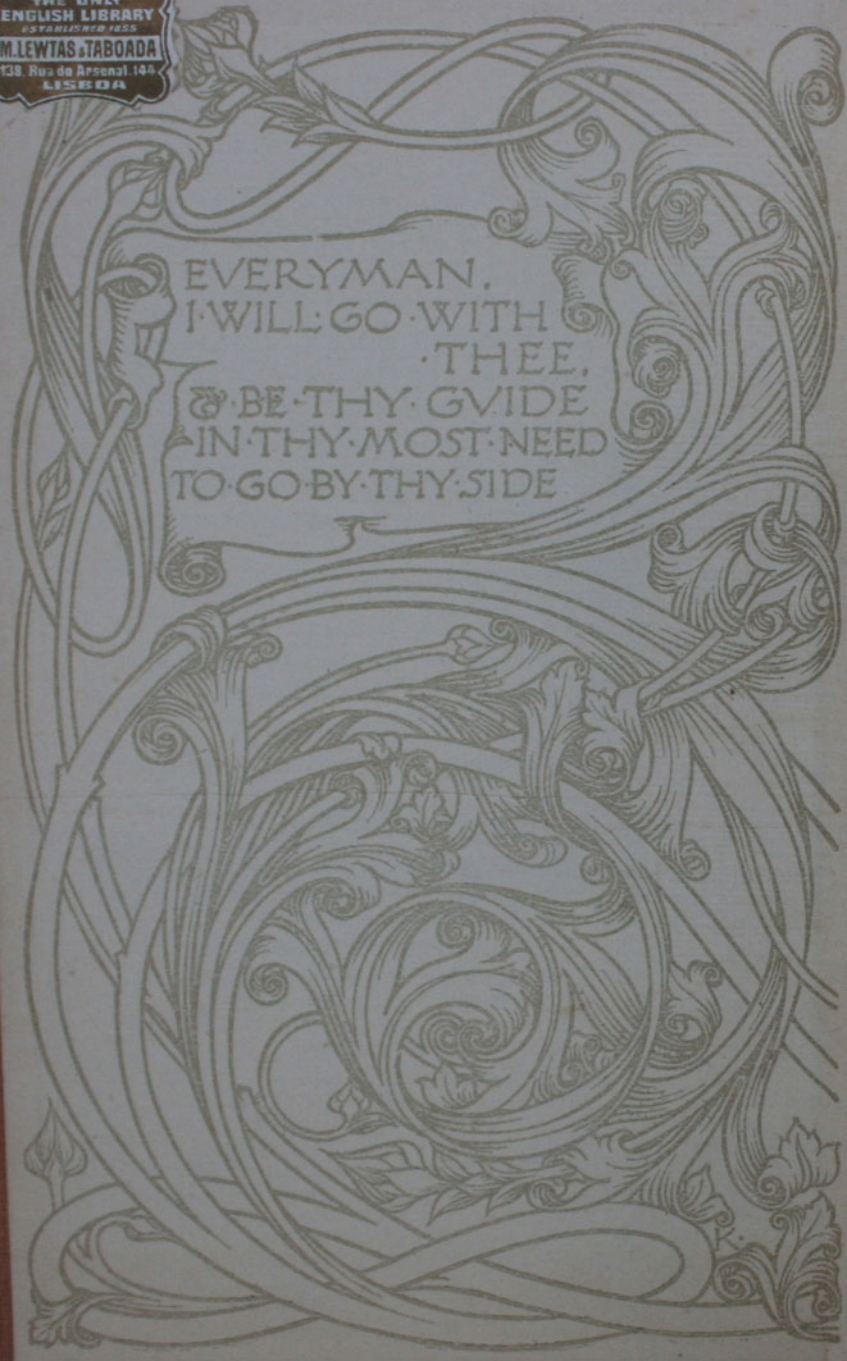


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ESSAYS AND
BELLES LETTRES

AMONG MY BOOKS

BY JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL


MOST CURRENT FOR THAT THEY COME HOME TO MEN'S BUSINESS & BOSOMS
LORD BACON

AMONG MY BOOKS BY JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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INTRODUCTION

Some years ago when James Russell Lowell was American minister in England he wrote an "Apology for a Preface" to a volume of his collected essays, in which he explained that they were originally composed as lectures for an audience, part academic, part popular. This accounted for their "more rhetorical tone;" and we may add for their reminding their hearers continually of their author's attempt to strike an equation between himself, a New Englander of 1845, or thereabouts, and the writers and poets, men of all time, of whom they treated. Indeed a considerable share of our interest in Lowell the critic lies in his power to range his vigorous modern spirit, charged with American humour, against the moods, prejudices, superstitions, ideas, and formularies of the past.

True, many of his fellow-countrymen took afterwards to discounting heavily Lowell's American quality. They said his long residence in England and his evident wish to remain there in the orbit of the court and its circles was a sure presumption of his being, at heart, a degenerate Yankee. So strong was this feeling that, when in the United States in 1888 avowedly with the desire to see there what was most American, I was invited to meet him at the house of his kinsman, the late Professor Charles Eliot Norton, some friends in Boston strongly dissuaded me from accepting the invitation. Lowell's life abroad had spoiled him as a good American and a representative man of letters; they even used an expression suggesting very much what Critos said in a scene of "Cynthia's Revels"—that he was another "Amorphus." However, I went over to Cambridge that Sunday, and in the afternoon Lowell, so far as my recollection goes, smoked a short clay and enlarged amusingly enough on a favourite topic with Americans, the phlegm and want of humour of the average

Englishman and the over-weight of tradition that the new generation in the old world had to bear. He impressed me then as a man who had seen life at large and richly assimilated its nourriture, and who was agreeably freed, by increase of years and the frequent alternation between two worlds, from the superstitions, or, if you like, the prejudices, of either orbit. A citizen of the world he seemed, who had been and still was not a close but a liberal scholar, a lover of books and what is before books, a man fond of his pipe and his joke, with a lingering pleasure in the memory of the great occasions he had gone through, and the "princes and counties" he had seen. In a letter to me, written in October 1888, about the volume of essays already referred to, he said—being then an old stager of sixty-nine years old: "I can't always write when I would; one must always have some coign of vantage to hitch one's web to, swinging off into infinite space being unprofitable. . . . What I promised was that I would if I could—*je voudrais si je coudrais*, as a countrywoman of mine said *à l'improviste* when suddenly asked to give a direction in the streets of Paris."

This suggests that there was always something optional in his prose-writing, whatever be said of his verse; which it may be thought is a good element in your true essayist, who can only if he is a Carlyle or an Emerson put on prophetic airs with advantage. Lowell had the faith of a writer whom he was much given to cite, Montaigne, in the inevitable cordial and fruitful reaction between books and men, literature and event. He saw his man always behind the page, referred Dryden to his Will's Coffee House and Lessing to the Gottsched and Klopstock German bounds from which he broke free; and when he had to deal with New England witches or with French egotists, he knew how to work himself sympathetically into a mood accordant with that of their contemporaries, and to catch in his own style something of the varying aroma of their pages—

> "Whatever moulds of various brain
> E'er shaped the world to weal or woe."

An open-eyed American critic, the late Edmund Clarence Stedman, who was in some ways well equipped for dealing

with Lowell, said of him shrewdly that his essays were often planned on great lines and they had noble vestibules, but the rest of the structure did not quite fulfil the promise. He wrote indeed with the freedom and variety of a great causeur, but hardly with the inspired patience of the greatest and subtlest critics. "His resources make him prodigal, and he has the brave impatience of a skilled performer who trusts his ear and is none too careful of the written score." He himself more or less subscribed to this opinion in his confession that he had hardly the stuff in him of an adequate professor of literature, though he might have had that of a tolerable Mercury.

He was an immense discursive reader, reading with the sure instinct of the man who taking up an old book at once contrives to get his finger on the live pulse in it. He had the art of making authors live, move, and have their being, in spite of all the baggage and the paraphernalia of duller sheets and pages they carried. So it was when he wrote of Lessing and Rousseau, of Parris the Salem minister and Howes the "Swedenborgian before Swedenborg." For robust, scholarly, humorous, and frankly human criticism you will not find much better than this New England critic at his best.

Lowell was born at Cambridge, Mass., in 1819 and died in 1891.

His bibliography in brief follows:

Works.—Harvardiana, 1838; Class Poem, 1838; A Year's Life, 1841; The Pioneer, 1843; Poems, 1844; Conversations on Some of the Old Poets, 1844; Poems, Second Series, 1848; A Fable for Critics, 1848; The Biglow Papers, 1848; The Vision of Sir Launfal, 1848; Poems, 2 vols., 1849; Intro. to Keats' Poems, 1854; Intro. to Wordsworth's Poems, 1854; Poems of Maria Lowell, 1855; Intro. to Shelley's Poems, 1857; ed. *Atlantic Monthly*, 1857-1862; Poetical Works, 1858; Mason and Slidell, 1862; Fireside Travels, 1864; ed. *North American Review*, 1864-1872; Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, 1865; The Biglow Papers, Second Series, 1867; Under the Willows, and other Poems, 1868; The Cathedral, 1870; Among My Books, 1870; My Study Windows, 1871; Among My Books, Second Series, 1876; Three Memorial Poems, 1877; Complete Poetical Works, 1877; Democracy, and other Addresses, 1886; The Independent in Politics, 1888; Political Essays, 1888; Heartsease and Rue, 1888; Intro. to Walton's Complete Angler, 1889; Riverside Edition of Works, 10 vols., 1890-1891; Latest Literary Essays and Addresses, 1891; The Old English Dramatists, 1892; Letters, ed. by Chas. Eliot Norton, 1893; Last Poems, ed. by Chas. Eliot Norton, 1895; Complete Poetical Works, ed. by H. E. Scudder, 1896; The Power of Sound: a Rhymed Lecture,

1896; Lectures on the English Poets, 1897; Impressions of Spain, 1899; Anti-Slavery Papers, 1902; Early Prose Writings, 1902; Elmwood Edition of Complete Works, 16 vols., 1904.

BIOGRAPHIES.—His Message and How It Helped Me, by W. T. Stead, 1892; The Poet and the Man, by F. H. Underwood, 1893; Biographical Sketch in Complete Poetical Works, by H. E. Scudder, 1896; J. R. Lowell and His Friends, by Edward Everett Hale, 1899; A Biography, by H. E. Scudder, 1901; His Life and Work, by F. Greenslet, 1905; Bibliography of J. R. Lowell, by G. W. Cooke, 1906; Lowell and His Poetry, by W. H. Hudson, 1911.

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TO

F. D. L.

Love comes and goes with music in his feet,
And tunes young pulses to his roundelays;
Love brings thee this: will it persuade thee, Sweet,
That he turns proser when he comes and stays?

AMONG MY BOOKS

DRYDEN[1]

BENVENUTO CELLINI tells us that when, in his boyhood, he saw a salamander come out of the fire, his grandfather forthwith gave him a sound beating, that he might the better remember so unique a prodigy. Though perhaps in this case the rod had another application than the autobiographer chooses to disclose, and was intended to fix in the pupil's mind a lesson of veracity rather than of science, the testimony to its mnemonic virtue remains. Nay, so universally was it once believed that the senses, and through them the faculties of observation and retention, were quickened by an irritation of the cuticle, that in France it was customary to whip the children annually at the boundaries of the parish, lest the true place of them might ever be lost through neglect of so inexpensive a mordant for the memory. From this practice the older school of critics would seem to have taken a hint for keeping fixed the limits of good taste, and what was somewhat vaguely called *classical* English. To mark these limits in poetry, they set up as Hermæ the images they had made to them of Dryden, of Pope, and later of Goldsmith. Here they solemnly castigated every new aspirant in verse, who in turn performed the same function for the next generation, thus helping to keep always sacred and immovable the *ne plus ultra* alike of inspiration and of the

[1] *The Dramatick Works of John Dryden, Esq.* In six volumes. London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, in the Strand. MDCCXXXV. 18mo.

The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose-Works of John Dryden, now first collected. With Notes and Illustrations. An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of his Letters, the greatest part of which has never before been published. By Edmund Malone, Esq. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand, 4 vols., 8vo.

The Poetical Works of John Dryden. (Edited by Mitford.) London: W. Pickering, 1832, 5 vols., 18mo.

vocabulary. Though no two natures were ever much more unlike than those of Dryden and Pope, and again of Pope and Goldsmith, and no two styles, except in such externals as could be easily caught and copied, yet it was the fashion, down even to the last generation, to advise young writers to form themselves, as it was called, on these excellent models. Wordsworth himself began in this school; and though there were glimpses, here and there, of a direct study of nature, yet most of the epithets in his earlier pieces were of the traditional kind so fatal to poetry during great part of the last century; and he indulged in that alphabetic personification which enlivens all such words as Hunger, Solitude, Freedom, by the easy magic of an initial capital.

> "Where the green apple shrivels on the spray,
> And pines the unripened pear in summer's kindliest ray,
> Even here Content has fixed her smiling reign
> With Independence, child of high Disdain.
> Exulting 'mid the winter of the skies,
> Shy as the jealous chamois, Freedom flies,
> And often grasps her sword, and often eyes."

Here we have every characteristic of the artificial method, even to the triplet, which Swift hated so heartily as "a vicious way of rhyming wherewith Mr. Dryden abounded, imitated by all the bad versifiers of Charles the Second's reign." Wordsworth became, indeed, very early the leader of reform; but, like Wesley, he endeavoured a reform within the Establishment. Purifying the substance, he retained the outward forms with a feeling rather than conviction that, in poetry, substance and form are but manifestations of the same inward life, the one fused into the other in the vivid heat of their common expression. Wordsworth could never wholly shake off the influence of the century into which he was born. He began by proposing a reform of the ritual, but it went no further than an attempt to get rid of the words of the Latin original where the meaning was as well or better given in derivatives of the Saxon. He would have stricken out the "assemble" and left the "meet together." Like Wesley, he might be compelled by necessity to a breach of the Canon; but, like him, he was never a willing schismatic, and his singing robes were the full and flowing canonicals of the Church by law established. Inspiration makes short work with the usage of the best authors and ready-made

elegances of diction; but where Wordsworth is not possessed by his demon, as Molière said of Corneille, he equals Thomson in verbiage, out-Miltons Milton in artifice of style, and Latinises his diction beyond Dryden. The fact was, that he took up his early opinions on instinct, and insensibly mollified them as he studied the masters of what may be called the Middle Period of English verse.[1] As a young man, he disparaged Virgil ("We talked a great deal of nonsense in those days," he said when taken to task for it later in life); at fifty-nine he translated three books of the *Æneid*, in emulation of Dryden, though falling far short of him in everything but closeness, as he seems, after a few years, to have been convinced. Keats was the first resolute and wilful heretic, the true founder of the modern school, which admits no cis-Elizabethan authority save Milton, whose own English was formed upon those earlier models. Keats denounced the authors of that style which came in toward the close of the seventeenth century, and reigned absolute through the whole of the eighteenth, as

> "A schism,
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
> . . . . who went about
> Holding a poor decrepit standard out,
> Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
> The name of one Boileau!"

But Keats had never then[2] studied the writers of whom he speaks so contemptuously, though he might have profited by so doing. Boileau would at least have taught him that *flimsy* would have been an apter epithet for the *standard* than for the mottoes upon it. Dryden was the author of that schism against which Keats so vehemently asserts the claim of the orthodox teaching it had displaced. He was far more just to Boileau, of whom Keats had probably never read a word. "If I would only cross the seas," he says, "I might find in France a living Horace and a Juvenal in the person of the admirable Boileau, whose numbers are excellent, whose expressions are noble, whose thoughts are just, whose language is pure, whose satire is pointed, and whose sense is just. What he borrows from the ancients he

[1] His "Character of a Happy Warrior" (1806), one of his noblest poems, has a dash of Dryden in it—still more his "Epistle to Sir George Beaumont" (1811).

[2] He studied Dryden's versification before writing his "Lamia."

repays with usury of his own, in coin as good and almost as universally valuable." [1]

Dryden has now been in his grave nearly a hundred and seventy years; in the second class of English poets perhaps no one stands, on the whole, so high as he; during his lifetime, in spite of jealousy, detraction, unpopular politics, and a suspicious change of faith, his pre-eminence was conceded; he was the earliest complete type of the purely literary man, in the modern sense; there is a singular unanimity in allowing him a certain claim to *greatness* which would be denied to men as famous and more read—to Pope or Swift, for example; he is supposed, in some way or other, to have reformed English poetry. It is now about half a century since the only uniform edition of his works was edited by Scott. No library is complete without him, no name is more familiar than his, and yet it may be suspected that few writers are more thoroughly buried in that great cemetery of the "British Poets." If contemporary reputation be often deceitful, posthumous fame may be generally trusted, for it is a verdict made up of the suffrages of the select men in succeeding generations. This verdict has been as good as unanimous in favour of Dryden. It is, perhaps, worth while to take a fresh observation of him, to consider him neither as warning nor example, but to endeavour to make out what it is that has given so lofty and firm a position to one of the most unequal, inconsistent, and faulty writers that ever lived. He is a curious example of what we often remark of the living, but rarely of the dead—that they get credit for what they might be quite as much as for what they are—and posterity has applied to him one of his own rules of criticism, judging him by the best rather than the average of his achievements, a thing posterity is seldom wont to do. On the losing side in politics, it is true of his polemical writings as of Burke's—whom in many respects he resembles, and especially in that supreme quality of a reasoner, that his mind gathers not only heat, but clearness and expansion, by its own motion—that they have won his battle for him in the judgment of after times.

To us, looking back at him, he gradually becomes a singularly interesting and even picturesque figure. He is, in more

[1] *On the Origin and Progress of Satire.* See Johnson's counter opinion in his *Life of Dryden.*

senses than one, in language, in turn of thought, in style of mind, in the direction of his activity, the first of the moderns. He is the first literary man who was also a man of the world, as we understand the term. He succeeded Ben Jonson as the acknowledged dictator of wit and criticism, as Dr. Johnson, after nearly the same interval, succeeded him. All ages are, in some sense, ages of transition; but there are times when the transition is more marked, more rapid; and it is, perhaps, an ill fortune for a man of letters to arrive at maturity during such a period, still more to represent in himself the change that is going on, and to be an efficient cause in bringing it about. Unless, like Goethe, he is of a singularly uncontemporaneous nature, capable of being *tutta in se romita*, and of running parallel with his time rather than being sucked into its current, he will be thwarted in that harmonious development of native force which has so much to do with its steady and successful application. Dryden suffered, no doubt, in this way. Though in creed he seems to have drifted backward in an eddy of the general current; yet of the intellectual movement of the time, so far certainly as literature shared in it, he could say, with Æneas, not only that he saw, but that himself was a great part of it. That movement was, on the whole, a downward one, from faith to scepticism, from enthusiasm to cynicism, from the imagination to the understanding. It was in a direction altogether away from those springs of imagination and faith at which they of the last age had slaked the thirst or renewed the vigour of their souls. Dryden himself recognised that indefinable and gregarious influence which we call nowadays the Spirit of the Age, when he said that "every Age has a kind of universal genius." [1] He had also a just notion of that in which he lived; for he remarks, incidentally, that "all knowing ages are naturally sceptic and not at all bigoted, which, if I am not much deceived, is the proper character of our own." [2] It may be conceived that he was even painfully half-aware of having fallen upon a time incapable, not merely of a great poet, but perhaps of any poet at all; for nothing is so sensitive to the chill of a sceptical atmosphere as that enthusiasm which, if it be not genius, is at least the beautiful illusion that saves it from the baffling quibbles of self-consciousness. Thrice unhappy he who, born to see

[1] *Essay on Dramatick Poesy.* [2] *Life of Lucian.*

things as they might be, is schooled by circumstances to see them as people say they are—to read God in a prose translation. Such was Dryden's lot, and such, for a good part of his days, it was by his own choice. He who was of a stature to snatch the torch of life that flashes from lifted hand to hand along the generations, over the heads of inferior men, chose rather to be a link-boy to the stews.

As a writer for the stage, he deliberately adopted and repeatedly re-affirmed the maxim that

> "He who lives to please, must please to live."

Without earnest convictions, no great or sound literature is conceivable. But if Dryden mostly wanted that inspiration which comes of belief in and devotion to something nobler and more abiding than the present moment and its petulant need, he had, at least, the next best thing to that—a thorough faith in himself. He was, moreover, a man of singularly open soul, and of a temper self-confident enough to be candid even with himself. His mind was growing to the last, his judgment widening and deepening, his artistic sense refining itself more and more. He confessed his errors, and was not ashamed to retrace his steps in search of that better knowledge which the omniscience of superficial study had disparaged. Surely an intellect that is still pliable at seventy is a phenomenon as interesting as it is rare. But at whatever period of his life we look at Dryden, and whatever, for the moment, may have been his poetic creed, there was something in the nature of the man that would not be wholly subdued to what it worked in. There are continual glimpses of something in him greater than he hints, of possibilities finer than anything he has done. You feel that the whole of him was better than any random specimens, though of his best, seem to prove. *Incessu patet*, he has by times the large stride of the elder race, though it sinks too often into the slouch of a man who has seen better days. His grand air may, in part, spring from a habit of easy superiority to his competitors; but must also, in part, be ascribed to an innate dignity of character. That this pre-eminence should have been so generally admitted, during his life, can only be explained by a bottom of good sense, kindliness, and sound judgment, whose solid worth could afford that many a flurry of vanity, petulance, and even error, should flit across the

surface and be forgotten. Whatever else Dryden may have been, the last and abiding impression of him is, that he was thoroughly manly; and while it may be disputed whether he was a great poet, it may be said of him, as Wordsworth said of Burke, that "he was by far the greatest man of his age, not only abounding in knowledge himself, but feeding, in various directions, his most able contemporaries." [1]

Dryden was born in 1631. He was accordingly six years old when Jonson died, was nearly a quarter of a century younger than Milton, and may have personally known Bishop Hall, the first English satirist, who was living till 1656. On the other side, he was older than Swift by thirty-six, than Addison by forty-one, and than Pope by fifty-seven years. Dennis says that "Dryden, for the last ten years of his life, was much acquainted with Addison, and drank with him more than he ever used to do, probably so far as to hasten his end," being commonly "an extreme sober man." Pope tells us that, in his twelfth year, he "saw Dryden," perhaps at Will's, perhaps in the street, as Scott did Burns. Dryden himself visited Milton now and then, and was intimate with Davenant, who could tell him of Fletcher and Jonson from personal recollection. Thus he stands between the age before and that which followed him, giving a hand to each. His father was a country clergyman, of Puritan leanings, a younger son of an ancient county family. The Puritanism is thought to have come in with the poet's great-grandfather, who made in his will the somewhat singular statement that he was "assured by the Holy Ghost that he was elect of God." It would appear from this that Dryden's self-confidence was an inheritance. The solid quality of his mind showed itself early. He himself tells us that he had read Polybius "in English, with the pleasure of a boy, before he was ten years of age, and yet even then *had some dark notions of the prudence with which he conducted his design.*" [2] The concluding words are very characteristic, even if Dryden, as men commonly do, interpreted his boyish turn of mind by later self-knowledge. We thus get a glimpse of him browsing —for, like Johnson, Burke, and the full as distinguished

[1] "The great man must have that intellect which puts in motion the intellect of others."—Landor, *Im. Con., Diogenes and Plato.*

[2] *Character of Polybius* (1692).

from the learned men, he was always a random reader[1]—in his father's library, and painfully culling here and there a spray of his own proper nutriment from among the stubs and thorns of Puritan divinity. After such schooling as could be had in the country, he was sent up to Westminster School, then under the headship of the celebrated Dr. Busby. Here he made his first essays in verse, translating among other school exercises of the same kind, the third satire of Persius. In 1650 he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there for seven years. The only record of his college life is a discipline imposed, in 1652, for "disobedience to the Vice-Master, and contumacy in taking his punishment, inflicted by him." Whether this punishment was corporeal, as Johnson insinuates in the similar case of Milton, we are ignorant. He certainly retained no very fond recollection of his Alma Mater, for in his "Prologue to the University of Oxford" he says:—

> "Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother university;
> Thebes did his green, unknowing youth engage,
> He chooses Athens in his riper age."

By the death of his father, in 1654, he came into possession of a small estate of sixty pounds a year, from which, however, a third must be deducted, for his mother's dower, till 1676. After leaving Cambridge, he became secretary to his near relative, Sir Gilbert Pickering, at that time Cromwell's chamberlain, and a member of his Upper House. In 1670 he succeeded Davenant as Poet Laureate,[2] and Howel as Historiographer, with a yearly salary of two hundred pounds. This place he lost at the Revolution, and had the mortification to see his old enemy and butt, Shadwell, promoted to it, as the best poet the Whig party could muster. If William was obliged to read the verses of his official minstrel, Dryden was more than avenged. From 1688 to his death, twelve years later, he earned his bread manfully by his pen, without any mean complaining, and with no allusion to his fallen fortunes that is not dignified and touching. These latter years, during which he was his own man again,

[1] "For my own part, who must confess it to my shame that I never read anything but for pleasure."—*Life of Plutarch* (1683).

[2] Gray says petulently enough that "Dryden was as disgraceful to the office, from his character, as the poorest scribbler could have been from his verses."—Gray to Mason, 19th December 1757.

were probably the happiest of his life. In 1664 or 1665 he married Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. About a hundred pounds a year were thus added to his income. The marriage is said not to have been a happy one, and perhaps it was not, for his wife was apparently a weak-minded woman; but the inference from the internal evidence of Dryden's plays, as of Shakespeare's, is very untrustworthy, ridicule of marriage having always been a common stock in trade of the comic writers.

The earliest of his verses that have come down to us were written upon the death of Lord Hastings, and are as bad as they can be—a kind of parody on the worst of Donne. They have every fault of his manner, without a hint of the subtile and often profound thought that more than reclaims it. As the Doctor himself would have said, here is Donne outdone. The young nobleman died of small-pox, and Dryden exclaims pathetically—

> "Was there no milder way than the small-pox,
> The very filthiness of Pandora's box?"

He compares the pustules to "rosebuds stuck i' the lily skin about," and says that

> "Each little pimple had a tear in it
> To wail the fault its rising did commit."

But he has not done his worst yet, by a great deal. What follows is even finer:—

> "No comet need foretell his change drew on,
> Whose corpse might seem a constellation.
> O, had he died of old, how great a strife
> Had been who from his death should draw their life!
> Who should, by one rich draught, become whate'er
> Seneca, Cato, Numa, Cæsar, were,
> Learn'd, virtuous, pious, great, and have by this
> An universal metempsychosis!
> Must all these aged sires in one funeral
> Expire? all die in one so young, so small?"

It is said that one of Allston's early pictures was brought to him, after he had long forgotten it, and his opinion asked as to the wisdom of the young artist's persevering in the career he had chosen. Allston advised his quitting it forthwith as hopeless. Could the same experiment have been tried with these verses upon Dryden, can any one doubt that his counsel would have been the same? It should be remembered, however, that he was barely turned eighteen when

they were written, and the tendency of his style is noticeable in so early an abandonment of the participial *ed* in *learned* and *aged*. In the next year he appears again in some commendatory verses prefixed to the sacred epigrams of his friend, John Hoddesdon. In these he speaks of the author as a

> "Young eaglet, who, thy nest thus soon forsook,
> So lofty and divine a course hast took
> As all admire, before the down begin
> To peep, as yet, upon thy smoother chin."

Here is almost every fault which Dryden's later nicety would have condemned. But perhaps there is no schooling so good for an author as his own youthful indiscretions. After this effort Dryden seems to have lain fallow for ten years, and then he at length reappears in the thirty-seven "heroic stanzas" on the death of Cromwell. This versification is smoother, but the conceits are there again, though in a milder form. The verse is modelled after "Gondibert." A single image from nature (he was almost always happy in these) gives some hint of the maturer Dryden:—

> "And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
> Made him but greater seem, not greater grow."

Two other verses,

> "And the isle, when her protecting genius went,
> Upon his obsequies loud sighs conferred,"

are interesting, because they show that he had been studying the early poems of Milton. He has contrived to bury under a rubbish of verbiage one of the most purely imaginative passages ever written by the great Puritan poet.

> "From haunted spring and dale,
> Edged with poplar pale,
> The parting genius is with sighing sent."

This is the more curious because, twenty-four years afterwards, he says, in defending rhyme: "Whatever causes he [Milton] alleges for the abolishment of rhyme, his own particular reason is plainly this, that rhyme was not his talent; he had neither the ease of doing it nor the graces of it: which is manifest in his *Juvenilia*, . . . where his rhyme is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymer, though not a poet."[1] It was this, no doubt, that heartened Dr. Johnson

[1] *Essay on the Origin and Progress of Satire.*

to say of "Lycidas" that "the diction was harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." It is Dryden's excuse that his characteristic excellence is to argue persuasively and powerfully, whether in verse or prose, and that he was amply endowed with the most needful quality of an advocate—to be always strongly and wholly of his present way of thinking, whatever it might be. Next we have, in 1660, "Astræa Redux," on the "happy restoration" of Charles II. In this also we can forebode little of the full-grown Dryden but his defects. We see his tendency to exaggeration, and to confound physical with metaphysical, as where he says of the ships that brought home the royal brothers, that

> "the joyful London meets
> The princely York, himself alone a freight,
> The *Swiftsure* groans beneath great Gloster's weight;"

and speaks of the

> "repeated prayer
> Which stormed the skies and ravished Charles from thence."

There is also a certain everydayness, not to say vulgarity, of phrase, which Dryden never wholly refined away, and which continually tempts us to sum up at once against him as the greatest poet that ever was or could be made wholly out of prose.

> "Heaven would no bargain for its blessings drive"

is an example. On the other hand, there are a few verses almost worthy of his best days, as these:—

> "Some lazy ages lost in sleep and ease,
> No action leave to busy chronicles;
> Such whose *supine felicity* but makes
> In story chasms, in epochas mistakes,
> O'er whom Time gently shakes his wings of down,
> Till with his silent sickle they are mown."

These are all the more noteworthy, that Dryden, unless in argument, is seldom equal for six lines together. In the poem to Lord Clarendon (1662) there are four verses that have something of the "energy divine" for which Pope praised his master:—

> "Let envy, then, those crimes within you see
> From which the happy never must be free;
> Envy that does with misery reside,
> The joy and the revenge of ruined pride."

In his *Aurengzebe* (1675) there is a passage, of which,

as it is a good example of Dryden, I shall quote the whole, though my purpose aims mainly at the latter verses:—

> " When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
> Yet, fooled with Hope, men favour the deceit,
> Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay;
> To-morrow's falser than the former day,
> Lies worse, and while it says we shall be blest
> With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.
> Strange cozenage! none would live past years again,
> Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,
> And from the dregs of life think to receive
> What the first sprightly running could not give.
> I'm tired of waiting for this chymic gold
> Which fools us young and beggars us when old."

The " first sprightly running " of Dryden's vintage was, it must be confessed, a little muddy, if not beery; but if his own soil did not produce grapes of the choicest flavour, he knew where they were to be had; and his product, like sound wine, grew better the longer it stood upon the lees. He tells us, evidently thinking of himself, that in a poet, " from fifty to threescore, the balance generally holds even in our colder climates, for he loses not much in fancy; and judgment, which is the effect of observation, still increases. His succeeding years afford him little more than the stubble of his own harvest, yet, if his constitution be healthful, his mind may still retain a decent vigour, and the gleanings of that of Ephraim, in comparison with others, will surpass the vintage of Abiezer." [1] Since Chaucer, none of our poets has had a constitution more healthful, and it was his old age that yielded the best of him. In him the understanding was, perhaps, in overplus for his entire good fortune as a poet, and that is a faculty among the earliest to mature. We have seen him, at only ten years, divining the power of reason in Polybius.[2] The same turn of mind led him later to imitate the French school of tragedy, and to admire in Ben Jonson the most correct of English poets. It was his imagination that needed quickening, and it is very curious to trace through his different prefaces the gradual opening of his eyes to the causes of the solitary pre-eminence of Shakespeare. At first he is sensible of an attraction towards him which he cannot explain, and for which he apologises, as if it were

[1] Dedication of the *Georgics*.

[2] Dryden's penetration is always remarkable. His general judgment of Polybius coincides remarkably with that of Mommsen. (*Röm. Gesch.* ii. 448, *seq.*)

wrong. But he feels himself drawn more and more strongly, till at last he ceases to resist altogether, and is forced to acknowledge that there is something in this one man that is not, and never was, anywhere else, something not to be reasoned about, ineffable, divine; if contrary to the rules, so much the worse for *them*. It may be conjectured that Dryden's Puritan associations may have stood in the way of his more properly poetic culture, and that his early knowledge of Shakespeare was slight. He tells us that Davenant, whom he could not have known before he himself was twenty-seven, first taught him to admire the great poet. But even after his imagination had become conscious of its prerogative, and his expression had been ennobled by frequenting this higher society, we find him continually dropping back into that *sermo pedestris* which seems, on the whole, to have been his more natural element. We always feel his epoch in him, that he was the lock which let our language down from its point of highest poetry to its level of easiest and most gently-flowing prose. His enthusiasm needs the contagion of other minds to arouse it; but his strong sense, his command of the happy word, his wit, which is distinguished by a certain breadth and, as it were, power of generalisation, as Pope's by keenness of edge and point, were his, whether he would or no. Accordingly, his poetry is often best and his verse more flowing where (as in parts of his version of the twenty-ninth ode of the third book of Horace) he is amplifying the suggestions of another mind.[1] Viewed from one side, he justifies Milton's remark of him, that "he was a good rhymist, but no poet." To look at all sides, and to distrust the verdict of a single mood, is, no doubt, the duty of a critic. But how if a certain side be so often presented as to thrust forward in the memory and disturb it in the effort to recall that total impression (for the office of a critic is not, though often so misunderstood, to say *guilty* or *not guilty* of some particular fact) which is the only safe ground of judgment? It is the weight of the whole man, not of one or the other limb of him, that we want. *Expende Hannibalem.* Very good, but not in a scale capacious only of a single quality at a time, for it is their union, and not their addition, that assures the value

[1] "I have taken some pains to make it my masterpiece in English." (Preface to *Second Miscellany*.) Fox said that it "was better than the original." J. C. Scaliger said of Erasmus: "Ex alieno ingenio poeta, ex suo versificator."

of each separately. It was not this or that which gave him his weight in council, his swiftness of decision in battle that outran the forethought of other men — it was Hannibal. But this prosaic element in Dryden will force itself upon me. As I read him, I cannot help thinking of an ostrich, to be classed with flying things, and capable, what with leap and flap together, of leaving the earth for a longer or shorter space, but loving the open plain, where wing and foot help each other to something that is both flight and run at once. What with his haste and a certain dash, which, according to our mood, we may call florid or splendid, he seems to stand among poets where Rubens does among painters—greater, perhaps, as a colourist than an artist, yet great here also, if we compare him with any but the first.

We have arrived at Dryden's thirty-second year, and thus far have found little in him to warrant an augury that he was ever to be one of the *great* names in English literature, the most perfect type, that is, of his class, and that class a high one, though not the highest. If Joseph de Maistre's axiom, *Qui n'a pas vaincu à trente ans, ne vaincra jamais*, were true, there would be little hope of him, for he has won no battle yet. But there is something solid and doughty in the man that can rise from defeat, the stuff of which victories are made in due time, when we are able to choose our position better, and the sun is at our back. Hitherto his performances have been mainly of the *obbligato* sort, at which few men of original force are good, least of all Dryden, who had always something of stiffness in his strength. Waller had praised the living Cromwell in perhaps the manliest verses he ever wrote—not *very* manly, to be sure, but really elegant, and, on the whole, better than those in which Dryden squeezed out melodious tears. Waller, who had also made himself conspicuous as a volunteer Antony to the country squire turned Cæsar,

> ("With ermine clad and purple, let him hold
> A royal sceptre made of Spanish gold,")

was more servile than Dryden in hailing the return of *ex officio* Majesty. He bewails to Charles, in snuffling heroics,

> "our sorrow and our crime
> To have accepted life so long a time,
> Without you here."

A weak man, put to the test by rough and angry times, as

Waller was, may be pitied, but meanness is nothing but contemptible under any circumstances. If it be true that "every conqueror creates a Muse," Cromwell was unfortunate. Even Milton's sonnet, though dignified, is reserved if not distrustful. Marvell's "Horatian Ode," the most truly classic in our language, is worthy of its theme. The same poet's Elegy, in parts noble, and everywhere humanly tender, is worth more than all Carlyle's biography as a witness to the gentler qualities of the hero, and of the deep affection that stalwart nature could inspire in hearts of truly masculine temper. As it is little known, a few verses of it may be quoted to show the difference between grief that thinks of its object and grief that thinks of its rhymes:—

"Valour, religion, friendship, prudence died
At once with him, and all that's good beside,
And we, death's refuse, nature's dregs, confined
To loathsome life, alas! are left behind.
Where we (so once we used) shall now no more,
To fetch day, press about his chamber-door,
No more shall hear that powerful language charm,
Whose force oft spared the labour of his arm,
No more shall follow where he spent the days
In war or counsel, or in prayer and praise.
. . . . . .
I saw him dead; a leaden slumber lies,
And mortal sleep, over those wakeful eyes;
Those gentle rays under the lids were fled,
Which through his looks that piercing sweetness shed;
That port, which so majestic was and strong,
Loose and deprived of vigour stretched along.
All withered, all discoloured, pale, and wan,
How much another thing! no more That Man!
O human glory! vain! O death! O wings!
O worthless world! O transitory things!
Yet dwelt that greatness in his shape decayed
That still, though dead, greater than Death he laid,
And, in his altered face, you something feign
That threatens Death he yet will live again."

Such verses might not satisfy Lindley Murray, but they are of that higher mood which satisfies the heart. These couplets, too, have an energy worthy of Milton's friend:—

"When up the armèd mountains of Dunbar
He marched, and through deep Severn, ending war;"

"Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse
Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse."

On the whole, one is glad that Dryden's panegyric on the Protector was so poor. It was purely official verse-making.

Had there been any feeling in it, there had been baseness in his address to Charles. As it is, we may fairly assume that he was so far sincere in both cases as to be thankful for a chance to exercise himself in rhyme, without much caring whether upon a funeral or a restoration. He might naturally enough expect that poetry would have a better chance under Charles than under Cromwell, or any successor with Commonwealth principles. Cromwell had more serious matters to think about than verses, while Charles might at least care as much about them as it was in his base good-nature to care about anything but loose women and spaniels. Dryden's sound sense, afterwards so conspicuous, shows itself even in these pieces, when we can get at it through the tangled thicket of tropical phrase. But the authentic and unmistakable Dryden first manifests himself in some verses addressed to his friend Dr. Charlton in 1663. We have first his common sense, which has almost the point of wit, yet with a tang of prose:—

> "The longest tyranny that ever swayed
> Was that wherein our ancestors betrayed
> Their freeborn reason to the Stagyrite,
> And made his torch their universal light.
> *So truth, while only one supplied the state,*
> *Grew scarce and dear and yet sophisticate.*
> *Still it was bought, like emp'ric wares or charms,*
> *Hard words sealed up with Aristotle's arms.*"

Then we have his graceful sweetness of fancy, where he speaks of the inhabitants of the New World:—

> "Guiltless men who danced away their time,
> Fresh as their groves and happy as their clime."

And, finally, there is a hint of imagination where "mighty visions of the Danish race" watch round Charles sheltered in Stonehenge after the battle of Worcester. These passages might have been written by the Dryden whom we learn to know fifteen years later. They have the advantage that he wrote them to please himself. His contemporary, Dr. Heylin, said of French cooks, that "their trade was not to feed the belly, but the palate." Dryden was a great while in learning this secret, as available in good writing as in cookery. He strove after it, but his thoroughly English nature, to the last, would too easily content itself with serving up the honest beef of his thought, without regard to daintiness of flavour in the

dressing of it.[1] Of the best English poetry, it might be said that it is understanding aërated by imagination. In Dryden the solid part too often refused to mix kindly with the leaven, either remaining lumpish or rising to a hasty puffiness. Grace and lightness were with him much more a laborious achievement than a natural gift, and it is all the more remarkable that he should so often have attained to what seems such an easy perfection in both. Always a hasty writer,[2] he was long in forming his style, and to the last was apt to snatch the readiest word rather than wait for the fittest. He was not wholly and unconsciously poet, but a thinker who sometimes lost himself on enchanted ground and was transfigured by its touch. This preponderance in him of the reasoning over the intuitive faculties, the one always there, the other flashing in when you least expect it, accounts for that inequality and even incongruousness in his writing which makes one revise his judgment at every tenth page. In his prose you come upon passages that persuade you he is a poet, in spite of his verses so often turning state's evidence against him as to convince you he is none. He is a prose-writer, with a kind of Æolian attachment. For example, take this bit of prose from the dedication of his version of Virgil's *Pastorals*, 1694: "He found the strength of his genius betimes, and was even in his youth preluding to his *Georgicks* and his *Æneis*. He could not forbear to try his wings, though his pinions were not hardened to maintain a long, laborious flight; yet sometimes they bore him to a pitch as lofty as ever he was able to reach afterwards. But when he was admonished by his subject to descend, he came down gently circling in the air and singing to the ground, like a lark melodious in her mounting and continuing her song till she

[1] In one of the last letters he ever wrote, thanking his cousin Mrs. Steward for a gift of marrow-puddings, he says: "A chine of honest bacon would please my appetite more than all the marrow-puddings; for I like them better plain, having a very vulgar stomach." So of Cowley he says: "There was plenty enough, but ill-sorted, whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women, but little of solid meat for men." The physical is a truer antitype of the spiritual man than we are willing to admit, and the brain is often forced to acknowledge the inconvenient country-cousinship of the stomach.

