sup> has somewhat insidiously laid a trap for his correspondents, the question put appearing at first so innocent, truly cutting so deep. It is not, indeed, until after some reconnaissance and review that the writer awakes to find himself engaged upon something in the nature of autobiography, or, perhaps worse, upon a chapter in the life of that little, beautiful brother whom we once all had, and whom we have all lost and mourned, the man we ought to have been, the man we hoped to be. But when word has been passed (even to an editor), it should, if possible, be kept; and if sometimes I am wise and say too little, and sometimes weak and say too much, the blame must lie at the door of the person who entrapped me.

The most influential books, and the truest in their influence, are works of fiction. They do not pin the reader to a dogma, which he must afterwards discover to be inexact; they do not teach him a lesson, which he must afterwards unlearn. They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves, they constrain us to the acquaintance of others; and they show us the web of experience, not as we can see it for ourselves, but with a singular change—that monstrous, consuming *ego* of ours being, for the nonce, struck out. To be so, they must be reasonably true to the human comedy; and any work that is so serves the turn of instruction. But the course of our education is answered

<sup>1</sup> First published in the *British Weekly*, May 13, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Of the *British Weekly*.

## 6 BOOKS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED ME

best by those poems and romances where we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters. Shakespeare has served me best. Few living friends have had upon me an influence so strong for good as Hamlet or Rosalind. The last character, already well beloved in the reading, I had the good fortune to see, I must think, in an impressionable hour, played by Mrs. Scott Siddons. Nothing has ever more moved, more delighted, more refreshed me ; nor has the influence quite passed away. Kent's brief speech over the dying Lear had a great effect upon my mind, and was the burthen of my reflections for long, so profoundly, so touchingly generous did it appear in sense, so overpowering in expression. Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is D'Artagnan—the elderly D'Artagnan of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. I know not a more human soul, nor, in his way, a finer ; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers. Lastly, I must name the *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book that breathes of every beautiful and valuable emotion.

But of works of art little can be said ; their influence is profound and silent, like the influence of nature ; they mould by contact ; we drink them up like water, and are bettered, yet know not how. It is in books more specifically didactic that we can follow out the effect, and distinguish and weigh and compare. A book which has been very influential upon me fell early into my hands, and so may stand first, though I think its influence was only sensible later on, and perhaps still keeps growing, for it is a book not easily outlived ; the *Essais* of Montaigne. That temperate and genial picture of life is a great gift to place in the hands of persons of to-day ; they will find in these smiling pages a magazine of heroism and wisdom, all of an antique strain ; they will have their 'linen decencies' and excited orthodoxies fluttered, and will (if they have any gift of reading) perceive that these have not been fluttered without some excuse and ground of reason ; and (again if they have any gift of reading) they will end by seeing that this old gentleman was in a dozen ways a finer

fellow, and held in a dozen ways a nobler view of life, than they or their contemporaries.

The next book, in order of time, to influence me, was the New Testament, and in particular the Gospel according to St. Matthew. I believe it would startle and move any one if they could make a certain effort of imagination and read it freshly like a book, not droningly and dully like a portion of the Bible. Any one would then be able to see in it those truths which we are all courteously supposed to know and all modestly refrain from applying. But upon this subject it is perhaps better to be silent.

I come next to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a book of singular service, a book which tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and, having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues. But it is, once more, only a book for those who have the gift of reading. I will be very frank—I believe it is so with all good books except, perhaps, fiction. The average man lives, and must live, so wholly in convention, that gunpowder charges of the truth are more apt to discompose than to invigorate his creed. Either he cries out upon blasphemy and indecency, and crouches the closer round that little idol of part-truths and part-conveniences which is the contemporary deity, or he is convinced by what is new, forgets what is old, and becomes truly blasphemous and indecent himself. New truth is only useful to supplement the old ; rough truth is only wanted to expand, not to destroy, our civil and often elegant conventions. He who cannot judge had better stick to fiction and the daily papers. There he will get little harm, and, in the first at least, some good.

Close upon the back of my discovery of Whitman, I came under the influence of Herbert Spencer. No more persuasive rabbi exists, and few better. How much of his vast structure will bear the touch of time, how much is clay and how much brass, it were too curious to inquire. But his words, if dry, are always manly and honest; there dwells in his pages a spirit of highly abstract joy, plucked

naked like an algebraic symbol but still joyful: and the reader will find there a *caput mortuum* of piety, with little indeed of its loveliness, but with most of its essentials; and these two qualities make him a wholesome, as his intellectual vigour makes him a bracing, writer. I should be much of a hound if I lost my gratitude to Herbert Spencer.

*Goethe's Life*, by Lewes, had a great importance for me when it first fell into my hands—a strange instance of the partiality of man's good and man's evil. I know no one whom I less admire than Goethe; he seems a very epitome of the sins of genius, breaking open the doors of private life, and wantonly wounding friends, in that crowning offence of *Werther*, and in his own character a mere pen-and-ink Napoleon, conscious of the rights and duties of superior talents as a Spanish inquisitor was conscious of the rights and duties of his office. And yet in his fine devotion to his art, in his honest and serviceable friendship for Schiller, what lessons are contained! Biography, usually so false to its office, does here for once perform for us some of the work of fiction, reminding us, that is, of the truly mingled tissue of man's nature, and how huge faults and shining virtues cohabit and persevere in the same character. History serves us well to this effect, but in the originals, not in the pages of the popular epitomizer, who is bound, by the very nature of his task, to make us feel the difference of epochs instead of the essential identity of man, and even in the originals only to those who can recognize their own human virtues and defects in strange forms, often inverted and under strange names, often interchanged. Martial is a poet of no good repute, and it gives a man new thoughts to read his works dispassionately, and find in this unseemly jester's serious passages the image of a kind, wise, and self-respecting gentleman. It is customary, I suppose, in reading Martial, to leave out these pleasant verses; I never heard of them, at least, until I found them for myself; and this partiality is one among a thousand things that help to build up our distorted and hysterical conception of the great Roman Empire.

This brings us by a natural transition to a very noble book—the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. The dispassionate gravity, the noble forgetfulness of self, the tenderness of others, that are there expressed and were practised on so great a scale in the life of its writer, make this book a book quite by itself. No one can read it and not be moved. Yet it scarcely or rarely appeals to the feelings—those very mobile, those not very trusty parts of man. Its address lies further back : its lesson comes more deeply home ; when you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself ; it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes and made a noble friend ; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue.

Wordsworth should perhaps come next. Every one has been influenced by Wordsworth, and it is hard to tell precisely how. A certain innocence, a rugged austerity of joy, a sight of the stars, ' the silence that is in the lonely hills,' something of the cold thrill of dawn, cling to his work and give it a particular address to what is best in us. I do not know that you learn a lesson ; you need not—Mill did not—agree with any one of his beliefs ; and yet the spell is cast. Such are the best teachers ; a dogma learned is only a new error—the old one was perhaps as good ; but a spirit communicated is a perpetual possession. These best teachers climb beyond teaching to the plane of art ; it is themselves, and what is best in themselves, that they communicate.

I should never forgive myself if I forget *The Egoist*. It is art, if you like, but it belongs purely to didactic art, and from all the novels I have read (and I have read thousands) stands in a place by itself. Here is a Nathan for the modern David ; here is a book to send the blood into men's faces. Satire, the angry picture of human faults, is not great art, we can all be angry with our neighbour, what we want is to be shown, not his defects, of which we are too conscious, but his merits, to which we are too blind. And *The Egoist* is a satire, so much must be allowed ; but it is a satire of a singular quality, which tells you nothing of that obvious mote, which is engaged

## 10 BOOKS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED ME

from first to last with that invisible beam. It is yourself that is hunted down; these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision. A young friend of Mr. Meredith's (as I have the story) came to him in an agony. 'This is too bad of you,' he cried. 'Willoughby is me!' 'No, my dear fellow,' said the author; 'he is all of us.' I have read *The Egoist* five or six times myself, and I mean to read it again; for I am like the young friend of the anecdote—I think Willoughby an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself.

I suppose, when I am done, I shall find that I have forgotten much that was most influential, as I see already I have forgotten Thoreau, and Hazlitt, whose paper 'On the Spirit of Obligations' was a turning-point in my life, and Penn, whose little book of aphorisms had a brief but strong effect on me, and Mitford's *Tales of Old Japan*, wherein I learned for the first time the proper attitude of any rational man to his country's laws—a secret found, and kept, in the Asiatic islands. That I should commemorate all is more than I can hope or the Editor could ask. It will be more to the point, after having said so much upon improving books, to say a word or two about the improvable reader. The gift of reading, as I have called it, is not very common, nor very generally understood. It consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual endowment—a free grace, I find I must call it—by which a man rises to understand that he is not punctually right, nor those from whom he differs absolutely wrong. He may hold dogmas; he may hold them passionately; and he may know that others hold them but coldly, or hold them differently, or hold them not at all. Well, if he has the gift of reading, these others will be full of meat for him. They will see the other side of propositions and the other side of virtues. He need not change his dogma for that, but he may change his reading of that dogma, and he must supplement and correct his deductions from it. A human truth, which is always very much a lie, hides as much of life as it displays. It is men who hold another truth, or as it seems to us, perhaps, a dangerous He, who

can extend our restricted field of knowledge and rouse our drowsy consciences, something that seems quite new, or that seems insolently false or very dangerous, is the test of a reader. If he tries to see what it means, what truth excuses it, he has the gift, and let him read. If he is merely hurt, or offended, or exclaims upon his author's folly, he had better take to the daily papers ; he will never be a reader.

And here, with the aptest illustrative force, after I have laid down my part-truth, I must step in with its opposite. For, after all, we are vessels of a very limited content. Not all men can read all books ; it is only in a chosen few that any man will find his appointed food ; and the fittest lessons are the most palatable, and make themselves welcome to the mind. A writer learns this early, and it is his chief support; he goes on unafraid, laying down the law ; and he is sure at heart that most of what he says is demonstrably false, and much of a mingled strain, and some hurtful, and very little good for service ; but he is sure besides that, when his words fall into the hands of any genuine reader, they will be weighed and winnowed, and only that which suits will be assimilated ; and when they fall into the hands of one who cannot intelligently read, they come there quite silent and inarticulate, falling upon deaf ears, and his secret is kept as if he had not written.

## ON FALLING IN LOVE

'Lord, what fools these mortals be ! \*

THERE is only one event in life which really astonishes a man and startles him out of his prepared opinions. Everything else befalls him very much as he expected. Event succeeds to event, with an agreeable variety indeed, but with little that is either startling or intense ; they form together no more than a sort of background or running accompaniment to the man's own reflections ; and he falls naturally into a cool, curious, and smiling habit of mind, and builds himself up in a conception of life which expects to-morrow to be after the pattern of to-day and yesterday. He may be accustomed to the vagaries of his friends and acquaintances under the influence of love. He may sometimes look forward to it for himself with an incomprehensible expectation. But it is a subject in which neither intuition nor the behaviour of others will help the philosopher to the truth. There is probably nothing rightly thought or rightly written on this matter of love that is not a piece of the person's experience. I remember an anecdote of a well-known French theorist, who was debating a point eagerly in his *cénacle*. It was objected against him that he had never experienced love. Whereupon he arose, left the society, and made it a point not to return to it until he considered that he had supplied the defect. 'Now,' he remarked, on entering, 'now I am in a position to continue the discussion.' Perhaps he had not penetrated very deeply into the subject after all ; but the story indicates right thinking, and may serve as an apologue to readers of this essay.

When at last the scales fall from his eyes, it is not without something of the nature of dismay that the man finds himself in such changed conditions. He has to deal with commanding emotions instead of the easy dislikes and preferences in which he has hitherto passed his days ; and he recognizes capabilities for pain and pleasure of which he had not yet suspected the existence. Falling in love is the one illogical adventure, the one thing of which we are tempted to think as supernatural, in our trite and reasonable world. The effect is out of all proportion with the cause. Two persons, neither of them, it may be, very amiable or very beautiful, meet, speak a little, and look a little into each other's eyes. That has been done a dozen or so of times in the experience of either with no great result. But on this occasion all is different. They fall at once into that state in which another person becomes to us the very gist and centre-point of God's creation, and demolishes our laborious theories with a smile ; in which our ideas are so bound up with the one master-thought that even the trivial cares of our own person become so many acts of devotion, and the love of life itself is translated into a wish to remain in the same world with so precious and desirable a fellow-creature. And all the while their acquaintances look on in stupor, and ask each other, with almost passionate emphasis, what so-and-so can see in that woman, or such-an-one in that man ? I am sure, gentlemen, I cannot tell you. For my part, I cannot think what the women mean. It might be very well, if the Apollo Belvedere should suddenly glow all over into life, and step forward from the pedestal with that godlike air of his. But of the misbegotten changelings who call themselves men, and prate intolerably over dinner-table, I never saw one who seemed worthy to inspire love—ho, nor read of any, except Leonardo da Vinci, and perhaps Goethe in his youth. About women I entertain a somewhat different opinion ; but there, I have the misfortune to be a man.

There are many matters in which you may waylay Destiny, and bid him stand and deliver. Hard work, high thinking, adventurous excitement, and a great deal

more that forms a part of this or the other person's spiritual bill of fare, are within the reach of almost any one who can dare a little and be patient. But it is by no means in the way of every one to fall in love. You know the difficulty Shakespeare was put into when Queen Elizabeth asked him to show Falstaff in love. I do not believe that Henry Fielding was ever in love. Scott, if it were not for a passage or two in *Rob Roy*, would give me very much the same effect. These are great names and (what is more to the purpose) strong, healthy, high-strung, and generous natures, of whom the reverse might have been expected. As for the innumerable army of anaemic and tailorish persons who occupy the face of this planet with so much propriety, it is palpably absurd to imagine them in any such situation as a love-affair. A wet rag goes safely by the fire ; and if a man is blind, he cannot expect to be much impressed by romantic scenery. Apart from all this many lovable people miss each other in the world, or meet under some unfavourable star. There is the nice and critical moment of declaration to be got over. From timidity or lack of opportunity a good half of possible love cases never get so far, and at least another quarter do there cease and determine. A very adroit person, to be sure, manages to prepare the way and out with his declaration in the nick of time. And then there is a fine solid sort of man, who goes on from snub to snub ; and, if he has to declare forty times, will continue imperturbably declaring amid the astonished consideration of men and angels, until he has a favourable answer. I dare say, if one were a woman, one would like to marry a man who was capable of doing this, but not quite one who had done so. It is just a little bit abject, and somehow just a little bit gross ; and marriages, in which one of the parties has been thus battered into consent, scarcely form agreeable subjects for meditation. Love should run out to meet love with open arms. Indeed the ideal story is that of two people who go into love step by step, with a fluttered consciousness, like a pair of children venturing together into a dark room. From the first moment when they see each other, with a pang of curiosity, through stage

after stage of growing pleasure and embarrassment, they can read the expression of their own trouble in each other's eyes. There is here no declaration properly so called ; the feeling is so plainly shared that, as soon as the man knows what it is in his own heart, he is sure of what it is in the woman's.

This simple accident of falling in love is as beneficial as it is astonishing. It arrests the petrifying influence of years, disproves cold-blooded and cynical conclusions, and awakens dormant sensibilities. Hitherto the man had found it a good policy to disbelieve the existence of any enjoyment which was out of his reach ; and thus he turned his back upon the strong sunny parts of nature, and accustomed himself to look exclusively on what was common and dull. He accepted a prose ideal, let himself go blind of many sympathies by disuse ; and if he were young and witty, or beautiful, wilfully forwent these advantages. He joined himself to the following of what, in the old mythology of love, was prettily called *nonchaloir* ; and in an odd mixture of feelings, a fling of self-respect, a preference for selfish liberty, and a great dash of that fear with which honest people regard serious interests, kept himself back from the straightforward course of life among certain selected activities. And now, all of a sudden, he is unhorsed, like St. Paul, from his infidel affectation. His heart, which had been ticking accurate seconds for the last year, gives a bound and begins to beat high and irregularly in his breast. It seems as if he had never heard or felt or seen until that moment ; and, by the report of his memory, he must have lived his past life between sleep and waking, or with the pre-occupied attention of a brown study. He is practically incommoded by the generosity of his feelings, smiles much when he is alone, and develops a habit of looking rather blankly upon the moon and stars. But it is not at all within the province of a prose essayist to give a picture of this hyperbolic frame of mind ; and the thing has been done already, and that to admiration. In *Adelaide*, in Tennyson's *Maud*, and in some of Heine's songs you get the absolute expression of this midsummer spirit. Romeo and Juliet

were very much in love ; although they tell me some German critics are of a different opinion, probably the same who would have us think Mercutio a dull fellow. Poor Antony was in love, and no mistake. That lay figure Marius, in *Les Misérables*, is also a genuine case in his own way, and worth observation. A good many of George Sand's people are thoroughly in love ; and so are a good many of George Meredith's. Altogether, there is plenty to read on the subject. If the root of the matter be in him, and if he has the requisite chords to set in vibration, a young man may occasionally enter, with the key of art, into that land of Beulah which is upon the borders of Heaven and within sight of the City of Love. There let him sit awhile to hatch delightful hopes and perilous illusions.

One thing that accompanies the passion in its first blush is certainly difficult to explain. It comes (I do not quite see how) that from having a very supreme sense of pleasure in all parts of life—in lying down to sleep, in waking, in motion, in breathing, in continuing to be—the lover begins to regard his happiness as beneficial for the rest of the world and highly meritorious in him. Our race has never been able contentedly to suppose that the noise of its wars, conducted by a few young gentlemen in a corner of an inconsiderable star, does not re-echo among the courts of Heaven with quite a formidable effect. In much the same taste, when people find a great to-do in their own breasts, they imagine it must have some influence in their neighbourhood. The presence of the two lovers is so enchanting to each other that it seems as if it must be the best thing possible for everybody else. They are half inclined to fancy it is because of them and their love that the sky is blue and the sun shines. And certainly the weather is usually fine while people are courting. . . . In point of fact, although the happy man feels very kindly towards others of his own sex, there is apt to be something too much of the magnifico in his demeanour. If people grow presuming and self-important over such matters as a dukedom or the Holy See, they will scarcely support the dizziest elevation in life without some suspicion of a strut;

and the dizziest elevation is to love and be loved in return. Consequently, accepted lovers are a trifle condescending in their address to other men. An overweening sense of the passion and importance of life hardly conduces to simplicity of manner. To women, they feel very nobly, very purely, and very generously, as if they were so many Joan-of-Arcs ; but this does not come out in their behaviour ; and they treat them to Grandisonian airs marked with a suspicion of fatuity. I am not quite certain that women do not like this sort of thing ; but really, after having bemused myself over *Daniel Deronda*, I have given up trying to understand what they like.

If it did nothing else, this sublime and ridiculous superstition, that the pleasure of the pair is somehow blessed to others, and everybody is made happier in their happiness, would serve at least to keep love generous and great-hearted. Nor is it quite a baseless superstition after all. Other lovers are hugely interested. They strike the nicest balance between pity and approval, when they see people aping the greatness of their own sentiments. It is an understood thing in the play that, while the young gentlefolk are courting on the terrace, a rough flirtation is being carried on, and a light, trivial sort of love is growing up, between the footman and the singing chambermaid. As people are generally cast for the leading parts in their own imaginations, the reader can apply the parallel to real life without much chance of going wrong. In short, they are quite sure this other love-affair is not so deep-seated as their own, but they like dearly to see it going forward. And love, considered as a spectacle, must have attractions for many who are not of the confraternity. The sentimental old maid is a common-place of the novelists ; and he must be rather a poor sort of human being, to be sure, who can look on at this pretty madness without indulgence and sympathy. For nature commends itself to people with a most insinuating art ; the busiest is now and again arrested by a great sunset ; and you may be as pacific or as cold-blooded as you will, but you cannot help some emotion when you read of well-disputed battles, or meet a pair of lovers in the lane.

Certainly, whatever it may be with regard to the world at large, this idea of beneficent pleasure is true as between the sweethearts. To do good and communicate is the lover's grand intention. It is the happiness of the other that makes his own most intense gratification. It is not possible to disentangle the different emotions, the pride, humility, pity, and passion, which are excited by a look of happy love or an unexpected caress. To make one's self beautiful, to dress the hair, to excel in talk, to do anything and all things that puff out the character and attributes and make them imposing in the eyes of others, is not only to magnify one's self, but to offer the most delicate homage at the same time. And it is in this latter intention that they are done by lovers ; for the essence of love is kindness : kindness, so to speak, run mad and become importunate and violent. Vanity in a merely personal sense exists no longer. The lover takes a perilous pleasure in privately displaying his weak points and having them, one after another, accepted and condoned. He wishes to be assured that he is not loved for this or that good quality, but for himself, or something as like himself as he can contrive to set forward. For, although it may have been a very difficult thing to paint the marriage of Cana, or write the fourth act of *Antony and Cleopatra*, there is a more difficult piece of art before every one in this world who cares to set about explaining his own character to others. Words and acts are easily wrenched from their true significance ; and they are all the language we have to come and go upon. A pitiful job we make of it, as a rule. For better or worse, people mistake our meaning and take our emotions at a wrong valuation. And generally, we rest pretty content with our failures ; we are content to be misapprehended by crackling flirts ; but, when once a man is moonstruck with this affection of love, he makes it a point of honour to clear such dubieties away. He cannot have the Best of her Sex misled upon a point of this importance ; and his pride revolts at being loved in a mistake.

He discovers a great reluctance to return on former periods of his life. To all that has not been shared with

her, rights and duties, bygone fortunes and dispositions, he can look back only by a difficult and repugnant effort of the will. That he should have wasted some years in ignorance of what alone was really important, that he may have entertained the thought of other women with any show of complacency, is a burthen almost too heavy for his self-respect. But it is the thought of another past that rankles in his spirit like a poisoned wound. That he himself made a fashion of being alive in the bald, beggarly days before a certain meeting, is deplorable enough in all good conscience. But that She should have permitted herself the same liberty seems inconsistent with a Divine providence.

A great many people run down jealousy, on the score that it is an artificial feeling, as well as practically inconvenient. This is scarcely fair ; for the feeling on which it merely attends, like an ill-humoured courtier, is itself artificial in exactly the same sense and to the same degree. I suppose what is meant by that objection is that jealousy has not always been a character of man ; formed no part of that very modest kit of sentiments with which he is supposed to have begun the world ; but waited to make its appearance in better days and among richer natures. And this is equally true of love, and friendship, and love of country, and delight in what they call the beauties of nature, and most other things worth having. Love, in particular, will not endure any historical scrutiny ; to all who have fallen across it, it is one of the most incontestable facts in the world ; but if you begin to ask what it was in other periods and countries, in Greece for instance, the strangest doubts begin to spring up, and everything seems so vague and changing that a dream is logical in comparison. Jealousy, at any rate, is one of the consequences of love ; you may like it or not, at pleasure ; but there it is.

It is not exactly jealousy, however, that we feel when we reflect on the past of those we love. A bundle of letters found after years of happy union creates no sense of insecurity in the present ; and yet it will pain a man sharply. The two people entertain no vulgar doubt of each other ; but this pre-existence of both occurs to the

mind as something indelicate. To be altogether right, they should have had twin birth together, at the same moment with the feeling that unites them. Then indeed it would be simple and perfect and without reserve or afterthought. Then they would understand each other with a fullness impossible otherwise. There would be no barrier between them of associations that cannot be imparted. They would be led into none of those comparisons that send the blood back to the heart. And they would know that there had been no time lost, and they had been together as much as was possible. For besides terror for the separation that must follow some time or other in the future, men feel anger, and something like remorse, when they think of that other separation which endured until they met. Some one has written that love makes people believe in immortality, because there seems not to be room enough in life for so great a tenderness, and it is inconceivable that the most masterful of our emotions should have no more than the spare moments of a few years. Indeed, it seems strange ; but if we call to mind analogies, we can hardly regard it as impossible.

