

AFTERTHOUGHTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TRIVIA

MORE TRIVIA

WORDS AND IDIOMS

A TREASURY OF ENGLISH PROSE

A TREASURY OF ENGLISH APHORISMS

AFTERTHOUGHTS

BY

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"Little fish are sweet"

[vii]

I. LIFE AND HUMAN NATURE

LIFE AND HUMAN NATURE

WE are the children of our age, but children who can never know their mother.

It is just as well to be a little giddy-pated, if you are to feel at home on this turning earth.

The future looms a dense fog before us, through which we can see the eyes of Posterity, gazing at us coldly.

How furious it makes people to tell them of the things which belong to their peace !

All mirrors are magical mirrors, and we never see our faces in them.

Happiness is a wine of the rarest vintage, and seems insipid to a vulgar taste.

There are two things to aim at in life : first, to get what you want ; and, after that, to enjoy it. Only the wisest of mankind achieve the second.

Our lives within may be mysteries and marvels ; but our names and noses are familiar to the world.

That amusing stories are told about us
does not amuse the Soul.

How awful to reflect that what people say
of us is true !

Our names are labels, plainly printed on
the bottled essence of our past behaviour.

As oysters secrete scale by scale the shells
which over-crust their pearly seclusion, so our
souls exude act by act the rough personage
which hides away from the world our soft,
inner, irrelevant dream of existence.

My festival is a festival of imagination on
the way to the palace.

How inexhaustibly ironic is the entertain-
ment we can derive from our disillusionments !

For souls in growth, great quarrels are
great emancipations.

The actual is egregious and discon-
certing, and never more so than when the
Ideal becomes real, and Heaven touches
earth for a moment.

How many of our daydreams would darken into nightmares if there seemed any danger of their coming true !

What happens in life is mere litter ; but from this waste-paper of perishable events Thought can unpack priceless and imperishable meanings.

Amid the vast unimportance of all things, how beyond all calculation important we find it each morning to have at hand—in the face of Time and Eternity and the starry spaces—an adequate supply of thin paper !

(Solvency is entirely a matter of temperament and not of income.

All-glorious within us are our gay pretensions, but when they escape from our lips, how are they bereft of their glory !

That we should practise what we preach is generally admitted; but anyone who preaches what he and his hearers practise must incur the gravest moral disapprobation.

It is only those who can declare without guile that they are doing the very opposite of what they are really doing—meat-eating Vegetarians for instance, and money-abhorring Misers—who keep stainless their serene ideals, and walk the earth in white, like angels.

To peep at our appearance in public mirrors, and try to see ourselves as others see us, is not a thing that self-respecting people care to do.

Are we all alike, all pleased alike and troubled by that wanton eye so reprobated by the Founder of our Faith?

Only those who get into scrapes with their eyes open can find the safe way out.

The lusts and greeds of the Body scandalize the Soul ; but it has to come to heel.

We are told by Moralists with the plainest faces that immorality will spoil our looks.

Money and sex are forces too unruly for our reason ; they can only be controlled by taboos with which we tamper at our peril.

There are few sorrows, however poignant, in which a good income is of no avail.

What is more mortifying than to feel that you have missed the plum for want of courage to shake the tree ?

Little superstitions are the spiders of the mind ; we must keep brushing them away, or they will choke it with their dusky webs.

We need bogeys and awful apprehensions to keep us from growing dull.

‘ On the hill at Bomma, at the mouth of the Congo River,’ Frazer tells us, in a sentence which seems to solve all the problems, ‘ dwells Namvulu Vulu, king of the rain and storm.’

Sound is more than sense.

That we are all lost in a world of vain illusion; and that somewhere, somehow, we must all seek Salvation and a more abiding city—this is what old-fashioned parsons keep droning from their pulpits: and the worst is—what they say is true.

‘Seven great poplars, and amid those poplars, a golden well.’

It is through the cracks in our brains that happiness creeps in.

An improper mind is a perpetual feast.

Look at the Moon ! You may not know it, but there is something wrong about the Moon. She will not keep her appointments, nor conform to the programme laid down for her by the lunar theorists. At the end of the nineteenth century she arrived ten seconds late : was fourteen seconds ahead of time a hundred years before.