[2] In his preface to *All for Love*, he says, evidently alluding to himself: "If he have a friend whose hastiness in writing is his greatest fault, Horace would have taught him to have minced the matter, and to have called it readiness of thought and a flowing fancy." And in the Preface to the *Fables* he says of Homer: "This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper." He makes other allusions to it.

alights, still preparing for a higher flight at her next sally, and tuning her voice to better music." This is charming, and yet even this wants the ethereal tincture that pervades the style of Jeremy Taylor, making it, as Burke said of Sheridan's eloquence, "neither prose nor poetry, but something better than either." Let us compare Taylor's treatment of the same image: "For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion of an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below." Taylor's fault is that his sentences too often smell of the library, but what an open air is here! How unpremeditated it all seems! How carelessly he knots each new thought, as it comes, to the one before it with an *and*, like a girl making lace! And what slidingly musical use he makes of the sibilants with which our language is unjustly taxed by those who can only make them hiss, not sing! There are twelve of them in the first twenty words, fifteen of which are monosyllables. We notice the structure of Dryden's periods, but this grows up as we read. It gushes, like the song of the bird itself,—

> "In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

Let us now take a specimen of Dryden's bad prose from one of his poems. I open the *Annus Mirabilis* at random, and hit upon this:—

> "Our little fleet was now engaged so far,
> That, like the swordfish in the whale, they fought:
> The combat only seemed a civil war,
> Till through their bowels we our passage wrought."

Is this Dryden, or Sternhold, or Shadwell, those Toms who made him say that "dulness was fatal to the name of Tom"? The natural history of Goldsmith in the verse of Pye! His thoughts did not "voluntary move harmonious numbers." He had his choice between prose and verse, and seems to be poetical on second thought. I do not speak without book.

He was more than half conscious of it himself. In the same letter to Mrs. Steward, just cited, he says, "I am still drudging on, always a poet and never a good one;" and this from no mock-modesty, for he is always handsomely frank in telling us whatever of his own doing pleased him. This was written in the last year of his life, and at about the same time he says elsewhere: "What judgment I had increases rather than diminishes, and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse or to give them the other harmony of prose; I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit and become familiar to me."[1] I think that a man who was primarily a poet would hardly have felt this equanimity of choice.

I find a confirmation of this feeling about Dryden in his early literary loves. His taste was not an instinct, but the slow result of reflection and of the manfulness with which he always acknowledged to himself his own mistake. In this latter respect few men deal so magnanimously with themselves as he, and accordingly few have been so happily inconsistent. *Ancora imparo* might have served him for a motto as well as Michael Angelo. His prefaces are a complete log of his life, and the habit of writing them was a useful one to him, for it forced him to think with a pen in his hand, which, according to Goethe, "if it do no other good, keeps the mind from staggering about." In these prefaces we see his taste gradually rising from *Du Bartas* to Spenser, from Cowley to Milton, from Corneille to Shakespeare. "I remember when I was a boy," he says in his dedication of the *Spanish Friar*, 1681, "I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, and was rapt into an ecstasy when I read these lines:—

> "'Now when the winter's keener breath began
> To crystallise the Baltic oceän,
> To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,
> And periwig with snow[2] the baldpate woods.'

[1] Preface to the *Fables*.

[2] *Wool* is Sylvester's word. Dryden reminds us of Burke in this also, that he always quotes from memory, and seldom exactly. His memory was better for things than for words. This helps to explain the length of time it took him to master that vocabulary at last so various, full, and seemingly extemporaneous. He is a large quoter, though, with his usual inconsistency, he says, "I am no admirer of quotations" (*Essay on Heroic Plays*).

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian." Swift, in his *Tale of a Tub*, has a ludicrous passage in this style: "Look on this globe of earth, you will find it to be a very complete and fashionable dress. What is that which some call *land*, but a fine coat faced with green? or the *sea*, but a waistcoat of water-tabby? Proceed to the particular works of creation, you will find how curious journeyman Nature has been to trim up the vegetable *beaux;* observe how *sparklish a periwig adorns the head of a beech*, and what a fine doublet of white satin is worn by the birch." The fault is not in any inaptness of the images, nor in the mere vulgarity of the things themselves, but in that of the associations they awaken. The "prithee, undo this button" of Lear, coming where it does and expressing what it does, is one of those touches of the pathetically sublime, of which only Shakespeare ever knew the secret. Herrick, too, has a charming poem on "Julia's petticoat," the charm being that he lifts the familiar and the low to the region of sentiment. In the passage from Sylvester, it is precisely the reverse, and the wig takes as much from the sentiment as it adds to a Lord Chancellor. So Pope's proverbial verse,

"True wit is Nature to advantage drest,"

unpleasantly suggests Nature under the hands of a lady's maid.[1] We have no word in English that will exactly define this want of propriety in diction. *Vulgar* is too strong, and *commonplace* too weak. Perhaps *bourgeois* comes as near as any. It is to be noticed that Dryden does not unequivocally condemn the passage he quotes, but qualifies it with an "if I am not much mistaken." Indeed, though his judgment in substantials, like that of Johnson, is always worth having, his taste, the negative half of genius, never altogether refined itself from a colloquial familiarity, which is one of the charms of his prose, and gives that air of easy strength in which his satire is unmatched. In his *Royal Martyr* (1669), the tyrant Maximin says to the gods:—

"Keep you your rain and sunshine in the skies,
And I'll keep back my flame and sacrifice;
Your trade of Heaven shall soon be at a stand,
And all your goods lie dead upon your hand,"—

[1] In the *Epimetheus* of a poet usually as elegant as Gray himself, one's finer sense is a little jarred by the

"Spectral gleam their snow-white *dresses*."

a passage which has as many faults as only Dryden was capable of committing, even to a false idiom forced by the last rhyme. The same tyrant in dying exclaims:—

> " And after thee I'll go,
> Revenging still, and following e'en to th' other world my blow,
> And, *shoving back this earth on which I sit,*
> *I'll mount and scatter all the gods I hit.*"

In the *Conquest of Grenada* (1670), we have—

> " This little loss in our vast body shows
> So small, that half *have never heard the news ;*
> *Fame's out of breath e'er she can fly so far*
> *To tell 'em all that you have e'er made war.*" [1]

And in the same play—

> " That busy thing,
> *The soul, is packing up*, and just on wing
> Like parting swallows when they seek the spring,"

where the last sweet verse curiously illustrates that inequality (poetry on a prose background) which so often puzzles us in Dryden. Infinitely worse is the speech of Almanzor to his mother's ghost:—

> " I'll rush into the covert of the night
> And pull thee backward by the shroud to light;
> Or else I'll squeeze thee like a bladder there,
> Or make thee groan thyself away to air."

What wonder that Dryden should have been substituted for Davenant as the butt of the *Rehearsal*, and that the parody should have had such a run? And yet it was Dryden who, in speaking of Persius, hit upon the happy phrase of " boisterous metaphors; " [2] it was Dryden who said of Cowley, whom he elsewhere calls " the darling of my youth," [3] that he was sunk in reputation because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way, but swept, like a drag-net, great and small.[4] But the passages I have thus far

[1] This probably suggested to Young the grandiose image in his *Last Day* (b. ii.)—

> " Those overwhelming armies . . .
> Whose rear lay wrapt in night, while breaking dawn
> Roused the broad front and called the battle on."

This, to be sure, is no plagiarism; but it should be carried to Dryden's credit that we catch the poets of the next half-century oftener with their hands in his pockets than in those of any one else.

[2] *Essay on Satire.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Preface to *Fables*. Men are always inclined to avenge themselves on their old idols in the first enthusiasm of conversion to a purer faith. Cowley had all the faults that Dryden loads him with, and yet his

cited as specimens of our poet's coarseness (for poet he surely was *intus*, though not always *in cute*) were written before he was forty, and he had an odd notion, suitable to his healthy complexion, that poets on the whole improve after that date. "Man at forty," he says, "seems to be fully in his summer tropic . . . and I believe that it will hold in all great poets that, though they wrote before with a certain heat of genius which inspired them, yet that heat was not perfectly digested." [1] But artificial heat is never to be digested at all, as is plain in Dryden's case. He was a man who warmed slowly, and, in his hurry to supply the market, forced his mind. The result was the same after forty as before. In *Œdipus* (1679) we find,

> "not one bolt
> Shall err from Thebes, but more be called for, more,
> *New-moulded thunder of a larger size!*"

This play was written in conjunction with Lee, of whom Dryden relates [2] that, when some one said to him, "It is easy to write like a madman," he replied, "It is hard enough to write like a madman, but easy enough to write like a fool" —perhaps the most compendious lecture on poetry ever delivered. The splendid bit of eloquence, which has so much the sheet-iron clang of impeachment thunder (I hope that Dryden is not in the Library of Congress!) is perhaps Lee's. The following passage almost certainly in his:—

> "Sure 'tis the end of all things! Fate has torn
> The lock of Time off, and his head is now
> The ghastly ball of round Eternity!"

But the next, in which the soul is likened to the pocket of

popularity was to some extent deserved. He at least had a theory that poetry should soar, not creep, and longed for some expedient, in the failure of natural wings, by which he could lift himself away from the conventional and commonplace. By beating out the substance of Pindar very thin, he contrived a kind of balloon which, tumid with gas, did certainly mount a little *into* the clouds, if not above them, though sure to come suddenly down with a bump. His odes, indeed, are an alternation of upward jerks and concussions, and smack more of Chapelain than of the Theban, but his prose is very agreeable—Montaigne and water, perhaps, but with some flavour of the Gascon wine left. The strophe of his ode to Dr. Scarborough, in which he compares his surgical friend, operating for the stone, to Moses striking the rock, more than justifies all the ill that Dryden could lay at his door. It was into precisely such mud-holes that Cowley's Will-o'-the-Wisp had misguided him. Men may never wholly shake off a vice, but they are always conscious of it, and hate the tempter.

[1] Dedication of *Georgics*. [2] In a letter to Dennis, 1693.

an indignant housemaid charged with theft, is wholly in Dryden's manner:—

> "No; I dare challenge heaven to turn me outward,
> And shake my soul quite empty in your sight."

In the same style, he makes his Don Sebastian (1690) say that he is as much astonished as "drowsy mortals" at the last trump,

> "When, called in haste, *they fumble for their limbs*,"

and proposes to take upon himself the whole of a crime shared with another by asking Heaven *to charge the bill* on him. And in *King Arthur*, written ten years after the Preface from which I have quoted his confession about *Du Bartas*, we have a passage precisely of the kind he condemned:—

> "Ah for the many souls as but this morn
> Were clothed with flesh and warmed with vital blood,
> But naked now, or *shirted* but with air."

Dryden too often violated his own admirable rule, that "an author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought." [1] In his worst images, however, there is often a vividness that half excuses them. But it is a grotesque vividness, as from the flare of a bonfire. They do not flash into sudden lustre, as in the great poets, where the imaginations of poet and reader leap toward each other and meet half-way.

English prose is indebted to Dryden for having freed it from the cloister of pedantry. He, more than any other single writer, contributed, as well by precept as example, to give it suppleness of movement and the easier air of the modern world. His own style, juicy with proverbial phrases, has that familiar dignity, so hard to attain, perhaps unattainable except by one who, like Dryden, feels that his position is assured. Charles Cotton is as easy, but not so elegant; Walton is familiar, but not so flowing; Swift as idiomatic, but not so elevated; Burke more splendid, but not so equally luminous. That his style was no easy acquisition (though, of course, the aptitude was innate) he himself tells us. In his dedication of *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), where he seems to hint at the erection of an Academy, he says that "the perfect knowledge of a tongue was never attained by any single person. The Court, the College, and the Town

[1] Preface to *Fables*.

must all be joined in it. And as our English is a composition of the dead and living tongues, there is required a perfect knowledge, not only of the Greek and Latin, but of the Old German, French, and Italian, and to help all these, a conversation with those authors of our own who have written with the fewest faults in prose and verse. But how barbarously we yet write and speak your Lordship knows, and I am sufficiently sensible in my own English.[1] For I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false grammar and nonsense couched beneath that specious name of *Anglicism*, and have no other way to clear my doubts but by translating my English into Latin, and thereby trying what sense the words will bear in a more stable language." *Tantæ molis erat.* Five years later: "The proprieties and delicacies of the English are known to few; it is impossible even for a good wit to understand and practise them without the help of a liberal education, long reading and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, *the freedom of habitudes and conversation with the best company of both sexes*, and, in short, without wearing off the rust which he contracted while he was laying in a stock of learning." In the passage I have italicised, it will be seen that Dryden lays some stress upon the influence of women in refining language. Swift, also, in his plan for an Academy, says: "Now, though I would by no means give the ladies the trouble of advising us in the reformation of our language, yet I cannot help thinking that, since they have been left out of all meetings except parties at play, or where worse designs are carried on, our conversation has very much degenerated."[2] Swift affirms that the language had grown corrupt since the Restoration, and that "the court, which used to be the standard of propriety and correctness of speech, was then, and, I think, has ever since continued, the worst school in England."[3] He lays the blame partly on

[1] More than half a century later, Orrery, in his "Remarks" on Swift, says: "We speak and we write at random; and if a man's common conversation were committed to paper, he would be startled *for to* find himself guilty in *so few* sentences of so many solecisms and such false English." I do not remember *for to* anywhere in Dryden's prose. *So few* has long been denizened; no wonder, since it is nothing more than *si peu* Anglicised.

[2] Letter to the Lord High Treasurer.

[3] *Ibid.* He complains of "manglings and abbreviations." "What

the general licentiousness, partly upon the French education of many of Charles's courtiers, and partly on the poets. Dryden undoubtedly formed his diction by the usage of the court. The age was a very free-and-easy, not to say a very coarse one. Its coarseness was not external, like that of Elizabeth's day, but the outward mark of an inward depravity. What Swift's notion of the refinement of women was may be judged by his anecdotes of Stella. I will not say that Dryden's prose did not gain by the conversational elasticity which his frequenting men and women of the world enabled him to give it. It is the best specimen of every-day style that we have. But the habitual dwelling of his mind in a commonplace atmosphere, and among those easy levels of sentiment which befitted Will's Coffee-house and the Bird-cage Walk, was a damage to his poetry. Solitude is as needful to the imagination as society is wholesome for the character. He cannot always distinguish between enthusiasm and extravagance when he sees them. But apart from these influences which I have adduced in exculpation, there was certainly a vein of coarseness in him, a want of that exquisite sensitiveness which is the conscience of the artist. An old gentleman, writing to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1745, professes to remember "plain John Dryden (before he paid his court with success to the great) in one uniform clothing of Norwich drugget. I have eat tarts at the Mulberry Garden with him and Madam Reeve, when our

does your Lordship think of the words drudg'd, disturb'd, rebuk'd, fledg'd, and a thousand others?" In a contribution to the *Tatler* (No. 230) he ridicules the use of *'um* for *them*, and a number of slang phrases, among which is *mob*. "The war," he says, "has introduced abundance of polysyllables, which will never be able to live many more campaigns." *Speculations, operations, preliminaries, ambassadors, pallisadoes, communication, circumvallation, battalions*, are the instances he gives, and all are now familiar. No man, or body of men, can dam the stream of language. Dryden is rather fond of *'em* for *them*, but uses it rarely in his prose. Swift himself prefers *'tis* to *it is*, as does Emerson still. In what Swift says of the poets, he may be fairly suspected of glancing at Dryden, who was his kinsman, and whose prefaces and translation of Virgil he ridicules in the *Tale of a Tub*. Dryden is reported to have said of him, "Cousin Swift is no poet." The Dean began his literary career by Pindaric odes to Athenian Societies and the like—perhaps the greatest mistake as to his own powers of which an author was ever guilty. It was very likely that he would send these to his relative, already distinguished, for his opinion upon them. If this was so, the justice of Dryden's judgment must have added to the smart. Swift never forgot or forgave; Dryden was careless enough to do the one, and large enough to do the other.

author advanced to a sword and Chadreux wig."[1] I always fancy Dryden in the drugget, with wig, lace ruffles, and sword super-imposed. It is the type of this curiously incongruous man.

The first poem by which Dryden won a general acknowledgment of his power was *Annus Mirabilis*, written in his thirty-seventh year. Pepys, himself not altogether a bad judge, doubtless expresses the common opinion when he says: "I am very well pleased this night with reading a poem I brought home with me last night from Westminster Hall, of Dryden's, upon the present war; a very good poem."[2] And a very good poem, in some sort, it continues to be, in spite of its amazing blemishes. We must always bear in mind that Dryden lived in an age that supplied him with no ready-made inspiration, and that big phrases and images are apt to be pressed into the service when great ones do not volunteer. With this poem begins the long series of Dryden's prefaces, of which Swift made such excellent, though malicious, fun that I cannot forbear to quote it. "I do utterly disapprove and declare against that pernicious custom of making the *preface* a bill of fare to the book. For I have always looked upon it as a high point of indiscretion in monster-mongers and other retailers of strange sights to hang out a fair picture over the door, drawn after the life, with a most eloquent description underneath; this has saved me many a threepence. . . . Such is exactly the fate at this time of *prefaces*. . . . This expedient was admirable at first; our great Dryden has long carried it as far as it would go,

[1] Both Malone and Scott accept this gentleman's evidence without question, but I confess suspicion of a memory that runs back more than eighty-one years, and recollects a man before he had any claim to remembrance. Dryden was never poor, and there is at Oxford a portrait of him painted in 1664, which represents him in a superb periwig and laced band. This was "before he had paid his court with success to the great." But the story is at least *ben trovato*, and morally true enough to serve as an illustration. Who the "old gentleman" was has never been discovered. Of Crowne (who has some interest for us as a sometime student at Harvard) he says: "Many a cup of metheglin have I drank with little starch'd Johnny Crown; we called him so, from the stiff, unalterable primness of his long cravat." Crowne reflects no more credit on his Alma Mater than Downing. Both were sneaks, and of such a kind as, I think, can only be produced by a debauched Puritanism. Crowne, as a rival of Dryden, is contemptuously alluded to by Cibber in his *Apology*.

[2] *Diary*, iii. 390. Almost the only notices of Dryden that make him alive to me I have found in the delicious book of this Polonius-Montaigne, the only man who ever had the courage to keep a sincere journal, even under the shelter of cipher.

and with incredible success. He has often said to me in confidence, 'that the world would never have suspected him to be so great a poet, if he had not assured them so frequently, in his prefaces, that it was impossible they could either doubt or forget.' Perhaps it may be so; however, I much fear his instructions have edified out of their place, and taught men to grow wiser in certain points where he never intended they should be."[1] The *monster-monger* is a terrible thrust, when we remember some of the comedies and heroic plays which Dryden ushered in in this fashion. In the dedication of the *Annus* to the city of London is one of those pithy sentences of which Dryden is afterwards so full, and which he lets fall with a carelessness that seems always to deepen the meaning: "I have heard, indeed, of some virtuous persons who have ended unfortunately, but never of any virtuous nation; Providence is engaged too deeply when the cause becomes so general." In his "account" of the poem in a letter to Sir Robert Howard, he says: "I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains or stanzas of four in alternate rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us. . . . The learned languages have certainly a great advantage of us in not being tied to the slavery of rhyme. . . . But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy, though not so proper for this occasion; for the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the labour of the poet." A little further on: "They [the French] write in alexandrines, or verses of six feet, such as amongst us is the old translation of Homer by Chapman: all which by lengthening their chain,[2] makes the

[1] *Tale of a Tub*, sect. v. Pepys also speaks of buying the *Maiden Queen* of Mr. Dryden's, which he himself, in his preface, seems to brag of, and indeed is a good play.—18th January 1668.

[2] He is fond of this image. In the *Maiden Queen* Celadon tells Sabina that, when he is with her rival Florimel, his heart is still her prisoner, "it only draws a longer chain after it." Goldsmith's fancy was taken by it; and everybody admires in the "Traveller" the extraordinary conceit of a heart dragging a lengthening chain. The smoothness of too many rhymed pentameters is that of thin ice over shallow water; so long as we glide along rapidly, all is well; but if we dwell a moment on any one spot, we find ourselves knee-deep in mud. A later poet, in trying to improve on Goldsmith, shows the ludicrousness of the image—

"And round my heart's leg ties its galling chain."

To write imaginatively a man should have—imagination!

sphere of their activity the greater." I have quoted these passages because, in a small compass, they include several things characteristic of Dryden. "I have ever judged," and "I have always found," are particularly so. If he took up an opinion in the morning, he would have found so many arguments for it before night that it would seem already old and familiar. So with his reproach of rhyme; a year or two before he was eagerly defending it;[1] again a few years, and he will utterly condemn and drop it in his plays, while retaining it in his translations; afterwards his study of Milton leads him to think that blank verse would suit the epic style better, and he proposes to try it with Homer, but at last translates one book as a specimen, and behold it is in rhyme! But the charm of this great advocate is, that, whatever side he was on, he could always find excellent reasons for it, and state them with great force, and abundance of happy illustration. He is an exception to the proverb, and is none the worse pleader that he is always pleading his own cause. The blunder about Chapman is of a kind into which his hasty temperament often betrayed him. He remembered that Chapman's *Iliad* was in a long measure, concluded without looking that it was alexandrine, and then attributes it generally to his *Homer*. Chapman's *Iliad* is done in fourteen-syllable verse, and his *Odyssee* in the very metre that Dryden himself used in his own version.[2] I remark also what he says of the couplet, that it was easy because the second verse concludes the labour of the poet. And yet it was Dryden who found it hard for that very reason. His vehement abundance refused those narrow banks, first running over into a triplet, and, even then uncontainable, rising to an alexandrine in the concluding verse. And I have little doubt that it was the roominess, rather than the dignity, of the quatrain which led him to choose it. As opposite to

[1] See his epistle dedicatory to the *Rival Ladies* (1664). For the other side, see particularly a passage in his *Discourse on Epic Poetry* (1697).

[2] In the same way he had two years before assumed that Shakespeare "was the first who, to shun the pains of continued rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse!" Dryden was never, I suspect, a very careful student of English literature. He seems never to have known that Surrey translated a part of the *Æneid* (and with great spirit) into blank verse. Indeed, he was not a scholar, in the proper sense of the word, but he had that faculty of rapid assimilation without study, so remarkable in Coleridge and other rich minds, whose office is rather to impregnate than to invent. These brokers of thought perform a great office in literature, second only to that of originators.

this, I may quote what he elsewhere says of octosyllabic verse: "The thought can turn itself with greater ease in a larger compass. When the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straightens the expression: we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning the thought. It makes a poet giddy with turning in a space too narrow for his imagination." [1]

Dryden himself, as was not always the case with him, was well satisfied with his work. He calls it his best hitherto, and attributes his success to the excellence of his subject, "incomparably the best he ever had, *excepting only the Royal Family*." The first part is devoted to the Dutch war; the last to the fire of London. The martial half is infinitely the better of the two. He altogether surpasses his model, Davenant. If his poem lack the gravity of thought attained by a few stanzas of *Gondibert*, it is vastly superior in life, in picturesqueness, in the energy of single lines, and, above all, in imagination. Few men have read *Gondibert*, and almost every one speaks of it, as commonly of the dead, with a certain subdued respect. And it deserves respect as an honest effort to bring poetry back to its highest office in the ideal treatment of life. Davenant emulated Spenser, and if his poem had been as good as his preface, it could still be read in another spirit than that of investigation. As it is, it always reminds me of Goldsmith's famous verse. It is remote, unfriendly, solitary, and, above all, slow. Its shining passages, for there are such, remind one of distress-rockets sent up at intervals from a ship just about to founder, and sadden rather than cheer.[2]

The first part of the *Annus Mirabilis* is by no means clear of the false taste of the time,[3] though it has some of Dryden's

[1] *Essay on Satire.* What he has said just before this about Butler is worth noting. Butler had had a chief hand in the *Rehearsal*, but Dryden had no grudges where the question was of giving its just praise to merit.

[2] The conclusion of the second canto of Book Third is the best continuously fine passage. Dryden's poem has nowhere so much meaning in so small space as Davenant, when he says of the sense of honour that,

"Like Power, it grows to nothing, growing less."

Davenant took the hint of the stanza from Sir John Davies. Wyatt first used it, so far as I know, in English.

[3] Perhaps there is no better lecture on the prevailing vices of style and thought (if thought this frothy ferment of the mind may be called)

manliest verses and happiest comparisons, always his two distinguishing merits. Here, as almost everywhere else in Dryden, measuring him merely as poet, we recall what he, with pathetic pride, says of himself in the prologue to *Aurengzebe* :—

> " Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
> The first of this, the hindmost of the last."

What can be worse than what he says of comets?—

> " Whether they unctuous exhalations are
> Fired by the sun, or seeming so alone,
> Or each some more remote and slippery star
> Which loses footing when to mortals shown."

Or than this, of the destruction of the Dutch India-ships?—

> " Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,
> And now their odours armed against them fly;
> Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall,
> And some by aromatic splinters die."

Dear Dr. Johnson had his doubts about Shakespeare, but here at least was poetry! This is one of the quatrains which he pronounces " worthy of our author." [1]

But Dryden himself has said that " a man who is resolved to praise an author with any appearance of justice must be sure to take him on the strongest side, and where he is least liable to exceptions." This is true also of one who wishes to measure an author fairly, for the higher wisdom of criticism lies in the capacity to admire.

> " Leser, wie gefall ich dir?
> Leser, wie gefällst du mir? "

are both fair questions, the answer to the first being more often involved in that to the second than is sometimes thought. The poet in Dryden was never more fully revealed than in such verses as these:—

than in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*. For Mather, like a true provincial, appropriates only the mannerism, and, as is usual in such cases, betrays all its weakness by the unconscious parody of exaggeration.

[1] The Doctor was a capital judge of the substantial value of the goods he handled, but his judgment always seems that of the thumb and forefinger. For the shades, the disposition of colours, the beauty of the figures, he has as good as no sense whatever. The critical parts of his *Life of Dryden* seem to me the best of his writing in this kind. There is little to be gleaned after him. He had studied his author, which he seldom did, and his criticism is sympathetic, a thing still rarer with him. As illustrative of his own habits, his remarks on Dryden's reading are curious.

" And threatening France, placed like a painted Jove,[1]
Kept idle thunder in his lifted hand; "

" Silent in smoke of cannon they come on; "

" And his loud guns speak thick like angry men; "

" The vigorous seamen every port-hole plies,
And adds his heart to every gun he fires; "

" And, though to me unknown, they sure fought well,
Whom Rupert led, and who were British born."

This is masculine writing, and yet it must be said that there is scarcely a quatrain in which the rhyme does not trip him into a platitude, and there are too many swaggering with that *expression forte d'un sentiment faible* which Voltaire condemns in Corneille—a temptation to which Dryden always lay too invitingly open. But there are passages higher in kind than any I have cited, because they show imagination. Such are the verses in which he describes the dreams of the disheartened enemy:—

" In dreams they fearful precipices tread,
Or, shipwrecked, labour to some distant shore,
Or in dark churches walk among the dead; "

and those in which he recalls glorious memories, and sees where

" The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,
And armèd Edwards looked with anxious eyes."

A few verses, like the pleasantly alliterative one in which he makes the spider, " from the silent ambush of his den," " feel far off the trembling of his thread," show that he was beginning to study the niceties of verse, instead of trusting

[1] Perhaps the hint was given by a phrase of Corneille, *monarque en peinture*. Dryden seldom borrows, unless from Shakespeare, without improving, and he borrowed a great deal. Thus in *Don Sebastian* (of suicide)—

" Brutus and Cato might discharge their souls,
And give them furloughs for the other world;
But we, like sentries, are obliged to stand
In starless nights, and wait the appointed hour."

The thought is Cicero's, but how it is intensified by the " starless nights! " Dryden, I suspect, got it from his favourite, Montaigne, who says, " Que nous ne pouvons abandonner cette garnison du monde, sans le commandement exprez de celuy qui nous y a mis " (*Liv.* ii. chap. 3). In the same play, by a very Drydenish verse, he gives new force to an old comparison:—

" And I should break through laws divine and human,
And think 'em cobwebs spread for little man,
Which all the bulky herd of Nature breaks."

wholly to what he would have called his natural *fougue*. On the whole, this part of the poem is very good war poetry, as war poetry goes (for there is but one first-rate poem of the kind in English—short, national, eager as if the writer were personally engaged, with the rapid metre of a drum beating the charge—and that is Drayton's "Battle of Agincourt"[1]), but it shows more study of Lucan than of Virgil, and for a long time yet we shall find Dryden bewildered by bad models. He is always imitating—no, that is not the word, always emulating — somebody in his more strictly poetical attempts, for in that direction he always needed some external impulse to set his mind in motion. This is more or less true of all authors; nor does it detract from their originality, which depends wholly on their being able so far to forget themselves as to let something of themselves slip into what they write.[2] Of absolute originality we will not speak till authors are raised by some Deucalion-and-Pyrrha process; and even then our faith would be but small, for writers who have no past are pretty sure of having no future. Dryden, at any rate, always had to have his copy set him at the top of the page, and wrote ill or well accordingly. His mind (somewhat solid for a poet) warmed slowly, but, once fairly heated through, he had more of that good luck of self-oblivion than most men. He certainly gave even a liberal interpretation to Molière's rule of taking his own property wherever he found it, though he sometimes blundered awkwardly about what was properly *his;* but in literature, it should be remembered, a thing always becomes his at last who says it best, and thus makes it his own.[3]

[1] Not his solemn historical droning under that title, but addressed "To the Cambrio-Britons on their harp."

[2] "Les poëtes euxmêmes s'animent et s'échauffent par la lecture des autres poëtes. Messieurs de Malherbe, Corneille, etc., se disposoient au travail par la lecture des poëtes qui étoient de leur gout."—VIGNEUL, *Marvilliana*, i. 64, 65.

[3] For example, Waller had said,

> "Others may use the ocean as their road,
> Only the English *make it their abode;*
> . . . . .
> We *tread on billows with a steady foot*,"—

long before Campbell. Campbell helps himself to both thoughts, enlivens them into

> "Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
> Her home is on the deep,"

and they are his for evermore. His "leviathans afloat" he *lifted* from

Mr. Savage Landor once told me that he said to Wordsworth: "Mr. Wordsworth, a man may mix poetry with prose as much as he pleases, and it will only elevate and enliven; but the moment he mixes a particle of prose with his poetry, it precipitates the whole." Wordsworth, he added, never forgave him. The always hasty Dryden, as I think I have already said, was liable, like a careless apothecary's 'prentice, to make the same confusion of ingredients, especially in the more mischievous way. I cannot leave the *Annus Mirabilis* without giving an example of this. Describing the Dutch prizes, rather like an auctioneer than a poet, he says that

> "Some English wool, vexed in a Belgian loom,
> And into cloth of spongy softness made,
> Did into France or colder Denmark doom
> To ruin with worse ware our staple trade."

One might fancy this written by the secretary of a board of trade in an unguarded moment; but we should remember that the poem is dedicated to the city of London. The depreciation of the rival fabrics is exquisite; and Dryden, the most English of our poets, would not be so thoroughly English if he had not in him some fibre of *la nation boutiquière*. Let us now see how he succeeds in attempting to infuse science (the most obstinately prosy material) with poetry. Speaking of "a more exact knowledge of the longitudes," as he explains in a note, he tells us that,

> "Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,
> And view the ocean leaning on the sky;
> From thence our rolling neighbours we shall know,
> And on the lunar world securely pry."

Dr. Johnson confesses he does not understand this. Why should he, when it is plain that Dryden was wholly in the dark himself? To understand it is none of my business, but I confess that it interests me as an Americanism. We

the *Annus Mirabilis;* but in what court could Dryden sue? Again, Waller in another poem calls the Duke of York's flag

> "His dreadful streamer, like a comet's hair;"

and this, I believe, is the first application of the celestial portent to this particular comparison. Yet Milton's "imperial ensign" waves defiant behind his impregnable lines, and even Campbell flaunts his "meteor flag" in Waller's face. Gray's bard might be sent to the lock-up, but even he would find bail.

> "C'est imiter quelqu'un que de planter des choux."

have hitherto been credited as the inventors of the "jumping-off place" at the extreme western verge of the world. But Dryden was beforehand with us. Though he doubtless knew that the earth was a sphere (and perhaps that it was flattened at the poles), it was always a flat surface in his fancy. In his *Amphitryon*, he makes Alcmena say:—

> "No, I would fly thee to the ridge of earth,
> And leap the precipice to 'scape thy sight."

And in his *Spanish Friar*, Lorenzo says to Elvira that they "will travel together to the ridge of the world, and then drop into the next." It is idle for us poor Yankees to hope that we can invent anything. To say sooth, if Dryden had left nothing behind him but the *Annus Mirabilis*, he might have served as a type of the kind of poet America would have produced by the biggest-river-and-tallest-mountain recipe—longitude and latitude in plenty, with marks of culture scattered here and there like the *cæsets* on a proof-sheet.

It is now time to say something of Dryden as a dramatist. In the thirty-two years between 1662 and 1694 he produced twenty-five plays, and assisted Lee in two. I have hinted that it took Dryden longer than most men to find the true bent of his genius. On a superficial view, he might almost seem to confirm that theory, maintained by Johnson, among others, that genius was nothing more than great intellectual power exercised persistently in some particular direction which chance decided, so that it lay in circumstance merely whether a man should turn out a Shakespeare or a Newton. But when we come to compare what he wrote, regardless of Minerva's averted face, with the spontaneous production of his happier muse, we shall be inclined to think his example one of the strongest cases against the theory in question. He began his dramatic career, as usual, by rowing against the strong current of his nature, and pulled only the more doggedly the more he felt himself swept down the stream. His first attempt was at comedy, and, though his earliest piece of that kind (the *Wild Gallant*, 1663) utterly failed, he wrote eight others afterwards. On the 23rd February, 1663, Pepys writes in his diary: "To court, and there saw the *Wild Gallant* performed by the king's house; but it was ill acted, and the play so poor a thing as I never saw in my life almost, and so little answering the name, that, from the beginning to the end, I could not, nor can at this time, tell

certainly which was the Wild Gallant. The king did not seem pleased at all the whole play, nor anybody else." After some alteration, it was revived with more success. On its publication in 1669 Dryden honestly admitted its former failure, though with a kind of salvo for his self-love. "I made the town my judges, and the greater part condemned it. After which I do not think it my concernment to defend it with the ordinary zeal of a poet for his decried poem, though Corneille is more resolute in his preface before *Pertharite*,[1] which was condemned more universally than this. . . . Yet it was received at court, and was more than once the divertisement of his majesty, by his own command." Pepys lets us amusingly behind the scenes in the matter of his majesty's divertisement. Dryden does not seem to see that in the condemnation of something meant to amuse the public there can be no question of degree. To fail at all is to fail utterly.

"*Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux.*"

In the reading, at least, all Dryden's comic writing for the stage must be ranked with the latter class. He himself would fain make an exception of the *Spanish Friar*, but I confess that I rather wonder at than envy those who can be amused by it. His comedies lack everything that a comedy should have—lightness, quickness of transition, unexpectedness of incident, easy cleverness of dialogue, and humorous contrast of character brought out by identity of situation. The comic parts of the *Maiden Queen* seem to me Dryden's best, but the merit even of these is Shakespeare's, and there is little choice even where the best is only tolerable. The common quality, however, of all Dryden's comedies is their nastiness, the more remarkable because we have ample evidence that he was a man of modest conversation. Pepys, who was by no means squeamish (for he found *Sir Martin Marall* "the most entire piece of mirth . . . that certainly ever was writ . . . very good wit therein, not fooling"), writes in his diary of the 19th June, 1668: "My wife and Deb to the king's playhouse to-day, thinking to spy me there, and saw the new play *Evening Love*, of Dryden's, which, though the world commends, she likes not." The next day

[1] Corneille's tragedy of *Pertharite* was acted unsuccessfully in 1659. Racine made free use of it in his more fortunate *Andromaque*.

he saw it himself, "and do not like it, it being very smutty, and nothing so good as the *Maiden Queen* or the *Indian Emperor* of Dryden's making. *I was troubled at it.*" On the 22nd he adds: "Calling this day at Herringman's,[1] he tells me Dryden do himself call it but a fifth-rate play." This was no doubt true, and yet, though Dryden in his preface says, "I confess I have given [yielded] too much to the people in it, and am ashamed for them as well as for myself, that I have pleased them at so cheap a rate," he takes care to add, "not that there is anything here that I would not defend to an ill-natured judge." The plot was from Calderon, and the author, rebutting the charge of plagiarism, tells us that the king ("without whose command they should no longer be troubled with anything of mine") had already answered for him by saying, "that he only desired that they who accused me of theft would always steal him plays like mine." Of the morals of the play he has not a word, nor do I believe that he was conscious of any harm in them till he was attacked by Collier, and then (with some protest against what he considers the undue severity of his censor) he had the manliness to confess that he had done wrong. "It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one."[2] And in a letter to his correspondent, Mrs. Thomas, written only a few weeks before his death, warning her against the example of Mrs. Behn, he says, with remorseful sincerity: "I confess I am the last man in the world who ought in justice to arraign her, who have been myself too much of a libertine in most of my poems, which I should be well contented I had time either to purge or to see them fairly burned." Congreve was less patient, and even Dryden, in the last epilogue he ever wrote, attempts an excuse:—

> "Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far,
> When with our Theatres he waged a war;
> He tells you that this very moral age
> Received its first infection from the Stage,
> Be sure a banished Court, with lewdness fraught,
> The seeds of open vice returning brought.
> . . . . . .
> Whitehall the naked Venus first revealed,
> Who, standing, as at Cyprus, in her shrine,
> The strumpet was adored with rites divine.
> . . . . . .

[1] Dryden's publisher.

[2] Preface to the *Fables*.

> The poets, who must live by Courts or starve,
> Were proud so good a Government to serve,
> And mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,
> Tainted the Stage for some small snip of gain."

Dryden, least of all men, should have stooped to this palliation, for he had, not without justice, said of himself: "The same parts and application which have made me a poet might have raised me to any honours of the gown." Milton and Marvell neither lived by the court, nor starved. Charles Lamb most ingeniously defends the Comedy of the Restoration as "the sanctuary and quiet Alsatia of hunted casuistry," where there was no pretence of representing a real world.[1] But this was certainly not so. Dryden again and again boasts of the superior advantage which his age had over that of the elder dramatists in painting polite life, and attributes it to a greater freedom of intercourse between the poets and the frequenters of the court.[2] We shall be less surprised at the *kind* of refinement upon which Dryden congratulated himself, when we learn (from the dedication of *Marriage à la Mode*) that the Earl of Rochester was its exemplar: "The best comic writers of our age will join with me to acknowledge that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behaviour from your lordship." In judging Dryden, it should be borne in mind that for some years he was under contract to deliver three plays a year, a kind of bond to which no man should subject his brain who has a decent respect for the quality of its products. We should remember, too, that in his day *manners* meant what we call *morals*, that custom always makes a larger part of virtue among average men than they are quite aware, and that the reaction from an outward conformity which had no root in inward faith may for a time have given to the frank expression of laxity an air of honesty that made it seem almost refreshing. There is no such hotbed for excess of licence as excess of restraint, and the arrogant fanaticism of a single virtue is apt to make men suspicious of tyranny in all the rest. But the riot of emancipation could not last long, for the more tolerant

[1] I interpret some otherwise ambiguous passages in this charming and acute essay by its title: "On the *artificial* comedy of the last century."

[2] See especially his defence of the epilogue to the Second Part of the *Conquest of Granada* (1672).

society is of private vice, the more exacting will it be of public decorum, that excellent thing, so often the plausible substitute for things more excellent. By 1678 the public mind had so far recovered its tone that Dryden's comedy of *Limberham* was barely tolerated for three nights. I will let the man who looked at human nature from more sides, and therefore judged it more gently than any other, give the only excuse possible for Dryden:—

> "Men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
> Do draw the inward quality after them
> To suffer all alike."

Dryden's own apology makes matters worse for him by showing that he committed his offences with his eyes open, and that he wrote comedies so wholly in despite of nature as never to deviate into the comic. Failing as clown, he did not scruple to take on himself the office of Chiffinch to the palled appetite of the public. "For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy; I want the gaiety of humour which is requisite to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: in short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: Reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend."[1] For my own part, though I have been forced to hold my nose in picking my way through these ordures of Dryden, I am free to say that I think them far less morally mischievous than that *corps-de-ballet* literature in which the most animal of the passions is made more temptingly naked by a veil of French gauze. Nor does Dryden's lewdness leave such a reek in the mind as the filthy cynicism of Swift, who delighted to uncover the nakedness of our common mother.

It is pleasant to follow Dryden into the more congenial region of heroic plays, though here also we find him making a false start. Anxious to please the king,[2] and so able a

[1] *Defence of an Essay on Dramatic Poesy.*

[2] "The favour which heroick plays have lately found upon our theatres has been wholly derived to them from the countenance and

reasoner as to convince even himself of the justice of whatever cause he argued, he not only wrote tragedies in the French style, but defended his practice in an essay which is by far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English. Eugenius (Lord Buckhurst), Lisideius (Sir Charles Sedley), Crites (Sir R. Howard), and Neander (Dryden) are the four partakers in the debate. The comparative merits of ancients and moderns, of the Shakespearian and contemporary drama, of rhyme and blank verse, the value of the three (supposed) Aristotelian unities, are the main topics discussed. The tone of the discussion is admirable, midway between bookishness and talk, and the fairness with which each side of the argument is treated shows the breadth of Dryden's mind perhaps better than any other one piece of his writing. There are no men of straw set up to be knocked down again, as there commonly are in debates conducted upon this plan. The "Defence" of the Essay is to be taken as a supplement to Neander's share in it, as well as many scattered passages in subsequent prefaces and dedications. All the interlocutors agree that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers," and that "our poesy is much improved by the happiness of some writers yet living, who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it." In another place he shows that by "living writers" he meant Waller and Denham. "Rhyme has all the advantages of prose besides its own. But the excellence and dignity of it were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it: he first made writing easily an art; first showed us to conclude the sense, most commonly in distiches, which in the verse before him runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it."[1] Dryden afterwards changed his mind, and one of the excellences of his own rhymed verse is, that his sense is too ample to be concluded by the distich. Rhyme had been censured as unnatural in dialogue; but Dryden replies that it is no more so than

approbation they have received at Court" (Dedication of *Indian Emperor* to Duchess of Monmouth).