'The blind bow-boy,' who smiles upon us from the end of terraces in old Dutch gardens, laughingly hails his bird-bolts among a fleeting generation. But for as fast as ever he shoots, the game dissolves and disappears into eternity from under his falling arrows ; this one is gone ere he is struck ; the other has but time to make one gesture and give one passionate cry ; and they are all the things of a moment. When the generation is gone, when the play is over, when the thirty years' panorama has been withdrawn in tatters from the stage of the world, we may ask what has become of these great, weighty, and undying loves, and the sweethearts who despised mortal conditions in a fine credulity ; and they can only show us a few songs in a bygone taste, a few actions worth remembering, and a few children who have retained some happy stamp from the disposition of their parents.

#### IV

### AES TRIPLEX

THE changes wrought by death are in themselves so sharp and final, and so terrible and melancholy in their consequences, that the thing stands alone in man's experience, and has no parallel upon earth. It outdoes all other accidents because it is the last of them. Sometimes it leaps suddenly upon its victims, like a Thug ; sometimes it lays a regular siege and creeps upon their citadel during a score of years. And when the business is done, there is sore havoc made in other people's lives, and a pin knocked out by which many subsidiary friendships hung together. There are empty chairs, solitary walks, and single beds at night. Again, in taking away our friends, death does not take them away utterly, but leaves behind a mocking, tragical, and soon intolerable residue, which must be hurriedly concealed. Hence a whole chapter of sights and customs striking to the mind, from the pyramids of Egypt to the gibbets and dule trees of mediaeval Europe. The poorest persons have a bit of pageant going towards the tomb ; memorial stones are set up over the least memorable ; and, in order to preserve some show of respect for what remains of our old loves and friendships, we must accompany it with much grimly ludicrous ceremonial, and the hired undertaker parades before the door. All this, and much more of the same sort, accompanied by the eloquence of poets, has gone a great way to put humanity in error ; nay, in many philosophies the error has been embodied and laid down with every circumstance of logic ; although in real life the bustle and swiftness, in leaving people little time to think, have not left them time enough to go dangerously wrong in practice.

As a matter of fact, although few things are spoken of with more fearful whisperings than this prospect of death, few have less influence on conduct under healthy circumstances. We have all heard of cities in South America built upon the side of fiery mountains, and how, even in this tremendous neighbourhood, the inhabitants are not a jot more impressed by the solemnity of mortal conditions than if they were delving gardens in the greenest corner of England. There are serenades and suppers and much gallantry among the myrtles overhead ; and meanwhile the foundation shudders underfoot, the bowels of the mountain growl, and at any moment living ruin may leap sky-high into the moonlight, and tumble man and his merry-making in the dust. In the eyes of very young people, and very dull old ones, there is something indescribably reckless and desperate in such a picture. It seems not credible that respectable married people, with umbrellas, should find appetite for a bit of supper within quite a long distance of a fiery mountain ; ordinary life begins to smell of high-handed debauch when it is carried on so close to a catastrophe, and even cheese and salad, it seems, could hardly be relished in such circumstances without something like a defiance of the Creator. It should be a place for nobody but hermits dwelling in prayer and maceration, or mere born-devils drowning care in a perpetual carouse.

And yet, when one comes to think upon it calmly, the situation of these South American citizens forms only a very pale figure for the state of ordinary mankind. This world itself, travelling blindly and swiftly in overcrowded space, among a million other worlds travelling blindly and swiftly in contrary directions, may very well come by a knock that would set it into explosion like a penny squib. And what, pathologically looked at, is the human body with all its organs, but a mere bagful of petards ? The least of these is as dangerous to the whole economy as the ship's powder-magazine to the ship ; and with every breath we breathe, and every meal we eat, we are putting one or more of them in peril. If we clung as devotedly as some philosophers pretend we do to the abstract idea

of life, or were, half as frightened as they make out we are, for the subversive accident that ends it all, the trumpets might sound by the hour and no one would follow them into battle—the blue-peter might fly at the truck, but who would climb into a sea-going ship? Think (if these philosophers were right) with what a preparation of spirit we should affront the daily peril of the dinner-table, a deadlier spot than any battlefield in history, where the far greater proportion of our ancestors have miserably left their bones! What woman would ever be lured into marriage, so much more dangerous than the wildest sea? And what would it be to grow old? For, after a certain distance, every step we take in life we find the ice growing thinner below our feet, and all around us and behind us we see our contemporaries going through. By the time a man gets well into the seventies, his continued existence is a mere miracle, and when he lays his old bones in bed for the night, there is an overwhelming probability that he will never see the day. Do the old men mind it, as a matter of fact? Why, no. They were never merrier; they have their grog at night, and tell the raciest stories; they hear of the death of people about their own age, or even younger, not as if it was a grisly warning, but with a simple, childlike pleasure at having outlived some one else; and when a draught might puff them out like a guttering candle, or a bit of a stumble shatter them like so much glass, their old hearts keep sound and unaffrighted, and they go on bubbling with laughter, through years of man's age compared to which the valley at Balaklava was as safe and peaceful as a village cricket-green on Sunday. It may fairly be questioned (if we look to the peril only) whether it was a much more daring feat for Curtius to plunge into the gulf than for any old gentleman of ninety to doff his clothes and clamber into bed.

Indeed, it is a memorable subject for consideration, with what unconcern and gaiety mankind pricks along the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The whole way is one wilderness of snares, and the end of it, for those who fear the last pinch, is irrevocable ruin. And yet we go spinning

through it all, like a party for the Derby. Perhaps the reader remembers one of the humorous devices of the deified Caligula ; how he encouraged a vast concourse of holiday-makers on to his bridge over Baia3 bay ; and, when they were in the height of their enjoyment, turned loose the Praetorian guards among the company, and had them tossed into the sea. This is no bad miniature of the dealings of nature with the transitory race of man. Only, what a chequered picnic we have of it, even while it lasts, and into what great waters, not to be crossed by any swimmer, God's pale Praetorian throws us over in the end !

We live the time that a match flickers, we pop the cork of a ginger-beer bottle, and the earthquake swallows us on the instant. Is it not odd, is it not incongruous, is it not, in the highest sense of human speech, incredible that we should think so highly of the ginger-beer, and regard so little the devouring earthquake ? The love of Life and the fear of Death are two famous phrases that grow harder to understand the more we think about them. It is a well-known fact that an immense proportion of boat accidents would never happen if people held the sheet in their hands instead of making it fast, and yet, unless it be some martinet of a professional mariner or some landsman with shattered nerves, every one of God's creatures makes it fast. A strange instance of man's unconcern and brazen boldness in the face of death !

We confound ourselves with metaphysical phrases which we import into daily talk with noble inappropriateness. We have no idea of what death is, apart from its circumstances and some of its consequences to others ; and although we have some experience of living, there is not a man on earth who has flown so high into abstraction as to have any practical guess at the meaning of the word *life*. All literature, from Job and Omar Khayam to Thomas Carlyle or Walt Whitman, is but an attempt to look upon the human state with such largeness of view as shall enable us to rise from the consideration of living to the definition of life. And our sages give us about the best satisfaction in their power when they say that it is a vapour, or a show, or made out of the same stuff with

dreams. Philosophy, in its more rigid sense, has been at the same work for ages ; and after a myriad bald heads have wagged over the problem, and piles of words have been heaped one upon another into dry and cloudy volumes without end, philosophy has the honour of laying before us, with modest pride, her contribution towards the subject that life is a Permanent Possibility of Sensation. Truly a fine result! A man may very well love beef, or hunting, or a woman : but surely, surely, not a Permanent Possibility of Sensation ! He may be afraid of a precipice, or a dentist, or a large enemy with a chub, or even an undertaker's man ; but not certainly of abstract death. We may trick with the word life in its dozen senses until we are weary of tricking ; we may argue in terms of all the philosophies on earth, but one fact remains true throughout—that we do not love life, in the sense that we are greatly preoccupied about its conservation ; that we do not, properly speaking, love life at all, but living. Into the views of the least careful there will enter some degree of providence ; no man's eyes are fixed entirely on the passing hour ; but although we have some anticipation of good health, good weather, wine, active employment, love, and self-approval, the sum of these anticipations does not amount to anything like a general view of life's possibilities and issues ; nor are those who cherish them most vividly, at all the most scrupulous of their personal safety. To be deeply interested in the accidents of our existence, to enjoy keenly the mixed texture of human experience, rather leads a man to disregard precautions, and risk his neck against a straw. For surely the love of living is stronger in an Alpine climber roping over a peril, or a hunter riding merrily at a stiff fence, than in a creature who lives upon a diet and walks a measured distance in the interest of his constitution.

'There is a great deal of very vile nonsense talked upon both sides of the matter : tearing divines reducing life to the dimensions of a mere funeral procession, so short as to be hardly decent; and melancholy unbelievers yearning for the tomb as if it were a world too far away. Both sides must feel a little ashamed of their performances now

and again when they draw in their chairs to dinner. Indeed, a good meal and a bottle of wine is an answer to most standard works upon the question. When a man's heart warms to his viands, he forgets a great deal of sophistry, and soars into a rosy zone of contemplation. Death may be knocking at the door, like the Commander's statue ; we have something else in hand, thank God, and let him knock. Passing bells are ringing all the world over. All the world over, and every hour, some one is parting company with all his aches and ecstasies. For us also the trap is laid. But we are so fond of life that we have no leisure to entertain the terror of death. It is a honeymoon with us all through, and none of the longest. Small blame to us if we give our whole hearts to this glowing bride of ours, to the appetites, to honour, to the hungry curiosity of the mind, to the pleasure of the eyes in nature, and the pride of our own nimble bodies.

We all of us appreciate the sensations ; but, as for caring about the Permanence of the Possibility, a man's head is generally very bald, and his senses very dull, before he comes to that. Whether we regard life as a lane leading to a dead wall—a mere bag's end, as the French say—or whether we think of it as a vestibule or gymnasium, where we wait our turn and prepare our faculties for some more noble destiny ; whether we thunder in a pulpit, or pule in little atheistic poetry-books, about its vanity and brevity : whether we look justly for years of health and vigour, or are about to mount into a bath-chair, as a step towards the hearse ; in each and all of these views and situations there is but one conclusion possible : that a man should stop his ears against paralysing terror, and run the race that is set before him with a single mind. No one surely could have recoiled with more heartache and terror from the thought of death than our respected lexicographer ; and yet we know how little it affected his conduct, how wisely and boldly he walked, and in what a fresh and lively vein he spoke of life. Already an old man, he ventured on his Highland tour ; and his heart, bound with triple brass, did not recoil before twenty-seven individual cups of tea. As courage and intelligence are

the two qualities best worth a good man's cultivation, so it is the first part of intelligence to recognize our precarious estate in life, and the first part of courage to be not at all abashed before the fact. A frank and somewhat headlong carriage, not looking too anxiously before, not dallying in maudlin regret over the past, stamps the man who is well armoured for this world.

And not only well armoured for himself, but a good friend and a good citizen to boot. We do not go to cowards for tender dealing ; there is nothing so cruel as panic ; the man who has least fear for his own carcase, has most time to consider others. That eminent chemist who took his walks abroad in tin shoes, and subsisted wholly upon tepid milk, had all his work cut out for him in considerable dealings with his own digestion. So soon as prudence has begun to grow up in the brain, like a dismal fungus, it finds its first expression in a paralysis of generous acts. The victim begins to shrink spiritually ; he develops a fancy for parlours with a regulated temperature, and takes morality on the principle of tin shoes and tepid milk. The care of one important body or soul becomes so engrossing, that all the noises of the outer world begin to come thin and faint into the parlour with the regulated temperature ; and the tin shoes go equably forward over blood and rain. To be otherwise is to ossify, and the scruple-monger ends by standing stockstill. Now the man who has his heart on his sleeve, and a good whirling weathercock of a brain, who reckons his life as a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded, makes a very different acquaintance of the world, keeps all his pulses going true and fast, and gathers impetus as he runs, if he be running towards anything better than wildfire, he may shoot up and become a constellation in the end. Lord look after his health, Lord have a care for his soul, says he ; and he has at the key of the position, and swashes through incongruity and peril towards his aim. Death is on all sides of him with pointed batteries as he is on all sides of all of us, unfortunate surprises gird him round, mim-mouthed friends and relations hold up their hands in quite a little elegiacal synod about his path and what

cares he for all this ? Being a true lover of living, a fellow with something pushing and spontaneous in his inside, he must, like any other soldier, in any other stirring, deadly warfare, push on at his best pace until he touch the goal. ' A peerage or Westminster Abbey ! ' cried Nelson in his bright, boyish, heroic manner. These are great incentives ; nor for any of these, but for the plain satisfaction of living, of being about their business in some sort or other, do the brave, serviceable men of every nation tread down the nettle danger, and pass flyingly over all the stumbling-blocks of prudence. Think of the heroism of Johnson, think of that superb indifference to mortal limitation that set him upon his dictionary and carried him through triumphantly until the end ! Who, if he were wisely considerate of things at large, would ever embark upon any work much more considerable than a halfpenny postcard ? Who would project a serial novel, after Thackeray and Dickens had each fallen in mid-course ? Who would find heart enough to begin to live, if he dallied with the consideration of death ?

And after all, what sorry and pitiful quibbling all this is ! To forego all the issues of living in a parlour with a regulated temperature—as if it were not to die a hundred times over, and for ten years at a stretch ! As if it were not to die in one's own lifetime, and without even the sad immunities of death ! As if it were not to die, and yet be the patient spectators of our own pitiable change ! The Permanent Possibility is preserved, but the sensations carefully held at arm's length, as if one kept a photographic plate in a dark chamber. It is better to lose health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it than to die daily in the sick-room. By all means begin your folio ; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week. It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending. All who have meant good work with their whole hearts, have done good work, although they

may die before they have the time to sign it. Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the tradition of mankind. And even if death catch people, like an open pitfall, and in mid-career, laying out vast projects, and planning monstrous foundations, flushed with hope, and their mouths full of boastful language, they should be at once tripped up and silenced ; is there not something brave and spirited in such a termination ? and does not life go down with a better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas ? When the Greeks made their fine saying that those whom the gods love die young, I cannot help believing they had this sort of death also in their eye. For surely, at whatever age it overtake the man, this is to die young. Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land.

## CHILD'S PLAY

THE regret we have for our childhood is not wholly justifiable ; so much a man may lay down without fear of public ribaldry ; for although we shake our heads over the change, we are not unconscious of the manifold advantages of our new state. What we lose in generous impulse, we more than gain in the habit of generously watching others ; and the capacity to enjoy Shakespeare may balance a lost aptitude for playing at soldiers. Terror is gone out of our lives, moreover ; we no longer see the devil in the bed-curtains nor lie awake to listen to the wind. We go to school no more ; and if we have only exchanged one drudgery for another (which is by no means sure), we are set free for ever from the daily fear of chastisement. And yet a great change has overtaken us ; and although we do not enjoy ourselves less, at least we take our pleasure differently. We need pickles nowadays to make Wednesday's cold mutton please our Friday's appetite ; and I can remember the time when to call it red venison, and tell myself a hunter's story, would have made it more palatable than the best of sauces. To the grown person cold mutton is cold mutton all the world over ; not all the mythology ever invented by man will make it better or worse to him ; the broad fact, the clamant reality, of the mutton carries away before it such seductive figments. But for the child it is still possible to weave an enchantment over eatables ; and if he has but read of a dish in a story-book, it will be heavenly manna to him for a week.

If a grown man does not like eating and drinking and exercise, if he is not something positive in his tastes, it means he has a feeble body, and should have some medi-

cine ; but children may be pure spirits, if they will, and take their enjoyment in a world of moonshine. Sensation does not count for so much in our first years as afterwards ; something of the swaddling numbness of infancy clings about us ; we see and touch and hear through a sort of golden mist. Children, for instance, are able enough to see, but they have no great faculty for looking ; they do not use their eyes for the pleasure of using them, but for by-ends of their own ; and the things I call to mind seeing most vividly, were not beautiful in themselves, but merely interesting or enviable to me as I thought they might be turned to practical account in play. Nor is the sense of touch so clean and poignant in children as it is in a man. If you will turn over your old memories, I think the sensations of this sort you remember will be somewhat vague, and come to not much more than a blunt, general sense of heat on summer days, or a blunt, general sense of well-being in bed. And here, of course, you will understand pleasurable sensations ; for overmastering pain—the most deadly and tragical element in life, and the true commander of man's soul and body—alas ! pain has its own way with all of us ; it breaks in, a rude visitant, upon the fairy garden where the child wanders in a dream, no less surely than it rules upon the field of battle or sends the immortal war-god whimpering to his father ; and innocence, no more than philosophy, can protect us from this sting. As for taste, when we bear in mind the excesses of unmitigated sugar which delight a youthful palate, ' it is surely no very cynical asperity ' to think taste a character of the maturer growth. Smell and hearing are perhaps more developed ; I remember many scents, many voices, and a great deal of spring singing in the woods. But hearing is capable of vast improvement as a means of pleasure ; and there is all the world between gaping wonderment at the jargon of birds, and the emotion with which a man listens to articulate music.

At the same time, and step by step with this increase in the definition and intensity of what we feel which accompanies our growing age, another change takes place in the sphere of intellect, by which all things are trans-

formed and seen through theories and associations as through coloured windows. We make to ourselves day by day, out of history, and gossip, and economical speculations, and God knows what, a medium in which we walk and through which we look abroad. We study shop windows with other eyes than in our childhood, never to wonder, not always to admire, but to make and modify our little incongruous theories about life. It is no longer the uniform of a soldier that arrests our attention ; but perhaps the flowing carriage of a woman, or perhaps a countenance that has been vividly stamped with passion and carries an adventurous story written in its lines. The pleasure of surprise is passed away ; sugar-loaves and water-carts seem mighty tame to encounter ; and we walk the streets to make romances and to sociologize. Nor must we deny that a good many of us walk them solely for the purposes of transit or in the interest of a livelier digestion. These, indeed, may look back with mingled thoughts upon their childhood, but the rest are in a better case ; they know more than when they were children, they understand better, their desires and sympathies answer more nimbly to the provocation of the senses, and their minds are brimming with interest as they go about the world.

According to my contention, this is a flight to which children cannot rise. They are wheeled in perambulators or dragged about by nurses in a pleasing stupor. A vague, faint, abiding wonderment possesses them. Here and there some specially remarkable circumstance, such as a water-cart or a guardsman, fairly penetrates into the seat of thought and calls them, for half a moment, out of themselves ; and you may see them, still towed forward sideways by the inexorable nurse as by a sort of destiny, but still staring at the bright object in their wake. It may be some minutes before another such moving spectacle reawakens them to the world in which they dwell. For other children, they almost invariably show some intelligent sympathy. ' There is a fine fellow making mud pies,' they seem to say ; ' that I can understand, there is some sense in mud pies.' But the doings of their eiders, unless where they are speakingly picturesque or recommend

themselves by the quality of being easily imitable, they let them go over their heads (as we say) without the least regard. If it were not for this perpetual imitation, we should be tempted to fancy they despised us outright or only considered us in the light of creatures brutally strong and brutally silly : among whom they condescended to dwell in obedience like a philosopher at a barbarous court. At times, indeed, they display an arrogance of disregard that is truly staggering. Once when I was groaning aloud with physical pain, a young gentleman came into the room and nonchalantly inquired if I had seen his bow and arrow. He made no account of my groans, which he accepted, as he had to accept so much else, as a piece of the inexplicable conduct of his elders ; and like a wise young gentleman, he would waste no wonder on the subject. Those elders, who care so little for rational enjoyment, and are even the enemies of rational enjoyment for others, he had accepted without understanding and without complaint, as the rest of us accept the scheme of the universe.

We grown people can tell ourselves a story, give and take strokes until the bucklers ring, ride far and fast, marry, fall, and die ; all the while sitting quietly by the fire or lying prone in bed. This is exactly what a child cannot do, or does not do, at least, when he can find anything else. He works all with lay figures and stage properties. When his story comes to the fighting, he must rise, get something by way of a sword, and have a set-to with a piece of furniture, until he is out of breath. When he comes to ride with the king's pardon, he must bestride a chair, which he will so hurry and belabour, and on which he will so furiously demean himself, that the messenger will arrive, if not bloody with spurring, at least fiery red with haste. If his romance involves an accident upon a cliff, he must clamber in person about the chest of drawers and fall bodily upon the carpet, before his imagination is satisfied. Lead soldiers, dolls, all toys, in short, are in the same category and answer the same end. Nothing can stagger a child's faith; he accepts the clumsiest substitutes and can swallow the most staring incongruities.

The chair he has just been besieging as a castle, or valiantly cutting to the ground as a dragon, is taken away for the accommodation of a morning visitor, and he is nothing abashed ; he can skirmish by the hour with a stationary coal-scuttle ; in the midst of the enchanted pleasance, he can see, without sensible shock, the gardener soberly digging potatoes for the day's dinner. He can make abstraction of whatever does not fit into his fable ; and he puts his eyes into his pocket, just as we hold our noses in an unsavoury lane. And so it is, that although the ways of children cross with those of their elders in a hundred places daily, they never go in the same direction nor so much as lie in the same element. So may the telegraph wires intersect the line of the highroad, or so might a landscape painter and a bagman visit the same country, and yet move in different worlds.

People struck with these spectacles cry aloud about the power of imagination in the young. Indeed there may be two words to that. It is, in some ways, but a pedestrian fancy that the child exhibits. It is the grown people who make the nursery stories ; all the children do, is jealously to preserve the text. One out of a dozen reasons why *Robinson Crusoe* should be so popular with youth, is that it hits their level in this matter to a nicety ; Crusoe was always at makeshifts and had, in so many words, to *play* at a great variety of professions ; and then the book is all about tools, and there is nothing that delights a child so much. Hammers and saws belong to a province of life that positively calls for imitation. The juvenile lyrical drama, of the most ancient Thespian model, wherein the trades of mankind are successively simulated to the running burthen 'On a cold and frosty morning,' gives a good instance of the artistic taste in children. And this need for overt action and lay figures testifies to a defect in the child's imagination which prevents him from carrying out his novels in the privacy of his own heart. He does not yet know enough of the world and men. His experience is incomplete. That stage-wardrobe and scene-room that we call the memory is so ill provided, that he can overtake few combinations and body out few stories,

to his own content, without some external aid. He is at the experimental stage ; he is not sure how one would feel in certain circumstances ; to make sure, he must come as near trying it as his means permit. And so here is young heroism with a wooden sword, and mothers practise their kind vocation over a bit of jointed stick. It may be laughable enough just now ; but it is these same people and these same thoughts that, not long hence when they are on the theatre of life, will make you weep and tremble. For children think very much the same thoughts and dream the same dreams as bearded men and marriageable women. No one is more romantic. Fame and honour, the love of young men and the love of mothers, the business man's pleasure in method, all these and others they anticipate and rehearse in their play hours. Upon us, who are further advanced and fairly dealing with the threads of destiny, they only glance from time to time to glean a hint for their own mimetic reproduction. Two children playing at soldiers are far more interesting to each other than one of the scarlet beings whom both are busy imitating. This is perhaps the greatest oddity of all.

Art for art' is their motto, and the doings of grown folk are only interesting as the raw material for play. Not Théophile Gautier, not Flaubert, can look more callously upon life, or rate the reproduction more highly over the reality ; and they will parody an-execution, a deathbed, or the funeral of the young man of Nain, with all the cheerfulness in the world.

The true parallel for play is not to be found, of course, in conscious art, which, though it be derived from play, is itself an abstract, impersonal thing, and depends largely upon philosophical interests beyond the scope of childhood. It is when we make castles in the air and personate the leading character in our own romances, that we return to the spirit of our first years. Only, there are several reasons why the spirit is no longer so agreeable to indulge. Nowadays, when we admit this personal element into our divagations we are apt to stir up uncomfortable and sorrowful memories, and remind ourselves sharply of old wounds. Our day-dreams can no longer lie **all** in the air

like a story in the *Arabian Nights* ; they read to us rather like the history of a period in which we ourselves had taken part, where we come across many unfortunate passages, and find our own conduct smartly reprimanded. And then the child, mind you, acts his parts. He does not merely repeat them to himself ; he leaps, he runs, and sets the blood agog over all his body. And so his play breathes him ; and he no sooner assumes a passion than he gives it vent. Alas ! when we betake ourselves to our intellectual form of play, sitting quietly by the fire or lying prone in bed, we rouse many hot feelings for which we can find no outlet. Substitutes are not acceptable to the mature mind, which desires the thing itself ; and even to rehearse a triumphant dialogue with one's enemy, although it is perhaps the most satisfactory piece of play still left within our reach, is not entirely satisfying, and is even apt to lead to a visit and an interview which may be the reverse of triumphant after all.