The problem presented by the retardations and accelerations of this incalculable orb is one of the most perplexing of all astronomical enigmas. There are tens of thousands, we are told, who are capable of achieving success in the ordinary walks of life ; hundreds there are who can rule their fellow-men and wield empires, to one who can even understand this problem. But even these aristocrats of the intellect, ranking, we are told, above all other aristocracies in the scale of being, and including Ernest W. Brown and G. W. Hill among their most illustrious members, have never been able to calculate the motion of the Moon : still she laughs at their attempts to account for her behaviour.

II. AGE AND DEATH

A.

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AGE AND DEATH

It seemed so simple when one was young, and new ideas were mentioned, not to grow red in the face and gobble !

But we are forced like the insects, and cannot help it, to undergo all the metamorphoses preordained for our species.

We grow with years more fragile in body, but morally stouter, and can throw off the chill of a bad conscience almost at once.

An evil name, which is a drawback at first, sheds a kind of lustre on old age.

Growing old is not a gradual decline, but a series of drops, full of sorrow, from one ledge to another below it. But when we pick ourselves up we find that our bones are, after all, not broken; while level enough and not unpleasing is the new terrace which lies unexplored before us.

And far below we may hope to pluck from the Tree of Life its mellowest fruit, that joy of survival, which can only ripen there.

There is more felicity on the far side of baldness than young men can possibly imagine.

What music is more enchanting than the voices of young people, when you can't hear what they say?

The old know what they want ; the young are sad and bewildered.

There are people who are beautiful in dilapidation, like old houses that were hideous when new.

The denunciation of the young is a necessary part of the hygiene of older people, and greatly assists the circulation of their blood.

But what if we can find no freshly-kindled fires for our wet blankets to put out?

Don't laugh at a youth for his affectations ; he is only trying on one face after another to find a face of his own.

Youth is at war with Time ; but why should a youth of high fancy quarrel with that Abstraction which can ripen his talent, and mellow his portrait with the varnish of years ?

Unrequited affections seem in youth unmitigated woes ; only later do we learn to appreciate the safe, sad charm of these bogus heartbreaks.

If we shake hands with icy fingers, it is because we have burnt them so horribly before.

The mere process of growing old together will make our slightest acquaintances seem like bosom-friends.

What with its crude wakenings can youth know of the rich returns of awareness to elderly people from their afternoon naps ; of their ironic thoughts and long retrospections, and the sweetness they taste of not being dead ?

When elderly invalids meet with fellow-victims of their own ailments, then at last real conversation begins, and life is delicious.

Just when they sit down to enjoy in peace their evening meal of existence, the tables of most people are pounced upon as by harpies, and pillaged by their children.

Parents used to care more for their money than their children ; now they pay for their friendship through the nose.

Because once, in the unbelievable past, they underwent that amazing mutation, there are elderly people who will tell you that they know what love is.

It is the follies we could not see through in our youth which make us play the fool when we are old.

The fiery thought of a social slip which makes us feel hot all over, may mellow into a genial glow to warm our ageing bones.

I cannot forgive my friends for dying ; I do not find these vanishing acts of theirs at all amusing.

We all do ugly things, and our last great act is the ugliest of all.

Why are happy people not afraid of death, while the insatiable and the unhappy so abhor that grim feature ?

When hope fades away and belief and craving, and we come to contemplate in temporal things only their eternal meanings, then our life ceases at last to be a sham and a failure ; and dainty, when we die, will be our death.

III. OTHER PEOPLE

OTHER PEOPLE

THERE are men and women born into this world to do its work and win its prizes ; others, simply to look on and see what happens. These two kinds of people should be kept apart, for they are apt to feel ashamed when they meet each other.

If with an excess of interest you peer into the lives of others, what you will probably find is that you have to pay their debts.

Those who set out to serve both God and Mammon soon discover that there is no God.

There are people of whose lives I know such horrid details, that I feel ashamed of myself when I meet them in drawing-rooms, making a good impression.

When we say we are certain so-and-so could not have done it, what we mean is that we think he very likely did.

If we disregard what the world says of someone, we shall almost certainly live to repent it.

(The world is not unkind, and reprobates are worse than their reputations.

(If you set out to fight the battles of discredited people, don't be too much surprised when they snipe you from the rear.

(Most people sell their souls, and live with a good conscience on the proceeds.

To sell one's soul and not be paid for it,
and do the Devil's work without his wages,
is perhaps in Heaven's eyes a less flagitious
bargain.

It is almost always worth while to be cheated ; people's little frauds are revelations whose interest well repays what they cost us.