[1] Dedication of *Rival Ladies*.

blank verse, since no man talks any kind of verse in real life. But the argument for rhyme is of another kind. "I am satisfied if it cause delight, for delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy [he should have said *means*]; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights. . . . The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesy, and must be such as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation. . . . Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed as too weak for the government of serious plays, and, he failing, there now start up two competitors; one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing."[1] To the objection that the difficulties of rhyme will lead to circumlocution, he answers in substance, that a good poet will know how to avoid them.

It is curious how long the superstition that Waller was the refiner of English verse has prevailed since Dryden first gave it vogue. He was a very poor poet and a purely mechanical versifier. He has lived mainly on the credit of a single couplet,

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made,"

in which the melody alone belongs to him, and the conceit, such as it is, to Samuel Daniel, who said, long before, that the body's

> "walls, grown thin, permit the mind
> To look out thorough and his frailty find."

Waller has made worse nonsense of it in the transfusion. It might seem that Ben Jonson had a prophetic foreboding of him when he wrote: "Others there are that have no composition at all, but a kind of turning and rhyming fall, in what

[1] *Defence of the Essay.* Dryden, in the happiness of his illustrative comparisons, is almost unmatched. Like himself, they occupy a middle ground between poetry and prose—they are a cross between metaphor and simile.

they write. It runs and slides and only makes a sound. Women's poets they are called, as you have women's tailors.

> " 'They write a verse as smooth, as soft, as cream,
> In which there is no torrent, nor scarce stream.'

You may sound these wits and find the depth of them with your middle finger." [1] It seems to have been taken for granted by Waller, as afterwards by Dryden, that our elder poets bestowed no thought upon their verse. "Waller was smooth," but unhappily he was also flat, and his importation of the French theory of the couplet as a kind of thought-coop did nothing but mischief.[2] He never compassed even a smoothness approaching this description of a nightingale's song by a third-rate poet of the earlier school:—

> " Trails her plain ditty in one long-spun note
> Through the sleek passage of her open throat,
> A clear, unwrinkled song,"—

one of whose beauties is its running over into the third verse. Those poets indeed

> " Felt music's pulse in all her arteries; "

and Dryden himself found out, when he came to try it, that blank verse was not so easy a thing as he at first conceived it, nay, that it is the most difficult of all verse, and that it must make up in harmony, by variety of pause and modulation, for what it loses in the melody of rhyme. In what makes the chief merit of his later versification, he but rediscovered the secret of his predecessors in giving to rhymed pentameters something of the freedom of blank verse, and not mistaking metre for rhythm.

Voltaire, in his Commentary on Corneille, has sufficiently lamented the awkwardness of movement imposed upon the French dramatists by the gyves of rhyme. But he considers the necessity of overcoming this obstacle, on the whole, an

[1] Discoveries.

[2] What a wretched rhymer he could be we may see in his *alterations* of the *Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and Fletcher:—

> " Not long since walking in the field,
> My nurse and I, we there beheld
> A goodly fruit; which, tempting me,
> I would have plucked; but, trembling, she,
> Whoever eats those berries, cried,
> In less than half an hour died! "

What intolerable seesaw! Not much of Byron's " fatal facility " in *these* octosyllabics!

advantage. Difficulty is his tenth and superior muse. How did Dryden, who says nearly the same thing, succeed in his attempt at the French manner? He fell into every one of its vices, without attaining much of what constitutes its excellence. From the nature of the language all French poetry is purely artificial, and its high polish is all that keeps out decay. The length of their dramatic verse forces the French into much tautology, into bombast in its original meaning, the stuffing out a thought with words till it fills the line. The rigid system of their rhyme, which makes it much harder to manage than in English, has accustomed them to inaccuracies of thought which would shock them in prose. For example, in the *Cinna* of Corneille, as originally written, Emilie says to Augustus:—

> " Ces flammes dans nos cœurs dès longtemps étoient nées,
> Et ce sont des secrets de plus de quatre années."

I say nothing of the second verse, which is purely prosaic surplusage exacted by the rhyme, nor of the jingling together of *ces*, *dès*, *étoient*, *nées*, *des*, and *secrets*, but I confess that *nées* does not seem to be the epithet that Corneille would have chosen for *flammes*, if he could have had his own way, and that flames would seem of all things the hardest to keep secret. But in revising, Corneille changed the first verse thus:—

> " Ces flammes dans nos cœurs *sans votre ordre* étoient nées."

Can anything be more absurd than flames born to order? Yet Voltaire, on his guard against these rhyming pitfalls for the sense, does not notice this in his minute comments on this play. Of extravagant metaphor, the result of this same making sound the file-leader of sense, a single example from *Heraclius* shall suffice:—

> " La vapeur de mon sang ira grossir la foudre
> Que Dieu tient déjà prête à le reduire en poudre."

One cannot think of a Louis Quatorze Apollo except in a full-bottomed periwig, and the tragic style of their poets is always showing the disastrous influence of that portentous comet. It is the *style perruque* in another than the French meaning of the phrase, and the skill lay in dressing it majestically, so that, as Cibber says, " upon the head of a man of sense, *if it became him*, it could never fail of drawing to him

a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one." It did not become Dryden, and he left it off.[1]

Like his own Zimri, Dryden was "all for" this or that fancy, till he took up with another. But even while he was writing on French models, his judgment could not be blinded to their defects. "Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*, they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of state, and *Polieucte* in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs; . . . their actors speak by the hour-glass like our parsons. . . . I deny not but this may suit well enough with the French, for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious."[2] With what an air of innocent unconsciousness the sarcasm is driven home! Again, while he was still slaving at these bricks without straw, he says: "The present French poets are generally accused that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine's Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio." It is curious that Voltaire, speaking of the *Bérénice* of Racine, praises a passage in it for precisely what Dryden condemns: "Il semble qu'on entende *Henriette* d'Angleterre elle-même parlant au marquis de *Vardes*. La politesse de la cour de *Louis XIV*., l'agrément de la langue Française, la douceur de la versification la plus naturelle, le sentiment le plus tendre, tout se trouve dans ce peu de vers." After Dryden had broken away from the heroic style, he speaks out more plainly. In the Preface to his *All for Love*, in reply to some cavils upon "little and not essential decencies," the decision about which he refers to a master of ceremonies, he goes on to say: "The French poets, I confess, are strict observers of these punctilios; . . . in this nicety of manners does the excellency of French poetry consist. Their heroes are the most civil people breathing, but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense. All their wit is in their ceremony; they want the genius

[1] In more senses than one. His last and best portrait shows him in his own grey hair.

[2] *Essay on Dramatick Poesy*.

which animates our stage, and therefore 'tis but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. . . . They are so careful not to exasperate a critic that they never leave him any work . . . for no part of a poem is worth our discommending where the whole is insipid, as when we have once tasted palled wine we stay not to examine it glass by glass. But while they affect to shine in trifles, they are often careless in essentials. . . . For my part, I desire to be tried by the laws of my own country." This is said in heat, but it is plain enough that his mind was wholly changed. In his discourse on epic poetry he is as decided, but more temperate. He says that the French heroic verse " runs with more activity than strength.[1] Their language is not strung with sinews like our English; it has the nimbleness of a greyhound, but not the bulk and body of a mastiff. Our men and our verses overbear them by their weight, and *pondere, non numero,* is the British motto. The French have set up purity for the standard of their language, and a masculine vigour is that of ours. Like their tongue is the genius of their poets—light and trifling in comparison of the English." [2]

Dryden might have profited by an admirable saying of his own, that " they who would combat general authority with particular opinion must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men." He understood the defects much better than the beauties of the French theatre. Lessing was even more one-sided in his judgment upon it.[3] Goethe, with his usual wisdom, studied

[1] A French hendecasyllable verse runs exactly like our ballad measure:—

> A cobbler there was and he lived in a stall, ...
> *La raison, pour marcher, n'a souvent qu'une voye.*
> (Dryden's note.)

The verse is not a hendecasyllable. " Attended watchfully to her recitative (Mdlle. Duchesnois), and find that, in nine lines out of ten, ' A cobbler there was,' etc., *is* the tune of the French heroics."—Moore's *Diary*, 24th April 1821.

[2] " The language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose."—GRAY to West.

[3] Diderot and Rousseau, however, thought their language unfit for poetry, and Voltaire seems to have half agreed with them. No one has expressed this feeling more neatly than Fauriel: " Nul doute que l'on ne puisse dire en prose des choses éminemment poétiques, tout comme il n'est que trop certain que l'on peut en dire de fort prosaïques

it carefully without losing his temper, and tried to profit by its structural merits. Dryden, with his eyes wide open, copied its worst faults, especially its declamatory sentiment. He should have known that certain things can never be transplanted, and that among these is a style of poetry, whose great excellence was, that it was in perfect sympathy with the genius of the people among whom it came into being. But the truth is, that Dryden had no aptitude whatever for the stage, and in writing for it he was attempting to make a trade of his genius — an arrangement from which the genius always withdraws in disgust. It was easier to make loose thinking and the bad writing which betrays it pass unobserved while the ear was occupied with the more sonorous music of the rhyme to which they marched. Except in *All for Love*, " the only play," he tells us, " which he wrote to please himself," [1] there is no real passion in any of his tragedies. This, indeed, is inevitable, for there are no characters, but only personages, in any except that. That is, in many respects, a noble play, and there are few finer scenes, whether in the conception or the carrying out, than that between Antony and Ventidius in the first act.[2]

As usual, Dryden's good sense was not blind to the extravagances of his dramatic style. In *Mac Flecknoe* he makes his own Maximin the type of childish rant—

" And little Maximins the gods defy; "

but, as usual also, he could give a plausible reason for his own mistakes by means of that most fallacious of all fallacies which is true so far as it goes. In his Prologue to the *Royal Martyr* he says:—

" And he who servilely creeps after sense
Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.
. . . . . .
But, when a tyrant for his theme he had,
He loosed the reins and let his muse run mad,

en vers, et même en excellents vers, en vers élégamment tournés, et en beau langage. C'est un fait dont je n'ai pas besoin d'indiquer d'exemples: aucune littérature n'en fournirait autant que le nôtre."—*Hist. de la Poésie Provençale*, ii. 237.

[1] *Parallel of Poetry and Painting.*

[2] " Il y a seulement la scène de *Ventidius* et d'*Antoine* qui est digne de Corneille. C'est là le sentiment de milord Bolingbroke et de tous les bons auteurs; c'est ainsi que pensait Addisson."—VOLTAIRE to M. de Fromont, 15th November, 1735.

And, though he stumbles in a full career,
Yet rashness is a better fault than fear;
. . . . .
They then, who of each trip advantage take,
Find out those faults which they want wit to make."

And in the Preface to the same play he tells us: "I have not everywhere observed the quality of the numbers in my verse, partly by reason of my haste, but more especially because I *would not have my sense a slave to syllables*." Dryden, when he had not a bad case to argue, would have had small respect for the wit whose skill lay in the making of faults, and has himself, where his self-love was not engaged, admirably defined the boundary which divides boldness from rashness. What Quintilian says of Seneca applies very aptly to Dryden: "Velles eum sue ingenio dixisse, alieno judicio."[1] He was thinking of himself, I fancy, when he makes Ventidius say of Antony—

"He starts out wide
And bounds into a vice that bears him far
From his first course, and plunges him in ills;
But, when his danger makes him find his fault,
Quick to observe, and full of sharp remorse,
He censures eagerly his own misdeeds,
Judging himself with malice to himself,
And not forgiving what as man he did
Because his other parts are more than man."

But bad though they nearly all are as wholes, his plays contain passages which only the great masters have surpassed, and to the level of which no subsequent writer for the stage has ever risen. The necessity of rhyme often forced him to a platitude, as where he says—

"My love was blind to your deluding art,
But blind men feel when stabbed so near the heart."[2]

But even in rhyme he not seldom justifies his claim to the title of "glorious John." In the very play from which I have just quoted are these verses in his best manner:—

"No, like his better Fortune I'll appear,
With open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair,
Just flying forward from her rolling sphere."

His comparisons, as I have said, are almost always happy. This, from the *Indian Emperor*, is tenderly pathetic:—

"As callow birds,
Whose mother's killed in seeking of the prey,
Cry in their nest and think her long away,
And, at each leaf that stirs, each blast of wind,
Gape for the food which they must never find."

[1] Inst. X. i. 129.

[2] *Conquest of Grenada*, Second Part.

And this, of the anger with which the Maiden Queen, striving to hide her jealousy, betrays her love, is vigorous:—

> "Her rage was love, and its tempestuous flame,
> Like lightning, showed the heaven from whence it came."

The following simile from the *Conquest of Grenada* is as well expressed as it is apt in conception:—

> "I scarcely understand my own intent;
> But, silk-worm like, so long within have wrought,
> That I am lost in my own web of thought."

In the *Rival Ladies*, Angelina, walking in the dark, describes her sensations naturally and strikingly:—

> "No noise but what my footsteps make, and they
> Sound dreadfully and louder than by day:
> They double too, and every step I take
> Sounds thick, methinks, and more than one could make."

In all the rhymed plays [1] there are many passages which one is rather inclined to like than sure he would be right in liking them. The following verses from *Aurengzebe* are of this sort:—

> "My love was such it needed no return,
> Rich in itself, like elemental fire,
> Whose pureness does no aliment require."

This is Cowleyish, and *pureness* is surely the wrong word; and yet it is better than mere commonplace. Perhaps what oftenest turns the balance in Dryden's favour, when we are weighing his claims as a poet, is his persistent capability of enthusiasm. To the last he kindles, and sometimes *almost* flashes out that supernatural light which is the supreme test of poetic genius. As he himself so finely and characteristically says in *Aurengzebe*, there was no period in his life when it was not true of him that

> "He felt the inspiring heat, the absent god return."

The verses which follow are full of him, and, with the exception of the single word *underwent*, are in his luckiest manner:—

> "One loose, one sally of a hero's soul,
> Does all the military art control.
>
> While timorous wit goes round, or fords the shore,
> He shoots the gulf, and is already o'er,
> And, when the enthusiastic fit is spent,
> Looks back amazed at what he underwent." [2]

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[1] In most, he mingles blank verse.

[2] *Conquest of Grenada.*

Pithy sentences and phrases always drop from Dryden's pen as if unawares, whether in prose or verse. I string together a few at random:—

"The greatest argument for love is love."

"Few know the use of life before 'tis past."

"Time gives himself and is not valuëd."

"Death in itself is nothing; but we fear
To be we know not what, we know not where."

"Love either finds equality or makes it;
Like death, he knows no difference in degrees."

"That's empire, that which I can give away."

"Yours is a soul irregularly great,
Which, wanting temper, yet abounds in heat."

"Forgiveness to the injured does belong,
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong."

"Poor women's thoughts are all extempore."

"The cause of love can never be assigned,
'Tis in no face, but in the lover's mind." [1]

"Heaven can forgive a crime to penitence,
For Heaven can judge if penitence be true;
But man, who knows not hearts, should make examples."

"Kings' titles commonly begin by force,
Which time wears off and mellows into right."

"Fear's a large promiser; who subject live
To that base passion, know not what they give."

"The secret pleasure of the generous act
Is the great mind's great bribe."

"That bad thing, gold, buys all good things."

"Why, love does all that's noble here below."

"To prove religion true,
If either wit or sufferings could suffice,
All faiths afford the constant and the wise."

But Dryden, as he tells us himself,

"Grew weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme;
Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And Nature flies him like enchanted ground."

---

[1] This recalls a striking verse of Alfred de Musset:

"La muse est toujours belle,
Même pour l'insensé, même pour l'impuissant,
Car sa beauté pour nous, c'est notre amour pour elle."

The finest things in his plays were written in blank verse, as vernacular to him as the alexandrine to the French. In this he vindicates his claim as a poet. His diction gets wings, and both his verse and his thought become capable of a reach which was denied them when set in the stocks of the couplet. The solid man becomes even airy in this new-found freedom: Anthony says—

> " How I loved,
> Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours
> That *danced away with down upon your feet.*"

And what image was ever more delicately exquisite, what movement more fadingly accordant with the sense, than in the last two verses of the following passage?—

> " I feel death rising higher still and higher,
> Within my bosom; every breath I fetch
> Shuts up my life within a shorter compass,
> *And, like the vanishing sound of bells, grows less*
> *And less each pulse, till it be lost in air.*" [1]

Nor was he altogether without pathos, though it is rare with him. The following passage seems to me tenderly full of it:—

> " Something like
> That voice, methinks, I should have somewhere heard;
> But floods of woe have hurried it far off
> Beyond my ken of soul." [2]

And this single verse from *Aurengzebe*—

> " Live still! oh live! live even to be unkind! "

with its passionate eagerness and sobbing repetition, is worth a ship-load of the long-drawn treacle of modern self-compassion.

Now and then, to be sure, we come upon something that makes us hesitate again whether, after all, Dryden was not grandiose rather than great, as in the two passages that next follow:—

> " He looks secure of death, superior greatness,
> Like Jove when he made Fate and said, Thou art
> The slave of my creation." [3]

> " I'm pleased with my own work; Jove was not more
> With infant nature, when his spacious hand
> Had rounded this huge ball of earth and seas,
> To give it the first push and see it roll
> Along the vast abyss." [4]

I should say that Dryden is more apt to dilate our fancy than our thought, as great poets have the gift of doing.

[1] *Rival Ladies.* [2] *Don Sebastian.*
[3] *Don Sebastian.* [4] *Cleomenes.*

But if he have not the potent alchemy that transmutes the lead of our commonplace associations into gold, as Shakespeare knows how to do so easily, yet his sense is always up to the sterling standard; and though he has not added so much as some have done to the stock of bullion which others afterwards coin and put in circulation, there are few who have minted so many phrases that are still a part of our daily currency. The first line of the following passage has been worn pretty smooth, but the succeeding ones are less familiar:—

> "Men are but children of a larger growth,
> Our appetites as apt to change as theirs,
> And full as craving too and full as vain;
> And yet the soul, shut up in her dark room,
> Viewing so clear abroad, at home sees nothing;
> But, like a mole in earth, busy and blind,
> Works all her folly up and casts it outward
> In the world's open view." [1]

The image is mixed and even contradictory, but the thought obtains grace for it. I feel as if Shakespeare would have written *seeing* for *viewing*, thus gaining the strength of repetition in one verse and avoiding the sameness of it in the other. Dryden, I suspect, was not much given to correction, and indeed one of the great charms of his best writing is that everything seems struck off at a heat, as by a superior man in the best mood of his talk. Where he rises, he generally becomes fervent rather than imaginative; his thought does not incorporate itself in metaphor, as in purely poetic minds, but repeats and reinforces itself in simile. Where he *is* imaginative, it is in that lower sense which the poverty of our language, for want of a better word, compels us to call *picturesque*, and even then he shows little of that finer instinct which suggests so much more than it tells, and works the more powerfully as it taxes more the imagination of the reader. In Donne's *Relic* there is an example of what I mean. He fancies one breaking up his grave and spying

> "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,"—

a verse that still shines there in the darkness of the tomb, after two centuries, like one of those inextinguishable lamps whose secret is lost.[2] Yet Dryden sometimes showed a

[1] *All for Love.*

[2] Dryden, with his wonted perspicacity, follows Ben Jonson in

sense of this magic of a mysterious hint, as in the *Spanish Friar* :—

> " No, I confess you bade me not in words;
> The dial spoke not, but it made shrewd signs,
> And pointed full upon the stroke of murder."

This is perhaps a solitary example. Nor is he always so possessed by the image in his mind as unconsciously to choose even the picturesquely imaginative word. He has done so, however, in this passage from *Marriage à la Mode* :—

> " You ne'er must hope again to see your princess,
> Except as prisoners view fair walks and streets,
> And careless passengers going by their grates."

But after all, he is best upon a level table-land, it is true, and a very high level, but still somewhere between the loftier peaks of inspiration and the plain of every-day life. In those passages where he moralises he is always good, setting some obvious truth in a new light by vigorous phrase and happy illustration. Take this (from *Œdipus*) as a proof of it:—

> " The gods are just,
> But how can finite measure infinite?
> Reason! alas, it does not know itself!
> Yet man, vain man, would with his short-lined plummet
> Fathom the vast abyss of heavenly justice.
> Whatever is, is in its causes just,
> Since all things are by fate. But purblind man
> Sees but a part o' th' chain, the nearest links,
> His eyes not carrying to that equal beam
> That poises all above."

From the same play I pick an illustration of that ripened sweetness of thought and language which marks the natural vein of Dryden. One cannot help applying the passage to the late Mr. Quincey:—

> " Of no distemper, of no blast he died,
> But fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long,
> E'en wondered at because he dropt no sooner;
> Fate seemed to wind him up for fourscore years;
> Yet freshly went he on ten winters more,
> Till, like a clock worn out with eating Time,
> The wheels of weary life at last stood still." [1]

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calling Donne " the greatest wit, though not the best poet, of our nation " (Dedication of *Eleonora*). Even as a poet Donne

> " Had in him those brave translunary things
> That our first poets had."

To open vistas for the imagination through the blind wall of the senses, as he could sometimes do, is the supreme function of poetry.

[1] My own judgment is my sole warrant for attributing these extracts from *Œdipus* to Dryden rather than Lee.

Here is another of the same kind from *All for Love* :—

> " Gone so soon!
> Is Death no more? He used him carelessly,
> With a familiar kindness; ere he knocked,
> Ran to the door and took him in his arms,
> As who should say, You're welcome at all hours,
> A friend need give no warning."

With one more extract from the same play, which is in every way his best, for he had, when he wrote it, been feeding on the bee-bread of Shakespeare, I shall conclude. Antony says:—

> " For I am now so sunk from what I was,
> Thou find'st me at my lowest water-mark.
> The rivers that ran in and raised my fortunes
> Are all dried up, or take another course:
> What I have left is from my native spring;
> I've a heart still that swells in scorn of Fate,
> And lifts me to my banks."

This is certainly, from beginning to end, in what used to be called the *grand* style, at once noble and natural. I have not undertaken to analyse any one of the plays, for (except in *All for Love*) it would have been only to expose their weakness. Dryden had *no* constructive faculty; and in every one of his longer poems that required a plot, the plot is bad, always more or less inconsistent with itself, and rather hitched on to the subject than combining with it. It is fair to say, however, before leaving this part of Dryden's literary work, that Horne Tooke thought *Don Sebastian* " the best play extant." [1] Gray admired the plays of Dryden, " not as dramatic compositions, but as poetry." [2] " There are as many things finely said in his plays as almost by anybody," said Pope to Spence. Of their rant, their fustian, their bombast, their bad English, of their innumerable sins against Dryden's own better conscience both as poet and critic, I shall excuse myself from giving any instances.[3] I like what is good in Dryden so much, as it *is* so good, that I

[1] *Recollections of Rogers*, p. 165.

[2] Nicholls's *Reminiscences of Gray*. Pickering's edition of Gray's Works, vol. v. p. 35.

[3] Let one suffice for all. In the *Royal Martyr*, Porphyrius, awaiting his execution, says to Maximin, who had wished him for a son-in-law:

> " Where'er thou stand'st, I'll level at that place
> My gushing blood, and spout it at thy face;
> Thus not by marriage we our blood will join;
> Nay, more, my arms shall throw my head at thine."

" It is no shame," says Dryden himself, " to be a poet, though it is to be a bad one."

think Gray was justified in always losing his temper when he heard "his faults criticised."[1]

It is as a satirist and pleader in verse that Dryden is best known, and as both he is in some respects unrivalled. His satire is not so sly as Chaucer's, but it is distinguished by the same good-nature. There is no malice in it. I shall not enter into his literary quarrels further than to say that he seems to me, on the whole, to have been forbearing, which is the more striking as he tells us repeatedly that he was naturally vindictive. It was he who called revenge "the darling attribute of heaven." "I complain not of their lampoons and libels, though I have been the public mark for many years. I am vindictive enough to have repelled force by force if I could imagine that any of them had ever reached me." It was this feeling of easy superiority, I suspect, that made him the mark for so much jealous vituperation. Scott is wrong in attributing his onslaught upon Settle to jealousy because one of the latter's plays had been performed at court—an honour never paid to any of Dryden's.[2] I have found nothing like a trace of jealousy in that large and benignant nature. In his vindication of the *Duke of Guise*, he says, with honest confidence in himself: "Nay, I durst almost refer myself to some of the angry poets on the other side, whether I have not rather countenanced and assisted their beginnings than hindered them from rising." He seems to have been really as indifferent to the attacks on himself as Pope pretended to be. In the same vindication he says of the *Rehearsal*, the only one of them that had any wit in it, and it has a great deal: "Much less am I concerned at the noble name of Bayes; that's a brat so like his own father that he cannot be mistaken for any other body. They might as reasonably have called Tom Sternhold Virgil, and the resemblance would have held as well." In his *Essay on Satire* he says: "And yet we

[1] Gray, *ubi supra*, p. 38.

[2] Scott had never seen Pepys' *Diary* when he wrote this, or he would have left it unwritten: "Fell to discourse of the last night's work at court, where the ladies and Duke of Monmouth acted the *Indian Emperor*, wherein they told me these things most remarkable, that not any woman but the Duchess of Monmouth and Mrs. Cornwallis did anything but like fools and stocks, but that these two did do most extraordinary well; that not any man did anything well but Captain O'Bryan, who spoke and did well, but above all things did dance most incomparably."—14th January, 1668.

know that in Christian charity all offences are to be forgiven as we expect the like pardon for those we daily commit against Almighty God. And this consideration has often made me tremble when I was saying our Lord's Prayer; for the plain condition of the forgiveness which we beg is the pardoning of others the offences which they have done to us; for which reason I have many times avoided the commission of that fault, even when I have been notoriously provoked." [1] And in another passage he says, with his usual wisdom: "Good sense and good-nature are never separated, though the ignorant world has thought otherwise. Good-nature, by which I mean beneficence and candour, is the product of right reason, which of necessity will give allowance to the failings of others, by considering that there is nothing perfect in mankind." In the same Essay he gives his own receipt for satire: "How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! but how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! . . . This is the mystery of that noble trade. . . . Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive: a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. . . . There is a vast difference between the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. . . . I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

Dryden thought his genius led him that way. In his elegy on the satirist Oldham, whom Hallam, without reading him I suspect, ranks next to Dryden,[2] he says:—

[1] See also that noble passage in the *Hind and Panther* (1573-1591), where this is put into verse. Dryden always thought in prose.

[2] Probably on the authority of this very epitaph, as if epitaphs were to be believed even under oath! A great many authors live because

" For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine;
One common note in either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike."

His practice is not always so delicate as his theory; but if he was sometimes rough, he never took a base advantage. He knocks his antagonist down, and there an end. Pope seems to have nursed his grudge, and then, watching his chance, to have squirted vitriol from behind a corner, rather glad than otherwise if it fell on the women of those he hated or envied. And if Dryden is never dastardly, as Pope often was, so also he never wrote anything so maliciously depreciatory as Pope's unprovoked attack on Addison. Dryden's satire is often coarse, but where it is coarsest, it is commonly in defence of himself against attacks that were themselves brutal. Then, to be sure, he snatches the first ready cudgel, as in Shadwell's case, though even then there is something of the good-humour of conscious strength. Pope's provocation was too often the mere opportunity to say a biting thing, where he could do it safely. If his victim showed fight, he tried to smooth things over, as with Dennis. Dryden could forget he had ever had a quarrel, but he never slunk away from any, least of all from one provoked by himself.[1] Pope's satire is too much occupied with the externals of manners, habits, personal defects, and peculiarities. Dryden goes right to the rooted character of the man, to the weaknesses of his nature, as where he says of Burnet:—

" Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,
Invulnerable in his impudence,
He dares the world, and, eager of a name,
He thrusts about and *justles into fame.*
So fond of loud report that, not to miss
Of being known (his last and utmost bliss),
He rather would be known for what he is."

It would be hard to find in Pope such compression of meaning as in the first, or such penetrative sarcasm as in the second of the passages I have italicised. Dryden's satire is still quoted for its comprehensiveness of application, Pope's rather for the elegance of its finish and the point of its phrase

we read nothing but their tombstones. Oldham was, to borrow one of Dryden's phrases, " a bad or, which is worse, an indifferent poet."

[1] " He was of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate, easily forgiving injuries, and capable of a prompt and sincere reconciliation with them that had offended him."—CONGREVE.

than for any deeper qualities.[1] I do not remember that Dryden ever makes poverty a reproach.[2] He was above it, alike by generosity of birth and mind. Pope is always the *parvenu*, always giving himself the airs of a fine gentleman, and, like Horace Walpole and Byron, affecting superiority to professional literature. Dryden, like Lessing, was a hack-writer, and was proud, as an honest man has a right to be, of being able to get his bread by his brains. He lived in Grub Street all his life, and never dreamed that where a man of genius lived was not the best quarter of the town. "Tell his majesty," said sturdy old Jonson, "that his soul lives in an alley."

Dryden's prefaces are a mine of good writing and judicious criticism. His *obiter dicta* have often the penetration, and always more than the equity, of Voltaire's, for Dryden never loses temper, and never altogether qualifies his judgment by his self-love. "He was a more universal writer than Voltaire," said Horne Tooke, and perhaps it is true that he had a broader view, though his learning was neither so extensive nor so accurate. My space will not afford many extracts, but I cannot forbear one or two. He says of Chaucer, that "he is a perpetual fountain of good sense,"[3] and likes him better than Ovid—a bold confession in that day. He prefers the pastorals of Theocritus to those of Virgil. "Virgil's shepherds are too well read in the verses of Epicurus and of Plato;" "there is a kind of rusticity in all those pompous verses, somewhat of a holiday shepherd strutting in his country buskins;"[4] "Theocritus is softer than Ovid, he touches the passions more delicately, and performs all this out of his own fund, without diving into the arts and sciences for a supply. Even his Doric dialect has an incomparable

[1] Coleridge says excellently: "You will find this a good gauge or criterion of genius—whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden's *Achitophel and Zimri;* every line adds to or modifies the character, which is, as it were, a-building up to the very last verse; whereas in Pope's *Timon*, etc., the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirised" (*Table-Talk*, 192). Some of Dryden's best satirical *hits* are let fall by seeming accident in his prose, as where he says of his Protestant assailants, "Most of them love all whores but her of Babylon." They had first attacked him on the score of his private morals.

[2] That he taxes Shadwell with it is only a seeming exception, as any careful reader will see.

[3] Preface to *Fables*.

[4] Dedication of the *Georgics*.

sweetness in his clownishness, like a fair shepherdess, in her country russet, talking in a Yorkshire tone." [1] Comparing Virgil's verse with that of some other poets, he says that his "numbers are perpetually varied to increase the delight of the reader, so that the same sounds are never repeated twice together. On the contrary, Ovid and Claudian, though they write in styles different from each other, yet have each of them but one sort of music in their verses. All the versification and little variety of Claudian is included within four or five lines, and then he begins again in the same tenor, perpetually closing his sense at the end of a verse, and that verse commonly which they call golden, or two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace. Ovid, with all his sweetness, has as little variety of numbers and sound as he; he is always, as it were, upon the hand-gallop, and his verse runs upon carpet-ground." [2] What a dreary half-century would have been saved to English poetry, could Pope have laid these sentences to heart! Upon translation, no one has written so much and so well as Dryden in his various prefaces. Whatever has been said since is either expansion or variation of what he had said before. His general theory may be stated as an aim at something between the literalness of metaphrase and the looseness of paraphrase. "Where I have enlarged," he says, "I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but either *they are secretly in the poet*, or may be fairly deduced from him." Coleridge, with his usual cleverness of *assimilation*, has condensed him in a letter to Wordsworth: "There is no medium between a prose version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, *i.e.* manner, genius, total effect." [3]

I have selected these passages, not because they are the best, but because they have a near application to Dryden himself. His own characterisation of Chaucer (though too narrow for the greatest but one of English poets) is the best that could be given of himself: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." And the other passages show him a close and open-minded student of the art he professed. Has his influence on our literature, but especially on our poetry, been on the whole for good or evil? If he could have been read

[1] Preface to *Second Miscellany*. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Memoirs of Wordsworth*, vol. ii. p. 74 (American edition).

with the liberal understanding which he brought to the works of others, I should answer at once that it had been beneficial. But his translations and paraphrases, in some ways the best things he did, were done, like his plays, under contract to deliver a certain number of verses for a specified sum. The versification, of which he had learned the art by long practice, is excellent, but his haste has led him to fill out the measure of lines with phrases that add only to dilute; and thus the clearest, the most direct, the most manly versifier of his time became, without meaning it, the source (*fons et origo malorum*) of that poetic diction from which our poetry has not even yet recovered. I do not like to say it, but he has sometimes smothered the childlike simplicity of Chaucer under feather-beds of verbiage. What this kind of thing came to in the next century, when everybody ceremoniously took a bushel-basket to bring a wren's egg to market in, is only too sadly familiar. It is clear that his natural taste led Dryden to prefer directness and simplicity of style. If he was too often tempted astray by Artifice, his love of Nature betrays itself in many an almost passionate outbreak of angry remorse. Addison tells us that he took particular delight in the reading of our old English ballads. What he valued above all things was Force, though in his haste he is willing to make a shift with its counterfeit, Effect. As usual, he had a good reason to urge for what he did: "I will not excuse, but justify myself for one pretended crime for which I am liable to be charged by false critics, not only in this translation, but in many of my original poems—that I Latinise too much. It is true that when I find an English word significant and sounding, I neither borrow from the Latin or any other language; but when I want at home I must seek abroad. If sounding words are not of our growth and manufacture, who shall hinder me to import them from a foreign country? I carry not out the treasure of the nation which is never to return; but what I bring from Italy I spend in England: here it remains, and here it circulates; for if the coin be good, it will pass from one hand to another. I trade both with the living and the dead for the enrichment of our native language. We have enough in England to supply our necessity; but if we will have things of magnificence and splendour, we must get them by commerce. . . . Therefore, if I find a word in a classic author, I propose it to be

naturalised by using it myself, and if the public approve of it the bill passes. But every man cannot distinguish betwixt pedantry and poetry; every man, therefore, is not fit to innovate." [1] This is admirably said, and with Dryden's accustomed penetration to the root of the matter. The Latin has given us most of our canorous words, only they must not be confounded with merely sonorous ones, still less with phrases that, instead of supplementing the sense, encumber it. It was of Latinising in this sense that Dryden was guilty. Instead of stabbing he "with steel invades the life." The consequence was that by and by we have Dr. Johnson's poet, Savage, telling us,—

> "In front, a parlour meets my entering view,
> Opposed a room to sweet refection due;"

Dr. Blacklock making a forlorn maiden say of her "dear," who is out late,—

> "Or by some apoplectic fit deprest,
> Perhaps, alas! he seeks eternal rest;"

and Mr. Bruce, in a Danish war-song, calling on the vikings to "assume their oars." But it must be admitted of Dryden that he seldom makes the second verse of a couplet the mere trainbearer to the first, as Pope was continually doing. In Dryden the rhyme waits upon the thought; in Pope and his school the thought courtesies to the tune for which it is written.

Dryden has also been blamed for his Gallicisms.[2] He tried some, it is true, but they have not been accepted. I do not think he added a single word to the language, unless, as I suspect, he first used *magnetism* in its present sense of moral attraction. What he did in his best writing was to use the English as if it were a spoken, and not merely an inkhorn language; as if it were his own to do what he pleased with it, as if it need not be ashamed of itself.[3] In

[1] *A Discourse of Epick Poetry*. "If the *public* approve." "On ne peut pas admettre dans le développement des langues aucune révolution artificielle et sciemment exécutée; il n'y a pour elles ni conciles, ni assemblées délibérantes; on ne les réforme pas comme une constitution vicieuse."—RENAN, *De l'Origine du Langage*, p. 95.

[2] This is an old complaint. Puttenham sighs over such innovations in Elizabeth's time, and Carew in James's. A language grows, and is not made. Almost all the new-fangled words with which Johnson taxes Marston in his *Poetaster* are now current.

[3] Like most idiomatic, as distinguished from correct writers, he knew very little about the language historically or critically. His prose and

this respect, his service to our prose was greater than any other man has ever rendered. He says he formed his style upon Tillotson's (Bossuet, on the other hand, formed *his* upon Corneille's); but I rather think he got it at Will's, for its great charm is that it has the various freedom of talk.[1] In verse, he had a pomp which, excellent in itself, became pompousness in his imitators. But he had nothing of Milton's ear for various rhythm and interwoven harmony. He knew how to give new modulation, sweetness, and force to the pentameter; but in what used to be called pindarics, I am heretic enough to think he generally failed. His so much praised *Alexander's Feast* (in parts of it, at least) has no excuse for its slovenly metre and awkward expression, but that it was written for music. He himself tells us, in the epistle dedicatory to *King Arthur*, "that the numbers of poetry and vocal music are sometimes so contrary that in many places I have been obliged to cramp my verses and make them rugged to the reader that they may be harmonious to the hearer." His renowned ode suffered from this constraint, but this is no apology for the vulgarity of conception in too many passages.[2]

Dryden's conversion to Romanism has been commonly taken for granted as insincere, and has therefore left an abiding stain on his character, though the other mud thrown at him by angry opponents or rivals brushed off so soon as it was dry. But I think his change of faith susceptible of several explanations, none of them in any way discreditable

poetry swarm with locutions that would have made Lindley Murray's hair stand on end. *How* little he knew is plain from his criticising in Ben Jonson the use of *ones* in the plural, of "Though Heaven should speak with all *his* wrath," and *be* "as false English for *are*, though the rhyme hides it." Yet all are good English, and I have found them all in Dryden's own writing! Of his sins against idiom I have a longer list than I have room for. And yet he is one of our highest authorities for *real* English.

[1] To see what he rescued us from in pedantry on the one hand, and vulgarism on the other, read Feltham and Tom Brown—if you can.

[2] "Cette ode mise en musique par Purcell (si je ne me trompe), passe en Angleterre pour le chef-d'œuvre de la poësie la plus sublime et la plus variée; et je vous avoue que, comme je sais mieux l'anglais que le grec, j'aime cent fois mieux cette ode que tout Pindare."—VOLTAIRE to M. de Chabanon, 9 mars 1772.

Dryden would have agreed with Voltaire. When Chief-Justice Marlay, then a young Templar, "congratulated him on having produced the finest and noblest Ode that had ever been written in any language, 'You are right, young gentleman' (replied Dryden), 'a nobler Ode never *was* produced, nor ever *will*.' "—MALONE.

to him. Where Church and State are habitually associated, it is natural that minds even of a high order should unconsciously come to regard religion as only a subtler mode of police.[1] Dryden, conservative by nature, had discovered before Joseph de Maistre, that Protestantism, so long as it justified its name by continuing to be an active principle, was the abettor of Republicanism. I think this is hinted in more than one passage in his preface to *The Hind and Panther*. He may very well have preferred Romanism because of its elder claim to authority in all matters of doctrine, but I think he had a deeper reason in the constitution of his own mind. That he was "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy," he tells us of himself in the preface to the *Religio Laici;* but he was a sceptic with an imaginative side, and in such characters scepticism and superstition play into each other's hands. This finds a curious illustration in a letter to his sons, written four years before his death: "Towards the latter end of this month, September, Charles will begin to recover his perfect health, according to his Nativity, which, casting it myself, I am sure is true, and all things hitherto have happened accordingly to the very time that I predicted them." Have we forgotten Montaigne's votive offerings at the shrine of Loreto?

Dryden was short of body, inclined to stoutness, and florid of complexion. He is said to have had "a sleepy eye," but was handsome and of a manly carriage. He "was not a very genteel man, he was intimate with none but poetical men.[2] He was said to be a very good man by all that knew him: he was as plump as Mr. Pitt, of a fresh colour and a down look, and not very conversable." So Pope described him to Spence. He still reigns in literary tradition, as when at Will's his elbow-chair had the best place by the fire in winter, or on the balcony in summer, and when a pinch from his snuff-box made a young author blush with pleasure as would nowadays a favourable notice in the *Saturday*

[1] This was true of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and still more of Southey, who in some respects was not unlike Dryden.

[2] Pope's notion of gentility was perhaps expressed in a letter from Lord Cobham to him: "I congratulate you upon the fine weather. 'Tis a strange thing that people of condition and men of parts must enjoy it in common with the rest of the world" (Ruffhead's *Pope*, p. 276, *note*). His lordship's naïve distinction between people of condition and men of parts is as good as Pope's between genteel and poetical men. I fancy the poet grinning savagely as he read it.

Review. What gave and secures for him this singular eminence? To put it in a single word, I think that his qualities and faculties were in that rare combination which makes character. This gave *flavour* to whatever he wrote—a very rare quality.