In the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. • Making believe ' is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character. I could not learn my alphabet without some suitable *mise-en-scène*, and had to act a business man in an office before I could sit down to my book. Will you kindly question your memory, and find out how much you did, work or pleasure, in good faith and soberness, and for how much you had to cheat yourself with some invention ? I remember, as though it were yesterday, the expansion of spirit, the dignity and self-reliance, that came with a pair of mustachios in burnt cork, even when there was none to see. Children are even content to forego what we call the realities, and prefer the shadow to the substance. When they might be speaking intelligibly together, they chatter senseless gibberish by the hour, and are quite happy because they are making believe to speak French. I have said already how even the imperious appetite of hunger suffers itself to be gulled and led by the nose with the fag end of an old song. And it goes deeper than this : when children are together even a meal is felt as an interruption in the business of life ; and they must find some imaginative

sanction, and tell themselves some sort of story, to account **for**, to colour, to render entertaining the simple processes of eating and drinking. What wonderful fancies I have heard evolved out of the pattern upon tea-cups!—from which there followed a code of rules and a whole world of excitement, until tea-drinking began to take rank as a game. When my cousin and I took our porridge of a morning, we had a device to enliven the course of the meal. He ate his with sugar, and explained it to be a country continually buried under snow. I took mine with milk, and explained it to be a country suffering gradual inundation. You can imagine us exchanging bulletins; how here was an island still unsubmerged, here a valley not yet covered with snow; what inventions were made; how his population lived in cabins on perches and travelled on stilts, and how mine was always in boats; how the interest grew furious, as the last corner of safe ground was cut off on all sides and grew smaller every moment; and how in fine, the food was of altogether secondary importance, and might even have been nauseous so long as we seasoned it with these dreams. But perhaps the most exciting moments I ever had over a meal were in the case of calves-feet jelly. It was hardly possible not to believe—and you may be sure, so far from trying, I did all I could to favour the illusion—that some part of it was hollow, and that sooner or later my spoon would lay open the secret tabernacle of the golden rock. There, might some miniature *Red Beard* await his hour; there, might one find the treasures of the *Forty Thieves*, and bewildered Cassim beating about the walls. And so I quarried on slowly, with bated breath, savouring the interest. Believe me, I had little palate left for the jelly; and though I preferred the taste when I took cream with it, I used often to go without, because the cream dimmed the transparent fractures.

Even with games, this spirit is authoritative with right-minded children. It is thus that hide-and-seek has so pre-eminent a sovereignty, for it is the well-spring of romance, and the actions and the excitement to which it gives rise lend themselves to almost any sort of fable.

And thus cricket, which is a mere matter of dexterity, palpably about nothing and for no end, often fails to satisfy infantile craving. It is a game, if you like, but not a game of play. You cannot tell yourself a story about cricket; and the activity it calls forth can be justified on no rational theory. Even football, although it admirably simulates the tug and the ebb and flow of battle, has presented difficulties to the mind of young sticklers after verisimilitude ; and I knew at least one little boy who was mightily exercised about the presence of the ball, and had to spirit himself up, whenever he came to play, with an elaborate story of enchantment, and take the missile as a sort of talisman bandied about in conflict between two Arabian nations.

To think of such a frame of mind is to become disquieted about the bringing up of children. Surely they dwell in a mythological epoch, and are not the contemporaries of their parents. What can they think of them ? what can they make of these bearded or petticoated giants who look down upon their games ? who move upon a cloudy Olympus, following unknown designs apart from rational enjoyment ? who profess the tenderest solicitude for children, and yet every now and again reach down out of their altitude and terribly vindicate the prerogatives of age ? Off goes the child, corporally smarting, but morally rebellious. Were there ever such unthinkable deities as parents ? I would give a great deal to know what, in nine cases out of ten, is the child's unvarnished feeling. A sense of past cajolery ; a sense of personal attraction, at best very feeble ; above all, I should imagine, a sense of terror for the untried residue of mankind : go to make up the attraction that he feels. No wonder, poor little heart, with such a weltering world in front of him, if he clings to the hand he knows ! The dread irrationality of the whole affair, as it seems to children, is a thing we are all too ready to forget. ' Oh, why,' I remember passionately wondering, ' why can we not all be happy and devote ourselves to play ? ' And when children do philosophize, I believe it is usually to very much the same purpose.

One thing, at least, comes very clearly out of these

considerations ; that whatever we are to expect at the hands of children, it should not be any peddling exactitude about matters of fact. They walk in a vain show, and among mists and rainbows ; they are passionate after dreams and unconcerned about realities ; speech is a difficult art not wholly learned ; and there is nothing in their own tastes or purposes to teach them what we mean by abstract truthfulness. When a bad writer is inexact, even if he can look back on half a century of years, we charge him with incompetence and not with dishonesty. And why not extend the same allowance to imperfect speakers ? Let a stockbroker be dead stupid about poetry or a poet inexact in the details of business, and we excuse them heartily from blame. But show us a miserable, unbreeched, human entity, whose whole profession it is to take a tub for a fortified town and a shaving-brush for the deadly stiletto, and who passes three-fourths of his time in a dream and the rest in open, self-deception, and we expect him to be as nice upon a matter of fact as a scientific expert bearing evidence. Upon my heart, I think it less than decent. You do not consider how little the child sees, or how swift he is to weave what he has seen into bewildering fiction ; and that he cares no more for what you call truth, than you for a gingerbread dragon.

I am reminded, as I write, that the child is very inquiring as to the precise truth of stories. But indeed this is a very different matter, and one bound up with the subject of play, and the precise amount of playfulness, or payability, to be looked for in the world. Many such burning questions must arise in the course of nursery education. Among the fauna of his planet, which already embraces the pretty soldier and the terrifying Irish beggar-man, is, or is not, the child to expect a Bluebeard or a Cormoran ? Is he, or is he not, to look out for magicians, kindly and potent ? May he, or may he not, reasonably hope to be cast away upon a desert island, or turned to such diminutive proportions that he can live on equal terms with his lead soldiery, and go a cruise in his own toy schooner ? Surely all these are practical questions to a neophyte entering upon life with a view to play. Precision upon

such a point, the child can understand. But if you merely ask him of his past behaviour, as to who threw such a stone, for instance, or struck such and such a match; or whether he had looked into a parcel or gone by a forbidden path,—why, he can see no moment in the inquiry, and it is ten to one, he has already half forgotten and half bemused himself with subsequent imaginings.

It would be easy to leave them in their native cloud-land, where they figure so prettily—pretty like flowers and innocent like dogs. They will come out of their gardens soon enough, and have to go into offices and the witness-box. Spare them yet a while, O conscientious parent! Let them doze among their playthings yet a little! for who knows what a rough, warfaring existence lies before them in the future?

## VI

### PAN'S PIPES

THE world in which we live has been variously said and sung by the most ingenious poets and philosophers, these reducing it to formulæ and chemical ingredients, those striking the lyre in high-sounding measures for the handiwork of God. What experience supplies is of a mingled tissue, and the choosing mind has much to reject before it can get together the materials of a theory. Dew and thunder, destroying Attila and the Spring lambkins, belong to an order of the contrasts which no repetition can assimilate. There is an uncouth, outlandish strain throughout the web of the world, as from a vexatious planet in the house of life. Things are not congruous and wear strange disguises : the consummate flower is fostered out of dung, and after nourishing itself awhile with heaven's delicate distillations, decays again into indistinguishable soil; and with Caesar's ashes, Hamlet tells us, the urchins make dirt pies and filthily besmear their countenances. Nay, the kindly shine of summer, when tracked home with the scientific spy-glass, is found to issue from the most portentous nightmare of the universe—the great, conflagrant sun : a world of hell's squibs, tumultuary, roaring aloud, inimical to life. The sun itself is enough to disgust a human being of the scene which he inhabits ; and you would not fancy there was a green or habitable spot in a universe thus awfully lighted up. And yet it is by the blaze of such a conflagration, to which the fire of Rome was but a spark, that we do all our fiddling, and hold domestic tea-parties at the arbour door.

The Greeks figured Pan, the god of Nature, now terribly stamping his foot, so that armies were dispersed ; now

by the woodside on a summer noon trolling on his pipe until he charmed the hearts of upland ploughmen. And the Greeks, in so figuring, uttered the last word of human experience. To certain smoke-dried spirits matter and motion and elastic aethers, and the hypothesis of this or that other spectacled professor, tell a speaking story ; but for youth and all ductile and congenial minds, Pan is not dead, but of all the classic hierarchy alone survives in triumph ; goat-footed, with a gleeful and an angry look, the type of the shaggy world : and in every wood, if you go with a spirit properly prepared, you shall hear the note of his pipe.

For it is a shaggy world, and yet studded with gardens ; where the salt and tumbling sea receives clear rivers running from among reeds and lilies ; fruitful and austere ; a rustic world ; sunshiny, lewd, and cruel. What is it the birds sing among the trees in pairing-time ? What means the sound of the rain falling far and wide upon the leafy forest ? To what tune does the fisherman whistle, as he hauls in his net at morning, and the bright fish are heaped inside the boat ? These are all airs upon Pan's pipe ; he it was who gave them breath in the exultation of his heart, and gleefully modulated their outflow with his lips and ringers. The coarse mirth of herdsmen, shaking the dells with laughter and striking out high echoes from the rock ; the tune of moving feet in the lamplit city, or on the smooth ballroom floor ; the hooves of many horses, beating the wide pastures in alarm ; the song of hurrying rivers ; the colour of clear skies ; and smiles and the live touch of hands ; and the voice of things, and their significant look, and the renovating influence they breathe forth—these are his joyful measures, to which the whole earth treads in choral harmony. To this music the young lambs bound as to a tabor, and the London shop-girl skips rudely in the dance. For it puts a spirit of gladness in all hearts ; and to look on the happy side of nature is common, in their hours, to all created things. Some are vocal under a good influence, are pleasing whenever they are pleased, and hand on their happiness to others, as a child who, looking upon lovely things, looks lovely. Some leap to the strains

with unapt foot, and make a halting figure in the universal dance. And some, like sour spectators at the play, receive the music into their hearts with an unmoved countenance, and walk like strangers through the general rejoicing. But let him feign never so carefully, there is not a man but has his pulses shaken when Pan trolls out a stave of ecstasy and sets the world a-singing.

Alas if that were all! But oftentimes the air is changed ; and in the screech of the night wind, chasing navies, subverting the tall ships and the rooted cedar of the hills ; in the random deadly levin of the fury of headlong floods, we recognize the ' dread foundation ' of life and the anger in Pan's heart. Earth wages open war against her children, and under her softest touch hides treacherous claws. The cool waters invite us in to drown ; the domestic hearth burns up in the hour of sleep, and makes an end of all. Everything is good or bad, helpful or deadly, not in itself, but by its circumstances. For a few bright days in England the hurricane must break forth and the North Sea pay a toll of populous ships. And when the universal music has led lovers into the path of dalliance, confident of Nature's sympathy, suddenly the air shifts into a minor, and death makes a clutch from his ambuscade below the bed of marriage. For death is given a kiss ; the dearest kindnesses are fatal ; and into this life, where one thing preys upon another, the child too often makes its entrance from the mother's corpse. It is no wonder, with so traitorous a scheme of things, if the wise people who created for us the idea of Pan thought that of all fears the fear of him was the most terrible, since it embraces all. And still we preserve the phrase : a panic terror. To reckon dangers too curiously, to hearken too intently for the threat that runs through all the winning music of the world, to hold back the hand from the rose because of the thorn, and from life because of death : this it is to be afraid of Pan. Highly respectable citizens who flee life's pleasures and responsibilities and keep, with upright hat, upon the midway of custom, avoiding the right hand and the left, the ecstasies and the agonies, how surprised they would be if they could hear their attitude mythologic-

ally expressed, and knew themselves as tooth-chattering ones, who flee from Nature because they fear the hand of Nature's God ! Shrilly sound Pan's pipes ; and behold the banker instantly concealed in the bank parlour ! For to distrust one's impulses is to be recreant to Pan.

There are moments when the mind refuses to be satisfied with evolution, and demands a ruddier presentation of the sum of man's experience. Sometimes the mood is brought about by laughter at the humorous side of life, as when, abstracting ourselves from earth, we imagine people plodding on foot, or seated in ships and speedy trains, with the planet all the while whirling in the opposite direction, so that, for all their hurry, they travel back-foremost through the universe of space. Sometimes it comes by the spirit of delight, and sometimes by the spirit of terror. At least, there will always be hours when we refuse to be put off by the feint of explanation, nicknamed science ; and demand instead some palpitating image of our estate, that shall represent the troubled and uncertain element in which we dwell, and satisfy reason by the means of art. Science writes of the world as if with the cold finger of a starfish ; it is all true ; but what is it when compared to the reality of which it discourses ? where hearts beat high in April, and death strikes, and hills totter in the earthquake, and there is a-glamour over all the objects of sight, and a thrill in all noises for the ear, and Romance herself has made her dwelling among men ? So we come back to the old myth, and hear the goat-footed piper making the music which is itself the charm and terror of things ; and when a glen invites our visiting footsteps, fancy that Pan leads us thither with a gracious tremolo ; or when our hearts quail at the thunder of the cataract, tell ourselves that he has stamped his hoof in the nigh thicket.

## VII

### PASTORAL

To leave home in early life is to be stunned and quickened with novelties ; but when years have come, it only casts a more endearing light upon the past. As in those composite photographs of Mr. Galton's, the image of each new sitter brings out but the more clearly the central features of the race ; when once youth has flown, each new impression only deepens the sense of nationality and the desire of native places. So may some cadet of Royal Ecosais or the Albany Regiment, as he mounted guard about French citadels, so may some officer marching his company of the Scots-Dutch among the polders, have felt the soft rains of the Hebrides upon his brow, or started in the ranks at the remembered aroma of peat-smoke. And the rivers of home are dear in particular to all men. This is as old as Naaman, who was jealous for Abana and Pharpar ; it is confined to no race nor country, for I know one of Scottish blood but a child of Suffolk, whose fancy still lingers about the liliated lowland waters of that shire. But the streams of Scotland are incomparable in themselves—or I am only the more Scottish to suppose so—and their sound and colour dwell for ever in the memory. How often and willingly do I not look again in fancy on Tummel, or Manor, or the talking Airdle, or Dee swirling in its Lynn ; on the bright burn of Kinnaird, or the golden burn that pours and sulks in the den behind Kingussie ! I think shame to leave out one of these enchantresses, but the list would grow too long if I remembered all ; only I may not forget Allan Water, nor birch-wetting Rogie, nor yet Almond ; nor, for all its pollutions, that Water of Leith of the many and well-named mills—Bell's Mills, and Canon

Mills, and Silver Mills; nor Bedford Burn of pleasant memories; nor yet, for all its smallness, that nameless trickle that springs in the green bosom of Allermuir, and is fed from Halkerside with a perennial teacupful, and threads the moss under the Shearer's Knowe, and makes one pool there, overhung by a rock, where I loved to sit and make bad verses, and is then kidnapped in its infancy by subterranean pipes for the service of the sea-beholding city in the plain. From many points in the moss you may see at one glance its whole course and that of all its tributaries; the geographer of this Lilliput may visit all its corners without sitting down, and not yet begin to be breathed; Shearer's Knowe and Halkerside are but names of adjacent cantons on a single shoulder of a hill, as names are squandered (it would seem to the inexpert, in superfluity) upon these upland sheep-walks; a bucket would receive the whole discharge of the toy river; it would take it an appreciable time to fill your morning bath; for the most part, besides, it soaks unseen through the moss; and yet for the sake of auld lang syne, and the figure of a certain *genius loci*, I am condemned to linger awhile in fancy by its shores; and if the nymph (who cannot be above a span in stature) will but inspire my pen, I would gladly carry the reader along with me.

John Todd, when I knew him, was already 'the oldest herd on the Pentlands,' and had been all his days faithful to that curlew-scattering, sheep-collecting life. He remembered the droving days, when the drove roads, that now lie green and solitary through the heather, were thronged thoroughfares. He had himself often marched flocks into England, sleeping on the hillsides with his caravan; and by his account it was a rough business not without danger. The drove roads lay apart from habitation; the drovers met in the wilderness, as to-day the deep-sea fishers meet off the banks in the solitude of the Atlantic; and in the one as in the other case rough habits and fist-law were the rule. Crimes were committed, sheep filched, and drovers robbed and beaten; most of which offences had a moorland burial and were never heard of in the courts of justice. John, in those days, was at least once attacked,

—by two men after his watch,—and at least once, betrayed by his habitual anger, fell under the danger of the law and was clapped into some rustic prison-house, the doors of which he burst in the night and was no more heard of in that quarter. When I knew him, his life had fallen in quieter places, and he had no cares beyond the dullness of his dogs and the inroads of pedestrians from town. But for a man of his propensity to wrath these were enough ; he knew neither rest nor peace, except by snatches ; in the gray of the summer morning, and already from far up the hill, he would wake the ' toun ' with the sound of his shoutings ; and in the lambing time his cries were not yet silenced late at night. This wrathful voice of a man unseen might be said to haunt that quarter of the Pentlands, an audible bogie, and no doubt it added to the fear in which men stood of John, a touch of something legendary. For my own part, he was at first my enemy, and I, in my character of a rambling boy, his natural abhorrence. It was long before I saw him near at hand, knowing him only by some sudden blast of bellowing from far above, bidding me ' c'way oot amang the sheep.' The quietest recesses of the hill harboured this ogre ; I skulked in my favourite wilderness like a Cameronian of the Killing Time, and John Todd was my Claverhouse, and his dogs my questing dragoons. Little by little we dropped into civilities ; his hail at sight of me began to have less of the ring of a war-slogan ; soon, we never met but he produced his snuff-box, which was with him, like the calumet with the Red Indian, a part of the heraldry of peace ; and at length, in the ripeness of time, we grew to be a pair of friends, and when I lived alone in these parts in the winter, it was a settled thing for John to ' give me a cry ' over the garden wall as he set forth upon his evening round, and for me to overtake and bear him company.

That dread voice of his that shook the hills when he was angry, fell in ordinary talk very pleasantly upon the ear, with a kind of honied, friendly whine, not far off singing, that was eminently Scottish. He laughed not very often, and when he did, with a sudden, loud haw-haw, hearty but somehow joyless, like an echo from a rock.

His face was permanently set and coloured ; ruddy and stiff with weathering ; more like a picture than a face ; yet with a certain strain and a threat of latent anger in the expression, like that of a man trained too fine and harassed with perpetual vigilance. He spoke in the richest dialect of Scotch I ever heard ; the words in themselves were a pleasure and often a surprise to me, so that I often came back from one of our patrols with new acquisitions ; and this vocabulary he would handle like a master, stalking a little before me, ' beard on shoulder,' the plaid hanging loosely about him, the yellow staff clapped under his arm, and guiding me uphill by that devious, tactical ascent which seems peculiar to men of his trade. I might count him with the best talkers ; only that talking Scotch and talking English seem incomparable acts. He touched on nothing at least but he adorned it ; when he narrated, the scene was before you ; when he spoke (as he did mostly) of his own antique business, the thing took on a colour of romance and curiosity that was surprising. The clans of sheep with their particular territories on the hill, and how, in the yearly killings and purchases, each must be proportionally thinned and strengthened ; the midnight busyness of animals, the signs of the weather, the cares of the snowy season, the exquisite stupidity of sheep, the exquisite cunning of dogs : all these he could present so humanly, and with so much old experience and living gusto, that weariness was excluded. And in the midst he would suddenly straighten his bowed back, the stick would fly abroad in demonstration, and the sharp thunder of his voice roll out a long itinerary for the dogs, so that you saw at last the use of that great wealth of names for every knowe and howe upon the hillside ; and the dogs, having hearkened with lowered tails and raised faces, would run up their flags again to the masthead and spread themselves upon the indicated circuit. It used to fill me with wonder how they could follow and retain so long a story. But John denied these creatures all intelligence ; they were the constant butt of his passion and contempt ; it was just possible to work with the like of them, he said,—not more than possible. And then he

would expand upon the subject of the really good dogs that he had known, and the one really good dog that he had himself possessed. He had been offered forty pounds for it ; but a good collie was worth more than that, more than anything, to a 'herd' ; he did the herd's work for him. 'As for the like of them !' he would cry, and scornfully indicate the scouring tails of his assistants.

Once—I translate John's Lallan, for I cannot do it justice, being born *Britannis in montibus*, indeed, but alas ! *inerudito sceculo*—once, in the days of his good dog, he had bought some sheep in Edinburgh, and on the way out, the road being crowded, two were lost. This was a reproach to John, and a slur upon the dog ; and both were alive to their misfortune. Word came, after some days, that a farmer about Braid had found a pair of sheep ; and thither went John and the dog to ask for restitution. But the farmer was a hard man and stood upon his rights. 'How were they marked ?' he asked ; and since John had bought right and left from many sellers and had no notion of the marks—'Very well,' said the farmer, 'then it's only right that I should keep them.'—'Well,' said John, 'it's a fact that I cannae tell the sheep ; but if my dog can, will ye let me have them ?' The farmer was honest as well as hard, and besides I dare say he had little fear of the ordeal ; so he had all the sheep upon his farm into one large park, and turned John's dog into their midst. That hairy man of business knew his errand well ; he knew that John and he had bought two sheep and (to their shame) lost them about Boroughmuirhead ; he knew besides (the Lord knows how, unless by listening) that they were come to Braid for their recovery ; and without pause or blunder singled out, first one and then another, the two waifs. It was that afternoon the forty pounds were offered and refused. And the shepherd and his dog—what do I say ? the true shepherd and his man—set off together by Fairmilehead in jocund humour, and 'smiled to ither' all the way home, with the two recovered ones before them. So far, so good ; but intelligence may be abused. The dog, as he is by little man's inferior in mind, is only by little his superior in virtue ;

and John had another collie tale of quite a different complexion. At the foot of the moss behind Kirk Yetton (Caer Ketton, wise men say) there is a scrog of low wood and a pool with a dam for washing sheep. John was one day lying under a bush in the scrog, when he was aware of a collie on the far hillside skulking down through the deepest of the heather with obtrusive stealth. He knew the dog; knew him for a clever, rising practitioner from quite a distant farm; one whom perhaps he had coveted as he saw him masterfully steering flocks to market. But what did the practitioner so far from home? and why this guilty and secret manoeuvring towards the pool?—for it was towards the pool that he was heading. John lay the closer under his bush, and presently saw the dog come forth upon the margin, look all about to see if he were anywhere observed, plunge in and repeatedly wash himself over head and ears, and then (but now openly and with tail in air) strike homeward over the hills. That same night word was sent his master, and the rising practitioner, shaken up from where he lay, all innocence before the fire, was had out to a dykeside and promptly shot; for alas! he was that foulest of criminals under trust, a sheep-eater; and it was from the maculation of sheep's blood that he had come so far to cleanse himself in the pool behind Kirk Yetton.