When people come and talk to you of their aspirations, before they leave you had better count your spoons.

All Reformers, however strict their social conscience, live in houses just as big as they can pay for.

When they come downstairs from their Ivory Towers, Idealists are very apt to walk straight into the gutter.

People before the public live an imagined life in the thought of others, and flourish or feel faint as their self outside themselves grows bright or dwindles in that mirror.

A virtuous king is a king who has shirked his proper function—to embody for his subjects an ideal of the illustrious misbehaviour which is so far beyond their reach.

Some human roles are so fixed that it is too great a strain to act them in any but the accepted manner. Fathers should be tyrannical, and sons ungrateful ; grandmothers ought to demoralize their children's children, and mothers-in-law make all the mischief that they can.

Moralists who tell you that Envy is the only vice without a pleasure, have never known the pleasure of seeing bright reflections of themselves in the eyes of envy.

The Saints see men and women through the golden haze of their own goodness ; and too nice a discrimination of the characters of others is a sign that you are not too nice a character yourself.

It is among people who think no evil that Evil can flourish without fear.

Goodness is not enough ; but what a lustre it gives and delicate glaze to people who are good as well as charming !

Uncultivated minds are not full of wild flowers, like uncultivated fields. Villainous weeds grow in them and they are the haunt of toads.

How it infuriates a bigot, when he is forced to drag into the light his dark convictions !

Intolerable to us is the thought that people we detest must be delightful, if delightful people like them.

‘ Well, for my part,’ they say, ‘ I cannot see the charm of Mrs. Jones.’

‘ Is it not just conceivable,’ I feel inclined to answer, ‘ that Mrs. Jones hasn’t tried to charm you ? ’

Charming people live up to the very edge of their charm, and behave just as outrageously as the world will let them.

Never be sorry when fine creatures snap at you ; it is a sign that they hunt with another pack.

Dark and distorting are the minds of people who dislike us ; and when we meet them, we make dismal reflections.

What a joy to find suddenly among strangers a fish from our little swarm of fishes, a bee from our hive !

We need new friends ; some of us are cannibals who have eaten their old friends up : others must have ever-renewed audiences before whom to re-enact the ideal version of their lives.

Don't give to lovers you will replace, irreplaceable presents.

All our lives we are putting pennies—our most golden pennies—into penny-in-the-slot machines that are almost always empty.

We live in a world of monkeys, as Schopenhauer says ; and are victims for ever of the illusion which makes monkeys, at a distance, look like men.

It is a great mistake to talk to one set of people about another set they do not know. We should return as taciturn as cats when they come home from their nocturnal outings.

What impossible company we keep in the kind thoughts of those who think kindly of us !

‘ But we have the right,’ people protest sometimes, ‘ of entertaining our friends ! ’

‘ But have you the right,’ we are too polite to answer, ‘ of compelling us to know them ? ’

If we treat people too long with that pretended liking called politeness, we shall find it hard not to like them in the end.

Since few things—as we know—more annoy other people, why do we delight in crabbing their friends ?

If we form the habit of saying everything is pleasant and everyone delightful, we shall suffer the awful fate of believing what we say.

It is a matter of life and death for married people to interrupt each other’s stories ; for if they did not, they would burst.

How many Woes when you marry, how many ancient Calamities you invite to the wedding !

The act of flesh is an unsteady basis on which to build the house of life.

Married women are kept women, and they are beginning to find it out.

Eunuchs are no longer procurable to safeguard the chastity of females ; but there are men who can be absolutely trusted.

What are the Queens of Sodom to do when their sons come from school ?

Statisticians tell us that in Russia before the war six Christs came to save St. Petersburg every year, and were every year seduced by six great ladies of that capital.

How many human types have fallen out of fashion ! Where can we find the black sheep, the angel child, and the permanent invalid on her sofa ? Into what suburb or sad limbo have departed the dear old lady with her cap and laces, the seducer, the fop, the aesthete and the fallen daughter ?

IV. IN THE WORLD

IN THE WORLD

SOCIAL success has a delicious flavour, though it is greatly scorned by those to whose lips the cup has not been proffered.

The romantic impulse of our nature to people the world with gods seems to us pretty in lovers : in snobs we dislike it.

The hallucinations of sex are not to be trusted, but our worldly illusions can be counted on to keep us company to the grave.