Was he, then, a great poet? Hardly, in the narrowest definition. But he was a strong thinker who sometimes carried common-sense to a height where it catches the light of a diviner air, and warmed reason till it had wellnigh the illuminating property of intuition. Certainly he is not, like Spenser, the poets' poet, but other men have also their rights. Even the Philistine is a man and a brother, and is entirely right so far as he sees. To demand more of him is to be unreasonable. And he sees, among other things, that a man who undertakes to write should first have a meaning perfectly defined to himself, and then should be able to set it forth clearly in the best words. This is precisely Dryden's praise,[1] and amid the rickety sentiment looming big through misty phrase, which marks so much of modern literature, to read him is as bracing as a north-west wind. He blows the mind clear. In ripeness of mind and bluff heartiness of expression, he takes rank with the best. His phrase is always a short-cut to his sense, for his estate was too spacious for him to need that trick of winding the path of his thought about, and planting it out with clumps of epithet, by which the landscape-gardeners of literature give to a paltry half-acre the air of a park. In poetry, to be next-best is, in one sense, to be nothing; and yet to be among the first in any kind of writing, as Dryden certainly was, is to be one of a very small company. He had, beyond most, the gift of the right word. And if he does not, like one or two of the greater masters of song, stir our sympathies by that indefinable aroma so magical in arousing the subtile associations of the soul, he has this in common with the few great writers, that the winged seeds of his thought embed themselves in the memory and germinate there. If I could be guilty of the absurdity of recommending to a young man any author on whom to form his style, I should tell him that, next to having something that will not stay unsaid, he could find no safer guide than Dryden.

[1] "Nothing is truly sublime," he himself said, "that is not just and proper."

Cowper, in a letter to Mr. Unwin (5th January, 1782), expresses what I think is the common feeling about Dryden, that, with all his defects, he had that indefinable something we call Genius. "But I admire Dryden most [he had been speaking of Pope], who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and a carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope with all his touching and retouching could never equal." But, after all, perhaps no man has summed him up so well as John Dennis, one of Pope's typical dunces, a dull man outside of his own sphere, as men are apt to be, but who had some sound notions as a critic, and thus became the object of Pope's fear and therefore of his resentment. Dennis speaks of him as his "departed friend, whom I infinitely esteemed when living for the solidity of his thought, for the spring and the warmth and the beautiful turn of it; for the power and variety and fulness of his harmony; for the purity, the perspicuity, the energy of his expression; and, whenever these great qualities are required, for the pomp and solemnity and majesty of his style." [1]

[1] Dennis in a letter to Tonson, 1715.

WITCHCRAFT [1]

CREDULITY, as a mental and moral phenomenon, manifests itself in widely different ways, according as it chances to be the daughter of fancy or terror. The one lies warm about the heart as Folk-lore, fills moonlit dells with dancing fairies,

[1] *Salem Witchcraft*, with an account of Salem Village, and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects. By Charles W. Upham. Boston: Wiggin and Lunt. 1867. 2 vols.

Ioannis Wieri de praestigiis daemonum, et incantationibus ac veneficiis libri sex, postrema editione sexta aucti et recogniti. Accessit liber apologeticus et pseudomonarchia daemonum. Cum rerum et verborum copioso indice. Cum. Caes. Maiest. Regisq.; Galliarum gratia et privilegio. Basiliæ ex officina Oporiniani, 1583.

Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft:* proving the common opinions of Witches contracting with Divels, Spirits, or Familiars; and their power to kill, torment, and consume the bodies of men, women, and children, or other creatures by diseases or otherwise; their flying in the Air, etc.; To be but imaginary Erronious conceptions and novelties; Wherein also the lewde, unchristian practises of Witchmongers, upon aged, melancholy, ignorant and superstitious people in extorting confessions by inhumane terrors and Tortures, is notably detected. Also The knavery and confederacy of Conjurors. The impious blasphemy of Inchanters. The imposture of Soothsayers, and infidelity of Atheists. The delusion of Pythonists, Figure-casters, Astrologers, and vanity of Dreamers. The fruitlesse beggarly art of Alchimistry. The horrible art of Poisoning and all the tricks and conveyances of juggling and liegerdemain are fully deciphered. With many other things opened that have long lain hidden: though very necessary to be known for the undeceiving of Judges, Justices, and Juries, and for the preservation of poor, aged, deformed, ignorant people; frequently taken, arraigned, condemned and executed for Witches, when according to a right understanding, and a good conscience, Physick, Food, and necessaries should be administered to him. Whereunto is added a treatise upon the nature and substance of Spirits and Divels, etc., all written and published in Anno 1584. By Reginald Scot, Esquire. Printed by R. C. and are to be sold by Giles Calvert dwelling at the Black Spread-Eagle, at the West-End of Pauls, 1651.

De la Demonomanie des Sorciers. A Monseigneur M. Chrestofe de Thou, Chevalier, Seigneur de Coeli, premier President en la Cour de Parlement et Conseiller du Roy en son privé Conseil. Reveu, Corrigé, et augmenté d'une grande partie. Par I. Bodin Angevin. A Paris: Chez Iacques du Puys, Libraire Iuré, à la Samaritaine. M.D.LXXXVII. Avec privilege du Roy.

Magica, seu mirabilium historiarum de Spectris et Apparitionibus spirituum: Item, de magicis et diabolicis incantationibus. De Miraculis, Oraculis, Vaticiniis, Divinationibus, Prædictionibus, Revelationibus et aliis eiusmodi multis ac varijs præstigijs, ludibrijs et im-

sets out a meal for the Brownie, hears the tinkle of airy bridle-bells as Tamlane rides away with the Queen of Dreams, changes Pluto and Proserpine into Oberon and Titania, and makes friends with unseen powers as Good Folk; the other

posturis malorum Dæmonum. Libri II. Ex probatis et fide dignis historiarum scriptoribus diligenter collecti. Islebiæ, cura, Typis et sumptibus Henningi Grossij Bibl. Lipo. 1597. Cum privilegio.

The displaying of supposed Witchcraft wherein is affirmed that there are many sorts of Deceivers and Impostors, and divers persons under a passive delusion of Melancholy and Fancy. But that there is a corporeal league made betwixt the Devil and the Witch, or that he sucks on the Witch's body, has carnal copulation, or that Witches are turned into Cats, Dogs, raise Tempests or the like is utterly denied and disproved. Wherein is also handled, The existence of Angels and Spirits, the truth of Apparitions, the Nature of Astral and Sydereal Spirits, the force of Charms and Philters; with other abstruse matters. By John Webster, Practitioner in Physick. Falsa etenim opiniones Hominum non solum surdos sed et cœcos faciunt, ita ut videre nequeant quæ aliis perspicua apparent. Galen. lib. 8, de Comp. Med. London: Printed by I. M. and are to be sold by the booksellers in London. 1677.

Sadducismus Triumphatus: or Full and Plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions. In two Parts. The First treating of their Possibility; the Second of their Real Existence. By Joseph Glanvil, late Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty, and Fellow of the Royal Society. The third edition. The advantages whereof above the former the Reader may understand out of Dr. H. More's Account prefixed therunto. With two Authentick, but wonderful Stories of certain Swedish Witches. Done into English by A. Horneck, DD. London, Printed for S. L. and are to be sold by Anth. Baskerville at the Bible, the corner of Essex-street, without Temple-Bar. M.DCLXXXIX.

Demonologie ou Traitte des Demons et Sorciers: De leur puissance et impuissance: Par Fr. Perraud. Ensemble L'Antidemon de Mascon, ou Histoire Veritable de ce qu'un Demon a fait et dit, il y a quelques années en la maison dudit Sr. Perreaud à Mascon. I. Jacques iv. 7, 8. " Resistez au Diable, et il s'enfuira de vous. Approchez vous de Dieu, et il s'approchera de vous." A Geneve, chez Pierre Aubert. M,DC,LIII.

The Wonders of the Invisible World. Being an account of the tryals of several witches lately executed in New-England. By Cotton Mather, D.D. To which is added a farther account of the tryals of the New-England Witches. By Increase Mather, D.D., President of Harvard College. London: John Russell Smith, Soho Square. 1862. (First printed in Boston, 1692.)

I. N. D. N. J. C. Dissertatio Juridica de Lamiis earumque processu criminali, *Bon Heren und dem peinl. Brozesz wider deiselben*, Quam, auxiliante Divina Gratia, Consensu et Authoritate Magnifici JCtorum Ordinis in illustribus Athenis Salanis sub præsidio Magnifici, Nobilissimi, Amplissimi, Consultissimi, atque Excellentissimi Dn. Ernesti Frider. *Schröter* hereditarii in *Wicterstädt*, JCti et Antecessoris hujus Salanæ Famigeratissimi, Consiliarii Saxonici, Curiæ Provincialis, Facultatis Juridicæ, et Scabinatus Assessoris longe Gravissimi, Domini Patroni Præceptoris et Promotoris sui nullo non honoris et observantiæ cultu sanctè devenerandi, colendi, publicæ Eruditorum censuræ subjicit Michael Paris *Walburger*, Græbzigâ Anhaltinus, in Acroaterio JCtorum ad diem 1. Maj. A. 1670. Editio Tertia. Jenæ, Typis Pauli Ehrichii. 1707.

Histoire de Diables de Loudon, ou de la Possession des Religieuses

is a bird of night, whose shadow sends a chill among the roots of the hair: it sucks with the vampire, gorges with the ghoule, is choked by the night-hag, pines away under the witch's charm, and commits uncleanness with the embodied Principle of Evil, giving up the fair realm of innocent belief to a murky throng from the slums and stews of the debauched brain. Both have vanished from among educated men, and such superstition as comes to the surface nowadays is the harmless Jacobitism of sentiment, pleasing itself with the fiction all the more because there is no exacting reality behind it to impose a duty or demand a sacrifice. And as Jacobitism survived the Stuarts, so this has outlived the dynasty to which it professes an after-dinner allegiance. It nails a horseshoe over the door, but keeps a rattle by its bedside to summon a more substantial watchman; it hangs a crape on the beehives to get a taste of ideal sweetness, but obeys the teaching of the latest bee-book for material and market-

Ursulines, et de la condamnation et du suplice d'Urbain Grandier, Curé de la même ville. Cruels effets de la Vengeance du Cardinal de Richelieu. A Amsterdam Aux depens de la Compagnie. M.DCC.LII.

A View of the Invisible World, or General History of Apparitions. Collected from the best Authorities, both Antient and Modern, and attested by Authors of the highest Reputation and Credit. Illustrated with a Variety of Notes and parallel Cases; in which some Account of the Nature and Cause of Departed Spirits visiting their former Stations by returning again into the present World, is treated in a Manner different to the prevailing Opinions of Mankind. And an Attempt is made from Rational Principles to account for the Species of such supernatural Appearances, when they may be supposed consistent with the Divine Appointment in the Government of the World. With the sentiments of Monsieur le Clerc, Mr. Locke, Mr. Addison, and Others on this important Subject. In which some humorous and diverting instances are remarked, in order to divert that Gloom of Melancholy that naturally arises in the Human Mind, from reading or meditating on such Subjects. Illustrated with suitable Cuts. London: Printed in the year M,DCC,LII. [Mainly from Defoe's *History of Apparitions.*]

Satan's Invisible World discovered; or, a choice Collection of Modern Relations, proving evidently, against the Atheists of this present Age, that there are Devils, Spirits, Witches and Apparitions, from Authentic Records, Attestations of Witnesses, and undoubted Verity. To which is added that marvellous History of Major Weir and his Sister, the Witches of Balgarran, Pittenweem, and Calder, etc. By George Sinclair, late Professor of Philosophy in Glasgow. No man should be vain that he can injure the merit of a Book; for the meanest rogue may burn a City or kill a Hero; whereas he could never build the one, or equal the other.—Sir George M'Kenzie. Edinburgh: Sold by P. Anderson, Parliament Square. M.DCC.LXXX.

La Magie et l'Astrologie dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age, ou Etude sur les superstitions païennes qui se sont perpétuées jusqu'à nos jours. Par L. F. Alfred Maury. Troisième Edition revue et corigée. Paris: Didier. 1864.

able honey. This is the æsthetic variety of the malady, or rather, perhaps, it is only the old complaint robbed of all its pain, and lapped in waking dreams by the narcotism of an age of science. To the world at large it is not undelightful to see the poetical instincts of friends and neighbours finding some other vent than that of verse. But there has been a superstition of very different fibre, of more intense and practical validity, the deformed child of faith, peopling the midnight of the mind with fearful shapes and phrenetic suggestions, a monstrous brood of its own begetting, and making even good men ferocious in imagined self-defence.

Imagination has always been, and still is in a narrower sense, the great mythologiser; but both its mode of manifestation and the force with which it reacts on the mind are one thing in its crude form of childlike wonder, and another thing after it has been more or less consciously manipulated by the poetic faculty. A mythology that broods over us in our cradles, that mingles with the lullaby of the nurse and the winter-evening legends of the chimney-corner, that brightens day with the possibility of divine encounters, and darkens night with intimations of demonic ambushes, is of other substance than one which we take down from our bookcase, sapless as the shelf it stood on, and remote from all present sympathy with man or nature as a town history. It is something like the difference between live metaphor and dead personification. Primarily, the action of the imagination is the same in the mythologiser and the poet, that is, it forces its own consciousness on the objects of the senses, and compels them to sympathise with its own momentary impressions. When Shakespeare in his *Lucrece* makes

> " The threshold grate the door to have him heard,"

his mind is acting under the same impulse that first endowed with human feeling and then with human shape all the invisible forces of nature, and called into being those

> " Fair humanities of old religion "

whose loss the poets mourn. So also Shakespeare no doubt projected himself in his own creations; but those creations never became so perfectly disengaged from him, so objective, or, as they used to say, extrinsical, to him, as to react upon him like real and even alien existences. I mean permanently, for momentarily they may and must have done so. But

before man's consciousness had wholly disentangled itself from outward objects, all nature was but a many-sided mirror which gave back to him a thousand images more or less beautified or distorted, magnified or diminished, of himself, till his imagination grew to look upon its own incorporations as having an independent being. Thus, by degrees, it became at last passive to its own creations. You may see imaginative children every day anthropomorphising in this way, and the dupes of that superabundant vitality in themselves, which bestows qualities proper to itself on everything about them. There is a period of development in which grown men are childlike. In such a period the fables which endow beasts with human attributes first grew up; and we luckily read them so early as never to become suspicious of any absurdity in them. The Finnic epos of *Kalewala* is a curious illustration of the same fact. In that everything has the affections, passions, and consciousness of men. When the mother of Lemminkäinen is seeking her lost son,—

> " Sought she many days the lost one,
> Sought him ever without finding;
> Then the roadways come to meet her,
> And she asks them with beseeching:
> ' Roadways, ye whom God hath shapen,
> Have ye not my son beholden,
> Nowhere seen the golden apple,
> Him, my darling staff of silver? '
> Prudently they gave her answer,
> Thus to her replied the roadways:
> ' For thy son we cannot plague us,
> We have sorrows too, a many,
> Since our own lot is a hard one
> And our fortune is but evil,
> By dog's feet to be run over,
> By the wheel-tire to be wounded,
> And by heavy heels down-trampled.' "

It is in this tendency of the mind under certain conditions to confound the objective with subjective, or rather to mistake the one for the other, that Mr. Tylor, in his *Early History of Mankind*, is fain to seek the origin of the supernatural, as we somewhat vaguely call whatever transcends our ordinary experience. And this, no doubt, will in many cases account for the particular shapes assumed by certain phantasmal appearances, though I am inclined to doubt whether it be a sufficient explanation of the abstract phenomenon. It is easy for the arithmetician to make a key to the problems that he has devised to suit himself. An

immediate and habitual confusion of the kind spoken of is insanity; and the hypochondriac is tracked by the black dog of his own mind. Disease itself is, of course, in one sense natural, as being the result of natural causes; but if we assume health as the mean representing the normal poise of all the mental faculties, we must be content to call hypochondria subternatural, because the tone of the instrument is lowered, and to designate as supernatural only those ecstasies in which the mind, under intense but not unhealthy excitement, is snatched sometimes above itself, as in poets and other persons of imaginative temperament. In poets this liability to be possessed by the creations of their own brains is limited and proportioned by the artistic sense, and the imagination thus truly becomes the shaping faculty, while in less regulated or coarser organisations it dwells for ever in the *Nifelheim* of phantasmagoria and dream—a thaumaturge half cheat, half dupe. What Mr. Tylor has to say on this matter is ingenious and full of valuable suggestion, and to a certain extent solves our difficulties. Nightmare, for example, will explain the testimony of witnesses in trials for witchcraft, that they had been hag-ridden by the accused. But to prove the possibility, nay, the probability, of this confusion of objective with subjective is not enough. It accounts very well for such apparitions as those which appeared to Dion, to Brutus, and to Curtius Rufus. In such cases the imagination is undoubtedly its own *Doppelgänger*, and sees nothing more than the projection of its own deceit. But I am puzzled, I confess, to explain the appearance of the *first* ghost, especially among men who thought death to be the end-all here below. The thing once conceived of, it is easy, on Mr. Tylor's theory, to account for all after the first. If it was originally believed that only the spirits of those who had died violent deaths were permitted to wander,[1]

[1] Lucian, in his *Liars*, puts this opinion into the mouth of Arignotus. The theory by which Lucretius seeks to explain apparitions, though materialistic, seems to allow some influence also to the working of imagination. It is hard otherwise to explain how his *simulacra* (which are not unlike the *astral spirits* of later times) should appear in dreams.

> "Quae simulacra . . .
> . . . nobis vigilantibus obvia mentes
> terrificant atque in somnis, cum saepe figuras
> contuimur miras simulacraque luce carentum
> quae nos horrifice languentis saepe sopore
> excierunt."
>
> *De Rer. Nat.* iv. 33-37, ed. Munro.

the conscience of a remorseful murderer may have been haunted by the memory of his victim, till the imagination, infected in its turn, gave outward reality to the image on the inward eye. After putting to death Boëtius and Symmachus, it is said that Theodoric saw in the head of a fish served at his dinner the face of Symmachus, grinning horribly and with flaming eyes, whereupon he took to his bed, and died soon after in great agony of mind. It is not safe, perhaps, to believe all that is reported of an Arian; but supposing the story to be true, there is only a short step from such a delusion of the senses to the complete ghost of popular legend. But, in some of the most trustworthy stories of apparitions, they have shown themselves not only to persons who had done them no wrong in the flesh, but also to such as had never even known them. The *eidolon* of James Haddock appeared to a man named Taverner, that he might interest himself in recovering a piece of land unjustly kept from the dead man's infant son. If we may trust Defoe, Bishop Jeremy Taylor twice examined Taverner, and was convinced of the truth of his story. In this case, Taverner had formerly known Haddock. But the apparition of an old gentleman which entered the learned Dr. Scott's study, and directed him where to find a missing deed needful in settling what had lately been its estate in the West of England, chose for its attorney in the business an entire stranger, who had never even seen its original in the flesh.

Whatever its origin, a belief in spirits seems to have been common to all the nations of the ancient world who have left us any record of themselves. Ghosts began to walk early, and are walking still, in spite of the shrill cock-crow of *wir haben ja aufgeklärt*. Even the ghost in chains, which one would naturally take to be a fashion peculiar to convicts escaped from purgatory, is older than the belief in that reforming penitentiary. The younger Pliny tells a very good story to this effect: "There was at Athens a large and spacious house which lay under the disrepute of being haunted. In the dead of the night a noise resembling the clashing of iron was frequently heard, which, if you listened more attentively, sounded like the rattling of chains; at first it seemed at a distance, but approached nearer by degrees; immediately afterward a spectre appeared in the form of an old man, extremely meagre and ghastly, with a

long beard and dishevelled hair, rattling the chains on his feet and hands. . . . By this means the house was at last deserted, being judged by everybody to be absolutely uninhabitable; so that it was now entirely abandoned to the ghost. However, in hopes that some tenant might be found who was ignorant of this great calamity which attended it, a bill was put up giving notice that it was either to be let or sold. It happened that the philosopher Athenodorus came to Athens at this time, and, reading the bill, inquired the price. The extraordinary cheapness raised his suspicion; nevertheless, when he heard the whole story, he was so far from being discouraged that he was more strongly inclined to hire it, and, in short, actually did so. When it grew towards evening, he ordered a couch to be prepared for him in the fore part of the house, and, after calling for a light, together with his pen and tablets, he directed all his people to retire. But that his mind might not, for want of employment, be open to the vain terrors of imaginary noises and spirits, he applied himself to writing with the utmost attention. The first part of the night passed with usual silence, when at length the chains began to rattle; however, he neither lifted up his eyes nor laid down his pen, but diverted his observation by pursuing his studies with greater earnestness. The noise increased, and advanced nearer, till it seemed at the door, and at last in the chamber. He looked up and saw the ghost exactly in the manner it had been described to him; it stood before him, beckoning with its finger. Athenodorus made a sign with his hand that it should wait a little, and threw his eyes again upon his papers; but the ghost still rattling his chains in his ears, he looked up and saw him beckoning as before. Upon this he immediately arose, and with the light in his hand followed it. The ghost slowly stalked along as if encumbered with his chains, and turning into the area of the house, suddenly vanished. Athenodorus, being thus deserted, made a mark with some grass and leaves where the spirit left him. The next day he gave information to the magistrates, and advised them to order that spot to be dug up. This was accordingly done, and the skeleton of a man in chains was there found; for the body having lain a considerable time in the ground, was putrefied and mouldered away from the fetters. The bones, being collected together, were publicly buried, and thus,

after the ghost was appeased by the proper ceremonies, the house was haunted no more."[1] This story has such a modern air as to be absolutely disheartening. Are ghosts, then, as incapable of invention as dramatic authors? But the demeanour of Athenodorus has the grand air of the classical period, of one *qui connaît son monde*, and feels the superiority of a living philosopher to a dead Philistine. How far above all modern armament is his prophylactic against his insubstantial fellow-lodger! Nowadays men take pistols into haunted houses. Sterne, and after him Novalis, discovered that gunpowder made all men equally tall, but Athenodorus had found out that pen and ink establish a superiority in spiritual stature. As men of this world, we feel our dignity exalted by his keeping an ambassador from the other waiting till he had finished his paragraph. Never surely did authorship appear to greater advantage. Athenodorus seems to have been of Hamlet's mind:

> "I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
> And, for my soul, what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal, as itself?"[2]

A superstition, as its name imports, is something that has been left to stand over, like unfinished business, from one session of the world's *witenagemot* to the next. The vulgar receive it implicitly on the principle of *omne ignotum pro possibili*, a theory acted on by a much larger number than is commonly supposed, and even the enlightened are too apt to consider it, if not proved, at least rendered probable by the hearsay evidence of popular experience. Particular superstitions are sometimes the embodiment by popular imagination of ideas that were at first mere poetic figments, but more commonly the degraded and distorted relics of religious beliefs. Dethroned gods, outlawed by the new

[1] Pliny's *Letters*, vii. 27. Melmoth's translation.

[2] Something like this is the speech of Don Juan, after the statue of Don Gonzales has gone out:

> "Pero todas son ideas
> Que da a la imaginacion
> El temor; y temer muertos
> Es muy villano temor.
> Que si un cuerpo noble, vivo,
> Con potencias y razon
> Y con alma no se tema,
> ¿Quien cuerpos muertos temió?"
>
> *El Burlador de Sevilla*, A. iii. s. 15.

dynasty, haunted the borders of their old dominions, lurking in forests and mountains, and venturing to show themselves only after nightfall. Grimm and others have detected old divinities skulking about in strange disguises, and living from hand to mouth on the charity of Gammer Grethel and Mère l'Oie. Cast out from Olympus and Asgard, they were thankful for the hospitality of the chimney-corner, and kept soul and body together by an illicit traffic between this world and the other. While Schiller was lamenting the gods of Greece, some of them were nearer neighbours to him than he dreamed; and Heine had the wit to turn them to delightful account, showing himself, perhaps, the wiser of the two in saving what he could from the shipwreck of the past for present use on this prosaic Juan Fernandez of a scientific age, instead of sitting down to wail it. To make the pagan divinities hateful, they were stigmatised as cacodæmons; and as the human mind finds a pleasure in analogy and system, an infernal hierarchy gradually shaped itself as the convenient antipodes and counterpoise of the celestial one. Perhaps at the bottom of it all there was a kind of unconscious Manicheism, and Satan, as Prince of Darkness, or of the Powers of the Air, became at last a sovereign, with his great feudatories and countless vassals, capable of maintaining a not unequal contest with the King of Heaven. He was supposed to have a certain power of bestowing earthly prosperity, but he was really, after all, nothing better than a James II. at St. Germains, who could make Dukes of Perth and confer titular fiefs and garters as much as he liked, without the unpleasant necessity of providing any substance behind the shadow. That there should have been so much loyalty to him, under these disheartening circumstances, seems to me, on the whole, creditable to poor human nature. In this case it is due, at least in part, to that instinct of the poor among the races of the North, where there was a long winter, and too often a scanty harvest—and the poor have been always and everywhere a majority—which made a deity of Wish. The *Acheronta-movebo* impulse must have been pardonably strong in old women starving with cold and hunger, and fathers with large families and a small winter stock of provision. Especially in the transition period from the old religion to the new, the temptation must have been great to try one's luck with the discrowned dynasty, when the intruder

was deaf and blind to claims that seemed just enough, so long as it was still believed that God personally interfered in the affairs of men. On his death-bed, says Piers Plowman,

> " The poore dare plede and prove by reson
> To have allowance of his lord; by the law he it claimeth;
> . . . . . .
> Thanne may beggaris as beestes after boote waiten
> That al hir life han lyved in langour and in defaute
> But God sente hem som tyme som manere joye,
> Outher here or ellis where, kynde worlde it nevere."

He utters the common feeling when he says that it were against nature. But when a man has his choice between here and elsewhere, it may be feared that the other world will seem too desperately far away to be waited for when hungry ruin has him in the wind, and the chance on earth is so temptingly near. Hence the notion of a transfer of allegiance from God to Satan, sometimes by a written compact, sometimes with the ceremony by which homage is done to a feudal superior.

Most of the practices of witchcraft—such as the power to raise storms, to destroy cattle, to assume the shape of beasts by the use of certain ointments, to induce deadly maladies in men by waxen images, or love by means of charms and philtres—were inheritances from ancient paganism. But the theory of a compact was the product of later times, the result, no doubt, of the efforts of the clergy to inspire a horror of any lapse into heathenish rites by making devils of all the old gods. Christianity may be said to have invented the soul as an individual entity to be saved or lost; and thus grosser wits were led to conceive of it as a piece of property that could be transferred by deed of gift or sale, duly signed, sealed, and witnessed. The earliest legend of the kind is that of Theophilus, chancellor of the church of Adana in Cicilia some time during the sixth century. It is said to have been first written by Eutychianus, who had been a pupil of Theophilus, and who tells the story partly as an eye-witness, partly from the narration of his master. The nun Hroswitha first treated it dramatically in the latter half of the tenth century. Some four hundred years later Rutebeuf made it the theme of a French miracle-play. His treatment of it is not without a certain poetic merit. Theophilus has been deprived by his bishop of a lucrative office. In his despair he meets with Saladin, *qui parloit au deable*

quant il voloit. Saladin tempts him to deny God and devote himself to the Devil, who, in return, will give him back all his old prosperity, and more. He at last consents, signs and seals the contract required, and is restored to his old place by the bishop. But now remorse and terror come upon him; he calls on the Virgin, who, after some demur, compels Satan to bring back his deed from the infernal muniment-chest (which must have been fire-proof beyond any skill of our modern safe-makers), and the bishop having read it aloud to the awe-stricken congregation, Theophilus becomes his own man again. In this play, the theory of devilish compact is already complete in all its particulars. The paper must be signed with the blood of the grantor, who does feudal homage (*or joing tes mains, et si devien mes hom*), and engages to eschew good and do evil all the days of his life. The Devil, however, does not imprint any stigma upon his new vassal, as in the later stories of witch-compacts. The following passage from the opening speech of Theophilus will illustrate the conception to which I have alluded of God as a liege lord against whom one might seek revenge on sufficient provocation—and the only revenge possible was to rob him of a subject by going over to the great Suzerain, his deadly foe:—

" N'est riens que por avoir ne face;
Ne pris riens Dieu et sa manace.
Irai me je noier ou pendre?
Ie ne m'en puis pas à Dieu prendre,
C'on ne puet à lui avenir.
. . . . .
Mès il s'est en si haut lieu mis,
Por eschiver ses anemis
C'on n'i puet trere ni lancier.
Se or pooie à lui tancier,
Et combattre et escrimir,
La char li feroie fremir.
Or est là sus en son solaz,
Laz! chetis! et je sui ès laz
De Povreté et de Soufrete." [1]

During the Middle Ages the story became a favourite topic with preachers, while carvings and painted windows tended still further to popularise it, and to render men's minds familiar with the idea which makes the nexus of its plot. The plastic hands of Calderon shaped it into a dramatic poem not surpassed, perhaps hardly equalled, in subtile imaginative quality by any other of modern times.

[1] *Théâtre Français au Moyen Age* (Monmerqué et Michel), pp. 139, 140.

In proportion as a belief in the possibility of this damnable merchandising with hell became general, accusations of it grew more numerous. Among others, the memory of Pope Sylvester II. was blackened with the charge of having thus bargained away his soul. All learning fell under suspicion, till at length the very grammar itself (the last volume in the world, one would say, to conjure with) gave to English the word *gramary* (enchantment), and in French became a book of magic, under the alias of *Grimoire*. It is not at all unlikely that, in an age when the boundary between actual and possible was not very well defined, there were scholars who made experiments in this direction, and signed contracts, though they never had a chance to complete their bargain by an actual delivery. I do not recall any case of witchcraft in which such a document was produced in court as evidence against the accused. Such a one, it is true, was ascribed to Grandier, but was not brought forward at his trial. It should seem that Grandier had been shrewd enough to take a bond to secure the fulfilment of the contract on the other side; for we have the document in fac-simile, signed and sealed by Lucifer, Beelzebub, Satan, Elimi, Leviathan, and Astaroth, duly witnessed by Baalberith, Secretary of the Grand Council of Demons. Fancy the competition such a state paper as this would arouse at a sale of autographs! Commonly no security appears to have been given by the other party to these arrangements but the bare word of the Devil, which was considered, no doubt, every whit as good as his bond. In most cases, indeed, he was the loser, and showed a want of capacity for affairs equal to that of an average giant of romance. Never was comedy acted over and over with such sameness of repetition as *The Devil is an Ass*. How often must he have exclaimed (laughing in his sleeve):—

> "*I* to such blockheads set my wit,
> *I* damn such fools!—go, go, you're bit!"

In popular legend he is made the victim of some equivocation so gross that any court of equity would have ruled in his favour. On the other hand, if the story had been dressed up by some mediæval Tract Society, the Virgin appears in person at the right moment *ex machinâ*, and compels him to give up the property he had honestly paid for. One is tempted to ask, Were there no attorneys, then, in the place

he came from, of whom he might have taken advice beforehand? On the whole, he had rather hard measure, and it is a wonder he did not throw up the business in disgust. Sometimes, however, he was more lucky, as with the unhappy Dr. Faust; and even so lately as 1695, he came in the shape of a " tall fellow with black beard and periwig, respectable looking and well dressed," about two o'clock in the afternoon, to fly away with the Maréchal de Luxembourg, which, on the stroke of five, he punctually did as per contract, taking with him the window and its stone framing into the bargain. The clothes and wig of the involuntary aëronaut were, in the handsomest manner, left upon the bed, as not included in the bill of sale. In this case also we have a copy of the articles of agreement, twenty-eight in number, by the last of which the Maréchal renounces God and devotes himself to the enemy. This clause, sometimes the only one, always the most important in such compacts, seems to show that they first took shape in the imagination, while the struggle between Paganism and Christianity was still going on. As the converted heathen was made to renounce his false gods, none the less real for being false, so the renegade Christian must forswear the true Deity. It is very likely, however, that the whole thing may be more modern than the assumed date of Theophilus would imply, and if so, the idea of feudal allegiance gave the first hint, as it certainly modified the particulars, of the ceremonial.

This notion of a personal and private treaty with the Evil One has something of dignity about it that made it perennially attractive to the most imaginative minds. It rather flatters than mocks our feeling of the dignity of man. As we come down to the vulgar parody of it in the confessions of wretched old women on the rack, our pity and indignation are mingled with disgust. One of the most particular of these confessions is that of Abel de la Rue, convicted in 1584. The accused was a novice in the Franciscan Convent at Meaux. Having been punished by the master of the novices for stealing some apples and nuts in the convent garden, the Devil appeared to him in the shape of a black dog, promising him his protection, and advising him to leave the convent. Not long after going into the sacristy, he saw a large volume fastened by a chain, and further secured by bars of iron. The name of this book was *Grimoire*. Thrusting his hands

through the bars, he contrived to open it, and having read a sentence (which Bodin carefully suppresses), there suddenly appeared to him a man of middle stature, with a pale and very frightful countenance, clad in a long black robe of the Italian fashion, and with faces of men like his own on his breast and knees. As for his feet, they were like those of cows. He could not have been the most agreeable of companions, *ayant le corps et haleine puante*. This man told him not to be afraid, to take off his habit, to put faith in him, and he would give him whatever he asked. Then laying hold of him below the arms, the unknown transported him under the gallows of Meaux, and then said to him with a trembling and broken voice, and having a visage as pale as that of a man who has been hanged, and a very stinking breath, that he should fear nothing, but have entire confidence in him, that he should never want for anything, that his own name was Maître Rigoux, and that he would like to be his master; to which De la Rue made answer that he would do whatever he commanded, and that he wished to be gone from the Franciscans. Thereupon Rigoux disappeared, but returning between seven and eight in the evening, took him round the waist and carried him back to the sacristy, promising to come again for him the next day. This he accordingly did, and told De la Rue to take off his habit, get him gone from the convent, and meet him near a great tree on the high-road from Meaux to Vaulx-Courtois. Rigoux met him there, and took him to a certain Maître Pierre, who, after a few words exchanged in an undertone with Rigoux, sent De la Rue to the stable, after his return whence he saw no more of Rigoux. Thereupon Pierre and his wife made him good cheer, telling him that for the love of Maître Rigoux they would treat him well, and that he must obey the said Rigoux, which he promised to do. About two months after, Maître Pierre, who commonly took him to the fields to watch cattle, said to him there that they must go to the Assembly, because he (Pierre) was out of powders, to which he made answer that he was willing. Three days later, about Christmas eve, 1575, Pierre having sent his wife to sleep out of the house, set a long branch of broom in the chimney-corner, and bade De la Rue go to bed, but not to sleep. About eleven they heard a great noise as of an impetuous wind and thunder in the chimney: which hearing,

Maître Pierre told him to dress himself, for it was time to be gone. Then Pierre took some grease from a little box and anointed himself under the arm-pits, and De la Rue on the palms of his hands, which incontinently felt as if on fire, and the said grease stank like a cat three weeks or a month dead. Then, Pierre and he bestriding the branch, Maître Rigoux took it by the butt and drew it up the chimney as if the wind had lifted them. And, the night being dark, he saw suddenly a torch before them lighting them, and Maître Rigoux was gone unless he had changed himself into the said torch. Arrived at a grassy place some five leagues from Vaulx-Courtois, they found a company of some sixty people of all ages, none of whom he knew, except a certain Pierre of Dampmartin and an old woman who was executed, as he had heard, about five years ago for sorcery at Lagny. Then suddenly he noticed that all (except Rigoux, who was clad as before) were dressed in linen, though they had not changed their clothes. Then, at command of the eldest among them, who seemed about eighty years old, with a white beard and almost wholly bald, each swept the place in front of himself with his broom. Thereupon Rigoux changed into a great he-goat, black and stinking, around whom they all danced backward with their faces outward and their backs towards the goat. They danced about half an hour, and then his master told him they must adore the goat who was the Devil, *et ce fait et dict, veit que le dict Bouc courba ses deux pieds de deuant et leua son cul en haut, et lors que certaines menues graines grosses comme testes d'espingles, qui se conuertissoient en poudres fort puantes, sentant le soulphre et poudre à canon et chair puant meslées ensemble seroient tombées sur plusieurs drappeaux en sept doubles.* Then the oldest, and so the rest in order, went forward on their knees and gathered up their cloths with the powders, but first each *se seroit incliné vers le Diable et iceluy baisé en la partie honteuse de son corps.* They went home on their broom, lighted as before. De la Rue confessed also that he was at another assembly on the eve of St. John Baptist. With the powders they could cause the death of men against whom they had a spite, or their cattle. Rigoux before long began to tempt him to drown himself, and, though he lay down, yet rolled him some distance towards the river. It is plain that the poor fellow was mad or half-witted or both. And yet Bodin, the author

of the *De Republica*, reckoned one of the ablest books of that age, believed all this filthy nonsense, and prefixes it to his *Démonomanie*, as proof conclusive of the existence of sorcerers.

This was in 1587. Just a century later, Glanvil, one of the most eminent men of his day, and Henry More, the Platonist, whose memory is still dear to the lovers of an imaginative mysticism, were perfectly satisfied with evidence like that which follows. Elizabeth Styles confessed, in 1664, "that the Devil about ten years since appeared to her in the shape of a handsome Man, and after of a black Dog. That he promised her Money, and that she should live gallantly, and have the pleasure of the World for twelve years, if she would with her Blood sign his Paper, which was to give her soul to him; and observe his Laws, and that he might suck her Blood. This, after Four Solicitations, the Examinant promised him to do. Upon which he pricked the fourth Finger of her right hand, between the middle and upper Joynt (where the Sign at the Examination remained), and with a Drop or two of her Blood, she signed the Paper with an O. Upon this the Devil gave her sixpence and vanished with the Paper. That since he hath appeared to her in the Shape of a *Man*, and did so on *Wednesday* seven-night past, but more usually he appears in the Likeness of a *Dog*, and *Cat*, and a *Fly* like a Millar, in which last he usually sucks in the Poll about four of the Clock in the Morning, and did so *Jan.* 27, and that it is pain to her to be so suckt. That when she hath a desire to do harm she calls the Spirit by the name of *Robin*, to whom, when he appeareth, she useth these words, *O Sathan, give me my purpose.* She then tells him what she would have done. And that he should so appear to her was part of her Contract with him." The Devil in this case appeared as a black (dark-complexioned) man "in black clothes, with a little band"—a very clerical-looking personage. "Before they are carried to their meetings they anoint their Foreheads and Hand-Wrists with an Oyl the Spirit brings them (which smells raw), and then they are carried in a very short time, using these words as they pass, *Thout, tout a tout, throughout and about.* And when they go off from their Meetings they say, *Rentum, Tormentum.* That at every meeting before the Spirit vanisheth away, he appoints the next meeting-place and time, and at his departure there is a foul smell. At their meeting they have usually Wine or

good Beer, Cakes, Meat, or the like. They eat and drink really when they meet, in their Bodies, dance also and have some Musick. The Man in black sits at the higher end, and *Anne Bishop* usually next him. He useth some words before meat, and none after; his Voice is audible but very low. The Man in black sometimes plays on a Pipe or Cittern, and the Company dance. At last the Devil vanisheth, and all are carried to their several homes in a short space. At their parting they say, *A Boy! merry meet, merry part!*" Alice Duke confessed "that Anne Bishop persuaded her to go with her into the Churchyard in the Night-time, and being come thither, to go backward round the Church, which they did three times. In their first round they met a Man in black Cloths who went round the second time with them; and then they met a thing in the Shape of a great black Toad which leapt up against the Examinant's Apron. In their third round they met somewhat in the shape of a Rat, which vanished away." She also received sixpence from the Devil, and "her Familiar did commonly suck her right Breast about seven at night in the shape of a little Cat of a dunnish Colour, which is as smooth as a Want [mole], and when she is suckt, she is in a kind of Trance." Poor Christian Green only got fourpence half-penny for her soul, but her bargain was made some years later than that of the others, and quotations, as the stockbrokers would say, ranged lower. Her familiar took the shape of a hedgehog. Julian Cox confessed that "she had been often tempted by the Devil to be a Witch, but never consented. That one Evening she walkt about a Mile from her own House, and there came riding towards her three Persons upon three Broomstaves, born up about a yard and a half from the ground. Two of them she formerly knew, which was a Witch and a Wizzard that were hanged for Witchcraft several years before. The third person she knew not. He came in the shape of a black Man, and tempted her to give him her Soul, or to that effect, and to express it by pricking her Finger and giving her name in Blood in token of it." On her trial Judge Archer told the jury, "he had heard that a Witch could not repeat that Petition in the Lord's Prayer, viz. *And lead us not into temptation*, and having this occasion, he would try the Experiment." The jury "were not in the least measure to guide their Verdict according to it, because it was not legal

Evidence." Accordingly it was found that the poor old trot could say only, *Lead us into temptation*, or *Lead us not into no temptation*. Probably she used the latter form first, and, finding she had blundered, corrected herself by leaving out both the negatives. The old English double negation seems never to have been heard of by the court. Janet Douglass, a pretended dumb girl, by whose contrivance five persons had been burned at Raisley, in 1677, for having caused the sickness of Sir George Maxwell by means of waxen and other images, having recovered her speech shortly after, declared that she "had some smattering knowledge of the Lord's Prayer, which she had heard the witches repeat, it seems, by her vision, in the presence of the Devil; and at his desire, which they observed, they added to the word *art* the letter *w*, which made it run, 'Our Father which wart in heaven,' by which means the Devil made the application of the prayer to himself." She also showed on the arm of a woman named Campbell "an *invisible* mark which she had gotten from the Devil." The wife of one Barton confessed that she had engaged "in the Devil's service. She renounced her baptism, and did prostrate her body to the foul spirit, and received his mark, and got a new name from him, and was called *Margaratus*. She was asked if she ever had any pleasure in his company? 'Never much,' says she, 'but one night going to a dancing upon Pentland Hills, in the likeness of a rough tanny [tawny] dog, playing on a pair of pipes; the spring he played,' says she, 'was *The silly bit chicken, gar cast it a pickle, and it will grow meikle.*'"[1] In 1670, near seventy of both sexes, among them fifteen children, were executed for witchcraft at the village of Mohra in Sweden. Thirty-six children, between the ages of nine and sixteen, were sentenced to be scourged with rods on the palms of their hands, once a week for a year. The evidence in this case against the accused seems to have been mostly that of children. "Being asked whether they were sure that they were at any time carried away by the Devil, they all declared they were, begging of the Commissioners that they might be freed from that intolerable slavery." They "used to go to a Gravel pit which lay hardby a Cross-way,

[1] "There sat Auld Nick in shape o' beast,
A towzy tyke, black, grim, an' large;
To gie them music was his charge."

and there they put on a vest over their heads, and then danced round, and after ran to the Cross-way and called the Devil thrice, first with a still Voice, the second time somewhat louder, and the third time very loud, with these words, *Antecessour, come and carry us to Blockula.* Whereupon immediately he used to appear, but in different Habits: but for the most part they saw him in a gray Coat and red and blue Stockings. He had a red Beard, a highcrowned Hat, with linnen of divers Colours wrapt about it, and long Garters upon his Stockings." "They must procure some Scrapings of Altars and Filings of Church-Clocks [bells], and he gives them a Horn with some Salve in it, wherewith they do anoint themselves." "Being asked whether they were sure of a real personal Transportation, and whether they were awake when it was done, they all answered in the Affirmative, and that the Devil sometimes laid something down in the Place that was very like them. But one of them confessed that he did only take away her Strength, and her Body lay still upon the Ground. Yet sometimes he took even her Body with him." "Till of late they never had that power to carry away Children, but only this year and the last, and the Devil did at this time force them to it. That heretofore it was sufficient to carry but one of their Children or a Stranger's Child, which yet happened seldom, but now he did plague them and whip them if they did not procure him Children, insomuch that they had no peace or quiet for him; and whereas formerly one Journey a Week would serve their turn from their own town to the place aforesaid, now they were forced to run to other Towns and Places for Children, and that they brought with them some fifteen, some sixteen Children every night. For their journey they made use of all sorts of Instruments, of Beasts, of Men, of Spits, and Posts, according as they had opportunity. If they do ride upon Goats and have many Children with them," they have a way of lengthening the goat with a spit, "and then are anointed with the aforesaid Ointment. A little Girl of Elfdale confessed, That, naming the name of JESUS, as she was carried away, she fell suddenly upon the Ground and got a great hole in her Side, which the Devil presently healed up again. The first thing they must do at Blockula was that they must deny all and devote themselves Body and Soul to the Devil, and promise to serve him faithfully, and confirm all this with

an Oath. Hereupon they cut their Fingers, and with their Bloud writ their Name in his Book. He caused them to be baptised by such Priests as he had there, and made them confirm their Baptism with dreadful Oaths and Imprecations. Hereupon the Devil gave them a Purse, wherein their filings of Clocks [bells], with a Stone tied to it, which they threw into the Water, and then they were forced to speak these words: *As these filings of the Clock do never return to the Clock from which they are taken, so may my soul never return to Heaven.* The diet they did use to have there was Broth with Colworts and Bacon in it, Oatmeal-Bread spread with Butter, Milk, and Cheese. Sometimes it tasted very well, sometimes very ill. After Meals, they went to Dancing, and in the meanwhile Swore and Cursed most dreadfully, and afterward went to fighting one with another. The Devil had Sons and Daughters by them, which he did marry together, and they did couple and brought forth Toads and Serpents. If he hath a mind to be merry with them, he lets them all ride upon Spits before him, takes afterwards the Spits and beats them black and blue, and then laughs at them. They had seen sometimes a very great Devil like a Dragon, with fire about him and bound with an Iron Chain, and the Devil that converses with them tells them that, if they confess anything, he will let that great Devil loose upon them, whereby all *Sweedland* shall come into great danger. The Devil taught them to milk, which was in this wise: they used to stick a knife in the Wall and hang a kind of Label on it, which they drew and stroaked, and as long as this lasted the Persons that they had Power over were miserably plagued, and the Beasts were milked that way till sometimes they died of it. The minister of Elfdale declared that one Night these Witches were to his thinking upon the crown of his Head, and that from thence he had had a long-continued Pain of the Head. One of the Witches confessed, too, that the Devil had sent her to torment the Minister, and that she was ordered to use a Nail and strike it into his Head, but it would not enter very deep. They confessed also that the Devil gives them a Beast about the bigness and shape of a young Cat, which they call a *Carrier*, and that he gives them a Bird too as big as a Raven, but white. And these two Creatures they can send anywhere, and wherever they come they take away all sorts of Victuals they can get. What

the Bird brings they may keep for themselves; but what the Carrier brings they must reserve for the Devil. The Lords Commissioners were indeed very earnest and took great Pains to persuade them to show some of their Tricks, but to no Purpose; for they did all unanimously confess, that, since they had confessed all, they found that all their Witchcraft was gone, and that the Devil at this time appeared to them very terrible with Claws on his Hands and Feet, and with Horns on his Head and a long Tail behind." At Blockula "the Devil had a Church, such another as in the town of Mohra. When the Commissioners were coming, he told the Witches they should not fear them, for he would certainly kill them all. And they confessed that some of them had attempted to murther the Commissioners, but had not been able to effect it."