A trade that touches nature, one that lies at the foundations of life, in which we have all had ancestors employed, so that on a hint of it ancestral memories revive, lends itself to literary use, vocal or written. The fortune of a tale lies not alone in the skill of him that writes, but as much, perhaps, in the inherited experience of him who reads; and when I hear with a particular thrill of things that I have never done or seen, it is one of that innumerable army of my ancestors rejoicing in past deeds. Thus novels begin to touch not the fine *dilettanti* but the gross mass of mankind, when they leave off to speak of parlours and shades of manner and stillborn niceties of motive, and begin to deal with fighting, sailing, adventure, death or child-birth; and thus ancient outdoor crafts and occupations, whether Mr. Hardy wields the shepherd's crook or

Count Tolstoi swings the scythe, lift romance into a near neighbourhood with epic. These aged things have on them the dew of man's morning ; they lie near, not so much to us, the semi-artificial flowerets, as to the trunk and aboriginal taproot of the race. A thousand interests spring up in the process of the ages, and a thousand perish ; that is now an eccentricity or a lost art which was once the fashion of an empire ; and those only are perennial matters that rouse us to-day, and that roused men in all epochs of the past. There is a certain critic, not indeed of execution but of matter, whom I dare be known to set before the best : a certain low-browed, hairy gentleman, at first a percher in the fork of trees, next (as they relate) a dweller in caves, and whom I think I see squatting in cave-mouths, of a pleasant afternoon, to munch his berries—his wife, that accomplished lady, squatting by his side: his name I never heard, but he is often described as Probably Arboreal, which may serve for recognition. Each has his own tree of ancestors, but at the top of all sits Probably Arboreal; in all our veins there run some minims of his old, wild, tree-top blood ; our civilized nerves still tingle with his rude terrors and pleasures ; and to that which would have moved our common ancestor, all must obediently thrill.

We have not so far to climb to come to shepherds ; and it may be I had one for an ascendant who has largely moulded me. But yet I think I owe my taste for that hillside business rather to the art and interest of John Todd. He it was that made it live for me, as the artist can make all things live. It was through him the simple strategy of massing sheep upon a snowy evening, with its attendant scampering of earnest, shaggy aides-de-camp, was an affair that I never wearied of seeing, and that I never weary of recalling to mind : the shadow of the night darkening on the hills, inscrutable black blots of snow shower moving here and there like night already come, huddles of yellow sheep and dartings of black dogs upon the snow, a bitter air that took you by the throat, unearthly harpings of the wind along the moors ; and for centrepiece to all these features and influences, John

winding up the brae, keeping his captain's eye upon all sides, and breaking, ever and again, into a spasm of bellowing that seemed to make the evening bleaker. It is thus that I still see him in my mind's eye, perched on a hump of the declivity not far from Halkerside, his staff in airy flourish, his great voice taking hold upon the hills and echoing terror to the lowlands ; I, meanwhile, standing somewhat back, until the fit should be over, and, with a pinch of snuff, my friend relapse into his easy, even conversation.

## VIII

### THE MANSE

I HAVE named, among many rivers that make music in my memory, that dirty Water of Leith. Often and often I desire to look upon it again ; and the choice of a point of view is easy to me. It should be at a certain water-door, embowered in shrubbery. The river is there dammed back for the service of the flour-mill just below, so that it lies deep and darkling, and the sand slopes into brown obscurity with a glint of gold ; and it has but newly been recruited by the borrowings of the snuff-mill just above, and these, tumbling merrily in, shake the pool to its black heart, fill it with drowsy eddies, and set the curded froth of many other mills solemnly steering to and fro upon the surface. Or so it was when I was young ; for change, and the masons, and the pruning-knife, have been busy ; and if I could "hope to repeat a cherished experience, it must be on many and impossible conditions. I must choose, as well as the point of view, a certain moment in my growth, so that the scale may be exaggerated and the trees on the steep opposite side may seem to climb to heaven, and the sand by the water-door, where I am standing, seem as low as Styx. And I must choose the season also, so that the valley may be brimmed like a cup with sunshine and the songs of birds ;—and the year of grace, so that when I turn to leave the riverside I may find the old manse and its inhabitants unchanged.

It was a place in that time like no other : the garden cut into provinces by a great hedge of beech, and overlooked by the church and the terrace of the churchyard, where the tombstones were thick, and after nightfall ' spunkies ' might be seen to dance, at least by children ;

flower-plots lying warm in sunshine; laurels and the great yew making elsewhere a pleasing horror of shade ; the smell of water rising from all round, with an added tang of paper-mills; the sound of water everywhere, and the sound of mills—the wheel and the dam singing their alternate strain ; the birds on every bush and from every corner of the overhanging woods peeling out their notes until the air throbbed with them ; and, in the midst of this, the manse. I see it, by the standard of my childish stature, as a great and roomy house. In truth, it was not so large as I supposed, nor yet so convenient, and, standing where it did, it is difficult to suppose that it was healthful. Yet a large family of stalwart sons and tall daughters was housed and reared, and came to man and womanhood in that nest of little chambers ; so that the face of the earth was peppered with the children of the manse, and letters with outlandish stamps became familiar to the local postman, and the walls of the little chambers brightened with the wonders of the East. The dullest could see this was a house that had a pair of hands in divers foreign places : a well-beloved house—its image fondly dwelt on by many travellers.

Here lived an ancestor of mine, who was a herd of men. I read him, judging with older criticism the report of childish observation, as a man of singular simplicity of nature ; unemotional, and hating the display of what he felt; standing contented on the old ways ; a lover of his life and innocent habits to the end. We children admired him : partly for his beautiful face and silver hair, for none more than children are concerned for beauty and, above all, for beauty in the old ; partly for the solemn light in which we beheld him once a week, the observed of all observers, in the pulpit. But his strictness and distance, the effect, I now fancy, of old age, slow blood, and settled habit, oppressed us with a kind of terror. When not abroad, he sat much alone, writing sermons or letters to his scattered family, in a dark and cold room with a library of bloodless books—or so they seemed in those days, although I have some of them now on my own shelves and like well enough to read them ; and

## THE MANSE

these lonely hours wrapped him in the greater groom for our imaginations. But the study had a redeeming grace in many Indian pictures, gaudily coloured and dear to young eyes. I cannot depict (for I have no such passions now) the greed with which I beheld them ; and when I was once sent in to say a psalm to my grandfather, I went, quaking indeed with fear, but at the same time glowing with hope that, if I said it well, he might reward me with an Indian picture.

" Thy foot He'll not let slide, nor will  
He slumber that thee keeps,"

it ran : a strange conglomerate of the unpronounceable, a sad model to set in childhood before one who was himself to be a versifier, and a task in recitation that really merited reward. And I must suppose the old man thought so too, and was either touched or amused by the performance ; for he took me in his arms with most unwonted tenderness, and kissed me, and gave me a little kindly sermon for my psalm ; so that, for that day, we were clerk and parson. I was struck by this reception into so tender a surprise that I forgot my disappointment. And indeed the hope was one of those that childhood forges for a pastime, and with no design upon reality. Nothing was more unlikely than that my grandfather should strip himself of one of those pictures, love-gifts and reminders of his absent sons ; nothing more unlikely than that he should bestow it upon me. He had no idea of spoiling children, leaving all that to my aunt ; he had fared hard himself, and blubbered under the rod in the last century ; and his ways were still Spartan for the young. The last word I heard upon his lips was in this Spartan key. He had overwalked in the teeth of an east wind, and was now near the end of his many days. He sat by the dining-room fire, with his white hair, pale face, and bloodshot eyes, a somewhat awful figure ; and my aunt had given him a dose of our good old Scotch medicine, Dr. Gregory's powder. Now that remedy, as the work of a near kinsman of Rob Roy himself, may have a savour of romance for the imagination ; but it comes uncouthly to the palate. The old

gentleman had taken it with a wry face ; and that being accomplished, sat with perfect simplicity,, like a child's, munching a ' barley-sugar kiss.' But when my aunt, having the canister open in her hands, proposed to let me share in the sweets, he interfered at once. I had had no Gregory; then I should have no barley-sugar kiss: so he decided with a touch of irritation. And just then the phaeton coming opportunely to the kitchen door—for such was our unlordly fashion—I was taken for the last time from the presence of my grandfather.

Now I often wonder what I have inherited from this old minister. I must suppose, indeed, that he was fond of preaching sermons, and so am I, though I never heard it maintained that either of us loved to hear them. He sought health in his youth in the Isle of Wight, and I have sought it in both hemispheres; but whereas he found and kept it, I am still on the quest. He was a great lover of Shakespeare, whom he read aloud, I have been told, with taste ; well, I love my Shakespeare also, and am persuaded I can read him well, though I own I never have been told so. He made embroidery, designing his own patterns ; and in that kind of work I never made anything but a kettle holder in Berlin wool, and an odd garter of knitting, which was as black as the chimney before I had done with it. He loved port, and nuts, and porter ; and so do I, but they agreed better with my grandfather, which seems to me a breach of contract. He had chalk-stones in his fingers ; and these, in good time, I may possibly inherit, but I would much rather have inherited his noble presence. Try as I please, I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor ; and all the while, no doubt, and even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood, and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and centre of my being. In his garden, as I played there, I learned the love of mills—or had I an ancestor a miller ?—and a kindness for the neighbourhood of graves, as homely things not without their poetry—or had I an ancestor a sexton ? But what of the garden where he played himself ?—for that, too, was a scene of my education. Some part of me played there in the

eighteenth century, and ran races under the green avenue at Pilrig ; some part of me trudged up Leith Walk, which was still a country place, and sat on the High School benches, and was thrashed, perhaps, by Dr. Adam. The house where I spent my youth was not yet thought upon ; but we made holiday parties among the cornfields on its site, and ate strawberries and cream near by at a gardener's. All this I had forgotten ; only my grandfather remembered and once reminded me. I have forgotten, too, how we grew up, and took orders, and went to our first Ayrshire parish, and fell in love with and married a daughter of Burns's Dr. Smith—'Smith opens out his cauld harangues.' I have forgotten, but I was there all the same, and heard stories of Burns at first-hand.

And there is a thing stranger than all that ; for this *homunculus* or part-man of mine that walked about the eighteenth century with Dr. Balfour in his youth, was in the way of meeting other *homunculos* or part-men, in the persons of my other ancestors. These were of a lower order, and doubtless we looked down upon them duly. But as I went to college with Dr. Balfour, I may have seen the lamp and oil man taking down the shutters from his shop beside the Tron ;—we may have had a rabbit-hutch or a bookshelf made for us by a certain carpenter in I know not what wynd of the old, smoky city ; or, upon some holiday excursion, we may have looked into the windows of a cottage in a flower-garden and seen a certain weaver plying his shuttle. And these were all kinsmen of mine upon the other side ; and from the eyes of the lamp and oil man one-half of my unborn father and one-quarter of myself looked out upon us as we went by to college. Nothing of all this would cross the mind of the young student, as he posted up the Bridges with trim, stockinged legs, in that city of cocked hats and good Scotch still unadulterated. It would not cross his mind that he should have a daughter ; and the lamp and oil man, just then beginning, by a not unnatural metastasis, to bloom into a lighthouse-engineer, should have a grandson ; and that these two, in the fullness of time, should wed ; and some portion of that student himself should

survive yet a year or two longer in the person of their child.

But our ancestral adventures are beyond even the arithmetic of fancy ; and it is the chief recommendation of long pedigrees that we can follow backward the careers of our *homunculos* and be reminded of our ante-natal lives. Our conscious years are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us. Are you a bank-clerk, and do you live at Peckham ? It was not always so. And though to-day I am only a man of letters, either tradition errs or I was present when there landed at St. Andrews a French barber-surgeon, to tend the health and the beard of the great Cardinal Beaton ; I have shaken a spear in the Debateable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots ; I was present when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the '15 ; I was in a West India merchant's office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nicol Jarvie's, and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitt's ; I was with my engineer-grandfather (the son-in-law of the lamp and oil man) when he sailed north about Scotland on the famous cruise that gave us the *Pirate* and the *Lord of the Isles* ; I was with him, too, on the Bell Rock, in the fog, when the *Smeaton* had drifted from her moorings, and the Aberdeen men, pick in hand, had seized upon the only boats, and he must stoop and lap sea-water before his tongue could utter audible words ; and once more with him when the Bell Rock beacon took a ' thrawe,' and his workmen fled into the tower, then nearly finished, and he sat unmoved reading in his Bible—or affecting to read—till one after another slunk back with confusion of countenance to their engineer. Yes, parts of me have seen life, and met adventures, and sometimes met them well. And away in the still cloudier past, the threads that make me up can be traced by fancy into the bosoms of thousands and millions of ascendants : Picts who rallied round Macbeth and the old (and highly preferable) system of descent by females, fleers from before the legions of Agricola, marchers in Pannonian morasses, star-gazers on Chaldaean plateaus ; and, furthest of all, what face is this that fancy can see peering through the

disparted branches ? What sleeper in green tree-tops, what muncher of nuts, concludes my pedigree ? Probably arboreal in his habits . . .

And I know not which is the more strange, that I should carry about with me some fibres of my minister-grandfather ; or that in him, as he sat in his cool study, grave, reverend, contented gentleman, there was an aboriginal frisking of the blood that was not his ; tree-top memories, like undeveloped negatives, lay dormant in his mind ; tree-top instincts awoke and were trod down ; and Probably Arboreal (scarce to be distinguished from a monkey) gambolled and chattered in the brain of the old divine.

## IX

### MEMOIRS OF AN ISLET

#### I

THE little isle of Earraid lies close in to the south-west corner of the Ross of Mull : the sound of Iona on one side, across which you may see the isle and church of Columba ; the open sea to the other, where you shall be able to mark, on a clear, surfy day, the breakers running white on many sunken rocks. I first saw it, or first remember seeing it, framed in the round bull's-eye of a cabin port, the sea lying smooth along its shores like the waters of a lake, the colourless, clear light of the early morning making plain its heathery and rocky hummocks. There stood upon it, in these days, a single rude house of uncemented stones, approached by a pier of wreckwood. It must have been very early, for it was then summer, and in summer, in that latitude, day scarcely withdraws ; but even at that hour the house was making a sweet smoke of peats which came to me over the bay, and the bare-legged daughters of the cotter were wading by the pier. The same day we visited the shores of the isle in the ship's boats ; rowed deep into Fiddler's Hole, sounding as we went ; and having taken stock of all possible accommodation, pitched on the northern inlet as the scene of operations. For it was no accident that had brought the lighthouse steamer to anchor in the Bay of Earraid. Fifteen miles away to seaward, a certain black rock stood environed by the Atlantic rollers, the outpost of the Torran reefs. Here was a tower to be built, and a star lighted, for the conduct of seamen. But as the rock was small, and hard of access, and far from land, the work would be one of years ; and my father was now looking for a shore station,

where the stones might be quarried and dressed, the men live, and the tender, with some degree of safety, he at anchor.

I saw Earraid next from the stern thwart of an Iona lugger, Sam Bough and I sitting there cheek by jowl, with our feet upon our baggage, in a beautiful, clear, northern summer eve. And behold ! there was now a pier of stone, there were rows of sheds, railways, travelling-cranes, a street of cottages, an iron house for the resident engineer, wooden bothies for the men, a stage where the courses of the tower were put together experimentally, and behind the settlement a great gash in the hillside where granite was quarried. In the bay, the steamer lay at her moorings. All day long there hung about the place the music of chinking tools ; and even in the dead of night, the watchman carried his lantern to and fro in the dark settlement, and could light the pipe of any midnight muser. It was, above all, strange to see Earraid on the Sunday, when the sound of the tools ceased and there fell a crystal quiet. All about the green compound men would be sauntering in their Sunday's best, walking with those lax joints of the reposing toiler, thoughtfully smoking, talking small, as if in honour of the stillness, or hearkening to the wailing of the gulls. And it was strange to see our Sabbath services, held, as they were, in one of the bothies, with Mr. Brebner reading at a table, and the congregation perched about in the double tier of sleeping bunks ; and to hear the singing of the psalms, 'the chapters,' the inevitable Spurgeon's sermon, and the old, eloquent lighthouse prayer.

In fine weather, when by the spy-glass on the hill the sea was observed to run low upon the reef, there would be a sound of preparation in the very early morning ; and before the sun had risen from behind Ben More, the tender would steam out of the bay. Over fifteen sea-miles of the great blue Atlantic rollers she ploughed her way, trailing at her tail a brace of wallowing stonelighters. The open ocean widened upon either board, and the hills of the mainland began to go down on the horizon, before she came to her unhomey destination, and lay-to at last

where the rock clapped its black head above the swell, with the tall iron barrack on its spider legs, and the truncated tower, and the cranes waving their arms, and the smoke of the engine-fire rising in the mid-sea. An ugly reef is this of the Dhu Heartach ; no pleasant assemblage of shelves, and pools, and creeks, about which a child might play for a whole summer without weariness, like the Bell Rock or the Skerryvore, but one oval nodule of black-trap, sparsely bedabbled with an inconspicuous fucus, and alive in every crevice with a dingy insect between a slater and a bug. No other life was there but that of sea-birds, and of the sea itself, that here ran like a mill-race, and growled about the outer reef for ever, and ever and again, in the calmest weather, roared and spouted on the rock itself. Times were different upon Dhu Heartach when it blew, and the night fell dark, and the neighbour lights of Skerryvore and Rhu-val were quenched in fog, and the men sat prisoned high up in their iron drum, that then resounded with the lashing of the sprays. Fear sat with them in their sea-beleaguered dwelling ; and the colour changed in anxious faces when some greater billow struck the barrack, and its pillars quivered and sprang under the blow. It was then that the foreman builder, Mr. Goodwillie, whom I see before me still in his rock-habit of undecipherable rags, would get his fiddle down and strike up human minstrelsy amid the music of the storm. But it was in sunshine only that I saw Dhu Heartach ; and it was in sunshine, or the yet lovelier summer afterglow, that the steamer would return to Earraid, ploughing an enchanted sea ; the obedient lighters, relieved of their deck cargo, riding in her wake more quietly ; and the steersman upon each, as she rose on the long swell, standing tall and dark against the shining west.

## II

But it was in Earraid itself that I delighted chiefly. The lighthouse settlement scarce encroached beyond its fences ; over the top of the first brae the ground was all virgin, the world all shut out, the face of things unchanged

by any of man's doings. Here was no living presence, save for the limpets on the rocks, for some old, gray, rain-beaten ram that I might rouse out of a ferny den betwixt two boulders, or for the haunting and the piping of the gulls. It was older than man ; it was found so by incoming Celts, and seafaring Norsemen, and Columba's priests. The earthy savour of the bog plants, the rude disorder of the boulders, the inimitable seaside brightness of the air, the brine and the iodine, the lap of the billows among the weedy reefs, the sudden springing up of a great run of dashing surf along the sea-front of the isle, all that I saw and felt my predecessors must have seen and felt with scarce a difference. I steeped myself in open air and in past ages.

" Delightful would it be to me to be in *Uchd Ailiun*  
 On the pinnacle of a rock,  
 That I might often see  
 The face of the ocean ;  
 That I might hear the song of the wonderful birds,  
 Source of happiness ;  
 That I might hear the thunder of the crowding waves  
 Upon the rocks :  
 At times at work without compulsion—  
 This would be delightful ;  
 At times plucking dulse from the rocks ;  
 At times at fishing."

So, about the next island of Iona, sang Columba himself twelve hundred years before. And so might I have sung of Earraid.

And all the while I was aware that this life of sea-bathing and sun-burning was for me but a holiday. In that year cannon were roaring for days together on French battlefields ; and I would sit in my isle (I call it mine, after the use of lovers) and think upon the war, and the loudness of these far-away battles, and the pain of the men's wounds, and the weariness of their marching. And I would think too of that other war which is as old as mankind, and is indeed the life of man : the unsparing war, the grinding slavery of competition ; the toil of seventy years, dear-bought bread, precarious honour, the perils and pitfalls, and the poor rewards. It was a long

look forward ; the future summoned me as with trumpet calls, it warned me back as with a voice of weeping and beseeching ; and I thrilled and trembled on the brink of life, like a childish bather on the beach.

There was another young man on Earraid in these days, and we were much together, bathing, clambering on the boulders, trying to sail a boat and spinning round instead in the oily whirlpools of the roost. But the most part of the time we spoke of the great uncharted desert of our futures ; wondering together what should there befall us ; hearing with surprise the sound of our own voices in the empty vestibule of youth. As far, and as hard, as it seemed then to look forward to the grave, so far it seems now to look backward upon these emotions ; so hard to recall justly that loath submission, as of the sacrificial bull, with which we stooped our necks under the yoke of destiny. I met my old companion but the other day ; I cannot tell of course what he was thinking ; but, upon my part, I was wondering to see us both so much at home, and so composed and sedentary in the world ; and how much we had gained, and how much we had lost, to attain to that composure ; an I which had been upon the whole our best estate : when we sat there prating sensibly like men of some experience, or when we shared our timorous and hopeful counsels in a western islet.

## X

### PORTRAIT OF ROBERT HUNTER

WHETHER he was originally big or little is more than I can guess. When I knew him he was all fallen away and fallen in ; crooked and shrunken ; buckled into a stiff waistcoat for support ; troubled by ailments, which kept him hobbling in and out of the room ; one foot gouty ; a wig for decency, not for deception, on his head ; close shaved, except under his chin—and for that he never failed to apologize, for it went sore against the traditions of his life. You can imagine how he would fare in a novel by Miss Mather ; yet this rag of a Chelsea veteran lived to his last year in the plenitude of all that is best in man, brimming with human kindness, and staunch as a Roman soldier under his manifold infirmities. You could not say that he had lost his memory, for he would repeat Shakespeare and Webster and Jeremy Taylor and Burke by the page together ; but the parchment was filled up, there was no room for fresh inscriptions, and he was capable of repeating the same anecdote on many successive visits. His voice survived in its full power, and he took a pride in using it. On his last voyage as Commissioner of Lighthouses, he hailed a ship at sea and made himself clearly audible without a speaking trumpet, ruffling the while with a proper vanity in his achievement. He had a habit of eking out his words with interrogative hems, which was puzzling and a little wearisome, suited ill with his appearance, and seemed a survival from some former stage of bodily portliness. Of yore, when he was a great pedestrian and no enemy to good claret, he may have pointed with these minute guns his allocutions to the bench. His humour was perfectly equable, set beyond

the reach of fate ; gout, rheumatism, stone, and gravel might have combined their forces against that frail tabernacle, but when I came round on Sunday evening, he would lay aside Jeremy Taylor's *Life of Christ* and greet me with the same open brow, the same kind formality of manner. His opinions and sympathies dated the man almost to a decade. He had begun life, under his mother's influence, as an admirer of Junius, but on maturer knowledge had transferred his admiration to Burke. He cautioned me, with entire gravity, to be punctilious in writing English ; never to forget that I was a Scotchman, that English was a foreign tongue, and that if I attempted the colloquial, I should certainly be shamed : the remark was apposite, I suppose, in the days of David Hume. Scott was too new for him ; he had known the author—known him, too, for a Tory ; and to the genuine classic a contemporary is always something of a trouble. He had the old, serious love of the play ; had even, as he was proud to tell, played a certain part in the history of Shakespearian revivals, for he had successfully pressed on Murray, of the old Edinburgh Theatre, the idea of producing Shakespeare's fairy pieces with great scenic display. A moderate in religion, he was much struck in the last years of his life by a conversation with two young lads, revivalists. 'H'm,' he would say—'new to me. I have had—h'm—no such experience.' It struck him, not with pain, rather with a solemn philosophic interest, that he, a Christian as he hoped, and a Christian of so old a standing, should hear these young fellows talking of his own subject, his own weapons that he had fought the battle of life with,— 'and—h'm—not understand.' In this wise and graceful attitude he did justice to himself and others, reposed unshaken in his old beliefs, and recognized their limits without anger or alarm. His last recorded remark, on the last night of his life, was after he had been arguing against Calvinism with his minister and was interrupted by an intolerable pang. 'After all,' he said, 'of all the 'isms, I know none so bad as rheumatism.' My own last sight of him was some time before, when we dined together at an inn ; he had been on circuit, for he stuck to his

duties like a chief part of his existence ; and I remember it as the only occasion on which he ever soiled his lips with slang—a thing he loathed. We were both Roberts ; and as we took our places at table, he addressed me with a twinkle : ' We are just what you would call two bob.' He offered me port, I remember, as the proper milk of youth ; spoke of ' twenty-shilling notes ' ; and throughout the meal was full of old-world pleasantry and quaintness, like an ancient boy on a holiday. But what I recall chiefly was his confession that he had never read *Othello* to an end. Shakespeare was his continual study. He loved nothing better than to display his knowledge and memory by adducing parallel passages from Shakespeare, passages where the same word was employed, or the same idea differently treated. But *Othello* had beaten him. ' That noble gentleman and that noble lady—h'm—too painful for me.' The same night the hoardings were covered with posters, ' Burlesque of *Othello*,' and the contrast blazed up in my mind like a bonfire. An unforgettable look it gave me into that kind man's soul. His acquaintance was indeed a liberal and pious education. All the humanities were taught in that bare dining-room beside his gouty footstool. He was a piece of good advice ; he was himself the instance that pointed and adorned his various talk. Nor could a young man have found elsewhere a place so set apart from *envy*, fear, discontent, or any of the passions that debase ; a life so honest and composed ; a soul like an ancient violin, so subdued to harmony, responding to a touch in music—as in that dining-room, with Mr. Hunter chatting at the eleventh hour, under the shadow of eternity, fearless and gentle.