And yet to be worldly, to hold to the world's simple creed and believe in its heaven, must surely stagger at times the faith of the firmest believer.

The spread of atheism among the young is something awful ; I give no credit, however, to the report that some of them do not believe in Mammon.

You cannot be both fashionable and first-rate.

All worldly goods are good ; why otherwise should the world pursue them ? And yet the old indictment stands ; and crowns and vainglories are best as baubles for our thoughts to play with, like those diadems which drunken Kalenders take and give each other at the doors of Persian wine-shops, a brick beneath their heads, their feet resting on the Seven Stars.

It is the wretchedness of being rich that you have to live with rich people.

Eat with the rich, but go to the play with the poor, who are capable of joy.

I love money ; just to be in the room with a millionaire will make me less forlorn.

Wealth is a kind of leprosy, and wealthy people should be segregated like lepers to keep them from contaminating others.

To suppose, as we all suppose, that we could be rich and not behave as the rich behave, is like supposing that we could drink all day and keep absolutely sober.

Every situation in life provides us ready-made with the outfit of thoughts and ways of behaving which perfectly fit it.

People of quality are seldom at their ease with the intellectuals, among whom they are apt to make a great deal of mischief.

And when in their azure veins they dip their pens of gold, how vapid, and (but hush !) how vulgar are the books they write !

There are people whose society I find delicious ; but when I sit alone and think of them, I shudder.

Ladies there are who know too much of London, and stand petrified, like Lot's wife, when she looked back on Sodom.

'When people say they hate gossip, remember,' the son of a celebrated upholsterer once warned me, 'that some of them do really hate it.'

There are such astonishing things to be told about men and women, and hardly a man or a woman to whom one dare tell them.

If you want to be thought a liar, always tell the truth.

To say what you think will certainly damage you in society ; but a free tongue is worth more than a thousand invitations.

When we find it amusing to shock people, we forget what a shocking experience it is.

Hearts that are delicate and kind and tongues that are neither—these make the finest company in the world.

Those who talk on the razor-edge of double-meanings pluck the rarest blooms from the precipices on either side.

Beware of the execrable talk to be heard in certain drawing-rooms of this stony-hearted city. When too late, you may find that without it you cannot live.

Friendship in the middle-classes is founded on respect; in the world of fashion they simply adore men and women whom not one of them would dream of trusting round the corner.

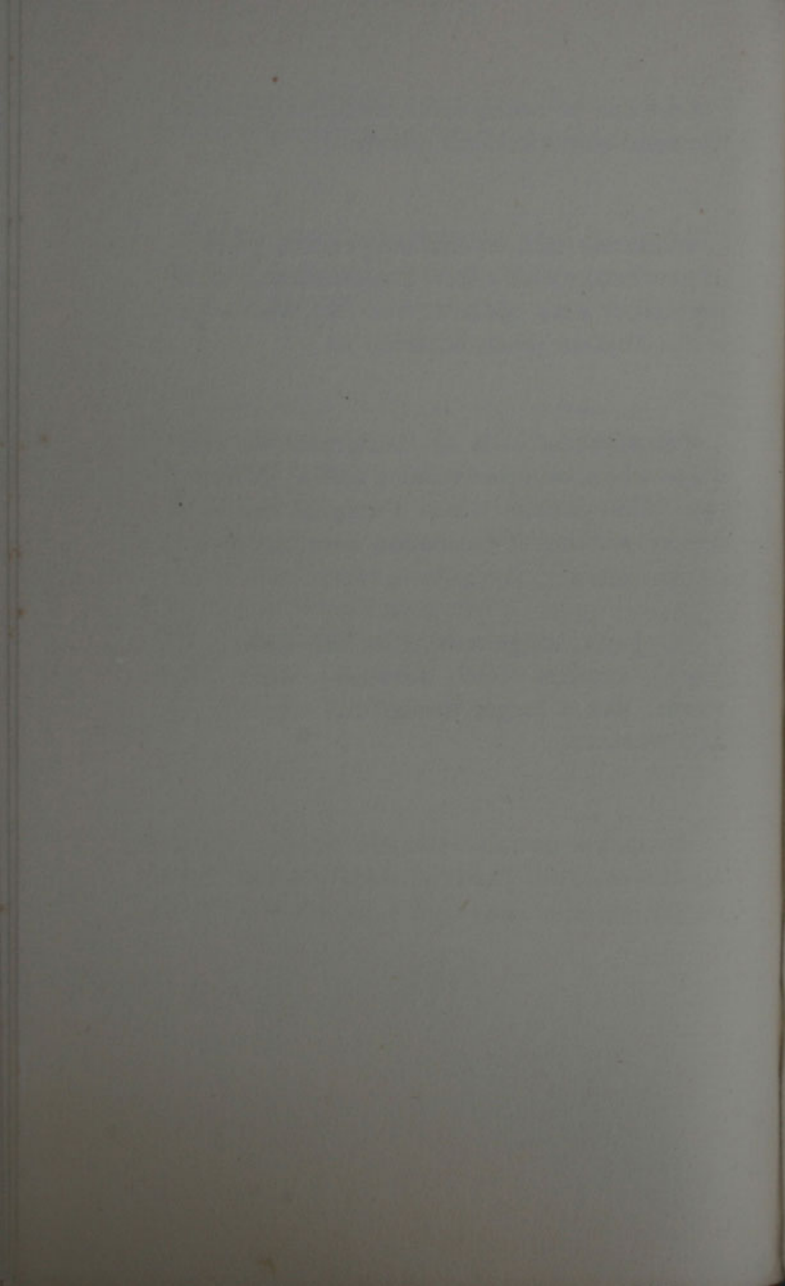
One can be bored until boredom becomes the most sublime of all emotions.