In these confessions we find included nearly all the particulars of the popular belief concerning witchcraft, and see the gradual degradation of the once superb Lucifer to the vulgar scarecrow with horns and tail. "The Prince of darkness *was* a gentleman." From him who had not lost all his original brightness, to this dirty fellow who leaves a stench, sometimes of brimstone, behind him, the descent is a long one. For the dispersion of this foul odour Dr. Henry More gives an odd reason. "The Devil also, as in other stories, leaving an ill smell behind him, seems to imply the reality of the business, those adscititious particles he held together in his visible vehicle being loosened at his vanishing and so offending the nostrils by their floating and diffusing themselves in the open Air." In all the stories vestiges of Paganism are not indistinct. The three principal witch-gatherings of the year were held on the days of great pagan festivals, which were afterwards adopted by the Church. Maury supposes the witches' Sabbath to be derived from the rites of Bacchus Sabazius, and accounts in this way for the Devil's taking the shape of a he-goat. But the name was more likely to be given from hatred of the Jews, and the goat may have a much less remote origin. Bodin assumes the identity of the Devil with Pan, and in the popular mythology both of Kelts and Teutons there were certain hairy wood-demons called by the former *Dus* and by the latter *Scrat*. Our common names of *Deuse* and *Old Scratch* are plainly derived from these, and possibly *Old Harry* is a corruption

of *Old Hairy*. By Latinisation they become Satyrs. Here, at any rate, is the source of the cloven hoof. The belief in the Devil's appearing to his worshippers as a goat is very old. Possibly the fact that this animal was sacred to Thor, the god of thunder, may explain it. Certain it is that the traditions of Vulcan, Thor, and Wayland [1] converged at last in Satan. Like Vulcan, he was hurled from heaven, and like him he still limps across the stage in Mephistopheles, though without knowing why. In Germany, he has a horse's and not a cloven foot,[2] because the horse was a frequent pagan sacrifice, and therefore associated with devil-worship under the new dispensation. Hence the horror of hippophagism which some French gastronomes are striving to overcome. Everybody who has read *Tom Brown*, or Wordsworth's Sonnet on a German stove, remembers the Saxon horse sacred to Woden. The raven was also his peculiar bird, and Grimm is inclined to think this the reason why the witch's familiar appears so often in that shape. It is true that our *Old Nick* is derived from *Nikkar*, one of the titles of that divinity, but the association of the Evil One with the raven is older, and most probably owing to the ill-omened character of the bird itself. Already in the apocryphal gospel of the "Infancy," the demoniac Son of the Chief Priest puts on his head one of the swaddling-clothes of Christ which Mary has hung out to dry, and forthwith "the devils began to come out of his mouth and to fly away as *crows* and serpents."

It will be noticed that the witches underwent a form of baptism. As the system gradually perfected itself among the least imaginative of men, as the superstitious are apt to be, they could do nothing better than describe Satan's world as in all respects the reverse of that which had been conceived by the orthodox intellect as Divine. Have you an illustrated Bible of the last century? Very good. Turn it upside down, and you find the prints on the whole about as near nature as ever, and yet pretending to be something new by a simple device that saves the fancy a good deal of trouble. For, while it is true that the poetic fancy plays, yet the faculty which goes by that pseudonyme in prosaic minds (and it was by such that the details of this Satanic

[1] Hence, perhaps, the name Valant applied to the Devil, about the origin of which Grimm is in doubt.

[2] One foot of the Greek Empusa was an ass's hoof.

commerce were pieced together) is hard put to it for invention, and only too thankful for any labour-saving contrivance whatsoever. Accordingly, all it need take the trouble to do was to reverse the ideas of sacred things already engraved on its surface, and behold, a kingdom of hell with all the merit and none of the difficulty of originality! "Uti olim Deus populo suo Hierosolymis Synagogas erexit, ut in iis ignarus legis divinæ populus erudiretur, voluntatemque Dei placitam ex verbo in iis prædicato hauriret; ita et Diabolus in omnibus omnino suis actionibus simiam Dei agens, gregi suo acherontico conventus et synagogas, quas satanica sabbata vocant, indicit. . . . Atque de hisce Conventibus et Synagogis Lamiarum nullus Antorum quos quidem evolvi, imo nec ipse Lamiarum Patronus [here he glances at Wierus] scilicet ne dubiolum quidem movit. Adeo ut tuto affirmari liceat conventus a diabolo certo institui. Quos vel ipse, tanquam præses collegii, vel per dæmonem, qui ad cujuslibet sagæ custodium constitutus est, . . . vel per alios Magos aut sagas per unum aut duos dies antequam fiat congregatio denunciat. . . . Loci in quibus solent a dæmone cœtus et conventicula malefica institui plerumque sunt sylvestres, occulti, subterranei, et ab hominum conversatione remoti. . . . Evocatæ hoc modo et tempore Lamiæ, . . . dæmon illis persuadet eas non posse conventiculis interesse nisi nudum corpus unguento ex corpusculis infantum ante baptismum necatorum præparato illinant, idque propterea solum illis persuadet ut ad quam plurimas infantum insontium cædes eas alliciat. . . . Unctionis ritu peracto, abiturientes, ne forte a maritis in lectis desiderantur, vel per incantationem somnum, aurem nimirum vellicando dextra manu prius prædicto unguine illita, conciliant maritis ex quo non facile possunt excitari; vel dæmones personas quasdam dormientibus adumbrant, quas, si contigeret expergisci, suas uxores esse putarent; vel interea alius dæmon in forma succubi ad latus maritorum adjungitur qui loco uxoris est. . . . Et ita sine omni remora insidentes baculo, furcæ, scopis, aut arundini vel tauro, equo, sui, hirco, aut cani, *quorum omnium exempla prodidit Remig.* L. I. c. 14, devehuntur a dæmone ad loca destinata. . . . Ibi dæmon præses conventus in solio sedet magnifico, forma terrifica, ut plurimum hirci vel canis. Ad quem advenientes viri juxta ac mulieres accedunt reverentiæ exhibendæ et adorandi gratia, non tamen uno eodemque

modo. Interdum complicatis genubus supplices; interdum obverso incedentes tergo et modo retrogrado, in oppositum directo illi reverentiæ quam nos præstare solemus. In signum homagii (sit honor castis auribus) Principem suum hircum in [obscænissimo quodam corporis loco] summa cum reverentia sacrilego ore osculantur. Quo facto, sacrificia dæmoni faciunt multis modis. Sæpe liberos suos ipsi offerunt. Sæpe communione sumpta benedictam hostiam in ore asservatam et extractam (horreo dicere) dæmoni oblatam coram eo pede conculcant. His et similibus flagitiis et abominationibus execrandis commissis, incipiunt mensis assidere et convivari de cibis insipidis, insulsis,[1] furtivis, quos dæmon suppeditat, vel quos singulæ attulere, interdum tripudiant ante convivium, interdum post illud. . . . Nec mensæ suæ deest benedictio cœtu hoc digna, verbis constans plane blasphemis quibus ipsum Beelzebub et creatorem et datorem et conservatorem omnium profitentur. Eadem sententia est gratiarum actionis. Post convivium, dorsis invicem obversis . . . choreas ducere et cantare fescenninos in honorem dæmonis obscænissimos, vel ad tympanum fistulamve sedentis alicujus in bifida abore saltare . . . tum suis amasiis dæmonibus fœdissime commisceri. Ultimo pulveribus (quos aliqui scribunt esse cineres hirci illis quem dæmon assumpserat et quem adorant subito coram illius flamma absumpti) vel venenis aliis acceptis, sæpe etiam cuique indicto nocendi penso, et pronunciato Pseudothei dæmonis decreto, ULCISCAMINI VOS, ALIOQUI MORIEMINI. Duabus aut tribus horis in hisce ludis exactis circa Gallicinium dæmon convivas suas dimittit."[2] Sometimes they were baptised anew. Sometimes they renounced the Virgin, whom they called in their rites *extensam mulierem*. If the Ave Mary bell should ring while the demon is conveying home his witch, he lets her drop. In the confession of Agnes Simpson the meeting-place was North Berwick Kirk. "The Devil started up himself in the pulpit, like a meikle black man, and calling the row [roll] every one answered, *Here*. At his command they opened up three graves and cutted off from the dead corpses the joints of their fingers, toes, and nose, and parted them amongst them, and the said Agnes Simpson got for her part a winding-sheet and two joints. The Devil commanded

[1] Salt was forbidden at these witch-feasts.
[2] *De Lamiis*, p. 59, *et seq.*

them to keep the joints upon them while [till] they were dry, and then to make a powder of them to do evil withal." This confession is sadly memorable, for it was made before James I., then King of Scots, and is said to have convinced him of the reality of witchcraft. Hence the act passed in the first year of his reign in England, and not repealed till 1736, under which, perhaps in consequence of which, so many suffered.

The notion of these witch-gatherings was first suggested, there can be little doubt, by secret conventicles of persisting or relapsed pagans, or of heretics. Both, perhaps, contributed their share. Sometimes a mountain, as in Germany the Blocksberg,[1] sometimes a conspicuous oak or linden, and there were many such among both Gauls and Germans sacred of old to pagan rites, and later a lonely heath, a place where two roads crossed each other, a cavern, gravel-pit, or quarry, the gallows, or the churchyard, was the place appointed for their diabolic orgies. That the witch could be conveyed bodily to these meetings was at first admitted without any question. But as the husbands of accused persons sometimes testified that their wives had not left their beds on the alleged night of meeting, the witchmongers were put to strange shifts by way of accounting for it. Sometimes the Devil imposed on the husband by a *deceptio visus;* sometimes a demon took the place of the wife; sometimes the body was left and the spirit only transported. But the more orthodox opinion was in favour of corporeal deportation. Bodin appeals triumphantly to the cases of Habbakuk (now in the Apocrypha, but once making a part of the Book of Daniel), and of Philip in the Acts of the Apostles. "I find," he says, "this estatic ravishment they talk of much more wonderful than bodily transport. And if the Devil has this power, as they confess, of ravishing the spirit out of the body, is it not more easy to carry body and soul without separation or division of the reasonable part, than to withdraw and divide the one from the other without death?"

[1] If the *Blockula* of the Swedish witches be a reminiscence of this, it would seem to point back to remote times and heathen ceremonies. But it is so impossible to distinguish what was put into the mind of those who confessed by their examining torturers from what may have been there before, the result of a common superstition, that perhaps, after all, the meeting on mountains may have been suggested by what Pliny says of the dances of Satyrs on Mount Atlas.

The author of *De Lamiis* argues for the corporeal theory. "The evil Angels have the same superiority of natural power as the good, since by the Fall they lost none of the gifts of nature, but only those of grace." Now, as we know that good angels can thus transport men in the twinkling of an eye, it follows that evil ones may do the same. He fortifies his position by a recent example from secular history. "No one doubts about John Faust, who dwelt at Wittenberg, in the time of the sainted Luther, and who, seating himself on his cloak with his companions, was conveyed away and borne by the Devil through the air to distant kingdoms." [1] Glanvil inclines rather to the spiritual than the material hypothesis, and suggests "that the Witch's anointing herself before she takes her flight may perhaps serve to keep the body tenantable and in fit disposition to receive the spirit at its return." Aubrey, whose *Miscellanies* were published in 1696, had no doubts whatever as to the physical asportation of the witch. He says that a gentleman of his acquaintance "was in Portugal *anno* 1655, when one was burnt by the Inquisition for being brought thither from Goa, in East India, in the air, in an incredible short time." As to the conveyance of witches through crevices, keyholes, chimneys and the like, Herr Walburger discusses the question with such comical gravity that we must give his argument in the undiminished splendour of its jurisconsult latinity. The first sentence is worthy of Magister Bartholomæus Kuckuk. "Hæc realis delatio trahit me quoque ad illam vulgo agitatam quæstionem: *An diabolus Lamias corpore per angusta foramina parietum, fenestrarum, portarum aut per cavernas ignifluas ferre queant?*" (Surely if *tace* be good Latin for a candle, *caverna ignifiua* should be flattering to a chimney.) "Resp. Lamiæ prædicto modo sæpius fatentur sese a diabolo per caminum aut alia loca angustiora scopis insidentes per aerem ad montem Bructerorum deferri. Verum deluduntur a Satana istæc mulieres hoc casu egregie, nec revera rimulas istas penetrant, sed solummodo dæmon præcedens latenter aperit et claudit januas vel fenestras corporis earum capaces, per quas eas intromittit quæ putant se formam animalculi parvi, mustelæ, catti, locustæ, et aliorum induisse. At si

[1] Wierus, whose book was published not long after Faust's death, apparently doubted the whole story, for he alludes to it with an *ut fertur*, and plainly looked on him as a mountebank.

forte contingat ut per parietem se delatam confiteatur Saga, tunc, si non totum hoc præstigiosum est, dæmonem tamen maxima celeritate tot quot sufficiunt lapides eximere et sustinere aliosne ruant, et postea eadem celeritate iterum eos in suum locum reponere, existimo: cum hominum adspectus hanc tartarei latomi fraudem nequeat deprendere. Idem quoque judicium esse potest de translatione per caminum. Siquidem si caverna igniflua justæ amplitudinis est ut nullo impedimento et hæsitatione corpus humanum eam perrepere possit, diabolo impossibile non esse per eam eas educere. Si vero per inproportionatum (ut ita loquar) corporibus spatium eas educit, tunc meras illusiones præstigiosas esse censeo, nec a diabolo hoc unquam effici posse. Ratio est, quoniam diabolus essentiam creaturæ seu lamiæ immutare non potest, multo minus efficere ut majus corpus penetret per spatium improportionatum, alioquin corporum penetratio esset admittenda quod contra naturam et omne Physicorum principium est." This is fine reasoning, and the *ut ita loquar* thrown in so carelessly, as if with a deprecatory wave of the hand for using a less classical locution than usual, strikes me as a very delicate touch indeed.

Grimm tells us that he does not know when broomsticks, spits, and similar utensils were first assumed to be the canonical instruments of this nocturnal equitation. He thinks in comparatively modern, but I suspect it is as old as the first child that ever bestrode his father's staff, and fancied it into a courser shod with wind, like those of Pindar. Alas for the poverty of human invention. It cannot afford a hippogriff for an everyday occasion. The poor old crones, badgered by inquisitors into confessing they had been where they never were, were involved in the further necessity of explaining how the devil they got there. The only steed their parents had ever been rich enough to keep had been of this domestic sort, and they no doubt had ridden in this inexpensive fashion, imagining themselves the grand dames they saw sometimes flash by, in the happy days of childhood, now so far away. Forced to give a *how*, and unable to conceive of mounting in the air without something to sustain them, their bewildered wits naturally took refuge in some such simple subterfuge, and the broomstave, which might make part of the poorest house's furniture, was the nearest at hand. If youth and good spirits could put such life into a dead stick

once, why not age and evil spirits now? Moreover, what so likely as an *emeritus* implement of this sort to become the staff of a withered beldame, and thus to be naturally associated with her image? I remember very well a poor half-crazed creature, who always wore a scarlet cloak and leaned on such a stay, cursing and banning after a fashion that would infallibly have burned her two hundred years ago. But apart from any adventitious associations of later growth, it is certain that a very ancient belief gave to magic the power of imparting life, or the semblance of it, to inanimate things, and thus sometimes making servants of them. The wands of the Egyptian magicians were turned to serpents. Still nearer to the purpose is the capital story of Lucian, out of which Goethe made his *Zauberlehrling*, of the stick turned water-carrier. The classical theory of the witch's flight was driven to no such vulgar expedients, the ointment turning her into a bird for the nonce, as in Lucian and Apuleius. In those days, too, there was nothing known of any camp-meeting of witches and wizards, but each sorceress transformed herself that she might fly to her paramour. According to some of the Scotch stories, the witch, after bestriding her broomstick, must repeat the magic formula, *Horse and Hattock!* The flitting of these ill-omened night-birds, like nearly all the general superstitions relating to witchcraft, mingles itself and is lost in a throng of figures more august.[1] Diana, Bertha, Holda, Abundia, Befana, once beautiful and divine, the bringers of blessing while men slept, became demons haunting the drear of darkness with terror and ominous suggestion. The process of disenchantment must have been a long one, and none can say how soon it became complete. Perhaps we may take Heine's word for it, that

> "Genau bei Weibern
> Weiss man niemals wo der Engel
> Aufhört und der Teufel anfängt."

Once goblinised, Herodias joins them, doomed still to bear about the Baptist's head; and Woden, who, first losing his identity in the Wild Huntsman, sinks by degrees into the mere *spook* of a Suabian baron, sinfully fond of field-sports, and therefore punished with an eternal phantasm of them, "the hunter and the deer a shade." More and more vulgarised, the infernal train snatches up and sweeps along with

[1] See Grimm's D. M., under *Hexenfart*, *Wütendes Heer*, etc.

it every lawless shape and wild conjecture of distempered fancy, streaming away at last into a comet's tail of wild-haired hags, eager with unnatural hate and more unnatural lust, the nightmare breed of some exorcist's or inquisitor's surfeit, whose own lie has turned upon him in sleep.

As it is painfully interesting to trace the gradual degeneration of a poetic faith into the ritual of unimaginative Tupperism, so it is amusing to see pedantry clinging faithfully to the traditions of its prosaic nature, and holding sacred the dead shells that once housed a moral symbol. What a divine thing the *out*side always has been and continues to be! And how the cast clothes of the mind continue always to be in fashion! We turn our coats without changing the cut of them. But was it possible for a man to change not only his skin but his nature? Were there such things as *versipelles*, *lycanthropi*, *werwolfs*, and *loupgarous?* In the earliest ages science was poetry, as in the later poetry has become science. The phenomena of nature, imaginatively represented, were not long in becoming myths. These the primal poets reproduced again as symbols, no longer of physical, but of moral truths. By and by the professional poets, in search of a subject, are struck by the fund of picturesque material lying unused in them, and work them up once more as narratives, with appropriate personages and decorations. Thence they take the further downward step into legend, and from that to superstition. How many metamorphoses between the elder Edda and the Nibelungen, between Arcturus and the *Idylls of the King!* Let a good, thorough-paced proser get hold of one of these stories, and he carefully desiccates them of whatever fancy may be left, till he has reduced them to the proper dryness of fact. King Lycaon, grandson by the spindleside of Oceanus, after passing through all the stages I have mentioned, becomes the ancestor of the werwolf. Ovid is put upon the stand as a witness, and testifies to the undoubted fact of the poor monarch's own metamorphosis:—

> "Territus ipse fugit, nactusque silentia ruris
> Exululat, frustraque loqui conatur."

Does any one still doubt that men may be changed into beasts? Call Lucian, call Apuleius, call Homer, whose story of the companions of Ulysses made swine of by Circe, says Bodin, *n'est pas fable.* If that arch-patron of sorcerers,

Wierus, is still unconvinced, and pronounces the whole thing a delusion of diseased imagination, what does he say to Nebuchadnezzar? Nay, let St. Austin be subpœnaed, who declares that "in his time among the Alps sorceresses were common, who, by making travellers eat of a certain cheese, changed them into beasts of burden and then back again into men." Too confiding tourist, beware of *Gruyère*, especially at supper! Then there was the Philosopher Ammonius, whose lectures were constantly attended by an ass,—a phenomenon not without parallel in more recent times, and all the more credible to Bodin, who had been professor of civil law.

In one case we have fortunately the evidence of the ass himself. In Germany, two witches who kept an inn made an ass of a young actor,—not always a very prodigious transformation, it will be thought by those familiar with the stage. In his new shape he drew customers by his amusing tricks,—*voluptates mille viatoribus exhibebat.* But one day making his escape (having overheard the secret from his mistresses), he plunged into the water, and was disasinised to the extent of recovering his original shape. "Id Petrus Damianus, vir sua ætate inter primos numerandus, cum rem sciscitatus est diligentissime ex hero, *ex asino*, ex mulieribus sagis confessis factum, Leoni VII. Papæ narravit, et postquam diu in utramque partem coram Papa fuit disputatum, hoc tandem posse fieri fuit constitutum." Bodin must have been delighted with this story, though perhaps as a Protestant he might have vilipended the infallible decision of the Pope in its favour. As for lycanthropy, that was too common in his own time to need any confirmation. It was notorious to all men. "In Livonia, during the latter part of December, a villain goes about summoning the sorcerers to meet at a certain place, and if they fail, the Devil scourges them thither with an iron rod, and that so sharply that the marks of it remain upon them. Their captain goes before; and they, to the number of several thousands, follow him across a river, which passed, they change into wolves, and, casting themselves upon men and flocks, do all manner of damage." This we have on the authority of Melancthon's son-in-law, Gaspar Peucerus. Moreover, many books published in Germany affirm "that one of the greatest kings in Christendom, not long since dead, was often changed into a wolf."

But what need of words? The conclusive proof remains, that many in our own day, being put to the torture, have confessed the fact, and been burned alive accordingly. The maintainers of the reality of witchcraft in the next century seem to have dropped the *werwolf* by common consent, though supported by the same kind of evidence they relied on in other matters, namely, that of ocular witnesses, the confession of the accused, and general notoriety. So lately as 1765 the French peasants believed the "wild beast of the Gevaudan" to be a *loupgarou*, and that, I think, is his last appearance.

The particulars of the concubinage of witches with their familiars were discussed with a relish and a filthy minuteness worthy of Sanchez. Could children be born of these devilish amours? Of course they could, said one party; are there not plenty of cases in authentic history? Who was the father of Romulus and Remus? nay, not so very long ago, of Merlin? Another party denied the possibility of the thing altogether. Among these was Luther, who declared the children to be supposititious, or else mere imps, disguised as innocent sucklings, and known as *Wechselkinder*, or changelings, who were common enough, as everybody must be aware. Of the intercourse itself Luther had no doubts.[1] A third party took a middle ground, and believed that vermin and toads might be the offspring of such amours. And how did the Demon, a mere spiritual essence, contrive himself a body? Some would have it that he entered into dead bodies, by preference, of course, those of sorcerers. It is plain, from the confession of De la Rue, that this was the theory of his examiners. This also had historical evidence in its favour. There was the well-known leading case of the Bride of Corinth, for example. And but yesterday, as it were, at Crossen in Silesia, did not Christopher Monig, an apothecary's servant, come back after being buried, and do duty, as if nothing particular had happened, putting up prescriptions as usual, and "pounding drugs in the mortar with a mighty noise?" Apothecaries seem to have been special victims of these Satanic pranks, for another appeared at Reichenbach not long before, affirming that "he had poisoned several

[1] Some Catholics, indeed, affirmed that he himself was the son of a demon who lodged in his father's house under the semblance of a merchant. Wierus says that a bishop preached to that effect in 1565, and gravely refutes the story.

men with his drugs," which certainly gives an air of truth to the story. Accordingly the Devil is represented as being unpleasantly cold to the touch. "Caietan escrit qu'une sorciere demanda un iour au diable pourquoy il ne se rechauffoit, qui fist response qu'il faisoit ce qu'il pouuoit." Poor Devil! But there are cases in which the Demon is represented as so hot that his grasp left a seared spot as black as charcoal. Perhaps some of them came from the torrid zone of their broad empire, and others from the thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice. Those who were not satisfied with the dead-body theory contented themselves, like Dr. More, with that of "adscititious particles," which has, to be sure, a more metaphysical and scholastic flavour about it. That the demons really came, either corporeally or through some diabolic illusion that amounted to the same thing, and that the witch devoted herself to him body and soul, scarce anybody was bold enough to doubt. To these familiars their venerable paramours gave endearing nicknames, such as My little Master, or My dear Martin,—the latter, probably, after the heresy of Luther, and when the rack was popish. The famous witch-finder Hopkins enables us to lengthen the list considerably. One witch whom he convicted, after being "kept from sleep two or three nights," called in five of her devilish servitors. The first was "*Holt*, who came in like a white kitling;" the second, "*Jarmara*, like a fat spaniel without any legs at all;" the third, "*Vinegar Tom*, who was like a long-tailed greyhound with an head like an oxe, with a long tail and broad eyes, who, when this discoverer spoke to and bade him to the place provided for him and his angells, immediately transformed himself into the shape of a child of foure yeares old, without a head, and gave half a dozen turnes about the house and vanished at the doore;" the fourth, "*Sack and Sugar*, like a black rabbet;" the fifth, "*News*, like a polcat." Other names of his finding were Elemauzer, Pywacket, Peck-in-the-Crown, Grizzel, and Greedygut, "which," he adds, "no mortal could invent." The name of *Robin*, which we met with in the confession of Alice Duke, has, perhaps, wider associations than the woman herself dreamed of; for, through Robin des Bois and Robin Hood, it may be another of those scattered traces that lead us back to Woden. Probably, however, it is only our old friend Robin Goodfellow, whose namesake

Knecht Ruprecht makes such a figure in the German fairy mythology. Possessed persons called in higher agencies,—Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Powers; and among the witnesses against Urbain Grandier we find the names of Leviathan, Behemoth, Isaacarum, Belaam, Asmodeus, and Beherit, who spoke French very well, but were remarkably poor Latinists, knowing, indeed, almost as little of the language as if their youth had been spent in writing Latin verses.[1] A shrewd Scotch physician tried them with Gaelic, but they could make nothing of it.

It was only when scepticism had begun to make itself uncomfortably inquisitive, that the Devil had any difficulty in making himself visible, and even palpable. In simpler times, demons would almost seem to have made no inconsiderable part of the population. Trithemius tells of one who served as cook to the Bishop of Hildesheim (one shudders to think of the school where he had graduated as *Cordon bleu*), and who " delectebatur esse cum hominibus, loquens, interrogans, respondens familiariter omnibus, aliquando visibiliter, aliquando invisibiliter apparens." This last feat of " appearing invisibly " would have been worth seeing. In 1554, the Devil came of a Christmas eve to Lawrence Doner, a parish priest of Saxony, and asked to be confessed. " Admissus, horrendas adversus Christum filium Dei blasphemias evomuit. Verum cum virtute verbi Dei a parocho victus esset, intolerabili post se relicto fœtore abiit." Splendidly dressed, with two companions, he frequented an honest man's house at Rothenberg. He brought with him a piper or fiddler, and contrived feasts and dances under pretext of wooing the goodman's daughter. He boasted that he was a foreign nobleman of immense wealth, and, for a time, was as successful as an Italian courier has been known to be at one of our fashionable watering-places. But the importunity of the guest and his friends at length " displicuit patrifamilias," who accordingly one evening invited a minister of the word to meet them at supper, and entered upon pious discourse with him from the word of God. Wherefore, seeking other

[1] Melancthon, however, used to tell of a possessed girl in Italy who knew no Latin, but the Devil in her, being asked by Bonamico, a Bolognese professor, what was the best verse in Virgil, answered at once:—

" Discite justitiam moniti, et non temnere divos,"—

a somewhat remarkable concession on the part of a fallen angel.

matter of conversation, they said there were many facetious things more suitable to exhilarate the supper-table than the interpretation of Holy Writ, and begged that they might be no longer bored with Scripture. Thoroughly satisfied by their singular way of thinking that his guests were diabolical, paterfamilias cries out in Latin worthy of Father Tom, "Apagite, vos scelerati nebulones!" This said, the tartarean impostor and his companions at once vanished with a great tumult, leaving behind them a most unpleasant fœtor and the bodies of three men who had been hanged. Perhaps if the clergyman-cure were faithfully tried upon the next fortune-hunting count with a large real estate in whiskers and imaginary one in Barataria, he also might vanish, leaving a strong smell of barber's-shop, and taking with him a body that will come to the gallows in due time. It were worth trying. Luther tells of a demon who served as *famulus* in a monastery, fetching beer for the monks, and always insisting on honest measure for his money. There is one case on record where the Devil appealed to the courts for protection in his rights. A monk, going to visit his mistress, fell dead as he was passing a bridge. The good and bad angel came to litigation about his soul. The case was referred by agreement to Richard, Duke of Normandy, who decided that the monk's body should be carried back to the bridge, and his soul restored to it by the claimants. If he persevered in keeping his assignation, the Devil was to have him; if not, then the Angel. The monk, thus put upon his guard, turns back and saves his soul, such as it was.[1] Perhaps the most impudent thing the Devil ever did was to open a school of magic in Toledo. The ceremony of graduation in this institution was peculiar. The senior class had all to run through a narrow cavern, and the venerable president was entitled to the hindmost, if he could catch him. Sometimes it happened that he only caught his shadow, and in that case the man who had been nimble enough to do what Goethe pronounces impossible became

[1] This story seems mediæval and Gothic enough, but is hardly more so than bringing the case of the Furies *v.* Orestes before the Areopagus, and putting Apollo in the witness-box, as Æschylus has done. The classics, to be sure, are always so classic! In the *Eumenides*, Apollo takes the place of the good angel. And why not? For though a demon, and a lying one, he has crept into the calendar under his other name of Helios as St. Helias. Could any of his oracles have foretold this?

the most profound magician of his year. Hence our proverb of *the Devil take the hindmost,* and Chamisso's story of Peter Schlemihl.

There is no end of such stories. They were repeated and believed by the gravest and wisest men down to the end of the sixteenth century; they were received undoubtingly by the great majority down to the end of the seventeenth. The Devil was an easy way of accounting for what was beyond men's comprehension. He was the simple and satisfactory answer to all the conundrums of Nature. And what the Devil had not time to bestow his personal attention upon, the witch was always ready to do for him. Was a doctor at a loss about a case? How could he save his credit more cheaply than by pronouncing it witchcraft, and turning it over to the parson to be exorcised? Did a man's cow die suddenly, or his horse fall lame? Witchcraft! Did one of those writers of controversial quartos, heavy as the stone of Diomed, feel a pain in the small of his back? Witchcraft! Unhappily there were always ugly old women; and if you crossed them in any way, or did them a wrong, they were given to scolding or banning. If, within a year or two after, anything should happen to you or yours, why, of course, old Mother Bombie or Goody Blake must be at the bottom of it. For it was perfectly well known that there were witches (does not God's law say expressly, "Suffer not a *witch* to live"?), and that they could cast a spell by the mere glance of their eyes, could cause you to pine away by melting a waxen image, could give you a pain wherever they liked by sticking pins into the same, could bring sickness into your house or into your barn by hiding a Devil's powder under the threshold; and who knows what else? Worst of all, they could send a demon into your body, who would cause you to vomit pins, hair, pebbles, knives—indeed, almost anything short of a cathedral—without any fault of yours, utter through you the most impertinent things *verbi ministro,* and, in short, make you the most important personage in the parish for the time being. Meanwhile, you were an object of condolence and contribution to the whole neighbourhood. What wonder if a lazy apprentice or servant-maid (Bekker gives several instances of the kind detected by him) should prefer being possessed, with its attendant perquisites, to drudging from morning till night? And to any one who has

observed how common a thing in certain states of mind self-connivance is, and how near it is to self-deception, it will not be surprising that some were, to all intents and purposes, really possessed. Who has never felt an almost irresistible temptation, and seemingly not self-originated, to let himself go? to let his mind gallop and kick and curvet and roll like a horse turned loose? in short, as we Yankees say, "to speak out in meeting?" Who never had it suggested to him by the fiend to break in at a funeral with a real character of the deceased, instead of that Mrs. Grundyfied view of him which the clergyman is so painfully elaborating in his prayer? Remove the pendulum of conventional routine, and the mental machinery runs on with a whir that gives a delightful excitement to sluggish temperaments, and is, perhaps, the natural relief of highly nervous organisations. The tyrant Will is dethroned, and the sceptre snatched by his frolic sister Whim. This state of things, if continued, must become either insanity or imposture. But who can say precisely where consciousness ceases and a kind of automatic movement begins, the result of over-excitement? The subjects of these strange disturbances have been almost always young women or girls at a critical period of their development. Many of the most remarkable cases have occurred in convents, and both there and elsewhere, as in other kinds of temporary derangement, have proved contagious. Sometimes, as in the affair of the nuns of London, there seems every reason to suspect a conspiracy; but I am not quite ready to say that Grandier was the only victim, and that some of the energumens were not unconscious tools in the hands of priestcraft and revenge. One thing is certain: that in the dioceses of humanely sceptical prelates the cases of possession were sporadic only, and either cured, or at least hindered from becoming epidemic, by episcopal mandate. Cardinal Mazarin, when Papal vice-legate at Avignon, made an end of the trade of exorcism within his government.

But scepticism, down to the beginning of the eighteenth century, was the exception. Undoubting and often fanatical belief was the rule. It is easy enough to be astonished at it, still easier to misapprehend it. How could sane men have been deceived by such nursery-tales? Still more, how could they have suffered themselves, on what seems to us such puerile evidence, to consent to such atrocious cruelties, nay,

to urge them on? As to the belief, we should remember that the human mind, when it sails by *dead reckoning*, without the possibility of a fresh observation, perhaps without the instruments necessary to take one, will sometimes bring up in very strange latitudes. Do we of the nineteenth century, then, always strike out boldly into the unlandmarked deep of speculation and shape our courses by the stars, or do we not sometimes con our voyage by what seem to us the firm and familiar headlands of truth, planted by God himself, but which may, after all, be no more than an insubstantial mockery of cloud or airy juggle of mirage? The refraction of our own atmosphere has by no means made an end of its tricks with the appearances of things in our little world of thought. The men of that day believed what they saw, or, as our generation would put it, what they *thought* they saw. Very good. The vast majority of men believe, and always will believe, on the same terms. When one comes along who can partly distinguish the thing seen from that travesty or distortion of it which the thousand disturbing influences within him and without him would *make* him see, we call him a great philosopher. All our intellectual charts are engraved according to his observations, and we steer contentedly by them till some man whose brain rests on a still more unmovable basis corrects them still further by eliminating what his predecessor thought *he* saw. We must account for many former aberrations in the moral world by the presence of more or less nebulous bodies of a certain gravity which modified the actual position of truth in its relation to the mind, and which, if they have now vanished, have made way, perhaps, for others whose influence will in like manner be allowed for by posterity in their estimate of us. In matters of faith, astrology has by no means yet given place to astronomy, nor alchemy become chemistry, which knows what to seek for and how to find it. In the days of witchcraft all science was still in the condition of *May-be ;* it is only just bringing itself to find a higher satisfaction in the imperturbable *Must-be* of law. We should remember that what we call *natural* may have a very different meaning for one generation from that which it has for another. The boundary between the " other " world and this ran till very lately, and at some points runs still, through a vast tract of unexplored border-land of very uncertain tenure.

Even now the territory which Reason holds firmly as Lord Warden of the marches during daylight, is subject to sudden raids of Imagination by night. But physical darkness is not the only one that lends opportunity to such incursions; and in midsummer 1692, when Ebenezer Bapson, looking out of the fort at Gloucester in broad day, saw shapes of men, sometimes in blue coats like Indians, sometimes in white waistcoats like Frenchmen, it seemed *more* natural to most men that they should be spectres than men of flesh and blood. Granting the assumed premises, as nearly every one did, the syllogism was perfect.

So much for the apparent reasonableness of the belief, since every man's logic is satisfied with a legitimate deduction from his own postulates. Causes for the cruelty to which the belief led are not further to seek. Toward no crime have men shown themselves so cold-bloodedly cruel as in punishing difference of belief, and the first systematic persecutions for witchcraft began with the inquisitors in the South of France in the thirteenth century. It was then and there that the charge of sexual uncleanness with demons was first devised. Persecuted heretics would naturally meet in darkness and secret, and it was easy to blacken such meetings with the accusation of deeds so foul as to shun the light of day and the eyes of men. They met to renounce God and worship the Devil. But this was not enough. To excite popular hatred and keep it fiercely alive, fear must be mingled with it; and this end was reached by making the heretic also a sorcerer, who, by the Devil's help, could and would work all manner of fiendish mischief. When by this means the belief in a league between witch and demon had become firmly established, witchcraft grew into a well-defined crime, hateful enough in itself to furnish pastime for the torturer and food for the fagot. In the fifteenth century, witches were burned by thousands, and it may well be doubted if all paganism together was ever guilty of so many human sacrifices in the same space of time. In the sixteenth, these holocausts were appealed to as conclusive evidence of the reality of the crime, terror was again aroused, the more vindictive that its sources were so vague and intangible, and cruelty was the natural consequence. Nothing but an abject panic, in which the whole use of reason, except as a mill to grind out syllogisms, was altogether lost, will account

for some chapters in Bodin's *Démonomanie*. Men were surrounded by a for ever-renewed conspiracy whose ramifications they could not trace, though they might now and then lay hold on one of its associates. Protestant and Catholic might agree in nothing else, but they were unanimous in their dread of this invisible enemy. If fright could turn civilised Englishmen into savage Iroquois during the imagined negro plots of New York in 1741 and of Jamaica in 1865, if the same invisible omnipresence of Fenianism shall be able to work the same miracle, as it perhaps will, next year in England itself, why need we be astonished that the blows should have fallen upon many an innocent head when men were striking wildly in self-defence, as they supposed, against the unindictable Powers of Darkness, against a plot which could be carried on by human agents, but with invisible accessories and by supernatural means? In the seventeenth century an element was added which pretty well supplied the place of heresy as a sharpener of hatred and an awakener of indefinable suspicion. Scepticism had been born into the world, almost more hateful than heresy, because it had the manners of good society and contented itself with a smile, a shrug, an almost imperceptible lift of the eyebrow—a kind of reasoning especially exasperating to disputants of the old school, who still cared about victory, even when they did not about the principles involved in the debate.