## XI

### BEGGARS

#### I

IN a pleasant, airy, up-hill country, it was my fortune when I was young to make the acquaintance of a certain beggar. I call him beggar, though he usually allowed his coat and his shoes (which were open-mouthed, indeed) to beg for him. He was the wreck of an athletic man, tall, gaunt, and bronzed ; far gone in consumption, with that disquieting smile of the mortally stricken on his face ; but still active afoot, still with the brisk military carriage, the ready military salute. Three ways led through this piece of country ; and as I was inconstant in my choice, I believe he must often have awaited me in vain. But often enough, he caught me ; often enough, from some place of ambush by the roadside, he would spring suddenly forth in the regulation attitude, and launching at once into his inconsequential talk, fall into step with me upon my farther course. ' A fine morning, sir, though perhaps a trifle inclining to rain. I hope I see you well, sir. Why, no, sir, I don't feel as hearty myself as I could wish, but I am keeping about my ordinary. I am pleased to meet you on the road, sir. I assure you I quite look forward to one of our little conversations.' He loved the sound of his own voice inordinately, and though (with something too off-hand to call servility) he would always hasten to agree with anything you said, yet he could never suffer you to say it to an end. By what transition he slid to his favourite subject I have no memory ; but we had never been long together on the way before he was dealing, in a very military manner, with the English poets. ' Shelley was a fine poet, sir, though a trifle atheistical in his opinion.

His Queen Mab, sir, is quite an atheistical work. Scott sir, is not so poetical a writer. With the works of Shakespeare I am not so well acquainted, but he was a fine poet. Keats—John Keats, sir—he was a very fine poet.' With such references, such trivial criticism, such loving parade of his own knowledge, he would beguile the road, striding forward up-hill, his staff now clapped to the ribs of his deep, resonant chest, now swinging in the air with the remembered jauntiness of the private soldier ; and all the while his toes looking out of his boots, and his shirt looking out of his elbows, and death looking out of his smile, and his big, crazy frame shaken by accesses of cough.

He would often go the whole way home with me : often to borrow a book, and that book always a poet. Off he would march, to continue his mendicant rounds, with the volume slipped into the pocket of his ragged coat ; and although he would sometimes keep it quite a while, yet it came always back again at last, not much the worse for its travels into beggardom. And in this way, doubtless, his knowledge grew and his glib, random criticism took a wider range. But my library was not the first he had drawn upon ; at our first encounter, he was already brimful of Shelley and the atheistical Queen Mab, and 'Keats—John Keats, sir.' And I have often wondered how he came by these acquirements ; just as I often wondered how he fell to be a beggar. He had served through the Mutiny—of which (like so many people) he could tell practically nothing beyond the names of places and that it was 'difficult work, sir,' and very hot, or that so-and-so was 'a very fine commander, sir.' He was far too smart a man to have remained a private ; in the nature of things, he must have won his stripes. And yet here he was without a pension. When I touched on this problem, he would content himself with diffidently offering me advice. 'A man should be very careful when he is young, sir. If you'll excuse me saying so, a spirited young gentleman like yourself, sir, should be very careful. I was perhaps a trifle inclined to atheistical opinions myself.' For (perhaps with a deeper wisdom than we

are inclined in these days to admit) he plainly bracketed agnosticism with beer and skittles.

Keats—John Keats, sir—and Shelley were his favourite bards. I cannot remember if I tried him with Rossetti ; but I know his taste to a hair, and if ever I did, he must have doted on that author. What took him was a richness in the speech ; he loved the exotic, the unexpected word ; the moving cadence of a phrase ; a vague sense of emotion (about nothing) in the very letters of the alphabet : the romance of language. His honest head was very nearly empty, his intellect like a child's ; and when he read his favourite authors, he can almost never have understood what he was reading. Yet the taste was not only genuine, it was exclusive ; I tried in vain to offer him novels ; he would none of them, he cared for nothing but romantic language that he could not understand. The case may be commoner than we suppose. I am reminded of a lad who was laid in the next cot to a friend of mine in a public hospital, and who was no sooner installed than he sent out (perhaps with his last pence) for a cheap Shakespeare. My friend pricked up his ears ; fell at once in a talk with his new neighbour, and was ready, when the book arrived, to make a singular discovery. For this lover of great literature understood not one sentence out of twelve, and his favourite part was that of which he understood the least—the inimitable, mouth-filling rodomontade of the ghost in *Hamlet*. It was a bright day in hospital when my friend expounded the sense of this beloved jargon : a task for which I am willing to believe my friend was very fit, though I can never regard it as an easy one. I know indeed a point or two, on which I would gladly question Mr. Shakespeare, that lover of big words, could he revisit the glimpses of the moon, or could I myself climb backward to the spacious days of Elizabeth. But in the second case, I should most likely pretermite these questionings, and take my place instead in the pit at the Blackfriars, to hear the actor in his favourite part, playing up to Mr. Burbage, and rolling out—as I seem to hear him—with a ponderous gusto—

' Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd.'

What a pleasant chance, if we could go there in a party ! and what a surprise for Mr. Burbage, when the ghost received the honours of the evening !

As for my old soldier, like Mr. Burbage and Mr. Shakespeare, he is long since dead ; and now lies buried, I suppose, and nameless and quite forgotten, in some poor city graveyard.—But not for me, you brave heart, have you been buried ! For me, you are still afoot, tasting the sun and air, and striding southward. By the groves of Comiston and beside the Hermitage of Braid, by the Hunters' Tryst, and where the curlews and plovers cry around Fairmilehead, I see and hear you, stalwartly carrying your deadly sickness, cheerfully discoursing of uncomprehended poets.

## II

The thought of the old soldier recalls that of another tramp, his counterpart. This was a little, lean, and fiery man, with the eyes of a dog and the face of a gipsy ; whom I found one morning encamped with his wife and children and his grinder's wheel, beside the burn of Kinnaird. To this beloved dell I went, at that time, daily ; and daily the knife-grinder and I (for as long as his tent continued pleasantly to interrupt my little wilderness) sat on two stones, and smoked, and plucked grass, and talked to the tune of the brown water. His children were mere whelps, they fought and bit among the fern like vermin. His wife was a mere squaw ; I saw her gather brush and tend the kettle, but she never ventured to address her lord while I was present. The tent was a mere gipsy hovel like a sty for pigs. But the grinder himself had the fine self-sufficiency and grave politeness of the hunter and the savage ; he did me the honours of this dell, which had been mine but the day before, took me far into the secrets of his life, and used me (I am proud to remember) as a friend.

Like my old soldier, he was far gone in the national complaint. Unlike him, he had a vulgar taste in letters ; scarce flying higher than the story papers ; probably

finding no difference, certainly seeking none, between Tannahill and Burns ; his noblest thoughts, whether of poetry or music, adequately embodied in that somewhat obvious ditty,

' Will ye gang, lassie, gang  
To the braes o' Balquidder:'

—which is indeed apt to echo in the ears of Scottish children, and to him, in view of his experience, must have found a special directness of address. But if he had no fine sense of poetry in letters, he felt with a deep joy the poetry of life. You should have heard him speak of what he loved ; of the tent pitched beside the talking water ; of the stars overhead at night ; of the blest return of morning, the peep of day over the moors, the awaking birds among the birches ; how he abhorred the long winter shut in cities ; and with what delight, at the return of the spring, he once more pitched his camp in the living out-of-doors. But we were a pair of tramps ; and to you, who are doubtless sedentary and a consistent first-class passenger in life, he would scarce have laid himself so open ;—to you, he might have been content to tell his story of a ghost—that of a buccaneer with his pistols as he lived—whom he had once encountered in a seaside cave near Buckie ; and that would have been enough, for that would have shown you the mettle of the man. Here was a piece of experience solidly and livingly built up in words, here was a story created, *teres alque rotundus*.

And to think of the old soldier, that lover of the literary bards ! He had visited stranger spots than any seaside cave ; encountered men more terrible than any spirit ; done and dared and suffered in that incredible, unsung epic of the Mutiny War ; played his part with the field force of Delhi, beleaguering and beleaguered ; shared in that enduring, savage anger and contempt of death and decency that, for long months together, bedevil'd and inspired the army ; was hurled to and fro in the battle-smoke of the assault ; was there, perhaps, where Nicholson fell ; was there when the attacking column, with hell upon every side, found the soldier's enemy—strong drink, and

the lives of tens of thousands trembled in the scale, and the fate of the flag of England staggered. And of all this he had no more to say than 'hot work, sir,' or 'the army suffered a great deal, sir,' or 'I believe General Wilson, sir, was not very highly thought of in the papers.' His life was naught to him, the vivid pages of experience quite blank : in words his pleasure lay—melodious, agitated words—printed words, about that which he had never seen and was connatally incapable of comprehending. We have here two temperaments face to face ; both untrained, unsophisticated, surprised (we may say) in the egg ; both boldly characterized :—that of the artist, the lover and artificer of words ; that of the maker, the seeër, the lover and forger of experience. If the one had a daughter and the other had a son, and these married, might not some illustrious writer count descent from the beggar-soldier and the needy knife-grinder ?

## XII

### RANDOM MEMORIES

#### THE EDUCATION OF AN ENGINEER

ANSTRUTHER is a place sacred to the Muse ; she inspired (really to a considerable extent) Tennant's vernacular poem *Anst'er Fair* ; and I have there waited upon her myself with much devotion. This was when I came as a young man to glean engineering experience from the building of the breakwater. What I gleaned, I am sure I do not know ; but indeed I had already my own private determination to be an author ; I loved the art of words and the appearances of life ; and *travellers*, and *headers*, and *rubble*, and *polished ashlar*, and *pierres perdues*, and even the thrilling question of the *string-course*, interested me only (if they interested me at all) as properties for some possible romance or as words to add to my vocabulary. To grow a little catholic is the compensation of years ; youth is one-eyed ; and in those days, though I haunted the breakwater by day, and even loved the place for the sake of the sunshine, the thrilling seaside air, the wash of waves on the sea-face, the green glimmer of the divers' helmets far below, and the musical chinking of the masons, my one genuine preoccupation lay elsewhere, and my only industry was in the hours when I was not on duty. I lodged with a certain Bailie Brown, a carpenter by trade ; and there, as soon as dinner was dispatched, in a chamber scented with dry rose leaves, drew in my chair to the table and proceeded to pour forth literature, at such a speed, and with such intimations of early death and immortality, as I now look back upon with wonder. Then it was that I wrote *Voces Fidelium*, a series of dramatic monologues

in verse ; then that I indited the bulk of a covenanting novel—like so many others never finished. Late I sat into the night, toiling (as I thought) under the very dart of death, toiling to leave a memory behind me. I feel moved to thrust aside the curtain of the years, to hail that poor feverish idiot, to bid him go to bed and clap *Voces Fidelium* on the fire before he goes ; so clear does he appear before me, sitting there between his candles in the rose-scented room and the late night ; so ridiculous a picture (to my elderly wisdom) does the fool present ! But he was driven to his bed at last without miraculous intervention ; and the manner of his driving sets the last touch upon this eminently youthful business. The weather was then so warm that I must keep the windows open ; the night without was populous with moths. As the late darkness deepened, my literary tapers beacons forth more brightly ; thicker and thicker came the dusty night-fliers, to gyrate for one brilliant instant round the flame and fall in agonies upon my paper. Flesh and blood could not endure the spectacle ; to capture immortality was doubtless a noble enterprise, but not to capture it at such a cost of suffering ; and out would go the candles, and off would I go to bed in the darkness, raging to think that the blow might fall on the morrow, and there was *Voces Fidelium* still incomplete. Well, the moths are all gone, and *Voces Fidelium* along with them ; only the fool is still on hand and practises new follies.

Only one thing in connexion with the harbour tempted me, and that was the diving, an experience I burned to taste of. But this was not to be, at least in Anstruther ; and the subject involves a change of scene to the sub-arctic town of Wick. You can never have dwelt in a country more unsightly than that part of Caithness, the land faintly swelling, faintly falling, not a tree, not a hedgerow, the fields divided by single slate-stones set upon their edge, the wind always singing in your ears and (down the long road that led nowhere) thrumming in the telegraph wires. Only as you approached the coast was there anything to stir the heart. The plateau broke down to the North Sea in formidable cliffs, the tall out-stacks rose like pillars

ringed about with surf, the coves were over-brimmed with clamorous froth, the sea-birds screamed, the wind sang in the thyme on the cliff's edge ; here and there, small ancient castles toppled on the brim ; here and there, it was possible to dip into a dell of shelter, where you might lie and tell yourself you were a little warm, and hear (near at hand) the whin-pods bursting in the afternoon sun, and (farther off) the rumour of the turbulent sea. As for Wick itself, it is one of the meanest of man's towns, and situate certainly on the baldest of God's bays. It lives for herring, and a strange sight it is to see (of an afternoon) the heights of Pulteney blackened by seaward-looking fishers, as when a city crowds to a review—or, as when bees have swarmed, the ground is horrible with lumps and clusters ; and a strange sight, and a beautiful, to see the fleet put silently out against a rising moon, the sea-line rough as a wood with sails, and ever and again and one after another, a boat flitting swiftly by the silver disk. This mass of fishers, this great fleet of boats, is out of all proportion to the town itself ; and the oars are manned and the nets hauled by immigrants from the Long Island (as we call the outer Hebrides), who come for that season only, and depart again, if 'the take' be poor, leaving debts behind them. In a bad year, the end of the herring fishery is therefore an exciting time ; fights are common, riots often possible ; an apple knocked from a child's hand was once the signal for something like a war ; and even when I was there, a gunboat lay in the bay to assist the authorities. To contrary interests, it should be observed, the curse of Babel is here added ; the Lews men are Gaelic speakers. Caithness has adopted English ; an odd circumstance, if you reflect that both must be largely Norsemen by descent. I remember seeing one of the strongest instances of this division : a thing like a Punch-and-Judy box erected on the flat grave-stones of the churchyard ; from the hutch or proscenium—I know not what to call it—an eldritch-looking preacher laying down the law in Gaelic about some one of the name of *Powl*, whom I at last divined to be the apostle to the Gentiles ; a large congregation of the Lews men very devoutly listening ; and on the

outskirts of the crowd, some of the town's children (to whom the whole affair was Greek and Hebrew) profanely playing tigg. The same descent, the same country, the same narrow sect of the same religion, and all these bonds made very largely nugatory by an accidental difference of dialect !

Into the bay of Wick stretched the dark length of the unfinished breakwater, in its cage of open staging; the travellers (like frames of churches) overplumbing all; and away at the extreme end, the divers toiling unseen on the foundation. On a platform of loose planks, the assistants turned their air-mills; a stone might be swinging between wind and water; underneath the swell ran gaily; and from time to time, a mailed dragon with a window-glass snout came dripping up the ladder. Youth is a blessed season after all; my stay at Wick was in the year of *Voces Fidelium* and the rose-leaf room at Bailie Brown's; and already I did not care two straws for literary glory. Posthumous ambition perhaps requires an atmosphere of roses; and the more rugged excitant of Wick east winds had made another boy of me. To go down in the diving-dress, that was my absorbing fancy; and with the countenance of a certain handsome scamp of a diver, Bob Bain by name, I gratified the whim.

It was gray, harsh, easterly weather, the swell ran pretty high, and out in the open there were 'skipper's daughters,' when I found myself at last on the diver's platform, twenty pounds of lead upon each foot and my whole person swollen with ply and ply of woollen under-clothing. One moment, the salt wind was whistling round my night-capped head; the next, I was crushed almost double under the weight of the helmet. As that intolerable burthen was laid upon me, I could have found it in my heart (only for shame's sake) to cry off from the whole enterprise. But it was too late. The attendants began to turn the hurdy-gurdy, and the air to whistle through the tube; some one screwed in the barred window of the vizor; and I was cut off in a moment from my fellow-men; standing there in their midst, but quite divorced from intercourse; a creature deaf and dumb,

pathetically looking forth upon them from a climate of his own. Except that I could move and feel, I was like a man fallen in a catalepsy. But time was scarce given me to realize my isolation ; the weights were hung upon my back and breast, the signal rope was thrust into my unresisting hand ; and setting a twenty-pound foot upon the ladder, I began ponderously to descend.

Some twenty rounds below the platform, twilight fell. Looking up, I saw a low green heaven mottled with vanishing bells of white ; looking around, except for the weedy spokes and shafts of the ladder, nothing but a green gloaming, somewhat opaque but very restful and delicious. Thirty rounds lower, I stepped off on the *pierres perdues* of the foundation ; a dumb helmeted figure took me by the hand, and made a gesture (as I read it) of encouragement ; and looking in at the creature's window, I beheld the face of Bain. There we were, hand to hand and (when it pleased us) eye to eye ; and either might have burst himself with shouting, and not a whisper come to his companion's hearing. Each, in his own little world of air, stood incommunicably separate.

Bob had told me ere this a little tale, a five minutes' drama at the bottom of the sea, which at that moment possibly shot across my mind. He was down with another, settling a stone of the sea-wall. They had it well adjusted, Bob gave the signal, the scissors were slipped, the stone set home ; and it was time to turn to something else. But still his companion remained bowed over the block like a mourner on a tomb, or only raised himself to make absurd contortions and mysterious signs unknown to the vocabulary of the diver. There, then, these two stood for awhile, like the dead and the living ; till there flashed a fortunate thought into Bob's mind, and he stooped, peered through the window of that other world, and beheld the face of its inhabitant wet with streaming tears. Ah ! the man was in pain ! And Bob, glancing downward, saw what was the trouble : the block had been lowered on the foot of that unfortunate—he was caught alive at the bottom of the sea under fifteen tons of rock.

That two men should handle a stone so heavy, even swinging in the scissors, may appear strange to the inexpert. These must bear in mind the great density of the water of the sea, and the surprising results of transplantation to that medium. To understand a little what these are, and how a man's weight, so far from being an encumbrance, is the very ground of his agility, was the chief lesson of my submarine experience. The knowledge came upon me by degrees. As I began to go forward with the hand of my estranged companion, a world of tumbled stones was visible, pillared with the weedy uprights of the staging : overhead, a flat roof of green : a little in front, the sea-wall, like an unfinished rampart. And presently in our upward progress, Bob motioned me to leap upon a stone ; I looked to see if he were possibly in earnest, and he only signed to me the more imperiously. Now the block stood six feet high ; it would have been quite a leap to me unencumbered ; with the breast and back weights, and the twenty pounds upon each foot, and the staggering load of the helmet, the thing was out of reason. I laughed aloud in my tomb'; and to prove to Bob how far he was astray, I gave a little impulse from my toes. Up I soared like a bird, my companion soaring at my side. As high as to the stone, and then higher, I pursued my impotent and empty flight. Even when the strong arm of Bob had checked my shoulders, my heels continued their ascent; so that I blew out sideways like an autumn leaf, and must be hauled in, hand over hand, as sailors haul in the slack of a sail, and propped upon my feet again like an intoxicated sparrow. Yet a little higher on the foundation, and we began to be affected by the bottom of the swell, running there like a strong breeze of wind. Or so I must suppose ; for, safe in my cushion of air, I was conscious of no impact; only swayed idly like a weed, and was now borne helplessly abroad, and now swiftly—and yet with dream-like gentleness impelled against my guide. So does a child's balloon divagate upon the currents of the air, and touch and slide off again from every obstacle. So must have ineffectually swung, so resented their inefficiency, those light crowds that followed

the Star of Hades, and uttered exiguous voices in the land beyond Cocytus.

There was something strangely exasperating, as well as strangely wearying, in these uncommanded evolutions. It is bitter to return to infancy, to be supported, and directed, and perpetually set upon your feet, by the hand of some one else. The air besides, as it is supplied to you by the busy millers on the platform, closes the eustachian tubes and keeps the neophyte perpetually swallowing, till his throat is grown so dry that he can swallow no longer. And for all these reasons—although I had a fine, dizzy, muddle-headed joy in my surroundings, and longed, and tried, and always failed, to lay hands on the fish that darted here and there about me, swift as humming-birds—yet I fancy I was rather relieved than otherwise when Bain brought me back to the ladder and signed to me to mount. And there was one more experience before me even then. Of a sudden, my ascending head passed into the trough of a swell. Out of the green, I shot at once into a glory of rosy, almost of sanguine light—the multitudinous seas incarnadined, the heaven above a vault of crimson. And then the glory faded into the hard, ugly daylight of a Caithness autumn, with a low sky, a gray sea, and a whistling wind.

Bob Bain had five shillings for his trouble, and I had done what I desired. It was one of the best things I got from my education as an engineer : of which, however, as a way of life, I wish to speak with sympathy. It takes a man into the open air; it keeps him hanging about harbour-sides, which is the richest form of idling ; it carries him to wild islands ; it gives him a taste of the genial dangers of the sea ; it supplies him with dexterities to exercise ; it makes demand upon his ingenuity ; it will go far to cure him of any taste (if ever he had one) for the miserable life of cities. And when it has done so, it carries him back and shuts him in an office ! From the roaring skerry and the wet thwart of the tossing boat, he passes to the stool and desk ; and with a memory full of ships, and seas, and perilous headlands, and the shining pharos, he must apply his long-sighted eyes to

the petty niceties of drawing, or measure his inaccurate mind with several pages of consecutive figures. He is a wise youth, to be sure, who can balance one part of genuine life against two parts of drudgery between four walls, and for the sake of the one, manfully accept the other.

Wick was scarce an eligible place of stay. But how much better it was to hang in the cold wind upon the pier, to go down with Bob Bain among the roots of the staging, to be all day in a boat coiling a wet rope and shouting orders -not always very wise —than to be warm and dry, and dull, and dead-alive, *in* the most comfortable office. And Wick itself had in those days a note of originality. It may have still, but I misdoubt it much. The old minister of Keiss would not preach, in these degenerate times, for an hour and a half upon the clock. The gipsies must be gone from their cavern ; where you might see, from the mouth, the women tending their fire, like Meg Merrilies, and the men sleeping off their coarse potations ; and where, in winter gales, the surf would beleaguer them closely, bursting in their very door. A traveller to-day upon the Thurso coach would scarce observe a little cloud of smoke among the moorlands, and be told, quite openly, it marked a private still. He would not indeed make that journey, for there is now no Thurso coach. And even if he could, one little thing that happened to me could never happen to him, or not, with the same trenchancy of contrast.

We had been upon the road all evening ; the coach-top was crowded with Lews fishers going home, scarce anything but Gaelic had sounded in my ears ; and our way had lain throughout over a moorish country very northern to behold. Latish at night, though it was still broad day in our subarctic latitude, we came down upon the shores of the roaring Pentland Firth, that grave of mariners ; on one hand, the cliffs of Dunnet Head ran seaward ; in front was the little bare, white town of Castleton, its streets full of blowing sand ; nothing beyond, but the North Islands, the great deep, and the perennial ice-fields of the Pole. And here, in the last imaginable place,

there sprang up young outlandish voices and a chatter of some foreign speech ; and I saw, pursuing the coach with its load of Hebridean fishers—as they had pursued *vetturini* up the passes of the Apennines or perhaps along the grotto under Virgil's tomb—two little dark-eyed, white-toothed Italian vagabonds, of twelve to fourteen years of age, one with a hurdy-gurdy, the other with a cage of white mice. The coach passed on, and their small Italian chatter died in the distance ; and I was left to marvel how they had wandered into that country, and how they fared in it, and what they thought of it, and when (if ever) they should see again the silver wind-breaks run among the olives, and the stone-pine stand guard upon Etruscan sepulchres.