When we talk in drawing-rooms politely of new books with a new acquaintance, what precipices may open at our feet, and what awful abysses yawn between us !

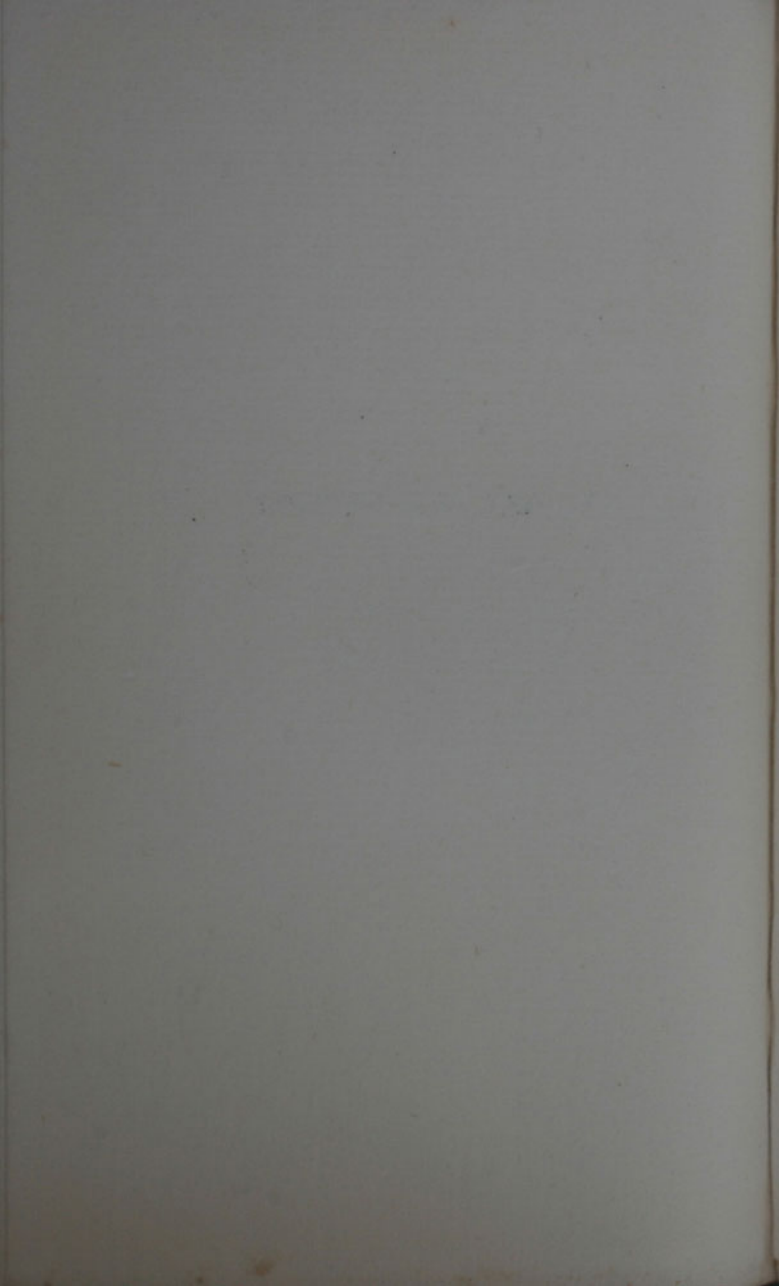
But what festivals of unanimity we celebrate when we meet what I call a ' Milver ' —a fellow-fanatic whose thoughts chime in a sweet ecstasy of execration with our own !