The Puritan emigration to New England took place at a time when the belief in diabolic agency had been hardly called in question, much less shaken. The early adventurers brought it with them to a country in every way fitted, not only to keep it alive, but to feed it into greater vigour. The solitude of the wilderness (and solitude alone, by disfurnishing the brain of its commonplace associations, makes it an apt theatre for the delusions of imagination), the nightly forest noises, the glimpse, perhaps, through the leaves, of a painted savage face, uncertain whether of red man or Devil, but more likely of the latter, above all, that measureless mystery of the unknown and conjectural stretching away illimitable on all sides and vexing the mind, somewhat as physical darkness does, with intimation and misgiving—under all these influences, whatever seeds of superstition had in any way got over from the Old World

would find an only too congenial soil in the New. The leaders of that emigration believed and taught that demons loved to dwell in waste and wooded places, that the Indians did homage to the bodily presence of the Devil, and that he was especially enraged against those who had planted an outpost of the true faith upon this continent hitherto all his own. In the third generation of the settlement, in proportion as living faith decayed, the clergy insisted all the more strongly on the traditions of the elders, and as they all placed the sources of goodness and religion in some inaccessible Other World rather than in the soul of man himself, they clung to every shred of the supernatural as proof of the existence of that Other World, and of its interest in the affairs of this. They had the countenance of all the great theologians, Catholic as well as Protestant, of the leaders of the Reformation, and in their own day of such men as More and Glanvil and Baxter.[1] If to all these causes, more or less operative in 1692, we add the harassing excitement of an Indian war (urged on by Satan in his hatred of the Churches), with its daily and nightly apprehensions and alarms, we shall be less astonished that the delusion in Salem Village rose so high than that it subsided so soon.

I have already said that it was religious antipathy or clerical interest that first made heresy and witchcraft identical, and cast them into the same expiatory fire. The invention was a Catholic one, but it is plain that Protestants soon learned its value, and were not slow in making it a plague to the inventor. It was not till after the Reformation that there was any systematic hunting out of witches in England. Then, no doubt, the innocent charms and rhyming prayers of the old religion were regarded as incantations, and twisted into evidence against miserable beldames who mumbled over in their dotage what they had learned at their mother's knee.

[1] Mr. Lecky, in his admirable chapter on Witchcraft, gives a little more credit to the enlightenment of the Church of England in this matter than it would seem fairly to deserve. More and Glanvil were faithful sons of the Church; and if the persecution of witches was especially rife during the ascendancy of the Puritans, it was because they happened to be in power while there was a reaction against Sadduceeism. All the convictions were under the statute of James I., who was no Puritan. After the Restoration, the reaction was the other way, and Hobbism became the fashion. It is more philosophical to say that the age believes this and that, than that the particular men who live in it do so.

It is plain, at least, that this is one of Agnes Simpson's crimes.

But as respects the frivolity of the proof adduced, there was nothing to choose between Catholic and Protestant. Out of civil and canon law a net was woven through whose meshes there was no escape, and into it the victims were driven by popular clamour. Suspicion of witchcraft was justified by general report, by the ill-looks of the suspected, by being silent when accused, by her mother's having been a witch, by flight, by exclaiming when arrested, *I am lost!* by a habit of using imprecations, by the evidence of two witnesses, by the accusation of a man on his death-bed, by a habit of being away from home at night, by fifty other things equally grave. Anybody might be an accuser—a personal enemy, an infamous person, a child, parent, brother, or sister. Once accused, the culprit was not to be allowed to touch the ground on the way to prison, was not to be left alone there lest she should have interviews with the Devil and get from him the means of being insensible under torture, was to be stripped and shaved in order to prevent her concealing some charm, or to facilitate the finding of witch-marks. Her right thumb tied to her left great-toe, and *vice versâ*, she was thrown into the water. If she floated, she was a witch; if she sank and was drowned, she was lucky. This trial, as old as the days of Pliny the Elder, was gone out of fashion, the author of *De Lamiis* assures us, in his day, everywhere but in Westphalia. "On half-proof or strong presumption," says Bodin, "the judge may proceed to torture." If the witch did not shed tears under the rack, it was almost conclusive of guilt. On this topic of torture he grows eloquent. The rack does very well, but to thrust splinters between the nails and flesh of hands and feet "is the most excellent gehenna of all, and practised in Turkey." That of Florence, where they seat the criminal in a hanging chair so contrived that if he drop asleep it overturns and leaves him hanging by a rope which wrenches his arms backwards, is perhaps even better, "for the limbs are not broken, and without trouble or labour one gets out the truth." It is well in carrying the accused to the chamber of torture to cause some in the next room to shriek fearfully as if on the rack, that they may be terrified into confession. It is proper to tell them that their accomplices have confessed and

accused them (" though they have done no such thing ") that they may do the same out of revenge. The judge may also with a good conscience lie to the prisoner, and tell her that if she admit her guilt she may be pardoned. This is Bodin's opinion, but Walburger, writing a century later, concludes that the judge may go to any extent *citra mendacium*, this side of lying. He may tell the witch that he will be favourable, meaning to the Commonwealth; that he will see that she has a new house built for her, that is, a wooden one to burn her in; that her confession will be most useful in saving her life, to wit, her life eternal. There seems little difference between the German's white lies and the Frenchman's black ones. As to punishment, Bodin is fierce for burning. Though a Protestant, he quotes with evident satisfaction a decision of the magistrates that one " who had eaten flesh on a Friday should be burned alive unless he repented, and if he repented, yet he was hanged out of compassion." A child under twelve who will not confess meeting with the Devil should be put to death if convicted of the fact, though Bodin allows that Satan made no express compact with those who had not arrived at puberty. This he learned from the examination of Jeanne Harvillier, who deposed, " that, though her mother dedicated her to Satan so soon as she was born, yet she was not married to him, nor did he demand that, or her renunciation of God, till she had attained the age of twelve."

There is no more painful reading than this, except the trials of the witches themselves. These awaken, by turns, pity, indignation, disgust, and dread—dread at the thought of what the human mind may be brought to believe not only probable, but proven. But it is well to be put upon our guard by lessons of this kind, for the wisest man is in some respects little better than a madman in a strait-waistcoat of habit, public opinion, prudence, or the like. Scepticism began at length to make itself felt, but it spread slowly, and was shy of proclaiming itself. The orthodox party was not backward to charge with sorcery whoever doubted their facts or pitied their victims. Bodin says that it is good cause of suspicion against a judge if he turn the matter into ridicule, or incline toward mercy. The mob, as it always is, was orthodox. It was dangerous to doubt; it might be fatal to deny. In 1453 Guillaume de Lure was burned at Poitiers

on his own confession of a compact with Satan, by which he agreed "to preach and did preach that everything told of sorcerers was mere fable, and that it was cruelly done to condemn them to death." The contract was found among his papers signed "with the Devil's own claw," as Howell says speaking of a similar case. It is not to be wondered at that the earlier doubters were cautious. There was literally a reign of terror, and during such *régimes* men are commonly found more eager to be informers and accusers than counsel for the defence. Peter of Abano is reckoned among the earliest unbelievers who declared himself openly.[1] Chaucer was certainly a sceptic, as appears by the opening of the Wife of Bath's Tale. Wierus, a German physician, was the first to undertake (1563) a refutation of the facts and assumptions on which the prosecutions for witchcraft were based. His explanation of the phenomena is mainly physiological. Mr. Lecky hardly states his position correctly, in saying, "that he never dreamed of restricting the sphere of the supernatural." Wierus went as far as he dared. No one can read his book without feeling that he insinuates much more than he positively affirms or denies. He would have weakened his cause if he had seemed to disbelieve in demoniacal possession, since that had the supposed warrant of Scripture; but it may be questioned whether he uses the words *Satan* and *Demon* in any other way than that in which many people still use the word *Nature*. He was forced to accept certain premises of his opponents by the line of his argument. When he recites incredible stories without comment, it is not that he believes them, but that he thinks their absurdity obvious. That he wrote under a certain restraint is plain from the Colophon of his book, where he says: "Nihil autem hic ita assertum volo, quod æquiori judicio Catholicæ Christi Ecclesiæ non omnino submittam, palinodia mox spontanea emendaturus, si erroris alicubi convincar." A great deal of latent and timid scepticism seems to have been brought to the surface by his work. Many eminent persons wrote to him in gratitude and com-

[1] I have no means of ascertaining whether he did or not. He was more probably charged with it by the inquisitors. Mr. Lecky seems to write of him only upon hearsay, for he calls him Peter "of Opono," apparently translating a French translation of the Latin "Aponus." The only book attributed to him that I have ever seen is itself a kind of manual of magic.

mendation. In the Preface to his shorter treatise *De Lamiis* (which is a mere abridgment), he thanks God that his labours had "in many places caused the cruelty against innocent blood to slacken," and that "some more distinguished judges treat more mildly and even absolve from capital punishment the wretched old women branded with the odious name of witches by the populace." In the *Pseudomonarchia Dæmonum*, he gives a kind of census of the diabolic kingdom,[1] but evidently with secret intention of making the whole thing ridiculous, or it would not have so stirred the bile of Bodin. Wierus was saluted by many contemporaries as a Hercules who destroyed monsters, and himself not immodestly claimed the civic wreath for having saved the lives of fellow-citizens. Posterity should not forget a man who really did an honest life's work for humanity and the liberation of thought. From one of the letters appended to his book we learn that Jacobus Savagius, a physician of Antwerp, had twenty years before written a treatise with the same design, but confining himself to the medical argument exclusively. He was, however, prevented from publishing it by death. It is pleasant to learn from Bodin that Alciato, the famous lawyer and emblematist, was one of those who "laughed and made others laugh at the evidence relied on at the trials, insisting that witchcraft was a thing impossible and fabulous, and so softened the hearts of judges (in spite of the fact that an inquisitor had caused to burn more than a hundred sorcerers in Piedmont), that all the accused escaped." In England, Reginald Scot was the first to enter the lists in behalf of those who had no champion. His book, published in 1584, is full of manly sense and spirit; above all, of a tender humanity that gives it a warmth which we miss in every other written on the same side. In the dedication to Sir Roger Manwood he says: "I renounce all protection and despise all friendship that might serve towards the suppressing or supplanting of truth." To his kinsman, Sir Thomas Scot, he writes: "My greatest adversaries are *young ignorance* and *old custom;* for what folly soever tract of time hath fostered, it is so superstitiously pursued of some, as though no error could be acquainted with custom." And

[1] "With the names and surnames," says Bodin, indignantly, "of seventy-two princes, and of seven million four hundred and five thousand nine hundred and twenty-six devils, *errors excepted.*"

in his Preface he thus states his motives: "God that knoweth my heart is witness, and you that read my book shall see, that my drift and purpose in this enterprise tendeth only to these respects. First, that the glory and power of God be not so abridged and abased as to be thrust into the hand or lip of a lewd old woman, whereby the work of the Creator should be attributed to the power of a creature. Secondly, that the religion of the Gospel may be seen to stand without such peevish trumpery. Thirdly, that lawful favour and Christian compassion be rather used towards these poor souls than rigour and extremity. Because they which are commonly accused of witchcraft are the least sufficient of all other persons to speak for themselves, as having the most base and simple education of all others, the extremity of their age giving them leave to dote, their poverty to beg, their wrongs to chide and threaten (as being void of any other way of revenge), their humour melancholical to be full of imaginations, from whence chiefly proceedeth the vanity of their confessions. . . . And for so much as the mighty help themselves together, and the poor widow's cry, though it reach to Heaven, is scarce heard here upon earth, I thought good (according to my poor ability) to make intercession that some part of common rigour and some points of hasty judgment may be advised upon." . . . The case is nowhere put with more point, or urged with more sense and eloquence, than by Scot, whose book contains also more curious matter, in the way of charms, incantations, exorcisms, and feats of legerdemain, than any other of the kind.

Other books followed on the same side, of which Bekker's, published about a century later, was the most important. It is well reasoned, learned, and tedious to a masterly degree. But though the belief in witchcraft might be shaken, it still had the advantage of being on the whole orthodox and respectable. Wise men, as usual, insisted on regarding superstition as of one substance with faith, and objected to any scouring of the shield of religion, lest, like that of Cornelius Scriblerus, it should suddenly turn out to be nothing more than "a paltry old sconce with the nozzle off." The Devil continued to be the only recognised Minister Resident of God upon earth. When we remember that one man's accusation on his death-bed was enough to constitute grave presumption of witchcraft, it might seem singular that dying testimonies

were so long of no avail against the common credulity. But it should be remembered that men are mentally no less than corporeally gregarious, and that public opinion, the fetish even of the nineteenth century, makes men, whether for good or ill, into a mob, which either hurries the individual judgment along with it, or runs over and tramples it into insensibility. Those who are so fortunate as to occupy the philosophical position of spectators *ab extra* are very few in any generation.

There were exceptions, it is true, but the old cruelties went on. In 1610 a case came before the tribunal of the *Tourelle*, and when the counsel for the accused argued at some length that sorcery was ineffectual, and that the Devil could not destroy life, President Séguier told him that he might spare his breath, since the court had long been convinced on those points. And yet two years later the grand-vicars of the Bishop of Beauvais solemnly summoned Beelzebuth, Satan, Motelu, and Briffaut, with the four legions under their charge, to appear and sign an agreement never again to enter the bodies of reasonable or other creatures, under pain of excommunication! If they refused, they were to be given over to "the power of hell to be tormented and tortured more than was customary, three thousand years after the judgment." Under this proclamation they all came in, like reconstructed rebels, and signed whatever document was put before them. Toward the middle of the seventeenth century, the safe thing was still to believe, or at any rate to profess belief. Sir Thomas Browne, though he had written an exposure of *Vulgar Errors*, testified in court to his faith in the possibility of witchcraft. Sir Kenelm Digby, in his *Observations on the Religio Medici*, takes, perhaps, as advanced ground as any, when he says: "Neither do I deny there are witches; I only reserve my assent till I meet with stronger motives to carry it." The position of even enlightened men of the world in that age might be called semi-sceptical. La Bruyère, no doubt, expresses the average of opinion: "Que penser de la magie et du sortilége? La théorie en est obscurcie, les principes vagues, incertains, et qui approchent du visionnaire; mais il y a des faits embarrassants, affirmés par des hommes graves qui les ont vus; les admettre tous, ou les nier tous, paraît un égal inconvénient, et j'ose dire qu'en cela comme en toutes les choses extraordinaires et qui

sortent des communes règles, il y a un parti à trouver entre les âmes crédules et les esprits forts."[1] Montaigne, to be sure, had long before declared his entire disbelief, and yet the Parliament of Bordeaux, his own city, condemned a man to be burned as a *noüeur d'aiguillettes* so lately as 1718. Indeed, it was not, says Maury, till the first quarter of the eighteenth century that one might safely publish his incredulity in France. In Scotland, witches were burned for the last time in 1722. Garinet cites the case of a girl near Amiens possessed by three demons—Mimi, Zozo, and Crapoulet—in 1816.

The two beautiful volumes of Mr. Upham are, so far as I know, unique in their kind. It is, in some respects, a clinical lecture on human nature, as well as on the special epidemical disease under which the patient is labouring. He has written not merely a history of the so-called Salem Witchcraft, but has made it intelligible by a minute account of the place where the delusion took its rise, the persons concerned in it, whether as actors or sufferers, and the circumstances which led to it. By deeds, wills, and the records of courts and churches, by plans, maps, and drawings, he has recreated Salem Village as it was two hundred years ago, so that we seem well-nigh to talk with its people and walk over its fields, or through its cart-tracks and bridle-roads. We are made partners in parish and village feuds, we share in the chimney-corner gossip, and learn for the first time how many mean and merely human motives, whether consciously or unconsciously, gave impulse and intensity to the passions of the actors in that memorable tragedy which dealt the deathblow in this country to the belief in Satanic compacts. Mr. Upham's minute details, which give us something like a photographic picture of the indoor and outdoor scenery that surrounded the events he narrates, help us materially to understand their origin and the course they inevitably took. In this respect his book is original and full of new interest. To know the kind of life these people led, the kind of place they dwelt in, and the tenor of their thought, makes much real to us that was conjectural before. The influences of outward nature, of remoteness from the main highways of the world's thought, of seclusion, as the foster-mother of traditionary beliefs, of a hard life and unwholesome diet in

[1] Cited by Maury, p. 221, note 4.

exciting or obscuring the brain through the nerves and stomach, have been hitherto commonly overlooked in accounting for the phenomena of witchcraft. The great persecutions for this imaginary crime have always taken place in lonely places, among the poor, the ignorant, and, above all, the ill-fed.

One of the best things in Mr. Upham's book is the portrait of Parris, the minister of Salem Village, in whose household the children who, under the assumed possession of evil spirits, became accusers and witnesses, began their tricks. He is shown to us pedantic and something of a martinet in church discipline and ceremony, somewhat inclined to magnify his office, fond of controversy as he was skilful and rather unscrupulous in the conduct of it, and glad of any occasion to make himself prominent. Was he the unconscious agent of his own superstition, or did he take advantage of the superstition of others for purposes of his own? The question is not an easy one to answer. Men will sacrifice everything, sometimes even themselves, to their pride of logic and their love of victory. Bodin loses sight of humanity altogether in his eagerness to make out his case, and displays his learning in the canon and civil law. He does not scruple to exaggerate, to misquote, to charge his antagonists with atheism, sorcery, and insidious designs against religion and society, that he may persuade the jury of Europe to bring in a verdict of guilty.[1] Yet there is a reason to doubt the sincerity of his belief. Was Parris equally sincere? On the whole, I think it likely that he was. But if we acquit Parris, what shall we say of the demoniacal girls? The probability seems to be that those who began in harmless deceit found themselves at length involved so deeply, that dread of shame and punishment drove them to an extremity where their only choice was between sacrificing themselves, or others to save themselves. It is not unlikely that some of the younger girls were so far carried along by imitation or imaginative sympathy as in some degree to "credit their own lie." Any one who has watched or made experiments in animal magnetism knows how easy it is to persuade young women of nervous temperaments that they are doing that by the will of another which they really do by an obscure

[1] There is a kind of compensation in the fact that he himself lived to be accused of sorcery and Judaism.

volition of their own, under the influence of an imagination adroitly guided by the magnetiser. The marvellous is so fascinating, that nine persons in ten, if once persuaded that a thing is possible, are eager to believe it probable, and at last cunning in convincing themselves that it is proven. But it is impossible to believe that the possessed girls in this case did not know how the pins they vomited got into their mouths. Mr. Upham has shown, in the case of Anne Putnam, junior, an hereditary tendency to hallucination, if not insanity. One of her uncles had seen the Devil by broad daylight in the novel disguise of a blue boar, in which shape, as a tavern sign, he had doubtless proved more seductive than in his more ordinary transfigurations. A great deal of light is let in upon the question of whether there was deliberate imposture or no, by the narrative of Rev. Mr. Threll of Medford, written in 1728, which gives us all the particulars of a case of pretended possession in Littleton, eight years before. The eldest of three sisters began the game, and found herself before long obliged to take the next in age into her confidence. By and by the youngest, finding her sisters pitied and caressed on account of their supposed sufferings while she was neglected, began to play off the same tricks. The usual phenomena followed. They were convulsed, they fell into swoons, they were pinched and bruised, they were found in the water, on the top of a tree or of the barn. To these places they said they were conveyed through the air, and there were those who had seen them flying, which shows how strong is the impulse which prompts men to conspire with their own delusion, where the marvellous is concerned. The girls did whatever they had heard or read that was common in such cases. They even accused a respectable neighbour as the cause of their torments. There were some doubters, but "so far as I can learn," says Turell, "the greater number believed and said they were under the evil hand, or possessed by Satan." But the most interesting fact of all is supplied by the confession of the elder sister, made eight years later under stress of remorse. Having once begun, they found returning more tedious than giving o'er. To keep up their cheat made life a burden to them, but they could not stop. Thirty years earlier, their juggling might have proved as disastrous as that at Salem Village. There, parish and boundary feuds had set enmity between neigh-

bours, and the girls, called on to say who troubled them, cried out upon those whom they had been wont to hear called by hard names at home. They probably had no notion what a frightful ending their comedy was to have; but at any rate they were powerless, for the reins had passed out of their hands into the sterner grasp of minister and magistrate. They were dragged deeper and deeper, as men always are by their own lie.

The proceedings at the Salem trials are sometimes spoken of as if they were exceptionally cruel. But, in fact, if compared with others of the same kind, they were exceptionally humane. At a time when Baxter could tell with satisfaction of a "*reading* parson" eighty years old, who, after being kept awake five days and nights, confessed his dealings with the Devil, it is rather wonderful that no mode of torture other than mental was tried at Salem. Nor were the magistrates more besotted or unfair than usual in dealing with the evidence. Now and then, it is true, a man more sceptical or intelligent than common had exposed some pretended demoniac. The Bishop of Orléans, in 1598, read aloud to Martha Brossier the story of the Ephesian Widow, and the girl, hearing Latin, and taking it for Scripture, went forthwith into convulsions. He found also that the Devil who possessed her could not distinguish holy from profane water. But that there were deceptions did not shake the general belief in the reality of possession. The proof in such cases could not and ought not to be subjected to the ordinary tests. "If many natural things," says Bodin, "are incredible and some of them incomprehensible, *à fortiori* the power of supernatural intelligences and the doings of spirits are incomprehensible. But error has risen to its height in this, that those who have denied the power of spirits and the doings of sorcerers have wished to dispute physically concerning supernatural or metaphysical things, which is a notable incongruity." That the girls were really possessed, seemed to Stoughton and his colleagues the most rational theory—a theory in harmony with the rest of their creed, and sustained by the unanimous consent of pious men as well as the evidence of that most cunning and least suspected of all sorcerers, the Past—and how confront or cross-examine invisible witnesses, especially witnesses whom it was a kind of impiety to doubt? Evidence that would have been

convincing in ordinary cases was of no weight against the general prepossession. In 1659 the house of a man in Brightling, Sussex, was troubled by a demon, who set it on fire at various times, and was continually throwing things about. The clergy of the neighbourhood held a day of fasting and prayer in consequence. A maid-servant was afterwards detected as the cause of the missiles. But this did not in the least stagger Mr. Bennett, minister of the parish, who merely says, "There was a *seeming blur* cast, though not on the whole, yet upon some part of it, for their servant-girl was at last found throwing some things," and goes off into a eulogium on the "efficacy of prayer."

In one respect, to which Mr. Upham first gives the importance it deserves, the Salem trials were distinguished from all others. Though some of the accused had been terrified into confession, yet not one persevered in it, but all died protesting their innocence, and with unshaken constancy, though an acknowledgment of guilt would have saved the lives of all. This martyr proof of the efficacy of Puritanism in the character and conscience may be allowed to outweigh a great many sneers at Puritan fanaticism. It is at least a testimony to the courage and constancy which a profound religious sentiment had made common among the people of whom these sufferers were average representatives. The accused also were not, as was commonly the case, abandoned by their friends. In all the trials of this kind there is nothing so pathetic as the picture of Jonathan Cary holding up the weary arms of his wife during her trial, and wiping away the sweat from her brow and the tears from her face. Another remarkable fact is this, that while in other countries the delusion was extinguished by the incredulity of the upper classes and the interference of authority, here the reaction took place among the people themselves, and here only was an attempt made at some legislative restitution, however inadequate. Mr. Upham's sincere and honest narrative, while it never condescends to a formal plea, is the best vindication possible of a community which was itself the greatest sufferer by the persecution which its credulity engendered.

If any lesson may be drawn from the tragical and too often disgustful history of witchcraft, it is not one of exultation at our superior enlightenment or shame at the shortcomings of

the human intellect. It is rather one of charity and self-distrust. When we see what inhuman absurdities men in other respects wise and good have clung to as the corner-stone of their faith in immortality and a divine ordering of the world, may we not suspect that those who now maintain political or other doctrines which seem to us as barbarous and unenlightened, may be, for all that, in the main as virtuous and clear-sighted as ourselves? While we maintain our own side with an honest ardour of conviction, let us not forget to allow for mortal incompetence in the other. And if there are men who regret the Good Old Times, without too clear a notion of what they were, they should at least be thankful that we are rid of that misguided energy of faith which justified conscience in making men unrelentingly cruel. Even Mr. Lecky softens a little at the thought of so many innocent and beautiful beliefs of which a growing scepticism has robbed us in the decay of supernaturalism. But we need not despair; for, after all, scepticism is first cousin of credulity, and we are not surprised to see the tough doubter Montaigne hanging up his offerings in the shrine of our Lady of Loreto. Scepticism commonly takes up the room left by defect of imagination, and is the very quality of mind most likely to seek for sensual proof of suprasensual things. If one came from the dead, it could not believe; and yet it longs for such a witness, and will put up with a very dubious one. So long as night is left and the helplessness of dream, the wonderful will not cease from among men. While we are the solitary prisoners of darkness, the witch seats herself at the loom of thought, and weaves strange figures into the web that looks so familiar and ordinary in the dry light of every-day. Just as we are flattering ourselves that the old spirit of sorcery is laid, behold the tables are tipping and the floors drumming all over Christendom. The faculty of wonder is not defunct, but is only getting more and more emancipated from the unnatural service of terror, and restored to its proper function as a minister of delight. A higher mode of belief is the best exorciser, because it makes the spiritual at one with the actual world, instead of hostile or at best alien. It has been the grossly material interpretations of spiritual doctrine that have given occasion to the two extremes of superstition and unbelief. While the resurrection of the body has been insisted on, that resurrection

from the body which is the privilege of all has been forgotten. Superstition in its baneful form was largely due to the enforcement by the Church of arguments that involved a *petitio principii*, for it is the miserable necessity of all false logic to accept of very ignoble allies. Fear became at length its chief expedient for the maintenance of its power; and as there is a beneficent necessity laid upon a majority of mankind to sustain and perpetuate the order of things they are born into, and to make all new ideas manfully prove their right, first, to be at all, and then to be heard, many even superior minds dreaded the tearing away of vicious accretions as dangerous to the whole edifice of religion and society. But if this old ghost be fading away in what we regard as the dawn of a better day, we may console ourselves by thinking that perhaps, after all, we are not so *much* wiser than our ancestors. The rappings, the trance mediums, the visions of hands without bodies, the sounding of musical instruments without visible fingers, the miraculous inscriptions on the naked flesh, the enlivenment of furniture—we have invented none of them, they are all heirlooms. There is surely room for yet another schoolmaster, when a score of seers advertise themselves in Boston newspapers. And if the metaphysicians can never rest till they have taken their watch to pieces and have arrived at a happy positivism as to its structure, though at the risk of bringing it to a no-go, we may be sure that the majority will always take more satisfaction in seeing its hands mysteriously move on, even if they should err a little as to the precise time of day established by the astronomical observatories.

SHAKESPEARE ONCE MORE

It may be doubted whether any language be rich enough to maintain more than one truly great poet—and whether there be more than one period, and that very short, in the life of a language, when such a phenomenon as a great poet is possible. It may be reckoned one of the rarest pieces of good luck that ever fell to the share of a race, that (as was true of Shakespeare) its most rhythmic genius, its acutest intellect, its profoundest imagination, and its healthiest understanding should have been combined in one man, and that he should have arrived at the full development of his powers at the moment when the material in which he was to work—that wonderful composite called English, the best result of the confusion of tongues—was in its freshest perfection. The English-speaking nations should build a monument to the misguided enthusiasts of the Plain of Shinar; for, as the mixture of many bloods seems to have made them the most vigorous of modern races, so has the mingling of divers speeches given them a language which is perhaps the noblest vehicle of poetic thought that ever existed.

Had Shakespeare been born fifty years earlier, he would have been cramped by a book-language not yet flexible enough for the demands of rhythmic emotion, not yet sufficiently popularised for the natural and familiar expression of supreme thought, not yet so rich in metaphysical phrase as to render possible that ideal representation of the great passions which is the aim and end of Art, not yet subdued by practice and general consent to a definiteness of accentuation essential to ease and congruity of metrical arrangement. Had he been born fifty years later, his ripened manhood would have found itself in an England absorbed and angry with the solution of political and religious problems, from which his whole nature was averse, instead of in that Elizabethan social system, ordered and planetary in functions and degrees as the angelic hierarchy of the Areopagite, where his contemplative eye could crowd itself with various and

brilliant pictures, and whence his impartial brain—one lobe of which seems to have been Normanly refined and the other Saxonly sagacious—could draw its morals of courtly and worldly wisdom, its lessons of prudence and magnanimity. In estimating Shakespeare, it should never be forgotten, that, like Goethe, he was essentially observer and artist, and incapable of partisanship. The passions, actions, sentiments, whose character and results he delighted to watch and to reproduce, are those of man in society as it existed; and it no more occurred to him to question the right of that society to exist than to criticise the divine ordination of the seasons. His business was with men as they were, not with man as he ought to be—with the human soul as it is shaped or twisted into character by the complex experience of life, not in its abstract essence, as something to be saved or lost. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the centre of intellectual interest was rather in the other world than in this, rather in the region of thought and principle and conscience than in actual life. It was a generation in which the poet was, and felt himself, out of place. Sir Thomas Browne, our most imaginative mind since Shakespeare, found breathing-room, for a time, among the "*O altitudines!*" of religious speculation, but soon descended to occupy himself with the exactitudes of science. Jeremy Taylor, who half a century earlier would have been Fletcher's rival, compels his clipped fancy to the conventual discipline of prose (Maid Marian turned nun), and waters his poetic wine with doctrinal eloquence. Milton is saved from making total shipwreck of his large-utteranced genius on the desolate Noman's Land of a religious epic only by the lucky help of Satan and his colleagues, with whom, as foiled rebels and republicans, he cannot conceal his sympathy. As purely poet, Shakespeare would have come too late, had his lot fallen in that generation. In mind and temperament too exoteric for a mystic, his imagination could not have at once illustrated the influence of his epoch and escaped from it, like that of Browne; the equilibrium of his judgment, essential to him as an artist, but equally removed from propagandism, whether as enthusiast or logician, would have unfitted him for the pulpit; and his intellectual being was too sensitive to the wonder and beauty of outward life and Nature to have found satisfaction, as Milton's could (and perhaps only by

reason of his blindness), in a world peopled by purely imaginary figures. We might fancy him becoming a great statesman, but he lacked the social position which could have opened that career to him. What we mean when we say *Shakespeare*, is something inconceivable either during the reign of Henry the Eighth, or the Commonwealth, and which would have been impossible after the Restoration.

All favourable stars seem to have been in conjunction at his nativity. The Reformation had passed the period of its vinous fermentation, and its clarified results remained as an element of intellectual impulse and exhilaration; there were small signs yet of the acetous and putrefactive stages which were to follow in the victory and decline of Puritanism. Old forms of belief and worship still lingered, all the more touching to Fancy, perhaps, that they were homeless and attainted; the light of sceptic day was baffled by depths of forest where superstitious shapes still cowered, creatures of immemorial wonder, the raw material of Imagination. The invention of printing, without yet vulgarising letters, had made the thought and history of the entire past contemporaneous; while a crowd of translators put every man who could read in inspiring contact with the select souls of all the centuries. A new world was thus opened to intellectual adventure at the very time when the keel of Columbus had turned the first daring furrow of discovery in that unmeasured ocean which still girt the known earth with a beckoning horizon of hope and conjecture, which was still led by rivers that flowed down out of primeval silences, and which still washed the shores of Dreamland. Under a wise, cultivated, and firm-handed monarch also, the national feeling of England grew rapidly more homogeneous and intense, the rather as the womanhood of the sovereign stimulated a more chivalric loyalty — while the new religion, of which she was the defender, helped to make England morally, as it was geographically, insular to the continent of Europe.

If circumstances could ever make a great national poet, here were all the elements mingled at melting-heat in the alembic, and the lucky moment of projection was clearly come. If a great national poet could ever avail himself of circumstances, this was the occasion — and, fortunately, Shakespeare was equal to it. Above all, we may esteem it lucky that he found words ready to his use, original and

untarnished — types of thought whose sharp edges were unworn by repeated impressions. In reading Hakluyt's *Voyages*, we are almost startled now and then to find that even common sailors could not tell the story of their wanderings without rising to an almost Odyssean strain, and habitually used a diction that we should be glad to buy back from desuetude at any cost. Those who look upon language only as anatomists of its structure, or who regard it as only a means of conveying abstract truth from mind to mind, as if it were so many algebraic formulæ, are apt to overlook the fact that its being alive is all that gives it poetic value. We do not mean what is technically called a living language —the contrivance, hollow as a speaking-trumpet, by which breathing and moving bipeds, even now, sailing o'er life's solemn main, are enabled to hail each other and make known their mutual shortness of mental stores — but one that is still hot from the hearts and brains of a people, not hardened yet, but moltenly ductile to new shapes of sharp and clear relief in the moulds of new thought. So soon as a language has become literary, so soon as there is a gap between the speech of books and that of life, the language becomes, so far as poetry is concerned, almost as dead as Latin, and (as in writing Latin verses) a mind in itself essentially original becomes in the use of such a medium of utterance unconsciously reminiscential and reflective, lunar and not solar, in expression and even in thought. For words and thoughts have a much more intimate and genetic relation, one with the other, than most men have any notion of; and it is one thing to use our mother-tongue as if it belonged to us, and another to be the puppets of an overmastering vocabulary. "Ye know not," says Ascham, "what hurt ye do to Learning, that care not for Words, but for Matter, and so make a Divorce betwixt the Tongue and the Heart." *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana* is the Italian proverb; and that of the poets should be, *The tongue of the people in the mouth of the scholar*. I imply here no assent to the early theory, or, at any rate, practice, of Wordsworth, who confounded plebeian modes of thought with rustic forms of phrase, and then atoned for his blunder by absconding into a diction more Latinised than that of any poet of his century.

Shakespeare was doubly fortunate. Saxon by the father and Norman by the mother, he was a representative English-

man. A country boy, he learned first the rough and ready English of his rustic mates, who knew how to make nice verbs and adjectives courtesy to their needs. Going up to London, he acquired the *lingua aulica* precisely at the happiest moment, just as it was becoming, in the strictest sense of the word, *modern*—just as it had recruited itself, by fresh impressments from the Latin and Latinised languages, with new words to express the new ideas of an enlarging intelligence which printing and translation were fast making cosmopolitan—words which, in proportion to their novelty, and to the fact that the mother-tongue and the foreign had not yet wholly mingled, must have been used with a more exact appreciation of their meaning.[1] It was in London, and chiefly by means of the stage, that a thorough amalgamation of the Saxon, Norman, and scholarly elements of English was brought about. Already, Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesy*, declares that the practice of the capital and the country within sixty miles of it was the standard of correct diction, the *jus et norma loquendi*. Already Spenser had almost re-created English poetry—and it is interesting to observe, that, scholar as he was, the archaic words which he was at first over-fond of introducing are often provincialisms of purely English original. Already Marlowe had brought the English unrhymed pentameter (which had hitherto justified but half its name, by being always blank and never verse) to a perfection of melody, harmony, and variety which has never been surpassed. Shakespeare, then, found a language already to a certain extent *established*, but not yet fetlocked by dictionary and grammar mongers — a versification harmonised, but which had not yet exhausted all its modulations, nor been set in the stocks by critics who deal judgment on refractory feet, that will dance to Orphean measures of which their judges are insensible. That the language was established is proved by its comparative uniformity as used by the dramatists, who wrote for mixed audiences, as well as by Ben Jonson's satire upon Marston's neologisms; that it at the same time admitted foreign words to the rights of citizenship on easier terms than now is in good measure equally true. What was of greater import, no arbitrary line had been drawn between high words and low;

[1] As where Ben Jonson is able to say—

"Men may securely sin, but safely never."

vulgar then meant simply what was common; poetry had not been aliened from the people by the establishment of an Upper House of vocables, alone entitled to move in the stately ceremonials of verse, and privileged from arrest while they for ever kept the promise of meaning to the ear and break it to the sense. The hot conception of the poet had no time to cool while he was debating the comparative respectability of this phrase or that; but he snatched what word his instinct prompted, and saw no indiscretion in making a king speak as his country nurse might have taught him.[1] It was Waller who first learned in France that to talk in rhyme alone comported with the state of royalty. In the time of Shakespeare, the living tongue resembled that tree which Father Huc saw in Tartary, whose leaves were languaged—and every hidden root of thought, every subtilest fibre of feeling, was mated by new shoots and leafage of expression, fed from those unseen sources in the common earth of human nature.

The Cabalists had a notion, that whoever found out the mystic word for anything attained to absolute mastery over that thing. The reverse of this is certainly true of poetic expression; for he who is thoroughly possessed of his thought, who imaginatively conceives an idea or image, becomes master of the word that shall most amply and fitly utter it. Heminge and Condell tell us, accordingly, that there was scarce a blot in the manuscripts they received from Shakespeare; and this is the natural corollary from the fact that such an imagination as his is as unparalleled as the force, variety, and beauty of the phrase in which it embodied itself.[2]

[1] "Vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes adsuefiunt ab adsistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt: vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus *quam sine omni regula, nutricem imitantes, accepimus.*"—DANTE, *De Vulg. Eloquio*, lib. i. cap. 1.

[2] Gray, himself a painful corrector, told Nicholls that "nothing was done so well as at the first concoction"—adding as a reason, "We think in words." Ben Jonson said, it was a pity Shakespeare had not blotted more, for that he sometimes wrote nonsense—and cited in proof of it the verse,

"Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause."

The last four words do not appear in the passage as it now stands, and Professor Craik suggests that they were stricken out in consequence of Jonson's criticism. This is very probable; but we suspect that the pen that blotted them was in the hand of Master Heminge or his colleague. The moral confusion in the idea was surely admirably characteristic of

We believe that Shakespeare, like all other great poets, instinctively used the dialect which he found current, and that his words are not more wrested from their ordinary meaning than followed necessarily from the unwonted weight of thought or stress of passion they were called on to support. He needed not to mask familiar thoughts in the weeds of unfamiliar phraseology; for the life that was in his mind could transfuse the language of every day with an intelligent vivacity, that makes it seem lambent with fiery purpose, and at each new reading a new creation. He could say with Dante, that "no word had ever forced him to say what he would not, though he had forced many a word to say what *it* would not"—but only in the sense that the mighty magic of his imagination had conjured out of it its uttermost secret of power or pathos. When I say that Shakespeare used the current language of his day, I mean only that he habitually employed such language as was universally comprehensible, —that he was not run away with by the hobby of any theory as to the fitness of this or that component of English for expressing certain thoughts or feelings. That the artistic value of a choice and noble diction was quite as well understood in his day as in ours is evident from the praises bestowed by his contemporaries on Drayton, and by the epithet "well-languaged" applied to Daniel, whose poetic style is as modern as that of Tennyson; but the endless absurdities about the comparative merits of Saxon and Norman-French, vented by persons incapable of distinguishing one tongue from the other, were as yet unheard of. Hasty generalisers are apt to overlook the fact that the Saxon was never, to any great extent, a literary language. Accordingly, it held its own very well in the names of common things, but failed to answer the demands of complex ideas derived from them. The author of *Piers Ploughman* wrote for the people—Chaucer for the court. We open at random and count the Latin[1] words in ten verses of the *Vision* and ten of the *Romaunt of the Rose* (a translation from the French), and find the proportion to be seven in the former and five in the latter.

the general who had just accomplished a successful *coup d'état*, the condemnation of which he would fancy that he read in the face of every honest man he met, and which he would therefore be for ever indirectly palliating.

[1] We use the word *Latin* here to express words derived either mediately or immediately from that language.

The organs of the Saxon have always been unwilling and stiff in learning languages. He acquired only about as many British words as we have Indian ones, and I believe that more French and Latin was introduced through the pen and the eye than through the tongue and the ear. For obvious reasons, the question is one that must be decided by reference to prose writers, and not poets; and it is, we think, pretty well settled that more words of Latin original were brought into the language in the century between 1550 and 1650 than in the whole period before or since,—and for the simple reason, that they were absolutely needful to express new modes and combination of thought.[1] The language has gained immensely, by the infusion, in richness of synonyme and in the power of expressing nice shades of thought and feeling, but more than all in light-footed poly-syllables that trip singing to the music of verse. There are certain cases, it is true, where the vulgar Saxon word is refined, and the refined Latin vulgar in poetry—as in *sweat* and *perspiration;* but there are vastly more in which the Latin bears the bell. Perhaps there might be a question between the old English *again-rising* and *resurrection;* but there can be no doubt that *conscience* is better than *inwit,* and *remorse* than *again-bite.* Should we translate the title of Wordsworth's famous ode, *Intimations of Immortality,* into *Hints of Deathlessness,* it would hiss like an angry gander. If, instead of Shakespeare's

> " Age cannot wither her,
> Nor custom stale her infinite variety,"

we should say, " her boundless manifoldness," the sentiment would suffer in exact proportion with the music. What home-bred English could ape the high Roman fashion of such togated words as

> " The multitudinous sea incarnadine,"—

where the huddling epithet implies the tempest-tossed soul of the speaker, and at the same time pictures the wallowing waste of ocean more vividly than the famous phrase of

[1] The prose of Chaucer (1390) and of Sir Thomas Malory (translating from the French, 1470) is less Latinised than that of Bacon, Browne, Taylor, or Milton. The glossary to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) explains words of Teutonic and Romanic root in about equal proportions. The parallel but independent development of Scotch is not to be forgotten.