Upon any American, the strangeness of this incident is somewhat lost. For as far back as he goes in his own land, he will find some alien camping there ; the Cornish miner, the French or Mexican half-blood, the negro in the South, these are deep in the woods and far among the mountains. But in an old, cold, and rugged country such as mine, the days of immigration are long at an end ; and away up there, which was at that time far beyond the northernmost extreme of railways, hard upon the shore of that ill-omened strait of whirlpools, in a land of moors where no stranger came, unless it should be a sportsman to shoot grouse or an antiquary to decipher runes, the presence of these small pedestrians struck the mind as though a bird-of-paradise had risen from the heather or an albatross come fishing in the bay of Wick. They were as strange to their surroundings as my lordly evangelist or the old Spanish grandee on the Fair Isle.

### XIII

## THE LANTERN-BEARERS

### I

THESE boys congregated every autumn about a certain easterly fisher-village, where they tasted in a high degree the glory of existence. The place was created seemingly on purpose for the diversion of young gentlemen. A street or two of houses, mostly red and many of them tiled ; a number of fine trees clustered about the manse and the kirkyard, and turning the chief street into a shady alley ; many little gardens more than usually bright with flowers ; nets a-drying, and fisher-wives scolding in the backward parts ; a smell of fish, a genial smell of seaweed ; whiffs of blowing sand at the street-corners ; shops with golf-balls and bottled lollipops ; another shop with penny pickwicks (that remarkable cigar) and the *London Journal*, dear to me for its startling pictures, and a few novels, dear for their suggestive names : such, as well as memory serves me, were the ingredients of the town. These, you are to conceive posted on a spit between two sandy bays, and sparsely flanked with villas -enough for the boys to lodge in with their subsidiary parents, not enough (not yet enough) to cocknify the scene : a haven in the rocks in front : in front of that, a file of gray islets : to the left, endless links and sand wreaths, a wilderness of hiding-holes, alive with popping rabbits and soaring gulls : to the right, a range of seaward crags, one rugged brow beyond another ; the ruins of a mighty and ancient fortress on the brink of one ; coves between—now charmed into sunshine quiet, now whistling with wind and clamorous with bursting surges ; the dens and sheltered hollows redolent of thyme and southernwood, the air at the cliff's

edge brisk and clean and pungent of the sea—in front of all, the Bass Rock, tilted seaward like a doubtful bather, the surf ringing it with white, the solan-geese hanging round its summit like a great and glittering smoke. This choice piece of seaboard was sacred, besides, to the wrecker: and the Bass, in the eye of fancy, still flew the colours of King James ; and in the ear of fancy the arches of Tantalion still rang with horseshoe iron, and echoed to the commands of Bell-the-Cat.

There was nothing to mar your days, if you were a boy summering in that part, but the embarrassment of pleasure. You might golf if you wanted ; but I seem to have been better employed. You might secrete yourself in the Lady's Walk, a certain sunless dingle of elders, all mossed over by the damp as green as grass, and dotted here and there by the stream-side with roofless walls, the cold homes of anchorites. To fit themselves for life, and with a special eye to acquire the art of smoking, it was even common for the boys to harbour there ; and you might have seen a single penny pickwick, honestly shared in lengths with a blunt knife, bestrew the glen with these apprentices. Again, you might join our fishing parties, where we sat perched as thick as solan-geese, a covey of little anglers, boy and girl, angling over each other's heads, to the much entanglement of lines and loss of podleys and consequent shrill recrimination — shrill as the geese themselves. Indeed, had that been all, you might have done this often ; but though fishing be a fine pastime, the podley is scarce to be regarded as a dainty for the table ; and it was a point of honour that a boy should eat all that he had taken. Or again, you might climb the Law, where the whale's jawbone stood landmark in the buzzing wind, and behold the face of many counties, and the smoke and spires of many towns, and the sails of distant ships. You might bathe, now in the flaws of fine weather, that we pathetically call our summer, now in a gale of wind, with the sand scourging your bare hide, your clothes thrashing abroad from underneath their guardian stone, the froth of the great breakers casting you headlong ere it had drowned your knees. Or you might explore the

tidal rocks, above all in the ebb of springs, when the very roots of the hill were for the nonce discovered ; following *my* leader from one group to another, groping in slippery tangle for the wreck of ships, wading in pools after the abominable creatures of the sea, and ever with an eye cast backward on the march of the tide and the menaced line of your retreat. And then you might go Crusoeing, a word that covers all extempore eating in the open air : digging perhaps a house under the margin of the links, kindling a fire of the sea-ware, and cooking apples there—if they were truly apples, for I sometimes suppose the merchant must have played us off with some inferior and quite local fruit, capable of resolving, in the neighbourhood of fire, into mere sand and smoke and iodine ; or perhaps pushing to Tantallon, you might lunch on sandwiches and visions in the grassy court, while the wind hummed in the crumbling turrets ; or clambering along the coast, eat geans<sup>1</sup> (the worst, I must suppose, in Christendom) from an adventurous gean tree that had taken root under a cliff, where it was shaken with an ague of east wind, and silvered after gales with salt, and grew so foreign among its bleak surroundings that to eat of its produce was an adventure in itself.

There are mingled some dismal memories with so many that were joyous. Of the fisher-wife, for instance, who had cut her throat at Canty Bay ; and of how I ran with the other children to the top of the Quadrant, and beheld a posse of silent people escorting a cart, and on the cart, bound in a chair, her throat bandaged, and the bandage all bloody—horror!—the fisher-wife herself, who continued thenceforth to hag-ride my thoughts, and even to-day (as I recall the scene) darkens daylight. She was lodged in the little old jail in the chief street ; but whether or no she died there, with a wise terror of the worst, I never inquired. She had been tipping ; it was but a dingy tragedy ; and it seems strange and hard that, after all these years, the poor crazy sinner should be still pilloried on her cart in the scrap-book of my memory. Nor shall I readily forget a certain house in the Quadrant where a

<sup>1</sup> Wild cherries.

visitor died, and a dark old woman continued to dwell alone with the dead body; nor how this old woman conceived a hatred to myself and one of my cousins, and in the dread hour of the dusk, as we were clambering on the garden-walls, opened a window in that house of mortality and cursed us in a shrill voice and with a marrowy choice of language. It was a pair of very colourless urchins that fled down the lane from this remarkable experience ! But I recall with a more doubtful sentiment, compounded out of fear and exultation, the coil of equinoctial tempests ; trumpeting squalls, scouring flaws of rain ; the boats with their reefed lugsails scudding for the harbour mouth, where danger lay, for it was hard to make when the wind had any east in it ; the wives clustered with blowing shawls at the pier-head, where (if fate was against them) they might see boat and husband and sons—their whole wealth and their whole family—engulfed under their eyes ; and (what I saw but once) a troop of neighbours forcing such an unfortunate homeward, and she squalling and battling in their midst, a figure scarcely human, a tragic Maenad.

These are things that I recall with interest ; but what my memory dwells upon the most, I have been all this while withholding. It was a sport peculiar to the place, and indeed to a week or so of our two months' holiday there. Maybe it still flourishes in its native spot ; for boys and their pastimes are swayed by periodic forces inscrutable to man : so that tops and marbles reappear in their due season, regular like the sun and moon ; and the harmless art of knucklebones has seen the fall of the Roman empire and the rise of the United States. It may still flourish in its native spot, but nowhere else, I am persuaded ; for I tried myself to introduce it on Tweed-side, and was defeated lamentably ; its charm being quite local, like a country wine that cannot be exported.

The idle manner of it was this :—

Toward the end of September, when school-time was drawing near and the nights were already black, we would begin to sally from our respective villas, each equipped with a tin bull's-eye lantern. The thing was so well

known that it had worn a rut in the commerce of Great Britain; and the grocers, about the due time, began to garnish their windows with our particular brand of luminary. We wore them buckled to the waist upon a cricket belt, and over them, such was the rigour of the game, a buttoned top-coat. They smelled noisomely of blistered tin; they never burned aright, though they would always burn our ringers; their use was naught; the pleasure of them merely fanciful; and yet a boy with a bull's-eye under his top-coat asked for nothing more. The fishermen used lanterns about their boats, and it was from them, I suppose, that we had got the hint; but theirs were not bull's-eyes, nor did we ever play at being fishermen. The police carried them at their belts, and we had plainly copied them in that; yet we did not pretend to be policemen. Burglars, indeed, we may have had some haunting thoughts of; and we had certainly an eye to past ages when lanterns were more common, and to certain story-books in which we had found them to figure very largely. But take it for all in all, the pleasure of the thing was substantive; and to be a boy with a bull's-eye under his top-coat was good enough for us.

When two of these asses met, there would be an anxious 'Have you got your lantern?' and a gratified 'Yes!' That was the shibboleth, and very needful too; for, as it was the rule to keep our glory contained, none could recognize a lantern-bearer, unless (like the polecat) by the smell. Four or five would sometimes climb into the belly of a ten-man lugger, with nothing but the thwarts above them—for the cabin was usually locked, or choose out some hollow of the links where the wind might whistle overhead. There the coats would be unbuttoned and the bull's-eyes discovered; and in the chequering glimmer, under the huge windy hall of the night, and cheered by a rich steam of toasting tinware, these fortunate young gentlemen would crouch together in the cold sand of the links or on the scaly bilges of the fishing-boat, and delight themselves with inappropriate talk. Woe is me that I may not give some specimens—some of their foresights of life, or deep inquiries into the rudiments of man and

nature, these were so fiery and so innocent, they were so richly silly, so romantically young. But the talk, at any rate, was but a condiment; and these gatherings themselves only accidents in the career of the lantern-bearer. The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night; the slide shut, the top-coat buttoned; not a ray escaping, whether to conduct your footsteps or to make your glory public: a mere pillar of darkness in the dark; and all the while, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's-eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge.

## II

It is said that a poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid. It may be contended, rather, that this (somewhat minor) bard in almost every case survives, and is the spice of life to the possessor. Justice is not done to the versatility and the unplumbed childishness of man's imagination. His life from without may seem but a rude mound of mud; there will be some golden chamber at the heart of it, in which he dwells delighted; and for as dark as his pathway seems to the observer, he will have some kind of a bull's-eye at his belt.

It would be hard to pick out a career more cheerless than that of Dancer, the miser, as he figures in the 'Old Bailey Reports,' a prey to the most sordid persecutions, the butt of his neighbourhood, betrayed by his hired man, his house beleaguered by the impish schoolboy, and he himself grinding and fuming and impotently fleeing to the law against these pin-pricks. You marvel at first that any one should willingly prolong a life so destitute of charm and dignity; and then you call to memory that had he chosen, had he ceased to be a miser, he could have been freed at once from these trials, and might have built himself a castle and gone escorted by a squadron. For the love of more recondite joys, which we cannot estimate, which, it may be, we should envy, the man had willingly forgone both comfort and consideration. 'His mind to him a kingdom was'; and sure enough, digging

into that mind, which seems at first a dust-heap, we unearth some priceless jewels. For Dancer must have had the love of power and the disdain of using it, a noble character in itself ; disdain of many pleasures, a chief part of what is commonly called wisdom ; disdain of the inevitable end, that finest trait of mankind ; scorn of men's opinions, another element of virtue ; and at the back of all, a conscience just like yours and mine, whining like a cur, swindling like a thimble-rigger, but still pointing (there or thereabout) to some conventional standard. Here were a cabinet portrait to which Hawthorne perhaps had done justice ; and yet not Hawthorne either, for he was mildly minded, and it lay not in him to create for us that throb of the miser's pulse, his fretful energy of gusto, his vast arms of ambition clutching in he knows not what : insatiable, insane, a god with a muck-rake. Thus, at least, looking in the bosom of the miser, consideration detects the poet in the full tide of life, with more, indeed, of the poetic fire than usually goes to epics ; and tracing that mean man about his cold hearth, and to and fro in his uncomfortable house, spies within him a blazing bonfire of delight. And so with others, who do not live by bread alone, but by some cherished and perhaps fantastic pleasure ; who are meat salesmen to the external eye, and possibly to themselves are Shakespeares, Napoleons, or Beethovens ; who have not one virtue to rub against another in the field of active life, and yet perhaps, in the life of contemplation, sit with the saints. We see them on the street, and we can count their buttons ; but heaven knows in what they pride themselves ! heaven knows where they have set their treasure !

There is one fable that touches very near the quick of life : the fable of the monk who passed into the woods, heard a bird break into song, hearkened for a trill or two, and found himself on his return a stranger at his convent gates ; for he had been absent fifty years, and of all his comrades there survived but one to recognize him. It is not only in the woods that this enchanter carols, though perhaps he is native there. He sings in the most doleful places. The miser hears him and chuckles, and the days

are moments. With no more apparatus than an ill-smelling lantern I have evoked him on the naked links. All life that is not merely mechanical is spun out of two strands : seeking for that bird and hearing him. And it is just this that makes life so hard to value, and the delight of each so incommunicable. And just a knowledge of this, and a remembrance of those fortunate hours in which the bird has sung to us, that fills us with such wonder when we turn the pages of the realist. There, to be sure, we find a picture of life in so far as it consists of mud and of old iron, cheap desires and cheap fears, that which we are ashamed to remember and that which we are careless whether we forget; but of the note of that time-devouring nightingale we hear no news.

The case of these writers of romance is most obscure. They have been boys and youths ; they have lingered outside the window of the beloved, who was then most probably writing to some one else ; they have sat before a sheet of paper, and felt themselves mere continents of congested poetry, not one line of which would flow ; they have walked alone in the woods, they have walked in cities under the countless lamps ; they have been to sea, they have hated, they have feared, they have longed to knife a man, and maybe done it ; the wild taste of life has stung their palate. Or, if you deny them all the rest, one pleasure at least they have tasted to the full—their books are there to prove it—the keen pleasure of successful literary composition. And yet they fill the globe with volumes, whose cleverness inspires me with despairing admiration, and whose consistent falsity to all I care to call existence, with despairing wrath. If I had no better hope than to continue to revolve among the dreary and petty businesses, and to be removed by the paltry hopes and fears with which they surround and animate their heroes, I declare I would die now. But there has never an hour of mine gone quite so dully yet ; if it were spent waiting at a railway junction, I would have some scattering thoughts, I could count some grains of memory, compared to which the whole of one of these romances seems but dross.

These writers would retort (if I take them properly) that this was very true ; that it was the same with themselves and other persons of (what they call) the artistic temperament; that in this we were exceptional, and should apparently be ashamed of ourselves ; but that our works must deal exclusively with (what they call) the average man, who was a prodigious dull fellow, and quite dead to all but the paltriest considerations. I accept the issue. We can only know others by ourselves. The artistic temperament (a plague on the expression !) does not make us different from our fellowmen, or it would make us incapable of writing novels ; and the average man (a murrain on the word !) is just like you and me, or he would not be average. It was Whitman who stamped a kind of Birmingham sacredness upon the latter phrase ; but Whitman knew very well, and showed very nobly, that the average man was full of joys and full of a poetry of his own. And this harping on life's dullness and man's meanness is a loud profession of incompetence ; it is one of two things : the cry of the blind eye, I *cannot see*, or the complaint of the dumb tongue, I *cannot utter*. To draw a life without delights is to prove I have not realized it. To picture a man without some sort of poetry—well, it goes near to prove my case, for it shows an author may have little enough. To see Dancer only as a dirty, old, small-minded, impotently fuming man, in a dirty house, besieged by Harrow boys, and probably beset by small attorneys, is to show myself as keen an observer as . . . the Harrow boys. But these young gentlemen (with a more becoming modesty) were content to pluck Dancer by the coat-tails ; they did not suppose they had surprised his secret or could put him living in a book : and it is there my error would have lain. Or say that in the same romance—I continue to call these books romances, in the hope of giving pain—say that in the same romance, which now begins really to take shape, I should leave to speak of Dancer, and follow instead the Harrow boys; and say that I came on some such business as that of my lantern-bearers on the links; and described the boys as very cold, spat upon by flurries of rain, and drearily

surrounded, all of which they were ; and their talk as silly and indecent, which it certainly was. I might upon these lines, and had I Zola's genius, turn out, in a page or so, a gem of literary art, render the lantern-light with the touches of a master, and lay on the indecency with the ungrudging hand of love ; and when all was done, what a triumph would my picture be of shallowness and dullness ! how it would have missed the point ! how it would have belied the boys ! To the ear of the stenographer, the talk is merely silly and indecent ; but ask the boys themselves, and they are discussing (as it is highly proper they should) the possibilities of existence. To the eye of the observer they are wet and cold and drearily surrounded ; but ask themselves, and they are in the heaven of a recondite pleasure, the ground of which is an ill-smelling lantern.

### III

For, to repeat, the ground of a man's joy is often hard to hit. It may hinge at times upon a mere accessory, like the lantern, it may reside, like Dancer's, in the mysterious inwards of psychology. It may consist with perpetual failure, and find exercise in the continued chase. It has so little bond with externals (such as the observer scribbles in his note-book) that it may even touch them not ; and the man's true life, for which he consents to live, lie altogether in the field of fancy. The clergyman, in his spare hours, may be winning battles, the farmer sailing ships, the banker reaping triumph in the arts : all leading another life, plying another trade from that they chose ; like the poet's housebuilder, who, after all, is cased in stone,

**\* By his fireside, as impotent fancy prompts,  
Rebuilds it to his liking.'**

In such a case the poetry runs underground. The observer (poor soul, with his documents !) is all abroad. For to look at the man is but to court deception. We shall see the trunk from which he draws his nourishment ; but he

himself is above and abroad in the green dome of foliage, hummed through by winds and nested in by nightingales. And the true realism were that of the poets, to climb up after him like a squirrel, and catch some glimpse of the heaven for which he lives. And the true realism, always and everywhere, is that of the poets : to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing.

For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action. That is the explanation, that the excuse. To one who has not the secret of the lanterns, the scene upon the links is meaningless. And hence the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books. Hence, when we read the English realists, the incredulous wonder with which we observe the hero's constancy under the submerging tide of dullness, and how he bears up with his jibbing sweetheart, and endures the chatter of idiot girls, and stands by his whole unfeatured wilderness of an existence, instead of seeking relief in drink or foreign travel. Hence in the French, in that meat-market of middle-aged sensuality, the disgusted surprise with which we see the hero drift sidelong, and practically quite untempted, into every description of misconduct and dishonour. In each, we miss the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennoble what is base ; in each, life falls dead like dough, instead of soaring away like a balloon into the colours of the sunset ; each is true, each inconceivable ; for no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brain, with the painted windows and the storied walls.

Of this falsity we have had a recent example from a man who knows far better—Tolstoi's *Powers of Darkness*. Here is a piece full of force and truth, yet quite untrue. For before Mikita was led into so dire a situation he was tempted, and temptations are beautiful at least in part ; and a work which dwells on the ugliness of crime and gives no hint of any loveliness in the temptation, sins against the modesty of life, and even when a Tolstoi writes it, sinks to melodrama. The peasants are not

understood ; they saw their life in fairer colours ; even the deaf girl was clothed in poetry for Mikita, or he had never fallen. And so, once again, even an Old Bailey melodrama, without some brightness of poetry and lustre of existence, falls into the inconceivable and ranks with fairy tales.

## IV

In nobler books we are moved with something like the emotions of life; and this emotion is very variously provoked. We are so moved when Levine labours in the field, when Andre sinks beyond emotion, when Richard Feverel and Lucy Desborough meet beside the river, when Antony, 'not cowardly, puts off his helmet,' when Kent has infinite pity on the dying Lear, when, in Dostoevsky's *Despised and Rejected*, the uncomplaining hero drains his cup of suffering and virtue. These are notes that please the great heart of man. Not only love, and the fields, and the bright face of danger, but sacrifice and death and unmerited suffering humbly supported, touch in us the vein of the poetic. We love to think of them, we long to try them, we are humbly hopeful that we may prove heroes also.

We have heard, perhaps, too much of lesser matters. Here is the door, here is the open air. *Itur in antiquam silvam.*

## XIV

### A CHRISTMAS SERMON

BY the time this paper appears, I shall have been talking for twelve months ;<sup>1</sup> and it is thought I should take my leave in a formal and seasonable manner. Vale-dictory eloquence is rare, and death-bed sayings have not often hit the mark of the occasion. Charles Second, wit and sceptic, a man whose life had been one long lesson in human incredulity, an easy-going comrade, a manoeuvring king—remembered and embodied all his wit and scepticism along with more than his usual good humour in the famous 'I am afraid, gentlemen, I am an unconscionable time a-dying.'

#### I

An unconscionable time a-dying—there is the picture ('I am afraid, gentlemen,') of your life and of mine. The sands run out, and the hours are 'numbered and imputed,' and the days go by ; and when the last of these finds us, we have been a long time dying, and what else ? The very length is something, if we reach that hour of separation undishonoured ; and to have lived at all is doubtless (in the soldierly expression) to have served. There is a tale in Tacitus of how the veterans mutinied in the German wilderness ; of how they mobbed Germanicus, clamouring to go home ; and of how, seizing their general's hand, these old, war-worn exiles passed his finger along their toothless gums. *Sunt lacrymæ rerum* : this was the most eloquent of the songs of Simeon. And when a man has lived to a fair age, he bears his marks of service. He

<sup>1</sup> i.e. in the pages of *Scribner's Magazine* (1888).

may have never been remarked upon the breach at the head of the army ; at least he shall have lost his teeth on the camp bread.

The idealism of serious people in this age of ours is of a noble character. It never seems to them that they have served enough ; they have a fine impatience of their virtues. It were perhaps more modest to be singly thankful that we are no worse. It is not only our enemies, those desperate characters—it is we ourselves who know not what we do ;—thence springs the glimmering hope that perhaps we do better than we think : that to scramble through this random business with hands reasonably clean, to have played the part of a man or woman with some reasonable fullness, to have often resisted the diabolic, and at the end to be still resisting it, is for the poor human soldier to have done right well. To ask to see some fruit of our endeavour is but a transcendental way of serving for reward ; and what we take to be contempt of self is only greed of hire.

And again if we require so much of ourselves, shall we not require much of others ? If we do not genially judge our own deficiencies, is it not to be feared we shall be even stern to the trespasses of others ? And he who (looking back upon his own life) can see no more than that he has been unconscionably long a-dying, will he not be tempted to think his neighbour unconscionably long of getting hanged ? It is probable that nearly all who think of conduct at all, think of it too much ; it is certain we all think too much of sin. We are not damned for doing wrong, but for not doing right ; Christ would never hear of negative morality ; *thou shalt* was ever his word, with which he superseded *thou shalt not*. To make our idea of morality centre on forbidden acts is to defile the imagination and to introduce into our judgements of our fellow-men a secret element of gusto. If a thing is wrong for us, we should not dwell upon the thought of it ; or we shall soon dwell upon it with inverted pleasure. If we cannot drive it from our minds—one thing of two : either our creed is in the wrong and we must more indulgently remodel it ; or else, if our morality be in the right, we are criminal lunatics and should place our persons in restraint.

A mark of such unwholesomely divided minds is the passion for interference with others : the Fox without the Tail was of this breed, but had (if his biographer is to be trusted) a certain antique civility now out of date. A man may have a flaw, a weakness that unfits him for the duties of life, that spoils his temper, that threatens his integrity, or that betrays him into cruelty. It has to be conquered; but it must never be suffered to engross his thoughts. The true duties lie all upon the farther side, and must be attended to with a whole mind so soon as this preliminary clearing of the decks has been effected. In order that he may be kind and honest, it may be needful he should become a total abstainer ; let him become so then, and the next day let him forget the circumstance. Trying to be kind and honest will require all his thoughts ; a mortified appetite is never a wise companion ; in so far as he has had to mortify an appetite, he will still be the worse man ; and of such an one a great deal of cheerfulness will be required in judging life, and a great deal of humility in judging others.

It may be argued again that dissatisfaction with our life's endeavour springs in some degree from dullness. We require higher tasks, because we do not recognize the height of those we have. Trying to be kind and honest seems an affair too simple and too inconsequential for gentlemen of our heroic mould ; we had rather set ourselves to something bold, arduous, and conclusive ; we had rather found a schism or suppress a heresy, cut off a hand or mortify an appetite. But the task before us, which is to co-endure with our existence, is rather one of microscopic fineness, and the heroism required is that of patience. There is no cutting of the Gordian knots of life ; each must be smilingly unravelled.