' O Joy ! ' sings a bird in the heart, ' O Joy ! ' another bird answers ; while the world, like a large, thoughtful cat, sits by and watches.

Words are not always mere words : a few almost inaudible articulations may tie two people together, unhappily, for life.



V. ART AND LETTERS



ART AND LETTERS

THE indefatigable pursuit of an unattainable Perfection, even though it consist in nothing more than the pounding of an old piano, alone gives a meaning to our life on this unavailing star.

The test of a vocation is the love of the drudgery it involves.

Artists who do not love their art are more numerous, and more unhappy, than we think.

The Muses are vindictive virgins, and avenge themselves without mercy on those who grow weary of their charms.

We should nourish our souls on the dew of Poesy, and manure them as well.

The great art of writing is the art of making people real to themselves with words.

Style is a magic wand, and turns everything to gold that it touches.

Poets' words have wings ; and they float up the stairs of palaces on them.

Fine writers should split hairs together, and sit side by side, like friendly apes, to pick the fleas from each other's fur.

What a paradise for poets the great world would be, if any sort of discrimination were made in those palaces between fine gold and brass !

Authors know that the age of miracles is not over ; how otherwise explain the instantaneous transfiguration of asses who praise their writings into exquisite arbiters of taste ?

Desperate writers, who by their cries of agony used to wring tears from tender-hearted readers, come to prefer the glittering smiles of hostesses with hearts as hard as the mantel-pieces of marble in their drawing-rooms.

A best-seller is the gilded tomb of a mediocre talent.

Poverty and her sister Solitude, to whom princely talents used to look for their tuition—how these two shabby and austere old Maids of Honour are now hooted at by the young !

Writers who write for money don't write for me.

The notion of making money by popular work, and then retiring to do good work on the proceeds, is the most familiar of the devil's traps for artists.

Nothing is perfect in this world ; and in spite of the noise they make and their big incomes, the complacency of our full-blown authors is not untroubled at odd moments, I am told, by the thought of the little group, just round the corner, of unimpressed, jeering, superior people.

How gay it would be to glitter, with no fellow-performers, alone in the limelight !

Every author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity chained like a madman in the padded cell of his breast.

When we see what people we like will do for money, best it is to be sad and say nothing.

After all, a little good taste does no harm,
and the fever of perfection is not catching.

What humbugs we are, who pretend to live for Beauty, and never see the Dawn !

The vitality of a new movement in art or letters can be pretty accurately gauged by the fury it arouses.

If you try hard enough to seem to like pictures, you will like them in the end.

What sight in the world is sadder than the sight of a lady we admire admiring a nauseating picture ?

If you are up to date to-day, how dismally out of date you will seem to-morrow !

He who goes against the fashion is himself its slave.

All our affirmations are mere matters of chronology ; and even our bad taste is nothing more than the bad taste of the age we live in.

If we are told that an odd piece of our china is worth a hundred pounds, how will its beauty entrance us !

How amazing are those moments when we really possess our possessions !

We who travel thousands of miles to gaze on beauty, are rather put out by the flaming at home of unfashionable sunsets over fashionable shops.

VI. MYSELF

MYSELF

THE extreme oddness of existence is what reconciles me to it.

Our personal affairs are not really worthy, as Plato said, of our consideration ; the fact that we are forced to take them seriously (as I was forced to run after my hat when it blew off to-day), being, as he said, the ignoble part of our condition.

My life is a bubble ; but how much solid cash it costs to keep that bubble floating !

I like to walk down Bond Street, thinking of all the things I don't desire.

Why should my soul so rejoice in the crimes placarded by the evening papers, and never weary, in the streets of this cathedral city, of dallying with images of wrong ?

‘ Let me cease,’ I pray, ‘ O thou Perfectly Awakened, to remain as an ape in the great world-forest, perpetually ascending and descending in search of the fruits of folly.’