Æschylus does its rippling sunshine? Again, *sailor* is less poetical than *mariner*, as Campbell felt, when he wrote,

"Ye mariners of England,"

and Coleridge, when he chose

"It was an ancient mariner,"

rather than

"It was an elderly seaman;"

for it is as much the charm of poetry that it suggest a certain remoteness and strangeness as familiarity; and it is essential not only that we feel at once the meaning of the words in themselves, but also their melodic meaning in relation to each other, and to the sympathetic variety of the verse. A word once vulgarised can never be rehabilitated. We might say now a *buxom* lass, or that a chambermaid was *buxom*, but we could not use the term, as Milton did, in its original sense of *bowsome*—that is, *lithe, gracefully bending*.[1]

But the secret of force in writing lies not so much in the pedigree of nouns and adjectives and verbs, as in having something that you believe in to say, and making the parts of speech vividly conscious of it. It is when expression becomes an act of memory, instead of an unconscious neces-

[1] I believe that for the last two centuries the Latin radicals of English have been more familiar and homelike to those who use them than the Teutonic. Even so accomplished a person as Professor Craik in his *English of Shakespeare*, derives *head*, through the German *haupt*, from the Latin *caput!* I trust that its genealogy is nobler, and that it is of kin with *cælum tueri*, rather than with the Greek κεφαλή, if Suidas be right in tracing the origin of that to a word meaning *vacuity*. Mr. Craik suggests, also, that *quick* and *wicked* may be etymologically identical, *because* he fancies a relationship between *busy* and the German *böse*, though *wicked* is evidently the participial form of A.-S. *wacan* (German *weichen*), *to bend, to yield*, meaning *one who has given way to temptation*, while *quick* seems as clearly related to *wegan*, meaning *to move*, a different word, even if radically the same. In the *London Literary Gazette* for November 13, 1858, I find an extract from Miss Millington's *Heraldry in History, Poetry, and Romance*, in which, speaking of the motto of the Prince of Wales—*De par Houmout ich diene*—she says: "The precise meaning of the former word [*Houmout*] has not, I think, been ascertained." The word is plainly the German *Hochmuth*, and the whole would read, *De par* (*Aus*) *Hochmuth ich diene*—"Out of magnanimity I serve." So entirely lost is the Saxon meaning of the word *knave* (A.-S. *cnava*, German *knabe*), that the name *navvie*, assumed by railway labourers, has been transmogrified into *navigator*. I believe that more people could tell why the month of July was so called than could explain the origin of the names for our days of the week, and that it is oftener the Saxon than the French words in Chaucer that puzzle the modern reader.

sity, that diction takes the place of warm and hearty speech. It is not safe to attribute special virtues (as Bosworth, for example, does to the Saxon) to words of whatever derivation, at least in poetry. Because Lear's "oak-cleaving thunderbolts," and "the all-dreaded thunder-stone" in *Cymbeline* are so fine, we would not give up Milton's Virgilian "fulmined over Greece," where the verb in English conveys at once the idea of flash and reverberation, but avoids that of riving and shattering. In the experiments made for casting the great bell for the Westminster Tower, it was found that the superstition which attributed the remarkable sweetness and purity of tone in certain old bells to the larger mixture of silver in their composition had no foundation in fact. It was the cunning proportion in which the ordinary metals were balanced against each other, the perfection of form, and the nice gradations of thickness, that wrought the miracle. And it is precisely so with the language of poetry. The genius of the poet will tell him what word to use (else what use in his being poet at all?); and even then, unless the proportion and form, whether of parts or whole, be all that Art requires and the most sensitive taste finds satisfaction in, he will have failed to make what shall vibrate through all its parts with a silvery unison—in other words, a poem.

I think the component parts of English were in the latter years of Elizabeth thus exquisitely proportioned one to the other. Yet Bacon had no faith in his mother-tongue, translating the works on which his fame was to rest into what he called "the universal language," and affirming that "English would bankrupt all our books." He was deemed a master of it, nevertheless; and it is curious that Ben Jonson applies to him in prose the same commendation which he gave Shakespeare in verse, saying, that he "performed that in our tongue which may be compared or preferred either to *insolent Greece or haughty Rome;*" and he adds this pregnant sentence: "In short, within his view and about his time were all the wits born that could honour a language or help study. Now things daily fall: wits grow downwards, eloquence grows backwards." Ben had good reason for what he said of the wits. Not to speak of science, of Galileo and Kepler, the sixteenth century was a spendthrift of literary genius. An attack of immortality in a family might have been looked for then as scarlet-fever would be now.

Montaigne, Tasso, and Cervantes were born within fourteen years of each other; and in England, while Spenser was still delving over the *propria quæ maribus*, and Raleigh launching paper navies, Shakespeare was stretching his baby hands for the moon, and the little Bacon, chewing on his coral, had discovered that impenetrability was one quality of matter. It almost takes one's breath away to think that *Hamlet* and the *Novum Organon* were at the risk of teething and measles at the same time. But Ben was right also in thinking that eloquence had grown backwards. He lived long enough to see the language of verse become in a measure traditionary and conventional. It was becoming so, partly from the necessary order of events, partly because the most natural and intense expression of feeling had been in so many ways satisfied and exhausted—but chiefly because there was no man left to whom, as to Shakespeare, perfect conception gave perfection of phrase. Dante, among modern poets, his only rival in condensed force, says: "Optimis conceptionibus optima loquela conveniet; sed optimæ conceptiones non possunt esse nisi ubi scientia et ingenium est; . . . et sic non omnibus versificantibus optima loquela convenit, cum plerique sine scientiâ et ingenio versificantur." [1]

Shakespeare must have been quite as well aware of the provincialism of English as Bacon was; but he knew that great poetry, being universal in its appeal to human nature, can make any language classic, and that the men whose appreciation is immortality will mine through any dialect to get at an original soul. He had as much confidence in his home-bred speech as Bacon had want of it, and exclaims—

> "Not marble nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

He must have been perfectly conscious of his genius, and of the great trust which he imposed upon his native tongue as the embodier and perpetuator of it. As he had avoided obscurities in his sonnets, he would do so *a fortiori* in his plays, both for the purpose of immediate effect on the stage

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquio*, lib. ii. cap. 1, *ad finem*. I quote this treatise as Dante's, because the thoughts seem manifestly his; though I believe that in its present form it is an abridgment by some transcriber, who sometimes copies textually, and sometimes substitutes his own language for that of the original.

and of future appreciation. Clear thinking makes clear writing, and he who has shown himself so eminently capable of it in one case is not to be supposed to abdicate intentionally in others. The difficult passages in the plays, then, are to be regarded either as corruptions, or else as phenomena in the natural history of Imagination, whose study will enable us to arrive at a clearer theory and better understanding of it.

While I believe that our language had two periods of culmination in poetic beauty — one of nature, simplicity, and truth, in the ballads, which deal only with narrative and feeling — another of Art (or Nature as it is ideally reproduced through the imagination), of stately amplitude, of passionate intensity and elevation, in Spenser and the greater dramatists—and that Shakespeare made use of the latter as he found it, I by no means intend to say that he did not enrich it, or that any inferior man could have dipped the same words out of the great poet's inkstand. But he enriched it only by the natural expansion and exhilaration of which it was conscious, in yielding to the mastery of a genius that could turn and wind it like a fiery Pegasus, making it feel its life in every limb. He enriched it through that exquisite sense of music (never approached but by Marlowe), to which it seemed eagerly obedient, as if every word said to him,

> "*Bid me* discourse, I will enchant thine ear,"—

as if every latent harmony revealed itself to him as the gold to Brahma, when he walked over the earth where it was hidden, crying, "Here am I, Lord! do with me what thou wilt!" That he used language with that intimate possession of its meaning possible only to the most vivid thought is doubtless true; but that he wantonly strained it from its ordinary sense, that he found it too poor for his necessities, and accordingly coined new phrases, or that, from haste or carel ssness, he violated any of its received proprieties, I do not believe. I have said that it was fortunate for him that he came upon an age when our language was at its best; but it was fortunate also for us, because our costliest poet phrase is put beyond reach of decay in the gleaming precipitate in which it united itself with his thought.

That the propositions I have endeavoured to establish

have a direct bearing in various ways upon the qualifications of whoever undertakes to edit the works of Shakespeare will, I think, be apparent to those who consider the matter. The hold which Shakespeare has acquired and maintained upon minds so many and so various, in so many vital respects utterly unsympathetic and even incapable of sympathy with his own, is one of the most noteworthy phenomena in the history of literature. That he has had the most inadequate of editors, that, as his own Falstaff was the cause of the wit, so he has been the cause of the foolishness that was in other men (as where Malone ventured to discourse upon his metres, and Dr. Johnson on his imagination), must be apparent to every one—and also that his genius and its manifestations are so various, that there is no commentator but has been able to illustrate him from his own peculiar point of view or from the results of his own favourite studies. But to show that he was a good common lawyer, that he understood the theory of colours, that he was an accurate botanist, a master of the science of medicine, especially in its relation to mental disease, a profound metaphysician, and of great experience and insight in politics—all these, while they may very well form the staple of separate treatises, and prove that, whatever the extent of his learning, the range and accuracy of his knowledge were beyond precedent or later parallel, are really outside the province of an editor.

We doubt if posterity owe a greater debt to any two men living in 1623 than to the two obscure actors who in that year published the first folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. But for them, it is more than likely that such of his works as had remained to that time unprinted would have been irrecoverably lost, and among them were *Julius Cæsar*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*. But are we to believe them when they assert that they present to us the plays which they reprinted from stolen and surreptitious copies "cured and perfect of their limbs," and those which are original in their edition "absolute in their numbers as he [Shakespeare] conceived them?" Alas, we have read too many theatrical announcements, have been taught too often that the value of the promise was in an inverse ratio to the generosity of the exclamation-marks, too easily to believe that! Nay, we have seen numberless processions of healthy kine enter our native village unheralded save by the lusty shouts of

drovers, while a wretched calf, cursed by step-dame Nature with two heads, was brought to us in a triumphal car, avant-couriered by a band of music as abnormal as itself, and announced as the greatest wonder of the age. If a double allowance of vituline brains deserve such honour, there are few commentators on Shakespeare that would have gone afoot, and the trumpets of Messieurs Heminge and Condell call up in our minds too many monstrous and deformed associations.

What, then, is the value of the first folio as an authority? For eighteen of the plays it is the only authority we have, and the only one also for four others in their complete form. It is admitted that in several instances Heminge and Condell reprinted the earlier quarto impressions with a few changes, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse; and it is most probable that copies of those editions (whether surreptitious or not) had taken the place of the original prompter's books, as being more convenient and legible. Even in these cases it is not safe to conclude that all or even any of the variations were made by the hand of Shakespeare himself. And where the players printed from manuscript, is it likely to have been that of the author? The probability is small that a writer so busy as Shakespeare must have been during his productive periods should have copied out their parts for the actors himself, or that one so indifferent as he seems to have been to the immediate literary fortunes of his works should have given much care to the correction of copies, if made by others. The copies exclusively in the hands of Heminge and Condell were, it is manifest, in some cases very imperfect, whether we account for the fact by the burning of the Globe Theatre or by the necessary wear and tear of years, and (what is worthy of notice) they are plainly more defective in some parts than in others. *Measure for Measure* is an example of this, and we are not satisfied with being told that its ruggedness of verse is intentional, or that its obscurity is due to the fact that Shakespeare grew more elliptical in his style as he grew older. Profounder in thought he doubtless became; though, in a mind like his, we believe that this would imply only a more absolute supremacy in expression. But, from whatever original we suppose either the quartos or the first folio to have been printed, it is more than questionable whether

the proof-sheets had the advantage of any revision other than that of the printing-office. Steevens was of opinion that authors in the time of Shakespeare never read their own proof-sheets; and Mr. Spedding, in his recent edition of Bacon, comes independently to the same conclusion.[1] We may be very sure that Heminge and Condell did not, as vicars, take upon themselves a disagreeable task which the author would have been too careless to assume.

Nevertheless, however strong a case may be made out against the folio of 1623, whatever sins of omission we may lay to the charge of Heminge and Condell, or of omission to that of the printers, it remains the only text we have with any claims whatever to authenticity. It should be deferred to as authority in all cases where it does not make Shakespeare write bad sense, uncouth metre, or false grammar, of all which we believe him to have been more supremely incapable than any other man who ever wrote English. Yet we could not speak unkindly even of the blunders of the folio. They have put bread into the mouth of many an honest editor, publisher, and printer for the last century and a half; and he who loves the comic side of human nature will find the serious notes of a *variorum* edition of Shakespeare as funny reading as the funny ones are serious. Scarce a commentator of them all, for more than a hundred years, but thought, as Alphonso of Castile did of Creation, that, if he had only been at Shakespeare's elbow, he could have given valuable advice; scarce one who did not know off-hand that there was never a seaport in Bohemia—as if Shakespeare's world were one which Mercator could have projected; scarce one but was satisfied that his ten finger-tips were a sufficient key to those astronomic wonders of poise and counterpoise, of planetary law and cometary seeming-exception, in his metres; scarce one but thought

[1] Vol. iii. p. 348, *note*. He grounds his belief, not on the misprinting of words, but on the misplacing of whole paragraphs. We were struck with the same thing in the original edition of Chapman's *Biron's Conspiracy and Tragedy*. And yet, in comparing two copies of this edition, I have found corrections which only the author could have made. One of the misprints which Mr. Spedding notices affords both a hint and a warning to the conjectural emandator. In the edition of *The Advancement of Learning*, printed in 1605, occurs the word *dusinesse*. In a later edition this was conjecturally changed to *business*; but the occurrence of *vertigine* in the Latin translation enables Mr. Spedding to print rightly, *dizziness*.

he could gauge like an ale-firkin that intuition whose edging shallows may have been sounded, but whose abysses, stretching down amid the sunless roots of Being and Consciousness, mock the plummet; scarce one but could speak with condescending approval of that prodigious intelligence so utterly without congener, that our baffled language must coin an adjective to qualify it, and none is so audacious as to say Shakesperian of any other. And yet, in the midst of our impatience, we cannot help thinking also of how much healthy mental activity this one man has been the occasion, how much good he has indirectly done to society by withdrawing men to investigations and habits of thought that secluded them from baser attractions, for how many he has enlarged the circle of study and reflection; since there is nothing in history or politics, nothing in art or science, nothing in physics or metaphysics, that is not sooner or later taxed for his illustration. This is partially true of all great minds, open and sensitive to truth and beauty through any large arc of their circumference; but it is true in an unexampled sense of Shakespeare, the vast round of whose balanced nature seems to have been equatorial, and to have had a southward exposure and a summer sympathy at every point, so that life, society, statecraft, serve us at last but as commentaries on him, and whatever we have gathered of thought, of knowledge, and of experience, confronted with his marvellous page, shrinks to a mere foot-note, the stepping-stone to some hitherto inaccessible verse. We admire in Homer the blind placid mirror of the world's young manhood, the bard who escapes from his misfortune in poems all memory, all life and bustle, adventure and picture; we revere in Dante that compressed force of lifelong passion which could make a private experience cosmopolitan in its reach and everlasting in its significance; we respect in Goethe the Aristotelian poet, wise by weariless observation, witty with intention, the stately *Geheimerrath* of a provincial court in the empire of Nature. As we study these, we seem in our limited way to penetrate into their consciousness, and to measure and master their methods; but with Shakespeare it is just the other way; the more we have familiarised ourselves with the operations of our own consciousness, the more do we find, in reading him, that he has been beforehand with us, and that, while we have been vainly endeavouring

to find the door of his being, he has searched every nook and cranny of our own. While other poets and dramatists embody isolated phases of character and work inward from the phenomenon to the special law which it illustrates, he seems in some strange way unitary with human nature itself, and his own soul to have been the law and life-giving power of which his creations are only the phenomena. We justify or criticise the characters of other writers by our memory and experience, and pronounce them natural or unnatural; but he seems to have worked in the very stuff of which memory and experience are made, and we recognise his truth to Nature by an innate and unacquired sympathy, as if he alone possessed the secret of the "ideal form and universal mould," and embodied generic types rather than individuals. In this Cervantes alone has approached him; and Don Quixote and Sancho, like the men and women of Shakespeare, are the contemporaries of every generation, because they are not products of an artificial and transitory society, but because they are animated by the primeval and unchanging forces of that humanity which underlies and survives the for ever-fickle creeds and ceremonials of the parochial corners which we who dwell in them sublimely call The World.

That Shakespeare did not edit his own works must be attributed, we suspect, to his premature death. That he should not have intended it is inconceivable. Is there not something of self-consciousness in the breaking of Prospero's wand and burying his book—a sort of sad prophecy, based on self-knowledge of the nature of that man who, after such thaumaturgy, could go down to Stratford and live there for years, only collecting his dividends from the Globe Theatre, lending money on mortgage, and leaning over his gate to chat and bandy quips with neighbours? His mind had entered into every phase of human life and thought, had embodied all of them in living creations;—had he found all empty, and come at last to the belief that genius and its works were as phantasmagoric as the rest, and that fame was as idle as the rumour of the pit? However this may be, his works have come down to us in a condition of manifest and admitted corruption in some portions, while in others there is an obscurity which may be attributed either to an idiosyncratic use of words and condensation of phrase, to a

depth of intuition for a proper coalescence with which ordinary language in inadequate, to a concentration of passion in a focus that consumes the lighter links which bind together the clauses of a sentence or of a process of reasoning in common parlance, or to a sense of music which mingles music and meaning without essentially confounding them. We should demand for a perfect editor, then, first, a thorough glossological knowledge of the English contemporary with Shakespeare; second, enough logical acuteness of mind and metaphysical training to enable him to follow recondite processes of thought; third, such a conviction of the supremacy of his author as always to prefer his thought to any theory of his own; fourth, a feeling for music, and so much knowledge of the practice of other poets as to understand that Shakespeare's versification differs from theirs as often in kind as in degree; fifth, an acquaintance with the world as well as with books; and last, what is perhaps of more importance than all, so great a familiarity with the working of the imaginative faculty in general, and of its peculiar operation in the mind of Shakespeare, as will prevent his thinking a passage dark with excess of light, and enable him to fully understand that the Gothic Shakespeare often superimposed upon the slender column of a single word, that seems to twist under it, but does not—like the quaint shafts in cloisters—a weight of meaning which the modern architects of sentences would consider wholly unjustifiable by correct principle.

Many years ago, while yet fancy claimed that right in me which Fact has since, to my no small loss, so successfully disputed, I pleased myself with imagining the play of *Hamlet* published under some *alias*, and as the work of a new candidate in literature. Then I *played*, as the children say, that it came in regular course before some well-meaning doer of criticisms, who had never read the original (no very wild assumption, as things go), and endeavoured to conceive the kind of way in which he would be likely to take it. I put myself in his place, and tried to write such a perfunctory notice as I thought would be likely, in filling his column, to satisfy his conscience. But it was a *tour de force* quite beyond my power to execute without grimace. I could not arrive at that artistic absorption in my own conception which would enable me to be natural, and found myself, like a bad actor, continually betraying my self-consciousness by my very

endeavour to hide it under caricature. The path of Nature is indeed a narrow one, and it is only the immortals that seek it, and, when they find it, do not find themselves cramped therein. My result was a dead failure—satire instead of comedy. I could not shake off that strange accumulation which we call self, and report honestly what I saw and felt even to myself, much less to others.

Yet I have often thought, that, unless we can so far free ourselves from our own prepossessions as to be capable of bringing to a work of art some freshness of sensation, and receiving from it in turn some new surprise of sympathy and admiration—some shock even, it may be, of instinctive distaste and repulsion—though we may praise or blame, weighing our *pros* and *cons* in the nicest balances, sealed by proper authority, yet we shall not criticise in the highest sense. On the other hand, unless we admit certain principles as fixed beyond question, we shall be able to render no adequate judgment, but only to record our impressions, which may be valuable or not, according to the greater or less ductility of the senses on which they are made. Charles Lamb, for example, came to the old English dramatists with the feeling of a discoverer. He brought with him an alert curiosity, and everything was delightful simply because it was strange. Like other early adventurers, he sometimes mistook shining sand for gold; but he had the great advantage of not feeling himself responsible for the manners of the inhabitants he found there, and not thinking it needful to make them square with any Westminster Catechism of æsthetics. Best of all, he did not feel compelled to compare them with the Greeks, about whom he knew little, and cared less. He took them as he found them, described them in a few pregnant sentences, and displayed his specimens of their growth and manufacture. When he arrived at the dramatists of the Restoration, so far from being shocked, he was charmed with their pretty and unmoral ways; and what he says of them reminds us of blunt Captain Dampier, who, in his account of the island of Timor, remarks, as a matter of no consequence, that the natives "take as many wives as they can maintain, and as for religion, they have none."

Lamb had the great advantage of seeing the elder dramatists as they were; it did not lie within his province to point out what they were not. Himself a fragmentary writer, he

had more sympathy with imagination where it gathers into the intense focus of passionate phrase than with that higher form of it, where it is the faculty that shapes, gives unity of design and balanced gravitation of parts. And yet it is only this higher form of it which can unimpeachably assure to any work the dignity and permanence of a classic; for it results in that exquisite something called Style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere pervasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness. On a lower plane we may detect it in the structure of a sentence, in the limpid expression that implies sincerity of thought; but it is only where it combines and organises, where it eludes observation in particulars to give the rarer delight of perfection as a whole, that it belongs to art. Then it is truly ideal, the *forma mentis æterna*, not as a passive mould into which the thought is poured, but as the conceptive energy which finds all material plastic to its preconceived design. Mere vividness of expression, such as makes quotable passages, comes of the complete surrender of self to the impression, whether spiritual or sensual, of the moment. It is a quality, perhaps, in which the young poet is richer than the mature, his very inexperience making him more venturesome in those leaps of language that startle us with their rashness only to bewitch us the more with the happy ease of their accomplishment. For this there are no existing laws of rhetoric, for it is from such felicities that the rhetoricians deduce and codify their statutes. It is something which cannot be improved upon or cultivated, for it is immediate and intuitive. But this power of expression is subsidiary, and goes only a little way toward the making of a great poet. Imagination, where it is truly creative, is a faculty, and not a quality; it looks before and after, it gives the form that makes all the parts work together harmoniously toward a given end, its seat is in the higher reason, and it is efficient only as a servant of the will. Imagination, as it is too often misunderstood, is mere fantasy, the image-making power, common to all who have the gift of dreams, or who can afford to buy it in a vulgar drug as De Quincey bought it.

The true poetic imagination is of one quality, whether it be ancient or modern, and equally subject to those laws of grace, of proportion, of design, in whose free service, and in that

alone, it can become art. Those laws are something which do not

> "Alter when they alteration find,
> And bend with the remover to remove."

And they are more clearly to be deduced from the eminent examples of Greek literature than from any other source. It is the advantage of this select company of ancients that their works are defecated of all turbid mixture of contemporaneousness, and have become to us pure *literature*, our judgment and enjoyment of which cannot be vulgarised by any prejudices of time or place. This is why the study of them is fitly called a liberal education, because it emancipates the mind from every narrow provincialism whether of egoism or tradition, and is the apprenticeship that every one must serve before becoming a free brother of the guild which passes the torch of life from age to age. There would be no dispute about the advantages of that Greek culture which Schiller advocated with such generous eloquence, if the great authors of antiquity had not been degraded from teachers of thinking to drillers in grammar, and made the ruthless pedagogues of root and inflection, instead of companions for whose society the mind must put on her highest mood. The discouraged youth too naturally transfers the epithet of *dead* from the languages to the authors that wrote in them. What concern have we with the shades of dialect in Homer or Theocritus, provided they speak the spiritual *lingua franca* that abolishes all alienage of race, and makes whatever shore of time we land on hospitable and homelike? There is much that is deciduous in books, but all that gives them a title to rank as literature in the highest sense is perennial. Their vitality is the vitality not of one or another blood or tongue, but of human nature; their truth is not topical and transitory, but of universal acceptation; and thus all great authors seem the coevals not only of each other, but of whoever reaps them, growing wiser with him as he grows wise, and unlocking to him one secret after another as his own life and experience give him the key, but on no other condition. Their meaning is absolute, not conditional; it is a property of *theirs*, quite irrespective of manners or creed; for the highest culture, the development of the individual by observation, reflection, and study, leads to one result, whether in Athens or in London. The more we know of ancient literature, the more we are struck with

its modernness; just as the more we study the maturer dramas of Shakespeare, the more we feel his nearness in certain primary qualities to the antique and classical. Yet even in saying this, I tacitly make the admission that it is the Greeks who must furnish us with our standard of comparison. Their stamp is upon all the allowed measures and weights of æsthetic criticism. Nor does a consciousness of this, nor a constant reference to it, in any sense reduce us to the mere copying of a bygone excellence; for it is the test of excellence in any department of art that it can never be bygone, and it is not mere difference from antique models, but the *way* in which that difference is shown, the direction it takes, that we are to consider in our judgment of a modern work. The model is not there to be copied merely, but that the study of it may lead us insensibly to the same processes of thought by which its purity of outline and harmony of parts were attained, and enable us to feel that strength is consistent with repose, that multiplicity is not abundance, that grace is but a more refined form of power, and that a thought is none the less profound that the limpidity of its expression allows us to measure it at a glance. To be possessed with this conviction gives us at least a determinate point of view, and enables us to appeal a case of taste to a court of final judicature, whose decisions are guided by immutable principles. When we hear of certain productions, that they are feeble in design, but masterly in parts, that they are incoherent, to be sure, but have great merits of style, we know that it cannot be true; for in the highest examples we have, the master is revealed by his plan, by his power of making all accessories, each in its due relation, subordinate to it, and that to limit style to the rounding of a period or a distich is wholly to misapprehend its truest and highest function. Donne is full of salient verses that would take the rudest March winds of criticism with their beauty, of thoughts that first tease us like charades and then delight us with the felicity of their solution; but these have not saved him. He is exiled to the limbo of the formless and the fragmentary. To take a more recent instance—Wordsworth had, in some respects, a deeper insight, and a more adequate utterance of it, than any man of his generation. But it was a piecemeal insight and utterance: his imagination was feminine, not masculine; receptive, and not creative. His longer

poems are Egyptian sand-wastes, with here and there an oasis of exquisite greenery, a grand image, Sphinx-like, half buried in drifting commonplaces, or the solitary Pompey's Pillar of some towering thought. But what is the fate of a poet who owns the quarry, but cannot build the poem? Ere the century is out he will be nine parts dead, and immortal only in that tenth part of him which is included in a thin volume of "beauties." Already Moxon has felt the need of extracting this essential oil of him; and his memory will be kept alive, if at all, by the precious material rather than the workmanship of the vase that contains his heart. And what shall we forebode of so many modern poems, full of splendid passages, beginning everywhere and leading nowhere, reminding us of nothing so much as the amateur architect who planned his own house, and forgot the staircase that should connect one floor with another, putting it as an afterthought on the outside?

Lichtenberg says somewhere, that it was the advantage of the ancients to write before the great art of writing ill had been invented; and Shakespeare may be said to have had the good luck of coming after Spenser (to whom the debt of English poetry is incalculable) had re-invented the art of writing well. But Shakespeare arrived at a mastery in this respect which sets him above all other poets. He is not only superior in degree, but he is also different in kind. In that less purely artistic sphere of style which concerns the matter rather than the form his charm is often unspeakable. How perfect his style is may be judged from the fact that it never curdles into mannerism, and thus absolutely eludes imitation. Though here, if anywhere, the style is the man, yet it is noticeable only, like the images of Brutus, by its absence, so thoroughly is he absorbed in his work, while he fuses thought and word indissolubly together, till all the particles cohere by the best virtue of each. With perfect truth he has said of himself that he writes

> "All one, ever the same,
> Putting invention in a noted weed,
> That every word doth almost tell its name."

And yet who has so succeeded in imitating him as to remind us of him by even so much as the gait of a single verse? [1]

[1] "At first sight, Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists seem to write in styles much alike; nothing so easy as to fall into that of

Those magnificent crystallisations of feeling and phrase, basaltic masses, molten and interfused by the primal fires of passion, are not to be reproduced by the slow experiments of the laboratory striving to parody creation with artifice. Mr. Matthew Arnold seems to think that Shakespeare has damaged English poetry. I wish he had! It is true he lifted Dryden above himself in *All for Love;* but it was Dryden who said of him, by instinctive conviction rather than judgment, that within his magic circle none dared tread but he. Is he to blame for the extravagances of modern diction, which are but the reaction of the brazen age against the degeneracy of art into artifice, that has characterised the silver period in every literature? We see in them only the futile effort of misguided persons to torture out of language the secret of that inspiration which should be in themselves. We do not find the extravagances in Shakespeare himself. We never saw a line in any modern poet that reminded us of him, and will venture to assert that it is only poets of the second class that find successful imitators. And the reason seems to us a very plain one. The genius of the great poet seeks repose in the expression of itself, and finds it at last in style, which is the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding between the worker and his material.[1] The secondary intellect, on the other hand, seeks for excitement in expression, and stimulates itself into mannerism, which is the wilful obtrusion of self, as style is its unconscious abnegation. No poet of the first class has ever left a school, because his imagination is incommunicable; while, just as surely as the thermometer tells of the neighbourhood of an iceberg, you may detect the presence of a genius of the second class in any generation by the influence of his mannerism, for that, being an artificial thing, is capable of reproduction. Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, left no heirs either to the form or mode of their expression; while Milton, Sterne, and Wordsworth left behind them whole regiments uniformed with all their external characteristics. We do

Massinger and the others; whilst no one has ever yet produced one scene conceived and expressed in the Shakesperian idiom. I suppose it is because Shakespeare is universal, and, in fact, has no *manner*."—COLERIDGE'S *Table Talk*, 214.

[1] Pheidias said of one of his pupils that he had an inspired thumb, because the modelling-clay yielded to its careless sweep a grace of curve which it refused to the utmost pains of others.

not mean that great poetic geniuses may not have influenced thought (though we think it would be difficult to show how Shakespeare had done so, directly and wilfully), but that they have not infected contemporaries or followers with mannerism. The quality in him which makes him at once so thoroughly English and so thoroughly cosmopolitan is that aëration of the understanding by the imagination which he has in common with all the greater poets, and which is the privilege of genius. The modern school, which mistakes violence for intensity, seems to catch its breath when it finds itself on the verge of natural expression, and to say to itself, "Good heavens! I had almost forgotten I was inspired!" But of Shakespeare we do not even suspect that he ever remembered it. He does not always speak in that intense way that flames up in *Lear* and *Macbeth* through the rifts of a soil volcanic with passion. He allows us here and there the repose of a commonplace character, the consoling distraction of a humorous one. He knows how to be equable and grand without effort, so that we forget the altitude of thought to which he has led us, because the slowly receding slope of a mountain stretching downward by ample gradations gives a less startling impression of height than to look over the edge of a ravine that makes but a wrinkle in its flank.

Shakespeare has been sometimes taxed with the barbarism of profuseness and exaggeration. But this is to measure him by a Sophoclean scale. The simplicity of the antique tragedy is by no means that of expression, but is of form merely. In the utterance of great passions, something must be indulged to the extravagance of Nature; the subdued tone, to which pathos and sentiment are limited, cannot express a tempest of the soul. The range between the piteous "no more but so," in which Ophelia compresses the heart-break whose compression was to make her mad, and that sublime appeal of Lear to the elements of Nature, only to be matched, if matched at all, in the *Prometheus*, is a wide one, and Shakespeare is as truly simple in the one as in the other. The simplicity of poetry is not that of prose, nor its clearness that of ready apprehension merely. To a subtile sense, a sense heightened by sympathy, those sudden fervours of phrase, gone ere one can say it lightens, that show us Macbeth groping among the complexities of thought

in his conscience-clouded mind, and reveal the intricacy rather than enlighten it, while they leave the eye darkened to the literal meaning of the words, yet make their logical sequence, the grandeur of the conception, and its truth to Nature clearer than sober daylight could. There is an obscurity of mist rising from the undrained shallows of the mind, and there is the darkness of thunder-cloud gathering its electric masses with passionate intensity from the clear element of the imagination, not at random or wilfully, but by the natural processes of the creative faculty, to brood those flashes of expression that transcend rhetoric, and are only to be apprehended by the poetic instinct.

In that secondary office of imagination, where it serves the artist, not as the reason that shapes, but as the interpreter of his conceptions into words, there is a distinction to be noticed between the higher and lower mode in which it performs its function. It may be either creative or pictorial, may body forth the thought or merely image it forth. With Shakespeare, for example, imagination seems immanent in his very consciousness; with Milton, in his memory. In the one it sends, as if without knowing it, a fiery life into the verse,

> " Sei die Braut das Wort,
> Bräutigam der Geist; "

in the other it elaborates a certain pomp and elevation. Accordingly, the bias of the former is toward over-intensity, of the latter toward over-diffuseness. Shakespeare's temptation is to push a willing metaphor beyond its strength, to make a passion over-inform its tenement of words; Milton cannot resist running a simile on into a fugue. One always fancies Shakespeare *in* his best verses, and Milton at the key-board of his organ. Shakespeare's language is no longer the mere vehicle of thought, it has become part of it, its very flesh and blood. The pleasure it gives us is unmixed, direct, like that from the smell of a flower or the flavour of a fruit. Milton sets everywhere his little pitfalls of bookish association for the memory. I know that Milton's manner is very grand. It is slow, it is stately, moving as in triumphal procession, with music, with historic banners, with spoils from every time and every region; and captive epithets, like huge Sicambrians, thrust their broad shoulders between us and the thought whose pomp they decorate. But it is manner,

nevertheless, as is proved by the ease with which it is parodied, by the danger it is in of degenerating into mannerism whenever it forgets itself. Fancy a parody of Shakespeare—I do not mean of his words, but of his *tone*, for that is what distinguishes the master. You might as well try it with the Venus of Melos. In Shakespeare it is always the higher thing, the thought, the fancy, that is pre-eminent; it is Cæsar that draws all eyes, and not the chariot in which he rides, or the throng which is but the reverberation of his supremacy. If not, how explain the charm with which he dominates in all tongues, even under the disenchantment of translation? Among the most alien races he is as solidly at home as a mountain seen from different sides by many lands, itself superbly solitary, yet the companion of all thoughts and domesticated in all imaginations.

In description Shakespeare is especially great, and in that instinct which gives the peculiar quality of any object of contemplation in a single happy word that colours the impression on the sense with the mood of the mind. Most descriptive poets seem to think that a hogshead of water caught at the spout will give us a livelier notion of a thunder-shower than the sullen muttering of the first big drops upon the roof. They forget that it is by suggestion, not cumulation, that profound impressions are made upon the imagination. Milton's parsimony (so rare in him) makes the success of his

> "Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
> Wept at completion of the mortal sin."

Shakespeare understood perfectly the charm of indirectness, of making his readers seem to discover for themselves what he means to show them. If he wishes to tell them that the leaves of the willow are grey on the under side, he does not make it a mere fact of observation by bluntly saying so, but makes it picturesquely reveal itself to us as it might in Nature:—

> "There is a willow grows athwart the flood,
> That shows his *hoar* leaves in the glassy stream.

Where he goes to the landscape for a comparison, he does not ransack wood and field for specialities, as if he were gathering simples, but takes one image, obvious, familiar, and makes it new to us either by sympathy or contrast with his own immediate feeling. He always looked upon Nature

with the eyes of the mind. Thus he can make the melancholy of autumn or the gladness of spring alike pathetic:—

> " That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
> When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang
> Upon those boughs that shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

Or again:—

> " From thee have I been absent in the spring,
> When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
> Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
> That heavy Saturn leaped and laughed with him."

But, as dramatic poet, Shakespeare goes even beyond this, entering so perfectly into the consciousness of the characters he himself has created, that he sees everything through their peculiar mood, and makes every epithet, as if unconsciously, echo and re-echo it. Theseus asks Hermia,

> " Can you endure the livery of a nun,
> For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
> To live a *barren* sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the *cold fruitless* moon? "

When Romeo must leave Juliet, the private pang of the lovers becomes a property of Nature herself, and

> " *Envious* streaks
> Do lace the *severing* clouds in yonder east."

But even more striking is the following instance from *Macbeth* :—

> " The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal enterance of Duncan
> Under your battlements."

Here Shakespeare, with his wonted tact, makes use of a vulgar superstition, of a type in which mortal presentiment is already embodied, to make a common ground on which the hearer and Lady Macbeth may meet. After this prelude we are prepared to be possessed by her emotion more fully, to feel in her ears the dull tramp of the blood that seems to make the raven's croak yet hoarser than it is, and to betray the stealthy advance of the mind to its fell purpose. For Lady Macbeth hears not so much the voice of the bodeful bird as of her own premeditated murder, and we are thus made her shuddering accomplices before the fact. Every image receives the colour of the mind, every word throbs with the pulse of one controlling passion. The epithet *fatal*

makes us feel the implacable resolve of the speaker, and shows us that she is tampering with her conscience by putting off the crime upon the prophecy of the Weird Sisters to which she alludes. In the word *battlements*, too, not only is the fancy led up to the perch of the raven, but a hostile image takes the place of a hospitable; for men commonly speak of receiving a guest under their roof or within their doors. That this is not over-ingenuity, seeing what is not to be seen, nor meant to be seen, is clear to me from what follows. When Duncan and Banquo arrive at the castle, their fancies, free from all suggestion of evil, call up only gracious and amiable images. The raven was but the fantastical creation of Lady Macbeth's over-wrought brain.

> "This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air
> Nimbly and sweetly doth commend itself
> Unto our gentle senses.
> This *guest* of summer,
> The *temple-haunting* martlet, doth approve
> By his *loved mansionry* that the heaven's breath
> Smells *wooingly* here; no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, or coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle."

The contrast here cannot but be as intentional as it is marked. Every image is one of welcome, security, and confidence. The summer, one may well fancy, would be a very different hostess from her whom we have just seen expecting *them*. And why *temple-haunting*, unless because it suggests sanctuary? *O immaginativa, che si ne rubi delle cose di fuor*, how infinitely more precious are the inward ones thou givest in return! If all this be accident, it is at least one of those accidents of which only this man was ever capable. I divine something like it now and then in Æschylus, through the mists of a language which will not let me be sure of what I see, but nowhere else. Shakespeare, it is true, had, as I have said, as respects English, the privilege which only first-comers enjoy. The language was still fresh from those sources at too great a distance from which it becomes fit only for the service of prose. Wherever he dipped, it came up clear and sparkling, undefiled as yet by the drainage of literary factories, or of those dye-houses where the machine-woven fabrics of sham culture are coloured up to the last desperate style of sham sentiment. Those who criticise his diction as sometimes extravagant should remember that in

poetry language is something more than merely the vehicle of thought, that it is meant to convey the sentiment as much as the sense, and that, if there is a beauty of use, there is often a higher use of beauty.

What kind of culture Shakespeare had is uncertain; how much he had is disputed; that he had as much as he wanted, and of whatever kind he wanted, must be clear to whoever considers the question. Dr. Farmer has proved, in his entertaining essay, that he got everything at second-hand from translations, and that, where his translator blundered, he loyally blundered too. But Goethe, the man of widest acquirement in modern times, did precisely the same thing. In his character of poet he set as little store by useless learning as Shakespeare did. He learned to write hexameters, not from Homer, but from Voss, and Voss found them faulty; yet somehow *Hermann und Dorothea* is more readable than *Luise*. So far as all the classicism then attainable was concerned, Shakespeare got it as cheap as Goethe did, who always bought it ready-made. For such purposes of mere æsthetic nourishment Goethe always milked other minds—if minds these ruminators and digesters of antiquity into asses' milk may be called. There were plenty of professors who were for ever assiduously browsing in vales of Enna and on Pentelican slopes among the vestiges of antiquity, slowly secreting lacteous facts, and not one of them would have raised his head from that exquisite pasturage, though Pan had made music through his pipe of reeds. Did Goethe wish to work up a Greek theme? He drove out Herr Böttiger, for example, among that fodder delicious to him for its very dryness, that sapless Arcadia of scholiasts, let him graze, ruminate, and go through all other needful processes of the antiquarian organism, then got him quietly into a corner and milked him. The product, after standing long enough, mantled over with the rich Goethean cream, from which a butter could be churned, if not precisely classic, quite as good as the ancients could have made out of the same material. But who has ever read the *Achilleis*, correct in all *un*essential particulars as it probably is?

It is impossible to conceive that a man, who, in other respects, made such booty of the world around him, whose observation of manners was so minute, and whose insight into character and motives, as if he had been one of God's

spies, was so unerring that we accept it without question, as we do Nature herself, and find it more consoling to explain his confessedly immense superiority by attributing it to a happy instinct rather than to the conscientious perfecting of exceptional powers till practice made them seem to work independently of the will which still directed them—it is impossible that such a man should not also have profited by the converse of the cultivated and quick-witted men in whose familiar society he lived, that he should not have over and over again discussed points of criticism and art with them, that he should not have had his curiosity, so alive to everything else, excited about those ancients whom university men then, no doubt, as now, extolled without too much knowledge of what they really were, that he should not have heard too much rather than too little of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Quinctilian's *Rhetoric*, Horace's *Art of Poetry*, and the *Unities*, especially from Ben Jonson—in short, that he who speaks of himself as

> "Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what he most enjoyed contented least,"

and who meditated so profoundly on every other topic of human concern, should never have turned his thought to the principles of that art which was both the delight and business of his life, the bread-winner alike for soul and body. Was there no harvest of the ear for him whose eye had stocked its garners so full as well-nigh to forestall all after-comers? Did he who could so counsel the practisers of an art in which he never arrived at eminence, as in Hamlet's advice to the players, never take counsel with himself about that other art in which the instinct of the crowd, no less than the judgment of his rivals, awarded him an easy pre-eminence? If he had little Latin and less Greek, might he not have had enough of both for every practical purpose on this side pedantry? The most extraordinary, one might almost say contradictory, attainments have been ascribed to him, and yet he has been supposed incapable of what was within easy reach of every boy at Westminster School. There is a knowledge that comes of sympathy as living and genetic as that which comes of mere learning is sapless and unprocreant, and for this no profound study of the languages is needed.