To be honest, to be kind—to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim condition, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy. He has an ambitious soul

who would ask more ; he has a hopeful spirit who should look in such an enterprise to be successful. There is indeed one element in human destiny that not blindness itself can controvert : whatever else we are intended to do, we are not intended to succeed ; failure is the fate allotted. It is so in every art and study ; it is so above all in the continent art of living well. Here is a pleasant thought for the year's end or for the end of life : Only self-deception will be satisfied, and there need be no despair for the despaier.

## II

But Christmas is not only the mile-mark of another year, moving us to thoughts of self-examination : it is a season, from all its associations, whether domestic or religious, suggesting thoughts of joy. A man dissatisfied with his endeavours is a man tempted to sadness. And in the midst of the winter, when his life runs lowest and he is reminded of the empty chairs of his beloved, it is well he should be condemned to this fashion of the smiling face. Noble disappointment, noble self-denial are not to be pardoned, if they bring bitterness. It is one thing to enter the kingdom of heaven maim ; another to maim yourself and stay without. And the kingdom of heaven is of the child-like, of those who are easy to please, who love and who give pleasure. Mighty men of their hands, the smiters and the builders and the judges, have lived long and done sternly and yet preserved this lovely character ; and among our carpet interests and twopenny concerns, the shame were indelible if *we* should lose it. Gentleness and cheerfulness, these come before all morality ; they are the perfect duties. And it is the trouble with moral men that they have neither one nor other. It was the moral man, the Pharisee, whom Christ could not away with. If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong. I do not say ' give them up,' for they may be all you have ; but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better and simpler people.

A strange temptation attends upon a man : to keep his eye on pleasures even when he will not share in them ;

to aim all his morals against them. This very year a lady (singular iconoclast!) proclaimed a crusade against dolls ; and the racy sermon against lust is a feature of the age. I venture to call such moralists insincere. At any excess or perversion of a natural appetite, their lyre sounds of itself with relishing denunciations ; but for all displays of the truly diabolic—envy, malice, the mean lie, the mean silence, the calumnious truth, the back-biter, the petty tyrant, the peevish poisoner of family life—their standard is quite different. These are wrong, they will admit, yet somehow not so wrong ; there is no zeal in their assault on them, no secret element of gusto warms up the sermon ; it is for things not wrong in themselves that they reserve the choicest of their indignation. A man may naturally disclaim all moral kinship with the Reverend Mr. Zola or the hobgoblin old lady of the dolls ; for these are gross and naked instances. And yet in each of us some similar element resides. The sight of a pleasure in which we cannot or else will not share moves us to a particular impatience. It may be because we are envious, or because we are sad, or because we dislike noise and romping—being so refined, or because—being so philosophic—we have an overwhelming sense of life's gravity : at least, as we go on in years, we are all tempted to frown upon our neighbour's pleasures. People are nowadays so fond of resisting temptations : here is one to be resisted. They are fond of self-denial ; here is a propensity that cannot be too peremptorily denied. There is an idea abroad among moral people that they should make their neighbours good. One person I have to make good : myself. But my duty to my neighbour is much more nearly expressed by saying that I have to make him happy—if I may.

## III

Happiness and goodness, according to canting moralists, stand in the relation of effect and cause. There was never anything less proved or less probable : our happiness is never in our own hands ; we inherit our constitution ; we stand buffet among friends and enemies ; we may be

so built as to feel a sneer or an aspersion with unusual keenness, and so circumstanced as to be unusually exposed to them; we may have nerves very sensitive to pain, and be afflicted with a disease very painful. Virtue will not help us, and it is not meant to help us. It is not even its own reward, except for the self-centred and—I had almost said—the unamiable. No man can pacify his conscience; if quiet be what he want, he shall do better to let that organ perish from disuse. And to avoid the penalties of the law, and the minor *capitis diminutio* of social ostracism, is an affair of wisdom—of cunning, if you will—and not virtue.

In his own life, then, a man is not to expect happiness, only to profit by it gladly when it shall arise; he is on duty here; he knows not how or why, and does not need to know; he knows not for what hire, and must not ask. Somehow or other, though he does not know what goodness is, he must try to be good; somehow or other, though he cannot tell what will do it, he must try to give happiness to others. And no doubt there comes in here a frequent clash of duties. How far is he to make his neighbour happy? How far must he respect that smiling face, so easy to cloud, so hard to brighten again? And how far, on the other side, is he bound to be his brother's keeper and the prophet of his own morality? How far must he resent evil?

The difficulty is that we have little guidance; Christ's sayings on the point being hard to reconcile with each other, and (the most of them) hard to accept. But the truth of his teaching would seem to be this: in our own person and fortune, we should be ready to accept and to pardon all; it is *our* cheek we are to turn, *our* coat that we are to give away to the man who has taken *our* cloak. But when another's face is buffeted, perhaps a little of the lion will become us best. That we are to suffer others to be injured, and stand by, is not conceivable and surely not desirable. Revenge, says Bacon, is a kind of wild justice; its judgements at least are delivered by an insane judge; and in our own quarrel we can see nothing truly and do nothing wisely. But in the quarrel of our neigh-

bour, let us be more bold. One person's happiness is as sacred as another's ; when we cannot defend both, let us defend one with a stout heart. It is only in so far as we are doing this, that we have any right to interfere : the defence of B is our only ground of action against A. A has as good a right to go to the devil, as we to go to glory ; and neither knows what he does.

The truth is, that all these interventions and denunciations and militant mongerings of moral half-truths, though they are often enjoyable, do yet belong to an inferior grade of duties. Ill-temper and envy and revenge find here an arsenal of pious disguises ; this is the playground of inverted lusts. With a little more patience and a little less temper, a gentler and wiser method might be found in almost every case ; and the knot that we cut by some fine heady quarrel-scene in private life, or, in public affairs, by some denunciatory act against what we are pleased to call our neighbour's vices, might yet have been unwoven by the hand of sympathy.

#### IV

To look back upon the past year, and see how little we have striven and to what small purpose ; and how often we have been cowardly and hung back, or temerarious and rushed unwisely in ; and how every day and all day long we have transgressed the law of kindness ;—it may seem a paradox but in the bitterness of these discoveries a certain consolation resides. Life is not designed to minister to a man's vanity. He goes upon his long business most of the time with a hanging head, and all the time like a blind child. Full of rewards and pleasures as it is—so that to see the day break or the moon rise, or to meet a friend, or to hear the dinner-call when he is hungry, fills him with surprising joys—this world is yet for him no abiding city. Friendships fall through, health fails, weariness assails him ; year after year, he must thumb the hardly varying record of his own weakness and folly. It is a friendly process of detachment. When the time comes that he should go,

there need be few illusions left about himself. *Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, jailed much* :—surely that may be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed. Nor will complain at the summons which calls a defeated soldier from the field : defeated, ay, if he were Paul or Marcus Aurelius !—but if there is still one inch of fight in his old spirit, undishonoured. The faith which sustained him in his life-long blindness and life-long disappointment will scarce even be required in this last formality of laying down his arms. Give him a march with his old bones ; there, out of the glorious sun-coloured earth, out of the day and the dust and the ecstasy—there goes another Faithful Failure !

From a recent book of verse, where there is more than one such beautiful and manly poem, I take this memorial piece : it says better than I can, what I love to think ; let it be our parting word.

' A late lark twitters from the quiet skies ;  
 And from the west,  
 Where the sun, his day's work ended,  
 Lingers as in content,  
 There falls on the old, gray city  
 An influence luminous and serene,  
 A shining peace.  
 ' The smoke ascends  
 In a rosy-and-golden haze. The spires  
 Shine, and are changed. In the valley  
 Shadows rise. The lark sings on. The sun,  
 Closing his benediction,  
 Sinks, and the darkening air  
 Thrills with a sense of the triumphing night—  
 Night, with her train of stars  
 And her great gift of sleep.  
 So be my passing !  
 My task accomplished and the long day done,  
 My wages taken, and in my heart  
 Some late lark singing,  
 Let me be gathered to the quiet west,  
 The sundown splendid and serene,  
 Death.'

<sup>1</sup> From *A Book of Verses* by William Ernest Henley. D. Nutt, 1888.

## XV

### AN APOLOGY FOR IDLERS

' BOSWELL : We grow weary when idle.

\* JOHNSON : That is, sir, because others being busy, we want company ; but if we were idle, there would be no growing weary ; we should all entertain one another."

JUST now, when every one is bound, under pain of a decree in absence convicting them of lèse-respectability, to enter on some lucrative profession, and labour therein with something not far short of enthusiasm, a cry from the opposite party who are content when they have enough, and like to look on and enjoy in the meanwhile, savours a little of bravado and gasconade. And yet this should not be. Idleness so called, which does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognized in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class, has as good a right to state its position as industry itself. It is admitted that the presence of people who refuse to enter in the great handicap race for sixpenny pieces, is at once an insult and a disenchantment for those who do. A fine fellow (as we see so many) takes his determination, votes for sixpences, and in the emphatic Americanism, ' goes for ' them. And while such an one is ploughing distressfully up the road, it is not hard to understand his resentment, when he perceives cool persons in the meadows by the wayside, lying with a handkerchief over their ears and a glass at their elbow. Alexander is touched in a very delicate place by the disregard of Diogenes. Where was the glory of having taken Rome for these tumultuous barbarians, who poured into the Senate house, and found the Fathers sitting silent and unmoved by their success / It is a sore thing to have laboured along and scaled the arduous hilltops, **and** when all is done find humanity

indifferent to your achievement. Hence physicists condemn the unphysical; financiers have only a superficial toleration for those who know little of stocks; literary persons despise the unlettered; and people of all pursuits combine to disparage those who have none.

But though this is one difficulty of the subject, it is not the greatest. You could not be put in prison for speaking against industry, but you can be sent to Coventry for speaking like a fool. The greatest difficulty with most subjects is to do them well; therefore, please to remember this is an apology. It is certain that much may be judiciously argued in favour of diligence; only there is something to be said against it, and that is what, on the present occasion, I have to say. To state one argument is not necessarily to be deaf to all others, and that a man has written a book of travels in Montenegro, is no reason why he should never have been to Richmond.

It is surely beyond a doubt that people should be a good deal idle in youth. For though here and there a Lord Macaulay may escape from school honours with all his wits about him, most boys pay so dear for their medals that they never afterwards have a shot in their locker, and begin the world bankrupt. And the same holds true during all the time a lad is educating himself, or suffering others to educate him. It must have been a very foolish old gentleman who addressed Johnson at Oxford in these words: 'Young man, ply your book diligently now, and acquire a stock of knowledge; for when years come upon you, you will find that poring upon books will be but an irksome task.' The old gentleman seems to have been unaware that many other things besides reading grow irksome, and not a few become impossible, by the time a man has to use spectacles and cannot walk without a stick. Books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life. It seems a pity to sit like the Lady of Shalott, peering into a mirror, with your back turned on all the bustle and glamour of reality. And if a man reads very hard, as the old anecdote reminds us, he will have little time for thought.

If you look back on your own education, I am sure it will not be the full, vivid, instructive hours of truantry that you regret; you would rather cancel some lack-lustre periods between sleep and waking in the class. For my own part, I have attended a good many lectures in my time. I still remember that the spinning of a top is a case of Kinetic Stability. I still remember that Emphyteusis is not a disease, nor Stillicide a crime. But though I would not willingly part with such scraps of science, I do not set the same store by them as by certain other odds and ends that I came by in the open street while I was playing truant. This is not the moment to dilate on that mighty place of education, which was the favourite school of Dickens and of Balzac, and turns out yearly many inglorious masters in the Science of the Aspects of Life. Suffice it to say this : if a lad does not learn in the streets, it is because he has no faculty of learning. Nor is the truant always in the streets, for if he prefers, he may go out by the gardened suburbs into the country. He may pitch on some tuft of lilacs over a burn, and smoke innumerable pipes to the tune of the water on the stones. A bird will sing in the thicket. And there he may fall into a vein of kindly thought, and see things in a new perspective. Why, if this be not education, what is ? We may conceive Mr. Worldly Wiseman accosting such an one, and the conversation that should thereupon ensue :—

'How now, young fellow, what dost thou here ?'

'Truly, sir, I take mine ease.'

'Is not this the hour of the class ? and should'st thou not be plying thy Book with diligence, to the end thou mayest obtain knowledge ?'

'Nay, but thus also I follow after Learning, by your leave.'

'Learning, quotha ! After what fashion, I pray thee ? Is it mathematics ?'

'No, to be sure.'

'Is it metaphysics ?'

'Nor that.'

'Is it some language ?'

'Nay, it is no language.'

'Is it a trade ?'

'Nor a trade neither.'

'Why, then, what is't ?'

'Indeed, sir, as time may soon come for me to go upon Pilgrimage, I am desirous to note what is commonly done by persons in my case, and where are the ugliest Sloughs and Thickets on the Road ; as also, what manner of staff is of the best service. Moreover, I lie here, by this water, to learn by root-of-heart a lesson which my master teaches me to call Peace, or Contentment.'

Hereupon Mr. Worldly Wiseman was much commoved with passion, and shaking his cane with a very threatenful countenance, broke forth upon this wise : 'Learning, quotha !' said he ; 'I would have all such rogues scourged by the Hangman !'

And so he would go his way, ruffling out his cravat with a crackle of starch, like a turkey when it spread its feathers.

Now this, of Mr. Wiseman's, is the common opinion. A fact is not called a fact, but a piece of gossip, if it does not fall into one of your scholastic categories. An inquiry must be in some acknowledged direction, with a name to go by ; or else you are not inquiring at all, only lounging ; and the workhouse is too good for you. It is supposed that all knowledge is at the bottom of a well, or the far end of a telescope. Sainte-Beuve, as he grew older, came to regard all experience as a single great book, in which to study for a few years ere we go hence, and it seemed all one to him whether you should read in Chapter xx, which is the differential calculus, or in Chapter xxxix, which is hearing the band play in the gardens. As a matter of fact, an intelligent person, looking out of his eyes and hearkening in his ears, with a smile on his face all the time, will get more true education than many another in a life of heroic vigils. There is certainly some chill and arid knowledge to be found upon the summits of formal and laborious science ; but it is all round about you, and for the trouble of looking, that you will acquire the warm and palpitating facts of life. While others are filling their

memory with a lumber of words, one-half of which they will forget before the week be out, your truant may learn some really useful art : to play the fiddle, to know a good cigar, or to speak with ease and opportunity to all varieties of men. Many who have 'plied their book diligently,' and know all about some one branch or another of accepted lore, come out of the study with an ancient and owl-like demeanour, and prove dry, stockish, and dyspeptic in all the better and brighter parts of life. Many make a large fortune who remain underbred and pathetically stupid to the last. And meanwhile there goes the idler, who began life along with them—by your leave, a different picture. He has had time to take care of his health and his spirits ; he has been a great deal in the open air, which is the most salutary of all things for both body and mind ; and if he has never read the great Book in very recondite places, he has dipped into it and skimmed it over to excellent purpose. Might not the student afford some Hebrew roots, and the business man some of his half-crowns, for a share of the idler's knowledge of life at large, and Art of Living ? Nay, and the idler has another and more important quality than these. I mean his wisdom. He who has much looked on at the childish satisfaction of other people in their hobbies, will regard his own with only a very ironical indulgence. He will not be heard among the dogmatists. He will have a great and cool allowance for all sorts of people and opinions. If he finds no out-of-the-way truths, he will identify himself with no very burning falsehood. His way takes him along a by-road, not much frequented, but very even and pleasant, which is called Commonplace Lane, and leads to the Belvedere of Common-sense. Thence he shall command an agreeable, if no very noble prospect ; and while others behold the East and West, the Devil and the Sunrise, he will be contentedly aware of a sort of morning hour upon all sublunary things, with an army of shadows running speedily and in many different directions into the great daylight of Eternity. The shadows and the generations, the shrill doctors and the plangent wars, go by into ultimate silence and emptiness ; but underneath all this, a man

may see, out of the Belvedere windows, much green and peaceful landscape ; many firelit parlours ; good people laughing, drinking, and making love as they did before the Flood or the French Revolution ; and the old shepherd telling his tale under the hawthorn.

Extreme *busyness*, whether at school or college, kirk or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality ; and a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity. There is a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people about, who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation. Bring these fellows into the country or set them aboard ship, and you will see how they pine for their desk or their study. They have no curiosity ; they cannot give themselves over to random provocations ; they do not take pleasure in the exercise of their faculties for its own sake ; and unless Necessity lays about them with a stick, they will even stand still. It is no good speaking to such folk : they *cannot* be idle, their nature is not generous enough ; and they pass those hours in a sort of coma, which are not dedicated to furious moiling in the gold-mill. When they do not require to go to office, when they are not hungry and have no mind to drink, the whole breathing world is a blank to them. If they have to wait an hour or so for a train, they fall into a stupid trance with their eyes open. To see them, you would suppose there was nothing to look at and no one to speak with ; you would imagine they were paralysed or alienated ; and yet very possibly they are hard workers in their own way, and have good eyesight for a flaw in a deed or a turn of the market. They have been to school and college, but all the time they had their eye on the medal ; they have gone about in the world and mixed with clever people, but all the time they were thinking of their own affairs. As if a man's soul were not too small to begin with, they have dwarfed and narrowed theirs by a life of all work and no play ; until here they are at forty, with a listless attention, a mind vacant of all material of amusement, and not one thought to rub against another, while they wait for the train. Before

he was breeched, he might have clambered on the boxes; when he was twenty, he would have stared at the girls; but now the pipe is smoked out, the snuff-box empty, and my gentleman sits bolt upright upon a bench, with lamentable eyes. This does not appeal to me as being Success in Life.

But it is not only the person himself who suffers from his busy habits, but his wife and children, his friends and relations, and down to the very people he sits with in a railway-carriage or an omnibus. Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things. And it is not by any means certain that a man's business is the most important thing he has to do. To an impartial estimate it will seem clear that many of the wisest, most virtuous and most beneficent parts that are to be played upon the Theatre of Life are filled by gratuitous performers, and pass, among the world at large, as phases of idleness. For in that Theatre, not only the walking gentlemen, singing chambermaids, and diligent fiddlers in the orchestra, but those who look on and clap their hands from the benches, do really play a part and fulfil important offices towards the general result. You are no doubt very dependent on the care of your lawyer and stockbroker, of the guards and signalmen who convey you rapidly from place to place, and the policemen who walk the streets for your protection; but is there not a thought of gratitude in your heart for certain other benefactors who set you smiling when they fall in your way, or season your dinner with good company? Colonel Newcome helped to lose his friend's money; Fred Bay ham had an ugly trick of borrowing shirts; and yet they were better people to fall among than Mr. Barnes. And though Falstaff was neither sober nor very honest, I think I could name one or two long-faced Barabbases whom the world could better have done without. Hazlitt mentions that he was more sensible of obligation to Northcote, who had never done him anything he could call a service, than to his whole circle of ostentatious friends; for he thought a good companion emphatically the greatest benefactor.

I know there are people in the world who cannot feel grateful unless the favour has been done them at the cost of pain and difficulty. But this is a churlish disposition. A man may send you six sheets of letterpaper covered with the most entertaining gossip, or you may pass half-an-hour pleasantly, perhaps profitably, over an article of his ; do you think the service would be greater if he had made the manuscript in his heart's blood, like a compact with the devil ? Do you really fancy you should be more beholden to your correspondent, if he had been damning you all the while for your importunity ? Pleasures are more beneficial than duties because, like the quality of mercy, they are not strained, and they are twice blest. There must always be two to a kiss, and there may be a score in a jest ; but wherever there is an element of sacrifice, the favour is conferred with pain, and, among generous people, received with confusion. There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy. By being happy we sow anonymous benefits upon the world, which remain unknown even to ourselves, or when they are disclosed, surprise nobody so much as the benefactor. The other day, a ragged, bare-foot boy ran down the street after a marble, with so jolly an air that he set every one he passed into a good humour ; one of these persons, who had been delivered from more than usually black thoughts, stopped the little fellow and gave him some money with this remark : ' You see what sometimes comes of looking pleased.' If he had looked pleased before, he had now to look both pleased and mystified. For my part, I justify this encouragement of smiling rather than tearful children ; I do not wish to pay for tears anywhere but upon the stage ; but I am prepared to deal largely in the opposite commodity. A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note. He or she is a radiating focus of goodwill ; and their entrance into a room is as though another candle had been lighted. We need not care whether they could prove the forty-seventh proposition ; they do a better thing than that, they practically demonstrate the great Theorem of the Liveableness of Life. Consequently,

if a person cannot be happy without remaining idle, idle he should remain. It is a revolutionary precept; but thanks to hunger and the workhouse, one not easily to be abused; and within practical limits, it is one of the most incontestable truths in the whole Body of Morality. Look at one of your industrious fellows for a moment, I beseech you. He sows hurry and reaps indigestion; he puts a vast deal of activity out to interest, and receives a large measure of nervous derangement in return. Either he absents himself entirely from all fellowship, and lives a recluse in a garret, with carpet slippers and a leaden inkpot; or he comes among people swiftly and bitterly, in a contraction of his whole nervous system, to discharge some temper before he returns to work. I do not care how much or how well he works, this fellow is an evil feature in other people's lives. They would be happier if he were dead. They could easier do without his services in the Circumlocution Office, than they can tolerate his fractious spirits. He poisons life at the well-head. It is better to be beggared out of hand by a scapegrace nephew, than daily hag-ridden by a peevish uncle.

And what, in God's name, is all this pother about? For what cause do they embitter their own and other people's lives? That a man should publish three or thirty articles a year, that he should finish or not finish his great allegorical picture, are questions of little interest to the world. The ranks of life are full; and although a thousand fall, there are always some to go into the breach. When they told Joan of Arc she should be at home minding women's work, she answered there were plenty to spin and wash. And so, even with your own rare gifts! When nature is 'so careless of the single life,' why should we coddle ourselves into the fancy that our own is of exceptional importance? Suppose Shakespeare had been knocked on the head some dark night in Sir Thomas Lucy's preserves, the world would have wagged on better or worse, the pitcher gone to the well, the scythe to the corn, and the student to his book; and no one been any the wiser of the loss. There are not many works extant, if you look the alternative all over, which are worth the

price of a pound of tobacco to a man of limited means. This is a sobering reflection for the proudest of our earthly vanities. Even a tobacconist may, upon consideration, find no great cause for personal vainglory in the phrase ; for although tobacco is an admirable sedative, the qualities necessary for retailing it are neither rare nor precious in themselves. Alas and alas ! you may take it how you will, but the services of no single individual are indispensable. Atlas was just a gentleman with a protracted nightmare ! And yet you see merchants who go and labour themselves into a great fortune and thence into the bankruptcy court ; scribblers who keep scribbling at little articles until their temper is a cross to all who come about them, as though Pharaoh should set the Israelites to make a pin instead of a pyramid ; and fine young men who work themselves into a decline, and are driven off in a hearse with white plumes upon it. Would you not suppose these persons had been whispered, by the Master of the Ceremonies, the promise of some momentous destiny ? and that this lukewarm bullet on which they play their farces was the bull's-eye and centre-point of all the universe ? And yet it is not so. The ends for which they gave away their priceless youth, for all they know, may be chimerical or hurtful ; the glory and riches they expect may never come, or may find them indifferent ; and they and the world they inhabit are so inconsiderable that the mind freezes at the thought.

XVI

PULVIS ET UMBRA

WE look for some reward of our endeavours and are disappointed ; not success, not happiness, not even peace of conscience, crowns our ineffectual efforts to do well. Our frailties are invincible, our virtues barren ; the battle goes sore against us to the going down of the sun. The canting moralist tells us of right and wrong ; and we look abroad, even on the face of our small earth, and find them change with every climate, and no country where some action is not honoured for a virtue and none where it is not branded for a vice ; and we look in our experience, and find no vital congruity in the wisest rules, but at the best a municipal fitness. It is not strange if we are tempted to despair of good. We ask too much. Our religions and moralities have been trimmed to flatter us, till they are all emasculate and sentimentalized, and only please and weaken. Truth is of a rougher strain. In the harsh face of life, faith can read a bracing gospel. The human race is a thing more ancient than the ten commandments ; and the bones and revolution of the Kosmos, in whose joints we are but moss and fungus, more ancient still.