How my reason totters in her contemplative tower, when people say that they have seen me in the street !

But how hard it is, as Pyrrho of Elis said, to discard our human nature !

I like my universe as immense, grim, icy and pitiless as possible.

When to the lady I met at luncheon I tried to explain that there is no enchantment in life like that of disenchantment with it, she looked at me as if I were a cloud or a steeple on the horizon, and her answer was as cold as the moon.

When I look at those beautiful and mysterious apparitions we call people, I like to think of their adorations one for another ; how they listen for one another's voices, and love to gaze in the enchanted mirrors of each other's eyes.

‘ O, for an axe ! ’ my soul cries out in railway stations, ‘ to hew limb from limb all the fiends and Jezebels between me and the ticket-office ! ’

When I come in talk on a blank wall of stupidity facing me, why do I rush stupidly on to break my bald head against it ?

‘Isn’t it odd,’ I said, as we were looking at the roses with those ladies, ‘to think that flowers are the reproductive organs of the plants they grow on?’

People who live among photographs of their friends are not friends for me.

I might give my life for my friend, but he had better not ask me to do up a parcel.

Like other Moralists, I like to poke about in that dark cabinet, the human heart, and expose its more shady corners.

And what pursuit is more elegant than that of collecting the ignominies of our nature and transfixing them for show, each on the bright pin of a polished phrase?

But it is not always easy to treat men and women as apes, and not baboon oneself in the process.

Aphorisms are salted and not sugared
almonds at Reason's feast.

There is a toad in every social dish, how-
ever well they cook it.

I rather like singing for my supper ; what
grates on my ears is the song of the other
singers.

' I have eaten from the timbrel,' I chant,
' I have drunk from the cymbal, I have
carried the sacred vessel, I have crept be-
neath the bridal chamber.'

On scenes of worldly splendour I gaze
with eyes more mild than those of Moses
when, at the sight of the Golden Calf and
the dancing, his heart waxed wrath within
him.

And the tremendous enigma which so troubled King David—the prosperity of the Wicked, and the Righteous as withered grass—this moral paradox does not spoil my appetite in the least.

More fascinating, at a party, than any other music is the rushing sound of fashionable voices ; the vociferation of all those fairies, each faintly blowing its own trumpet.

How pleasant it is to sip with the impunity of years those cups of enchantment that would have been rank poison in our youth !

I like diaphanous illusions, with the shapes of things as they are showing not too faintly through them.

When people tinkle coronets in the conversation I am inordinately solaced.

I don't hate the Aristocracy ; but I do wish they wouldn't publish slip-slop with their photographs in the penny papers.

People say that life is the thing, but I prefer reading.

It is the misery of young people that they have to read each other's books.

I hate having books forced down my throat ; but how I love forcing them down the throats of other people !

From the bright, unbookish constellations
my thoughts float back to the dim-lit reading-
room of this circulating library, the earth.

The world, as I know from books, is full
of abominable evil ;—indeed, I myself, not
many years ago, had some collars stolen in
the wash.

Of all the themes of sentimental novels
most of all I love a marriage, loveless in
appearance, between a high-souled hero and
heroine who really do adore each other, but
are too proud—ah, far too proud—to avow
it ;

Till suddenly,
After years of icily polite relations,
The flame of their mutual ardour blazes
out,
And they fall at last
(While I almost swoon away with bliss),
Into the heaven of each other's arms.

I cannot claim to be a dainty feeder ; I
like to read of frantic passions, and am not
at all reluctant to wade ankle-deep in blood.

Amid the mirrored corridors, the fountains
and gardens of the Versailles within me,
struts his bewigged majesty, my Soul.

I love to take a romantic view of my life,
and I hate it.

How can they say my life is not a success? Have I not for more than sixty years got enough to eat and escaped being eaten?

Moonshine is all moonshine to me.

Thank heavens, the sun has gone in, and I don't have to go out and enjoy it.

Give me a bed and a book and I am happy.

How often my soul visits the National Gallery, and how seldom I go there myself!

Just as remorse at feeling no remorse is a form of the holiest contrition, so my coldness, when beauty leaves me cold, I regard as the proof of how warmly I love it.

I make no immoderate demands ; my hopes for my declining years are not greedy. In January—like an old French unbeliever I have read of—I begin to think of the strawberry season ; and I look forward, when that is over, to the ripening of peaches in August.