I

Of the Kosmos in the last resort, science reports many doubtful things and all of them appalling. There seems no substance to this solid globe on which we stamp : nothing but symbols and ratios. Symbols and ratios carry us and bring us forth and beat us down ; gravity that swings the incommensurable suns and worlds through space, is but a figment varying inversely as the squares of

distances ; and the suns and worlds themselves, imponderable figures of abstraction,  $\text{NH}_3$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . Consideration dares not dwell upon this view; that way madness lies ; science carries us into zones of speculation, where there is no habitable city for the mind of man.

But take the Kosmos with a grosser faith, as our senses give it us. We behold space sown with rotatory islands, suns and worlds and the shards and wrecks of systems : some, like the sun, still blazing; some rotting, like the earth ; others, like the moon, stable in desolation. All of these we take to be made of something we call matter : a thing which no analysis can help us to conceive ; to whose incredible properties no familiarity can reconcile our minds. This stuff, when not purified by the lustration of fire, rots uncleanly into something we call life ; seized through all its atoms with a pediculous malady ; swelling in tumours that become independent, sometimes even (by an abhorrent prodigy) locomotory; one splitting into millions, millions cohering into one, as the malady proceeds through varying stages. This vital putrescence of the dust, used as we are to it, yet strikes us with occasional disgust, and the profusion of worms in a piece of ancient turf, or the air of a marsh darkened with insects, will sometimes check our breathing so that we aspire for cleaner places. But none is clean: the moving sand is infected with lice ; the pure spring, where it bursts out of the mountain, is a mere issue of worms ; even in the hard rock the crystal is forming.

In two main shapes this eruption covers the countenance of the earth : the animal and the vegetable : one in some degree the inversion of the other : the second rooted to the spot; the first coming detached out of its natal mud, and scurrying abroad with the myriad feet of insects or towering into the heavens on the wings of birds : a thing so inconceivable that, if it be well considered, the heart stops. To what passes with the anchored vermin, we have little clue : doubtless they have their joys and sorrows, their delights and killing agonies : it appears not how. But of the locomotory, to which we ourselves belong, we can tell more. These share with us a thousand miracles :

the miracles of sight, of hearing, of the projection of sound, things that bridge space ; the miracles of memory and reason, by which the present is conceived, and when it is gone its image kept living in the brains of man and brute; the miracle of reproduction, with its imperious desires and staggering consequences. And to put the last touch upon this mountain mass of the revolting and the inconceivable, all these prey upon each other, lives tearing other lives in pieces, cramming them inside themselves, and by that summary process, growing fat : the vegetarian, the whale, perhaps the tree, not less than the lion of the desert; for the vegetarian is only the eater of the dumb.

Meanwhile our rotatory island loaded with predatory life, and more drenched with blood, both animal and vegetable, than ever mutinied ship, scuds through space with unimaginable speed, and turns alternate cheeks to the reverberation of a blazing world, ninety million miles away.

## II

What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber ; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself ; grown upon with hair-like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face ; a thing to set children screaming ;—and yet looked at nearer, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes ! Poor soul, here for so little, cast among so many hardships, filled with desires so incommensurate and so inconsistent, savagely surrounded, savagely descended, irremediably condemned to prey upon his fellow fives : who should have blamed him had he been of a piece with his destiny and a being merely barbarous ? And we look and behold him instead filled with imperfect virtues : infinitely childish, often admirably valiant, often touchingly kind ; sitting down, amidst his momentary life, to debate of right and wrong and the attributes of the deity ; rising up to do battle for an egg or die for an idea ; singling out his friends and his mate with cordial affection; bringing forth in pain, rearing with long-suffering solicitude,

his young. To touch the heart of his mystery, we find in him one thought, strange to the point of lunacy : the thought of duty ; the thought of something owing to himself, to his neighbour, to his God : an ideal of decency, to which he would rise if it were possible ; a limit of shame, below which, if it be possible, he will not stoop. The design in most men is one of conformity ; here and there, in picked natures, it transcends itself and soars on the other side, arming martyrs with independence ; but in all, in their degrees, it is a bosom thought:—Not in man alone, for we trace it in dogs and cats whom we know fairly well, and doubtless some similar point of honour sways the elephant, the oyster, and the louse, of whom we know so little :—But in man, at least, it sways with so complete an empire that merely selfish things come second, even with the selfish : that appetites are starved, fears are conquered, pains supported ; that almost the dullest shrinks from the reproof of a glance, although it were a child's ; and all but the most cowardly stand amid the risks of war ; and the more noble, having strongly conceived an act as due to their ideal, affront and embrace death. Strange enough if, with their singular origin and perverted practice, they think they are to be rewarded in some future life : stranger still, if they are persuaded of the contrary, and think this blow, which they solicit, will strike them senseless for eternity. I shall be reminded what a tragedy of misconception and misconduct man at large presents : of organized injustice, cowardly violence and treacherous crime ; and of the damning imperfections of the best. They cannot be too darkly drawn. Man is indeed marked for failure in his efforts to do right. But where the best consistently miscarry, how tenfold more remarkable that all should continue to strive ; and surely we should find it both touching and inspiring, that in a field from which success is banished, our race should not cease to labour.

If the first view of this creature, stalking in his rotatory isle, be a thing to shake the courage of the stoutest, on this nearer sight, he startles us with an admiring wonder. It matters not where we look, under what climate we

observe him, in what stage of society, in what depth of ignorance, burthened with what erroneous morality; by camp-fires in Assiniboia, the snow powdering his shoulders, the wind plucking his blanket, as he sits, passing the ceremonial calumet and uttering his grave opinions like a Roman senator; in ships at sea, a man inured to hardship and vile pleasures, his brightest hope a fiddle in a tavern and a bedizened trull who sells herself to rob him, and he for all that simple, innocent, cheerful, kindly like a child, constant to toil, brave to drown, for others; in the slums of cities, moving among indifferent millions to mechanical employments, without hope of change in the future, with scarce a pleasure in the present, and yet true to his virtues, honest up to his lights, kind to his neighbours, tempted perhaps in vain by the bright gin-palace, perhaps long-suffering with the drunken wife that ruins him; in India (a woman this time) kneeling with broken cries and streaming tears, as she drowns her child in the sacred river; in the brothel, the discard of society, living mainly on strong drink, fed with affronts, a fool, a thief, the comrade of thieves, and even here keeping the point of honour and the touch of pity, often repaying the worlds scorn with service, often standing firm upon a scruple, and at a certain cost, rejecting riches:—everywhere some virtue cherished or affected, everywhere some decency of thought and carriage, everywhere the ensign of man's ineffectual goodness:—ah! if I could show you this! if I could show you these men and women, all the world over, in every stage of history, under every abuse of error, under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging, in the brothel or on the scaffold, to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls! They may seek to escape, and yet they cannot; it is not alone their privilege and glory, but their doom; they are condemned to some nobility; and their lives long, the desire of good is at their heels, the implacable hunter.

Of all earth's meteors, here at least is the most strange **and** consoling: that this ennobled lemur, this hair-crowned bubble of the dust, this inheritor of a few years and sorrows,

should yet deny himself his rare delights, and add to his frequent pains, and live for an ideal, however misconceived. Nor can we stop with man. A new doctrine, received with screams a little while ago by canting moralists, and still not properly worked into the body of our thoughts, lights us a step farther into the heart of this rough but noble universe. For nowadays the pride of man denies in vain his kinship with the original dust. He stands no longer like a thing apart. Close at his heels we see the dog, prince of another genus : and in him too, we see dumbly testified the same cultus of an unattainable ideal, the same constancy in failure. Does it stop with the dog ? We look at our feet where the ground is blackened with the swarming ant : a creature so small, so far from us in the hierarchy of brutes, that we can scarce trace and scarce comprehend his doings ; and here also, in his ordered politics and rigorous justice, we see confessed the law of duty and the fact of individual sin. Does it stop, then, with the ant ? Rather this desire of well-doing and this doom of frailty run through all the grades of life : rather is this earth, from the frosty top of Everest to the next margin of the internal fire, one stage of ineffectual virtues and one temple of pious tears and perseverance. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together. It is the common and the god-like law of life. The browsers, the biters, the barkers, the hairy coats of field and forest, the squirrel in the oak, the thousand-footed creeper in the dust, as they share with us the gift of life, share with us the love of an ideal : strive like us—like us are tempted to grow weary of the struggle—to do well ; like us receive at times unmerited refreshment, visitings of support, returns of courage ; and are condemned like us to be crucified between that double law of the members and the will. Are they like us, I wonder, in the timid hope of some reward, some sugar with the drug ? do they, too, stand aghast at unrewarded virtues, at the sufferings of those whom, in our partiality, we take to be just, and the prosperity of such as, in our blindness, we call wicked ? It may be, and yet God knows what they should look for. Even while they look, even while they repent, the foot of

man treads them by thousands in the dust, the yelping hounds burst upon their trail, the bullet speeds, the knives are heating in the den of the vivisectionist; or the dew falls, and the generation of a day is blotted out. For these are creatures, compared with whom our weakness is strength, our ignorance wisdom, our brief span eternity.

And as we dwell, we living things, in our isle of terror and under the imminent hand of death, God forbid it should be man the erected, the reasoner, the wise in his own eyes—God forbid it should be man that wearies in well-doing, that despairs of unrewarded effort, or utters the language of complaint. Let it be enough for faith, that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy : Surely not all in vain.

## XVII

### MY FIRST BOOK:

#### ' TREASURE ISLAND ' <sup>1</sup>

IT was far indeed from being my first book, for I am not a novelist alone. But I am well aware that my paymaster, the Great Public, regards what else I have written with indifference, if not aversion ; if it call upon me at all, it calls on me in the familiar and indelible character ; and when I am asked to talk of my first book, no question in the world but what is meant is my first novel.

Sooner or later, somehow, anyhow, I was bound to write a novel. It seems vain to ask why men are born with various manias : from my earliest childhood, it was mine to make a plaything of imaginary series of events ; and as soon as I was able to write, I became a good friend to the paper-makers. Reams upon reams must have gone to the making of ' Rathillet,' ' The Pentland Rising,' <sup>2</sup> ' The King's Pardon ' (otherwise ' Park Whitehead '), ' Edward Daven,' ' A Country Dance,' and ' A Vendetta in the West'; and it is consolatory to remember that these reams are now all ashes, and have been received again into the soil. I have named but a few of my ill-fated efforts, only such indeed as came to a fair bulk ere they were desisted from ; and even so they cover a long vista of years. ' Rathillet' was attempted before fifteen, ' The Vendetta ' at twenty-nine, and the succession of defeats lasted unbroken till I was thirty-one. By that time, I had written little

<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Idler*, August 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Ne pas confondre*. Not the slim green pamphlet with the imprint of Andrew Elliot, for which (as I see with amazement from the book-lists) the gentlemen of England are willing to pay fancy prices ; but its predecessor, a bulky historical romance without a spark of merit, and now deleted from the world.

books and little essays and short stories ; and had got patted on the back and paid for them—though not enough to live upon. I had quite a reputation, I was the successful man ; I passed my days in toil, the futility of which would sometimes make my cheek to burn—that I should spend a man's energy upon this business, and yet could not earn a livelihood : and still there shone ahead of me an unattained ideal: although I had attempted the thing with vigour not less than ten or twelve times, I had not yet written a novel. All—all my pretty ones—had gone for a little, and then stopped inexorably like a schoolboy's watch. I might be compared to a cricketer of many years' standing who should never have made a run. Anybody can write a short story—a bad one, I mean—who has industry and paper and time enough ; but not every one may hope to write even a bad novel. It is the length that kills. The accepted novelist may take his novel up and put it down, spend days upon it in vain, and write not any more than he makes haste to blot. Not so the beginner. Human nature has certain rights ; instinct—the instinct of self-preservation—forbids that any man (cheered and supported by the consciousness of no previous victory) should endure the miseries of unsuccessful literary toil beyond a period to be measured in weeks. There must be something for hope to feed upon. The beginner must have a slant of wind, a lucky vein must be running, he must be in one of those hours when the words come and the phrases balance of themselves—*even to begin*. And having begun, what a dread looking forward is that until the book shall be accomplished ! For so long a time, the slant is to continue unchanged, the vein to keep running, for so long a time you must keep at command the same quality of style : for so long a time your puppets are to be always vital, always consistent, always vigorous ! I remember I used to look, in those days, upon every three-volume novel with a sort of veneration, as a feat—not possibly of literature—but at least of physical and moral endurance and the courage of Ajax.

In the fated year I came to live with my father and mother at Kinnaird, above Pitlochry. Then I walked on

the red moors and by the side of the golden burn; the rude, pure air of our mountains inspirited if it did not inspire us, and my wife and I projected a joint volume of bogey stories, for which she wrote 'The Shadow on the Bed,' and I turned out 'Thrawn Janet,' and a first draft of 'The Merry Men.' I love my native air, but it does not love me; and the end of this delightful period was a cold, a fly-blister, and a migration by Strathairdle and Glenshee to the Castleton of Braemar. There it blew a good deal and rained in a proportion; my native air was more unkind than man's ingratitude, and I must consent to pass a good deal of my time between four walls in a house lugubriously known as the Late Miss McGregor's Cottage. And now admire the finger of predestination. There was a schoolboy in the Late Miss McGregor's Cottage, home from the holidays, and much in want of 'something craggy to break his mind upon.' He had no thought of literature; it was the art of Raphael that received his fleeting suffrages; and with the aid of pen and ink and a shilling box of water colours, he had soon turned one of the rooms into a picture gallery. My more immediate duty towards the gallery was to be showman; but I would sometimes unbend a little, join the artist (so to speak) at the easel, and pass the afternoon with him in a generous emulation, making coloured drawings. On one of these occasions, I made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance 'Treasure Island.' I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down dale, the mills and the ruins, the ponds and the ferries, perhaps the *Standing Stone* or the *Druidic Circle* on the heath; here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or twopenceworth of imagination to understand with! No child but must remember laying his head in the grass,

staring into the infinitesimal forest and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies. Somewhat in this way, as I paused upon my map of 'Treasure Island,' the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection. The next thing I knew I had some papers before me and was writing out a list of chapters. How often have I done so, and the thing gone no further! But there seemed elements of success about this enterprise. It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. Women were excluded. I was unable to handle a brig (which the *Hispaniola* should have been), but I thought I could make shift to sail her as a schooner without public shame. And then I had an idea for John Silver from which I promised myself funds of entertainment; to take an admired friend of mine (whom the reader very likely knows and admires as much as I do), to deprive him of all his finer qualities and higher graces of temperament, to leave him with nothing but his strength, his courage, his quickness, and his magnificent geniality, and to try to express these in terms of the culture of a raw tarpaulin. Such psychical surgery is, I think, a common way of 'making character'; perhaps it is, indeed, the only way. We can put in the quaint figure that spoke a hundred words with us yesterday by the wayside; but do we know him? Our friend, with his infinite variety and flexibility, we know—but can we put him in? Upon the first, we must engraft secondary and imaginary qualities, possibly all wrong; from the second, knife in hand, we must cut away and deduct the needless arborescence of his nature, but the trunk and the few branches that remain we may at least be fairly sure of.

On a chill September morning, by the cheek of a brisk fire, and the rain drumming on the window, I began *The Sea Cook*, for that was the original title. I have begun (and finished) a number of other books, but I cannot remember to have sat down to one of them with more

complacency. It is not to be wondered at, for stolen waters are proverbially sweet. I am now upon a painful chapter. No doubt the parrot once belonged to Robinson Crusoe. No doubt the skeleton is conveyed from Poe. I think little of these, they are trifles and details ; and no man can hope to have a monopoly of skeletons or make a corner in talking birds. The stockade, I am told, is from *Masterman Ready*. It may be, I care not a jot. These useful writers had fulfilled the poet's saying : departing, they had left behind them Footprints on the sands of time, Footprints which perhaps another—and I was the other! It is my debt to Washington Irving that exercises my conscience, and justly so, for I believe plagiarism was rarely carried farther. I chanced to pick up the *Tales of a Traveller* some years ago with a view to an anthology of prose narrative, and the book flew up and struck me ; Billy Bones, his chest, the company in the parlour, the whole inner spirit, and a good deal of the material detail of my first chapters—all were there, all were the property of Washington Irving. But I had no guess of it then as I sat writing by the fireside, in what seemed the spring-tides of a somewhat pedestrian inspiration ; nor yet day by day, after lunch, as I read aloud my morning's work to the family. It seemed to me original as sin ; it seemed to belong to me like my right eye. I had counted on one boy, I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once with ail the romance and childishness of his original nature. His own stories, that every night of his life he put himself to sleep with, dealt perpetually with ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the era of steam. He never finished one of these romances ; the lucky man did not require to ! But in *Treasure Island* he recognized something kindred to his own imagination ; it was *his* kind of picturesque ; and he not only heard with delight the daily chapter, but set himself acting to collaborate. When the time came for Billy Bones's chest to be ransacked, he must have passed the better part of a day preparing, on the back of a legal envelope, an inventory of its contents, which I exactly followed ; and the name of 'Flint's old

ship '—the *Walrus*—was given at his particular request. And now who should come dropping in, *ex machinâ*, but Dr. Japp, like the disguised prince who is to bring down the curtain upon peace and happiness in the last act; for he carried in his pocket, not a horn or a talisman, but a publisher—had, in fact, been charged by my old friend Mr. Henderson, to unearth new writers for *Young Folks*. Even the ruthlessness of a united family recoiled before the extreme measure of inflicting on our guest the mutilated members of *The Sea Cook*; at the same time, we would by no means stop our readings; and accordingly the tale was begun again at the beginning, and solemnly re-delivered for the benefit of Dr. Japp. From that moment on, I have thought highly of his critical faculty; for when he left us, he carried away the manuscript in his portmanteau.

Here, then, was everything to keep me up, sympathy, help, and now a positive engagement. I had chosen besides a very easy style. Compare it with the almost contemporary *Merry Men*; one reader may prefer the one style, one the other—'tis an affair of character, perhaps of mood; but no expert can fail to see that the one is much more difficult, and the other much easier to maintain. It seems as though a full-grown experienced man of letters might engage to turn out *Treasure Island* at so many pages a day, and keep his pipe alight. But alas! this was not my case. Fifteen days I stuck to it, and turned out fifteen chapters; and then, in the early paragraphs of the sixteenth ignominiously lost hold. My mouth was empty; there was not one word of *Treasure Island* in my bosom; and here were the proofs of the beginning already waiting me at the 'Hand and Spear'! Then I corrected them, living for the most part alone, walking on the heath at Weybridge in dewy autumn mornings, a good deal pleased with what I had done, and more appalled than I can depict to you in words at what remained for me to do. I was thirty-one; I was the head of a family; I had lost my health; I had never yet paid my way, never yet made £200 a year; my father had quite recently bought back and cancelled a book that was judged a failure: was this to be another and last

fiasco ? I was indeed very close on despair; but I shut my mouth hard, and during the journey to Davos, where I was to pass the winter, had the resolution to think of other things and bury myself in the novels of M. de Boisgobey. Arrived at my destination, down I sat one morning to the unfinished tale; and behold ! it flowed from me like small talk : and in a second tide of delighted industry, and again at the rate of a chapter a day, I finished *Treasure Island*. It had to be transcribed almost exactly ; my wife was ill; the schoolboy remained alone of the faithful; and John Addington Symonds (to whom I timidly mentioned what I was engaged on) looked on me askance. He was at that time very eager I should write on the characters of Theophrastus : so far out may be the judgements of the wisest men. But Symonds (to be sure) was scarce the confidant to go to for sympathy on a boy's story. He was large-minded ; ' a full man,' if there was one ; but the very name of my enterprise would suggest to him only capitulations of sincerity and solecisms of style. Well! he was not far wrong.

*Treasure Island*—it was Mr. Henderson who deleted the first title, *The Sea Cook*—appeared duly in the story paper, where it figured in the ignoble midst, without woodcuts, and attracted not the least attention. I did not care. I liked the tale myself, for much the same reason as my father liked the beginning : it was my kind of picturesque. I was not a little proud of John Silver, also ; and to this day rather admire that smooth and formidable adventurer. What was infinitely more exhilarating, I had passed a landmark ; I had finished a tale, and written 'The End' upon my manuscript, as I had not done since \* *The Pentland Rising*, when I was a boy of sixteen not yet at college. In truth, it was so by a set of lucky accidents ; had not Dr. Japp come on his visit, had not the tale flowed from me with singular ease, it must have been laid aside like its predecessors, and found a circuitous and unlamented way to the fire. Purists may suggest it would have been better so. I am not of that mind. The tale seems to have given much pleasure, and it brought (or was the means of bringing) fire and

food **and** wine to a deserving family in which I took an interest. I need scarcely say I mean my own.

But the adventures of *Treasure Island* are not yet quite at an end. I had written it up to the map. The map was the chief part of my plot. For instance, I had called an islet 'Skeleton Island,' not knowing what I meant, seeking only for the immediate picturesque, and it was to justify this name that I broke into the gallery of Mr. Poe and stole Flint's pointer. And in the same way, it was because I had made two harbours that the *Hispaniola* was sent on her wanderings with Israel Hands. The time came when it was decided to republish, and I sent in my manuscript, and the map along with it, to Messrs. Cassell. The proofs came, they were corrected, but I heard nothing of the map. I wrote and asked; was told it had never been received, and sat aghast. It is one thing to draw a map at random, set a scale in one corner of it at a venture, and write up a story to the measurements. It is quite another to have to examine a whole book, make an inventory of all the allusions contained in it, and, with a pair of compasses, painfully design a map to suit the data. I did it; and the map was drawn again in my father's office, with embellishments of blowing whales and sailing ships, and my father himself brought into service a knack he had of various writing, and elaborately *forged* the signature of Captain Flint, and the sailing directions of Billy Bones. But somehow it was never *Treasure Island* to me.

I have said the map was the most of the plot. I might almost say it was the whole. A few reminiscences of Poe, Defoe, and Washington Irving, a copy of Johnson's *Buccaneers*, the name of the Dead Man's Chest from Kingsley's *At Last*, some recollections of canoeing on the high seas, and the map itself, with its infinite, eloquent suggestion, made up the whole of my materials. It is, perhaps, not often that a map figures so largely in a tale, yet it is always important. The author must know his countryside, whether real or imaginary, like his hand; the distances, the points of the compass, the place of the sun's rising, the behaviour of the moon, should all be

beyond cavil. And how troublesome the moon is ! I have come to grief over the moon in *Prince Otto*, and so soon as that was pointed out to me, adopted a precaution which I recommend to other men—I never write now without an almanack. With an almanack, and the map of the country, and the plan of every house, either actually plotted on paper or already and immediately apprehended in the mind, a man may hope to avoid some of the grossest possible blunders. With the map before him, he will scarce allow the sun to set in the east, as it does in *The Antiquary*. With the almanack at hand, he will scarce allow two horsemen, journeying on the most urgent affair, to employ six days, from three of the Monday morning till late in the Saturday night, upon a journey of, say, ninety or a hundred miles, and before the week is out, and still on the same nags, to cover fifty in one day, as may be read at length in the inimitable novel of *Bob Boy*. And it is certainly well, though far from necessary, to avoid such 'croppers.' But it is my contention—my superstition, if you like—that who is faithful to his map, and consults it, and draws from it his inspiration, daily and hourly, gains positive support, and not mere negative immunity from accident. The tale has a root there ; it grows in that soil ; it has a spine of its own behind the words. Better if the country be real, and he has walked every foot of it and knows every milestone. But even with imaginary places, he will do well in the beginning to provide a map ; as he studies it, relations will appear that he had not thought upon ; he will discover obvious, though unsuspected, short-cuts and footprints for his messengers ; and even when a map is not all the plot, as it was in *Treasure Island*, it will be found to be a mine of suggestion.

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