I shouldn't mind, though, living to my hundredth year, like Fontenelle, who never wept or laughed, never ran or interrupted anyone, and never lost his temper ; to whom all the science of his day was known, but who all his life adored three things—music, painting and women—about which he said he understood absolutely nothing.

Or like Huet, that polite old Bishop of Avranches (*'flos Episcoporum'* a German scholar called him), who lived to be ninety-one, and read Theocritus every year in his favourite month of May.

Or again I think with envy of the octogenarian Firdausi, who realised at last the dream of his childhood, when gazing into the irrigation canal that flowed by his father's garden, the Persian boy reflected that it would be a fine thing to leave an image of himself in the world that passes.

Or the learned old Baron Walckenaer, who wrote important books on spiders, solitary bees and Madame de Sévigné ; who established on a sound historical basis the chronology of Ninon de l'Enclos' lovers, and published a romance called '*l'Ile de Wight*,' in which island he located his dream of bliss and his ideal habitation.

It would have been a disillusion for the Baron had he known how, standing on a little platform at the top of his house at Farringford, and gazing up through a telescope at the icy constellations which hung in a horror of bottomless space above that island, Tennyson would sometimes shiver, and almost, for a moment, doubt the existence of a benevolent Creator.

All my life, as down an abyss without a bottom, I have been pouring masses and masses of information into that vacancy of oblivion I call my mind.

But most of all I envy the octogenarian poet who joined three words--

‘Go, lovely Rose’—
so happily together, that he left his name to float down through time on the wings of a phrase and a flower.

When I look at the ocean, which seemed so inadequate an object of contemplation to Coleridge ;—he and Wordsworth were sailing in 1798 on their memorable visit to Germany from Yarmouth in the Hamburg packet, and on Monday, the 17th of September, when the ship was out of sight of land and Coleridge came on deck and gazed at the objectless waters, he was exceedingly disappointed, he tells us, by the narrowness and nearness of the horizon, and was aware of none of that immensity which he had expected to find in such an unimpeded sea-prospect ;—so poorly indeed can objects directly before our senses satisfy the Imagination, that ‘ awful power,’ as his fellow-tourist was afterwards to call it ;—when, as I say, I look at the ocean, I remedy the defect which Coleridge noted, by contemplating it through the magnifying glass of our poetic vocabulary ; and by calling it ‘ unpathed,’ ‘ unfathomed,’ ‘ insatiate,’ and ‘ outrageous,’ I arrive at a more adequate conception of the view of flat water before me.

There are great youths too, whose achievements one may envy ; the boy David who slew Goliath ; Bishop Berkeley who annihilated the external world at the age of twenty-five in an octavo volume ; and David Hume, who by sweeping away in his youth all the props of the human understanding, destroyed for ever the possibility of knowledge.

Like the late Dr. Johnson, when at the age of seventy-two he retired to that summer-house at Streatham to plan a life of greater diligence, I too sometimes go off by myself and resolve to spend eight hours at least of all my remaining days in some grave employment.

To be an elegant and acrimonious scholar, and make emendations in Greek texts that shall fill the world with wonder ;

Or an illustrious Egyptologist, with spectacles and a white beard ;

Or a Lord of Thought, and sum up the universe in a single phrase ;

And know all about it, whatever it is, and break the teeth of the young lions, break their great teeth in their mouths ;

Or to lie in bed day after day like Joubert, in a pink dressing-gown, trying to think nothing and feel no emotion ?

How hard it is for the good to go wrong ! I seem to find the pleasant paths of transgression all effectually barricaded against me.

'Go to the ruins,' whispers the excavated voice of Babylonian disillusion, 'and behold the skulls of the former and the later ; who was the evil-doer, and who the benefactor ?'

Round and round the world, on the storms that blow always about the Southern Pole, Antarctic albatrosses float for ever ; and only once a year they land to lay their eggs on some island of the South Pacific. So from the circumgyrations of its skiey wheelings once in a great while my soul descends to hatch its Meditations.

How I should like to distil my disesteem of my contemporaries into prose so perfect that all of them would have to read it !

But good style depends, the Persian critics tell us, upon freedom from monetary troubles. Only thus, they say, can one arrive at perfect diction.

When by sips of champagne and a few oysters they can no longer keep me from fading away into the infinite azure, 'you cannot,' I shall whisper my last faint message to the world, 'be too fastidious.'