If Shakespeare did not know the ancients, I think they

were at least as unlucky in not knowing him. But it is incredible that he may have laid hold of an edition of the Greek tragedians, *Græcè et Latinè*, and then, with such poor wits as he was master of, contrived to worry some considerable meaning out of them? There are at least one or two coincidences which, whether accidental or not, are curious, and which I do not remember to have seen noticed. In the *Electra* of Sophocles, which is almost identical in its leading motive with *Hamlet*, the Chorus consoles Electra for the supposed death of Orestes in the same commonplace way which Hamlet's uncle tries with him.

Θνητοῦ πέφυκας πατρὸς, Ἠλέκτρα, φρόνει.
Θνητὸς δ' Ὀρέστης · ὥστε μὴ λίαν στένε,
Πᾶσιν γὰρ ἡμῖν τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν.

" Your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his. . . .
But to persever
In obstinate condolement is a course
Of impious stubbornness. . . .
'Tis common; all that live must die."

Shakespeare expatiates somewhat more largely, but the sentiment in both cases is almost verbally identical. The resemblance is probably a chance one, for commonplace and consolation were always twin sisters, whom always to escape is given to no man; but it is nevertheless curious. Here is another, from the *Œdipus Coloneus* :—

Τοῖς τοι δικαίοις χὠ βραχὺς νικᾷ μέγαν,

" Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."

Hamlet's " prophetic soul " may be matched with the πρόμαντις θυμός of Peleus (Eurip. *Androm.* 1075), and his " sea of troubles " with the κακῶν πέλαγος of Theseus in the *Hippolytus*, or of the Chorus in the *Hercules Furens*. And, for manner and tone, compare the speeches of Pheres in the *Alcestis*, and Jocasta in the *Phœnissæ*, with those of Claudio in *Measure for Measure*, and Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*.

The Greek dramatists were somewhat fond of a trick of words in which there is a reduplication of sense as well as of assonance, as in the *Electra* :—

Ἄλεκτρα γηράσκουσαν ἀνυμέναιά τε.

So Shakespeare:—

" Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled; "

and Milton after him, or, more likely, after the Greek:—

"Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved." [1]

I mention these trifles, in passing, because they have interested me, and therefore may interest others. I lay no stress upon them, for, if once the conductors of Shakespeare's intelligence had been put in connection with those Attic brains, he would have reproduced their message in a form of his own. They would have inspired, and not enslaved him. His resemblance to them is that of consanguinity, more striking in expression than in mere resemblance of feature. The likeness between the Clytemnestra—γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ — of Æschylus and the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare was too remarkable to have escaped notice. That between the two poets in their choice of epithets is as great, though more difficult of proof. Yet I think an attentive student of Shakespeare cannot fail to be reminded of something familiar to him in such phrases as "flame-eyed fire," "flax-winged ships," "star-neighbouring peaks," the rock Salmydessus,

"Rude jaw of the sea,
Harsh hostess of the seaman, step-mother
Of ships,"

and the beacon with its "*speaking eye* of fire." Surely there is more than a verbal, there is a genuine, similarity between the ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα and "the unnumbered beach" and "multitudinous sea." Æschylus, it seems to me, is willing, just as Shakespeare is, to risk the prosperity of a verse upon a lucky throw of words, which may come up the sices of hardy metaphor or the ambsace of conceit. There is such a difference between far-reaching and far-fetching! Poetry, to be sure, is always that daring one step beyond, which brings the right man to fortune, but leaves the wrong one in the ditch, and its law is, Be bold once and again, yet be not over-bold. It is true, also, that masters of language are a little apt to play with it. But whatever fault may be found with Shakespeare in this respect will touch a tender spot in Æschylus also. Does he sometimes overload a word,

[1] The best instance I remember is in the *Frogs*, where Bacchus pleads his inexperience at the oar, and says he is

ἄπειρος, ἀθαλάττωτος, ἀσαλαμίνιος,

which might be rendered,

Unskilled, unsea-soned, and un-Salamised.

so that the language not merely, as Dryden says, bends under him, but fairly gives way, and lets the reader's mind down with the shock as of a false step in taste? He has nothing worse than πέλαγος ἀνθοῦν νεκροῖς. A criticism, shallow in human nature, however deep in Campbell's *Rhetoric*, has blamed him for making persons, under great excitement of sorrow, or whatever other emotion, parenthesise some trifling play upon words in the very height of their passion. Those who make such criticisms have either never felt a passion or seen one in action, or else they forget the exaltation of sensibility during such crises, so that the attention, whether of the senses or the mind, is arrested for the moment by what would be overlooked in ordinary moods. The more forceful the current, the more sharp the ripple from any alien substance interposed. A passion that looks forward, like revenge or lust or greed, goes right to its end, and is straightforward in its expression; but a tragic passion, which is in its nature unavailing, like disappointment, regret of the inevitable, or remorse, is reflective, and liable to be continually diverted by the suggestions of fancy. The one is a concentration of the will, which intensifies the character and the phrase that expresses it; in the other, the will is helpless, and, as in insanity, while the flow of the mind sets imperatively in one direction, it is liable to almost ludicrous interruptions and diversions upon the most trivial hint of involuntary association. I am ready to grant that Shakespeare sometimes allows his characters to spend time, that might be better employed, in carving some cherry-stone of a quibble;[1] that he is sometimes tempted away from the natural by the quaint; that he sometimes forces a partial, even a verbal, analogy between the abstract thought and the sensual image into an absolute identity, giving us a kind of serious pun. In a pun our pleasure arises from a gap in the logical nexus too wide for the reason, but which the ear can bridge in an instant. "Is that your own hare, or a wig?" The fancy is yet more tickled where logic is treated with a mock ceremonial of respect.

> "His head was turned, *and so* he chewed
> His pigtail till he died."

[1] So Euripides:

Πενθεὺς δ' ὅπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις (*Bacchæ*, 363).
Ἐσωφρόνησεν οὐκ ἔχουσα σωφρονεῖν (*Hippol.*, 1037).

Now when this kind of thing is done in earnest, the result is one of those ill-distributed syllogisms which in rhetoric are called conceits.

> " Hard was the hand that struck the blow,
> Soft was the heart that bled."

I have seen this passage from Warner cited for its beauty, though I should have thought nothing could be worse, had I not seen General Morris's

> " Her heart and morning broke together
> In tears."

Of course, I would not rank with these Gloucester's

> " What! will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
> Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted; "

though as mere rhetoric it belongs to the same class.[1] It might be defended as a bit of ghastly humour characteristic of the speaker. But at any rate it is not without precedent in the two greater Greek tragedians. In a chorus of the *Seven against Thebes* we have:—

> ἐν δὲ γαίᾳ
> Ζωὰ φονορυτῷ
> Μέμικται, κάρτα δ' εἶσ' ὅμαιμοι.

And does not Sophocles make Ajax in his despair quibble upon his own name quite in the Shakespearian fashion, under similar circumstances? Nor does the coarseness with which our great poet is reproached lack an Æschylean parallel. Even the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* would have found a true gossip in her of the *Agamemnon*, who is so indiscreet in her confidences concerning the nursery life of Orestes. Whether Raleigh is right or not in warning historians against following truth too close upon the heels, the caution is a good one for poets as respects truth to Nature. But it is a mischievous fallacy in historian or critic to treat as a blemish of the man what is but the common tincture of his age. It is to confound a spatter of mud with a moral stain.

But I have been led away from my immediate purpose. I did not intend to compare Shakespeare with the ancients, much less to justify his defects by theirs. Shakespeare him-

[1] I have taken the first passage in point that occurred to my memory. It may not be Shakespeare's, though probably his. The question of authorship is, I think, settled, so far as criticism can do it, in Mr. Grant White's admirable essay appended to the Second Part of Henry VI.

self has left us a pregnant satire on dogmatical and categorical æsthetics (which commonly in discussion soon lose their ceremonious tails and are reduced to the internecine dog and cat of their bald first syllables) in the cloud-scene between Hamlet and Polonius, suggesting exquisitely how futile is any attempt at a cast-iron definition of those perpetually metamorphic impressions of the beautiful whose source is as much in the man who looks as in the thing he sees. In the fine arts a thing is either good in itself or it is nothing. It neither gains nor loses by having it shown that another good thing was also good in itself, any more than a bad thing profits by comparison with another that is worse. The final judgment of the world is intuitive, and is based, not on proof that a work possesses some of the qualities of another whose greatness is acknowledged, but on the immediate feeling that it carries to a high point of perfection certain qualities proper to itself. One does not flatter a fine pear by comparing it to a fine peach, nor learn what a fine peach is by tasting ever so many poor ones. The boy who makes his first bite into one does not need to ask his father if or how or why it is good. Because continuity is a merit in some kinds of writing, shall we refuse ourselves to the authentic charm of Montaigne's want of it? I have heard people complain of French tragedies because they were so very French. This, though it may not be to some particular tastes, and may from one point of view be a defect, is from another and far higher a distinguished merit. It is their flavour, as direct a tell-tale of the soil whence they drew it as that of French wines is. Suppose we should tax the Elgin marbles with being too Greek? When will people, nay, when will even critics, get over this self-defrauding trick of cheapening the excellence of one thing by that of another, this conclusive style of judgment which consists simply in belonging to the other parish? As one grows older, one loses many idols, perhaps comes at last to have none at all, though he may honestly enough uncover in deference to the worshippers before any shrine. But for the seeming loss the compensation is ample. These saints of literature descend from their canopied remoteness to be even more precious as men like ourselves, our companions in field and street, speaking the same tongue, though in many dialects, and owning one creed under the most diverse masks of form.

Much of that merit of structure which is claimed for the ancient tragedy is due, if I am not mistaken, to circumstances external to the drama itself,—to custom, to convention, to the exigencies of the theatre. It is formal rather than organic. The *Prometheus* seems to me one of the few Greek tragedies in which the whole creation has developed itself in perfect proportion from one central germ of living conception. The motive of the ancient drama is generally outside of it, while in the modern (at least in the English) it is necessarily within. Goethe, in a thoughtful essay,[1] written many years later than his famous criticism of Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meister*, says that the distinction between the two is the difference between *sollen* and *wollen*, that is, between *must* and *would*. He means that in the Greek drama the catastrophe is foreordained by an inexorable Destiny, while the element of Freewill, and consequently of choice, is the very axis of the modern. The definition is conveniently portable, but it has its limitations. Goethe's attention was too exclusively fixed on the Fate tragedies of the Greeks, and upon Shakespeare among the moderns. In the Spanish drama, for example, custom, loyalty, honour, and religion are as imperative and as inevitable as doom. In the *Antigone*, on the other hand, the crisis lies in the character of the protagonist. In this sense it is modern, and is the first example of true character-painting in tragedy. But, from whatever cause, that exquisite analysis of complex motives, and the display of them in action and speech, which constitute for us the abiding charm of fiction, were quite unknown to the ancients. They reached their height in Cervantes and Shakespeare, and, though on a lower plane, still belong to the upper region of art in Le Sage, Molière, and Fielding. The personages of the Greek tragedy seem to be commonly rather types than individuals. In the modern tragedy, certainly in the four greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies, there is still something very like Destiny, only the place of it is changed. It is no longer above man, but in him; yet the catastrophe is as sternly foredoomed in the characters of Lear, Othello, Macbeth, and Hamlet as it could be by an infallible oracle. In *Macbeth* indeed, the Weird Sisters introduce an element very like Fate; but generally it may be said that with the Greeks the character is involved in the

[1] Shakspeare und kein Ende.

action, while with Shakespeare the action is evolved from the character. In the one case, the motive of the play controls the personages; in the other, the chief personages are in themselves the motive to which all else is subsidiary. In any comparison, therefore, of Shakespeare with the ancients, we are not to contrast him with them as unapproachable models, but to consider whether he, like them, did not consciously endeavour, under the circumstances and limitations in which he found himself, to produce the most excellent thing possible, a model also in its own kind—whether higher or lower in degree is another question. The only fair comparison would be between him and that one of his contemporaries who endeavoured to anachronise himself, so to speak, and to subject his art, so far as might be, to the laws of classical composition. Ben Jonson was a great man, and has sufficiently proved that he had an eye for the external marks of character; but when he would make a whole of them, he gives us instead either a bundle of humours or an incorporated idea. With Shakespeare the plot is an interior organism, in Jonson an external contrivance. It is the difference between man and tortoise. In the one the osseous structure is out of sight, indeed, but sustains the flesh and blood that envelop it, while the other is boxed up and imprisoned in his bones.

I have been careful to confine myself to what may be called Shakespeare's ideal tragedies. In the purely historical or chronicle plays the conditions are different, and his imagination submits itself to the necessary restrictions on its freedom of movement. Outside the tragedies also, the *Tempest* makes an exception worthy of notice. If I read it rightly, it is an example of how a great poet should write allegory—not embodying metaphysical abstractions, but giving us ideals abstracted from life itself, suggesting an under-meaning everywhere, forcing it upon us nowhere, tantalising the mind with hints that imply so much and tell so little, and yet keep the attention all eye and ear with eager, if fruitless, expectation. Here the leading characters are not merely typical, but symbolical—that is, they do not illustrate a class of persons, they belong to universal Nature. Consider the scene of the play. Shakespeare is wont to take some familiar story, to lay his scene in some place the name of which, at least, is familiar—well knowing the reserve of power that

lies in the familiar as a background, when things are set in front of it under a new and unexpected light. But in the *Tempest* the scene is laid nowhere, or certainly in no country laid down on any map. Nowhere, then? At once nowhere and anywhere—for it is in the soul of man, that still vexed island hung between the upper and the nether world, and liable to incursions from both. There is scarce a play of Shakespeare's in which there is such variety of character, none in which character has so little to do in the carrying on and development of the story. But consider for a moment if ever the Imagination has been so embodied as in Prospero, the Fancy as in Ariel, the brute Understanding as in Caliban, who, the moment his poor wits are warmed with the glorious liquor of Stephano, plots rebellion against his natural lord, the higher Reason. Miranda is mere abstract Womanhood, as truly so before she sees Ferdinand as Eve before she was wakened to consciousness by the echo of her own nature coming back to her, the same, and yet not the same, from that of Adam. Ferdinand, again, is nothing more than Youth, compelled to drudge at something he despises, till the sacrifice of will and abnegation of self win him his ideal in Miranda. The subordinate personages are simply types: Sebastian and Antonio, of weak character and evil ambition; Gonzalo, of average sense and honesty; Adrian and Francisco, of the walking gentlemen who serve to fill up a world. They are not characters in the same sense with Iago, Falstaff, Shallow, or Leontius; and it is curious how every one of them loses his way in this enchanted island of life, all the victims of one illusion after another, except Prospero, whose ministers are purely ideal. The whole play, indeed, is a succession of illusions, winding up with those solemn words of the great enchanter who had summoned to his service every shape of merriment or passion, every figure in the great tragi-comedy of life, and who was now bidding farewell to the scene of his triumphs. For in Prospero shall we not recognise the Artist himself,—

> "That did not better for his life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds,
> Whence comes it that his name receives a brand,"—

who has forfeited a shining place in the world's eye by devotion to his art, and who, turned adrift on the ocean of life in the leaky carcass of a boat, has shipwrecked on that

Fortunate Island (as men always do who find their true vocation) where he is absolute lord, making all the powers of Nature serve him, but with Ariel and Caliban as special ministers? Of whom else could he have been thinking, when he says,—

> " Graves, at my command,
> Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let them forth,
> By my so potent art? "

Was this man, so extraordinary from whatsoever side we look at him, who ran so easily through the whole scale of human sentiment, from the homely common-sense of, " When two men ride of one horse, one *must* ride behind," to the transcendental subtilty of,

> " No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change;
> Thy pyramids, built up with newer might,
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
> They are but dressings of a former sight,"—

was he alone so unconscious of powers, some part of whose magic is recognised by all mankind, from the school-boy to the philosopher, that he merely sat by and saw them go without the least notion what they were about? Was he an inspired idiot, *votre bizarre Shakespeare?* a vast, irregular genius? a simple rustic, warbling his *native* wood-notes wild —in other words, insensible to the benefits of culture? When attempts have been made at various times to prove that this singular and seemingly contradictory creature, not one, but all mankind's epitome, was a musician, a lawyer, a doctor, a Catholic, a Protestant, an atheist, an Irishman, a discoverer of the circulation of the blood, and finally, that he was not himself, but somebody else, is it not a little odd that the last thing anybody should have thought of proving him was an artist? Nobody believes any longer that immediate inspiration is possible in modern times (as if God had grown old)—at least, nobody believes it of the prophets of those days, of John of Leyden, or Reeves, or Muggleton—and yet everybody seems to take it for granted of this one man Shakespeare. He, somehow or other, without knowing it, was able to do what none of the rest of them, though knowing it all too perfectly well, could begin to do. Everybody seems to get afraid of him in turn. Voltaire plays gentleman usher for him to his countrymen, and then, perceiving that his countrymen find a flavour in him beyond that of *Zaïre* or

Mahomet, discovers him to be a *Sauvage ivre, sans le moindre étincelle de bon goût, et sans le moindre connoissance des règles*. Goethe, who tells us that *Götz von Berlichingen* was written in the Shakespearian manner—and we certainly should not have guessed it, if he had not blabbed—comes to the final conclusion, that Shakespeare was a poet, but not a dramatist. Châteaubriand thinks that he has corrupted art. "If, to attain," he says, "the height of tragic art, it be enough to heap together disparate scenes without order and without connection, to dovetail the burlesque with the pathetic, to set the water-carrier beside the monarch and the huckster-wench beside the queen, who may not reasonably flatter himself with being the rival of the greatest masters? Whoever should give himself the trouble to retrace a single one of his days . . . to keep a journal from hour to hour, would have made a drama in the fashion of the English poet." But there are journals and journals, as the French say, and what goes into them depends on the eye that gathers for them. It is a long step from St. Simon to Dangeau, from Pepys to Thoresby, from Shakespeare even to the Marquis de Châteaubriand. M. Hugo alone, convinced that, as founder of the French Romantic School, there is a kind of family likeness between himself and Shakespeare, stands boldly forth to prove the father as extravagant as the son. Calm yourself, M. Hugo, you are no more a child of his than Will Davenant was! But, after all, is it such a great crime to produce something absolutely new in a world so tedious as ours, and so apt to tell its old stories over again? I do not mean new in substance, but in the manner of presentation. Surely the highest office of a great poet is to show us how much variety, freshness, and opportunity abides in the obvious and familiar. He invents nothing, but seems rather to *re*-discover the world about him, and his penetrating vision gives to things of daily encounter something of the strangeness of new creation. Meanwhile the changed conditions of modern life demand a change in the method of treatment. The ideal is not a strait-waistcoat. Because *Alexis and Dora* is so charming, shall we have no *Paul and Virginia?* It was the idle endeavour to reproduce the old enchantment in the old way that gave us the pastoral, sent to the garret now with our grandmothers' achievements of the same sort in worsted. Every age says to its poets, like

a mistress to her lover, "Tell me what I am like;" and he who succeeds in catching the evanescent expression that reveals character—which is as much to as say, what is intrinsically human—will be found to have caught something as imperishable as human nature itself. Aristophanes, by the vital and essential qualities of his humorous satire, is already more nearly our contemporary than Molière; and even the *Trouvères*, careless and trivial as they mostly are, could fecundate a great poet like Chaucer, and are still delightful reading.

The Attic tragedy still keeps its hold on the loyalty of scholars through their imagination, or their pedantry, or their feeling of an exclusive property, as may happen, and, however alloyed with baser matter, this loyalty is legitimate and well bestowed. But the domination of the Shakespearian is even wider. It pushes forward its boundaries from year to year, and moves no landmark backward. Here Alfieri and Lessing own a common allegiance; and the loyalty to him is one not of guild or tradition, but of conviction and enthusiasm. Can this be said of any other modern? of robust Corneille? of tender Racine? of Calderon even, with his tropical warmth and vigour of production? The Greeks and he are alike and alone in this, and for the same reason, that both are unapproachably the highest in their kind. Call him Gothic, if you like, but the inspiring mind that presided over the growth of these clustered masses of arch and spire and pinnacle and buttress is neither Greek nor Gothic—it is simply genius lending itself to embody the new desire of man's mind, as it had embodied the old. After all, to be delightful is to be classic, and the chaotic never pleases long. But manifoldness is not confusion, any more than formalism is simplicity. If Shakespeare rejected the unities, as I think he who complains of "Art made tongue-tied by Authority" might very well deliberately do, it was for the sake of an imaginative unity more intimate than any of time and place. The antique in itself is not the ideal, though its remoteness from the vulgarity of every-day associations helps to make it seem so. The true ideal is not opposed to the real, nor is it any artificial heightening thereof, but lies *in* it, and blessed are the eyes that find it! It is the *mens divinior* which hides within the actual, transfiguring matter-of-fact into matter-of-meaning for him who has the

gift of second sight. In this sense Hogarth is often more truly ideal than Raphael, Shakespeare often more truly so than the Greeks. I think it is a more or less conscious perception of this ideality, as it is a more or less well-grounded persuasion of it as respects the Greeks, that assures to him, as to them, and with equal justice, a permanent supremacy over the minds of men. This gives to his characters their universality, to his thought its irradiating property, while the artistic purpose running through and combining the endless variety of scene and character will alone account for his power of dramatic effect. Goethe affirmed, that, without Schröder's prunings and adaptations, Shakespeare was too undramatic for the German theatre—that, if the theory that his plays should be represented textually should prevail, he would be driven from the boards. The theory has prevailed, and he not only holds his own, but is acted oftener than ever. It is not irregular genius that can do this, for surely Germany need not go abroad for what her own Werners could more than amply supply her with.

But I would much rather quote a fine saying than a bad prophecy of a man to whom I owe so much. Goethe, in one of the most perfect of his shorter poems, tells us that a poem is like a painted window. Seen from without (and he accordingly justifies the Philistine, who never looks at them otherwise), they seem dingy and confused enough; but enter, and then

> "Da ist's auf einmal farbig helle,
> Geschicht' und Zierath glänzt in Schnelle."

With the same feeling he says elsewhere in prose, that "there is a destructive criticism and a productive. The former is very easy; for one has only to set up in his mind any standard, any model, however narrow" (let us say the Greeks), "and then boldly assert that the work under review does not match with it, and therefore is good for nothing—the matter is settled, and one must at once deny its claim. Productive criticism is a great deal more difficult; it asks, What did the author propose to himself? Is what he proposes reasonable and comprehensible? and how far has he succeeded in carrying it out?" It is in applying this latter kind of criticism to Shakespeare that the Germans have set us an example worthy of all commendation. If they have been sometimes over-subtile, they at least had the merit of

first looking at his works as wholes, as something that very likely contained an idea, perhaps conveyed a moral, if we could get at it. The illumination lent us by most of the English commentators reminds us of the candles which guides hold up to show us a picture in a dark place, the smoke of which gradually makes the work of the artist invisible under its repeated layers. Lessing, as might have been expected, opened the first glimpse in the new direction; Goethe followed with his famous exposition of *Hamlet;* A. W. Schlegel took a more comprehensive view in his Lectures, which Coleridge worked over into English, adding many fine criticisms of his own on single passages; and finally, Gervinus has devoted four volumes to a comment on the plays, full of excellent matter, though pushing the moral exegesis beyond all reasonable bounds.[1] With the help of all these, and especially of the last, I shall apply this theory of criticism to *Hamlet,* not in the hope of saying anything new, but of bringing something to the support of the thesis, that, if Shakespeare was skilful as a playwright, he was even greater as a dramatist—that, if his immediate business was to fill the theatre, his higher object was to create something which, by fulfilling the conditions and answering the requirements of modern life, should as truly deserve to be called a work of art as others had deserved it by doing the same thing in former times and under other circumstances. Supposing him to have accepted—consciously or not is of little importance—the new terms of the problem which makes character the pivot of dramatic action, and consequently the key of dramatic unity, how far did he succeed?

Before attempting my analysis, I must clear away a little rubbish. Are such anachronisms as those of which Voltaire accuses Shakespeare in *Hamlet,* such as the introduction of cannon before the invention of gunpowder, and making Christians of the Danes three centuries too soon, of the least bearing æsthetically? I think not; but as they are of a piece with a great many other criticisms upon the great poet, it is worth while to dwell upon them a moment.

The first demand we make upon whatever claims to be a work of art (and we have a right to make it) is that it shall be *in keeping.* Now this propriety is of two kinds, either

[1] I do not mention Ulrici's book, for it seems to me unwieldly and dull—zeal without knowledge.

extrinsic or intrinsic. In the first I should class whatever relates rather to the body than the soul of the work, such as fidelity to the facts of history (wherever that is important), congruity of costume, and the like—in short, whatever might come under the head of *picturesque* truth, a departure from which would shock too rudely our preconceived associations. I have seen an Indian chief in French boots, and he seemed to me almost tragic; but, put upon the stage in tragedy, he would have been ludicrous. Lichtenberg, writing from London in 1775, tells us that Garrick played Hamlet in a suit of the French fashion, then commonly worn, and that he was blamed for it by some of the critics; but, he says, one hears no such criticism during the play, nor on the way home, nor at supper afterwards, nor indeed till the emotion roused by the great actor has had time to subside. He justifies Garrick, though we should not be able to endure it now. Yet nothing would be gained by trying to make Hamlet's costume true to the assumed period of the play, for the scene of it is laid in a Denmark that has no dates.

In the second and more important category I should put, first, co-ordination of character, that is, a certain variety in harmony of the personages of a drama, as in the attitudes and colouring of the figures in a pictorial composition, so that, while mutually relieving and setting off each other, they shall combine in the total impression; second, that subordinate truth to Nature which makes each character coherent in itself; and, third, such propriety of costume and the like as shall satisfy the superhistoric sense, to which, and to which alone, the higher drama appeals. All these come within the scope of *imaginative* truth. To illustrate my third head by an example. Tieck criticises John Kemble's dressing for Macbeth in a modern Highland costume, as being ungraceful without any countervailing merit of historical exactness. I think a deeper reason for his dissatisfaction might be found in the fact, that this garb, with its purely modern and British army associations, is out of place on Forres Heath, and drags the Weird Sisters down with it from their proper imaginative remoteness in the gloom of the past to the disenchanting glare of the foot-lights. It is not the antiquarian, but the poetic conscience, that is wounded. To this, exactness, so far as concerns ideal representation, may not only not be truth, but may even be opposed to it.

Anachronisms and the like are in themselves of no account, and become important only when they make a gap too wide for our illusion to cross unconsciously, that is, when they are anacoluthons to the imagination. The aim of the artist is psychologic, not historic truth. It is comparatively easy for an author to *get up* any period with tolerable minuteness in externals, but readers and audiences find more difficulty in getting them down, though oblivion swallows scores of them at a gulp. The saving truth in such matters is a truth to essential and permanent characteristics. The Ulysses of Shakespeare, like the Ulysses of Dante and Tennyson, more or less harmonises with our ideal conception of the wary, long-considering, though adventurous son of Laertes; yet Simon Lord Lovat is doubtless nearer the original type. In *Hamlet*, though there is no Denmark of the ninth century, Shakespeare has suggested the prevailing rudeness of manners quite enough for his purpose. We see it in the single combat of Hamlet's father with the elder Fortinbras, in the vulgar wassail of the King, in the English monarch being expected to hang Rosencrantz and Guildenstern out of hand merely to oblige his cousin of Denmark, in Laertes, sent to Paris to be made a gentleman of, becoming instantly capable of any the most barbarous treachery to glut his vengeance. We cannot fancy Ragnar Lodbrog or Eric the Red matriculating at Wittenberg, but it was essential that Hamlet should be a scholar, and Shakespeare sends him thither without more ado. All through the play we get the notion of a state of society in which a savage nature has disguised itself in the externals of civilisation, like a Maori deacon, who has only to strip and he becomes once more a tattooed pagan with his mouth watering for a spare-rib of his pastor. Historically, at the date of *Hamlet*, the Danes were in the habit of burning their enemies alive in their houses, with as much of their family about them as might be to make it comfortable. Shakespeare seems purposely to have dissociated his play from history by changing nearly every name in the original legend. The motive of the play—revenge as a religious duty—belongs only to a social state in which the traditions of barbarism are still operative, but, with infallible artistic judgment, Shakespeare has chosen, not untamed Nature, as he found it in history, but the period of transition, a period in which the times are always out of joint, and thus the

irresolution which has its root in Hamlet's own character is stimulated by the very incompatibility of that legacy of vengeance he has inherited from the past with the new culture and refinement of which he is the representative. One of the few books which Shakespeare is known to have possessed was Florio's *Montaigne*, and he might well have transferred the Frenchman's motto, *Que sçais je?* to the front of his tragedy; nor can I help fancying something more than accident in the fact that Hamlet has been a student at Wittenberg, whence those new ideas went forth, of whose results in unsettling men's faith, and consequently disqualifying them for promptness in action, Shakespeare had been not only an eye-witness, but which he must actually have experienced in himself.

One other objection let me touch upon here, especially as it has been urged against *Hamlet*, and that is the introduction of low characters and comic scenes in tragedy. Even Garrick, who had just assisted at the Stratford Jubilee, where Shakespeare had been pronounced divine, was induced by this absurd outcry for the proprieties of the tragic stage to omit the grave-diggers' scene from *Hamlet*. Leaving apart the fact that Shakespeare would not have been the representative poet he is, if he had not given expression to this striking tendency of the Northern races, which shows itself constantly, not only in their literature, but even in their mythology and their architecture, the grave-diggers' scene always impresses me as one of the most pathetic in the whole tragedy. That Shakespeare introduced such scenes and characters with deliberate intention, and with a view to artistic relief and contrast, there can hardly be a doubt. We must take it for granted that a man whose works show everywhere the results of judgment sometimes acted with forethought. I find the springs of the profoundest sorrow and pity in this hardened indifference of the grave-diggers, in their careless discussion as to whether Ophelia's death was by suicide or no, in their singing and jesting at their dreary work.

> "A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
> For—and a shrouding-sheet:
> O, a pit of clay for to be made
> For such a guest is meet!"

We know who is to be the guest of this earthen hospitality—

how much beauty, love, and heartbreak are to be covered in that pit of clay. All we remember of Ophelia reacts upon us with tenfold force, and we recoil from our amusement at the ghastly drollery of the two delvers with a shock of horror. That the unconscious Hamlet should stumble on *this* grave of all others, that it should be *here* that he should pause to muse humorously on death and decay—all this prepares us for the revulsion of passion in the next scene, and for the frantic confession—

> " I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all *their* quantity of love
> Make up my sum! "

And it is only here that such an asseveration would be true even to the feeling of the moment; for it is plain from all we know of Hamlet that he could not so have loved Ophelia, that he was incapable of the self-abandonment of a true passion, that he would have analysed this emotion as he does all others, would have peeped and botanised upon it till it became to him a mere matter of scientific interest. All this force of contrast, and this horror of surprise, were necessary so to intensify his remorseful regret that he should believe himself for once in earnest. The speech of the King, " O, he is mad, Laertes," recalls him to himself, and he at once begins to rave:—

> " Zounds! show me what thou'lt do!
> Woul't weep? woul't fight? woul't fast? woul't tear thyself?
> Woul't drink up eysil? eat a crocodile? "

It is easy to see that the whole plot hinges upon the character of Hamlet, that Shakespeare's conception of this was the ovum out of which the whole organism was hatched. And here let me remark, that there is a kind of genealogical necessity in the character—a thing not altogether strange to the attentive reader of Shakespeare. Hamlet seems the natural result of the mixture of father and mother in his temperament, the resolution and persistence of the one, like sound timber wormholed and made shaky, as it were, by the other's infirmity of will and discontinuity of purpose. In natures so imperfectly mixed it is not uncommon to find vehemence of intention the prelude and counterpoise of weak performance, the conscious nature striving to keep up its self-respect by a triumph in words all the more resolute that it feels assured beforehand of inevitable defeat in action.

As in such slipshod housekeeping men are their own largest creditors, they find it easy to stave off utter bankruptcy of conscience by taking up one unpaid promise with another larger, and a heavier interest, till such self-swindling becomes habitual and by degrees almost painless. How did Coleridge discount his own notes of this kind with less and less specie as the figures lengthened on the paper! As with Hamlet, so it is with Ophelia and Laertes. The father's feebleness comes up again in the wasting heartbreak and gentle lunacy of the daughter, while the son shows it in a rashness of impulse and act, a kind of crankiness, of whose essential feebleness we are all the more sensible as contrasted with a nature so steady on its keel, and drawing so much water, as that of Horatio—the foil at once, in different ways, to both him and Hamlet. It was natural, also, that the daughter of self-conceited old Polonius should have her softness stiffened with a fibre of obstinacy; for there are two kinds of weakness, that which breaks, and that which bends. Ophelia's is of the former kind; Hero is her counterpart, giving way before calamity, and rising again so soon as the pressure is removed.

I find two passages in Dante that contain the exactest possible definition of that habit or quality of Hamlet's mind which justifies the tragic turn of the play, and renders it natural and unavoidable from the beginning. The first is from the second canto of the *Inferno* :—

> " E quale è quei che disvuol ciò che volle
> E per nuovi pensier cangia proposta,
> Si che del cominciar tutto si tolle;
> Tal mi fec' io in quella oscura costa
> Perchè pensando consumai la impresa
> Che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta."

> " And like the man who unwills what he willed,
> And for new thoughts doth change his first intent,
> So that he cannot anywhere begin,
> Such became I upon that slope obscure,
> Because with thinking I consumed resolve,
> That was so ready at the setting out."

Again, in the fifth of the *Purgatorio* :—

> " Che sempre l'uomo in cui pensier rampoglia
> Sovra pensier, da sè dilunga il segno,
> Perchè la foga l'un dell' altro insolla."

> " For always he in whom one thought buds forth
> Out of another farther puts the goal,
> For each has only force to mar the other."

Dante was a profound metaphysician, and as in the first passage he describes and defines a certain quality of mind, so in the other he tells us its result in the character and life, namely, indecision and failure—the goal *farther* off at the end than at the beginning. It is remarkable how close a resemblance of thought, and even of expression, there is between the former of these quotations and a part of Hamlet's famous soliloquy:—

> "Thus conscience [*i.e.* consciousness] doth make cowards of us all:
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pitch and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action!"

It is an inherent peculiarity of a mind like Hamlet's that it should be conscious of its own defect. Men of his type are for ever analysing their own emotions and motives. They cannot do anything, because they always see two ways of doing it. They cannot determine on any course of action, because they are always, as it were, standing at the cross-roads, and see too well the disadvantages of every one of them. It is not that they are incapable of resolve, but somehow the band between the motive power and the operative faculties is relaxed and loose. The engine works, but the machinery it should drive stands still. The imagination is so much in overplus, that thinking a thing becomes better than doing it, and thought with its easy perfection, capable of everything because it can accomplish everything with ideal means, is vastly more attractive and satisfactory than deed, which must be wrought at best with imperfect instruments, and always falls short of the conception that went before it. "If to do," says Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*—"if to do were as easy as to know what 'twere good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces." Hamlet knows only too well that 'twere good to do, but he palters with everything in a double sense: he sees the grain of good there is in evil, and the grain of evil there is in good, as they exist in the world, and, finding that he can make those feather-weighted accidents balance each other, infers that there is little to choose between the essences themselves. He is of Montaigne's mind, and says expressly that "there is nothing good or ill, but thinking makes it so." He dwells so exclusively in the world of ideas that the world of facts

seems trifling, nothing is worth the while; and he has been so long objectless and purposeless, so far as actual life is concerned, that, when at last an object and an aim are forced upon him, he cannot deal with them, and gropes vainly for a motive outside of himself that shall marshal his thoughts for him and guide his faculties into the path of action. He is the victim not so much of feebleness of will as of an intellectual indifference that hinders the will from working long in any one direction. He wishes to will, but never wills. His continual iteration of resolve shows that he has no resolution. He is capable of passionate energy where the occasion presents itself suddenly from without, because nothing is so irritable as conscious irresolution with a duty to perform. But of deliberate energy he is not capable; for there the impulse must come from within, and the blade of his analysis is so subtile that it can divide the finest hair of motive 'twixt north and north-west side, leaving him desperate to choose between them. The very consciousness of his defect is an insuperable bar to his repairing it; for the unity of purpose, which infuses every fibre of the character which will avail whenever wanted, is impossible where the mind can never rest till it has resolved that unity into its component elements, and satisfied itself which on the whole is of greater value. A critical instinct so insatiable that it must turn upon itself, for lack of something else to hew and hack, becomes incapable at last of originating anything except indecision. It becomes infallible in what *not* to do. How easily he might have accomplished his task is shown by the conduct of Laertes. When *he* has a death to avenge, he raises a mob, breaks into the palace, bullies the king, and proves how weak the usurper really was.

The world is the victim of splendid parts, and is slow to accept a rounded whole, because that is something which is long in completing, still longer in demonstrating its completion. We like to be surprised into admiration, and not logically convinced that we ought to admire. We are willing to be delighted with success, though we are somewhat indifferent to the homely qualities which insure it. Our thought is so filled with the rocket's burst of momentary splendour so far above us, that we forget the poor stick, useful and unseen, that made its climbing possible. One of these homely qualities is continuity of character, and it

escapes present applause because it tells chiefly, in the long run, in results. With his usual tact, Shakespeare has brought in such a character as a contrast and foil to Hamlet. Horatio is the only complete *man* in the play—solid, well-knit, and true; a noble, quiet nature, with that highest of all qualities, judgment, always sane and prompt; who never drags his anchors for any wind of opinion or fortune, but grips all the closer to the reality of things. He seems one of those calm, undemonstrative men whom we love and admire without asking to know why, crediting them with the capacity of great things, without any test of actual achievement, because we feel that their manhood is a constant quality, and no mere accident of circumstance and opportunity. Such men are always sure of the presence of their highest self on demand. Hamlet is continually drawing bills on the future, secured by his promise of himself to himself, which he can never redeem. His own somewhat feminine nature recognises its complement in Horatio, and clings to it instinctively, as naturally as Horatio is attracted by that fatal gift of imagination, the absence of which makes the strength of his own character, as its overplus does the weakness of Hamlet's. It is a happy marriage of two minds drawn together by the charm of unlikeness. Hamlet feels in Horatio the solid steadiness which he misses in himself; Horatio in Hamlet that need of service and sustainment to render which gives him a consciousness of his own value. Hamlet fills the place of a woman to Horatio, revealing him to himself not only in what he says, but by a constant claim upon his strength of nature; and there is great psychological truth in making suicide the first impulse of this quiet, undemonstrative man, after Hamlet's death, as if the very reason for his being were taken away with his friend's need of him. In his grief, he for the first and only time speaks of himself, is first made conscious of himself by his loss. If this manly reserve of Horatio be true to Nature, not less so are the communicativeness of Hamlet, and his tendency to soliloquise. If self-consciousness be alien to the one, it is just as truly the happiness of the other. Like a musician distrustful of himself, he is for ever tuning his instrument, first overstraining this cord a little, and then that, but unable to bring them into unison, or to profit by it if he could.

We do not believe that Horatio ever thought he " was not

a pipe for Fortune's finger to play what stop she please," till Hamlet told him so. That was Fortune's affair, not his; let her try it, if she liked. He is unconscious of his own peculiar qualities, as men of decision commonly are, or they would not be men of decision. When there is a thing to be done, they go straight at it, and for the time there is nothing for them in the whole universe but themselves and their object. Hamlet, on the other hand, is always studying himself. This world and the other, too, are always present to his mind, and there in the corner is the little black kobold of a doubt making mouths at him. He breaks down the bridges before him, not behind him, as a man of action would do; but there is something more than this. He is an ingrained sceptic; though his is the scepticism, not of reason, but of feeling, whose root is want of faith in himself. In him it is passive, a malady rather than a function of the mind. We might call him insincere: not that he was in any sense hypocrite, but only that he never was and never could be in earnest. Never could be, because no man without intense faith in something ever can. Even if he only believe in himself, that were better than nothing; for it will carry a man a great way in the outward successes of life, nay, will even sometimes give him the Archimedean fulcrum for moving the world. But Hamlet doubts everything. He doubts the immortality of the soul, just after seeing his father's spirit, and hearing from its mouth the secrets of the other world. He doubts Horatio even, and swears him to secrecy on the cross of his sword, though probably he himself has no assured belief in the sacredness of the symbol. He doubts Ophelia, and asks her, "Are you honest?" He doubts the ghost, after he has had a little time to think about it, and so gets up the play to test the guilt of the king. And how coherent the whole character is! With what perfect tact and judgment Shakespeare, in the advice to the players, makes him an exquisite critic! For just here that part of his character which would be weak in dealing with affairs is strong. A wise scepticism is the first attribute of a good critic. He must not believe that the fire-insurance offices will raise their rates of premium on Charles River, because the new volume of poems is printing at Riverside or the University Press. He must not believe so profoundly in the ancients as to think it wholly out of the question that

the world has still vigour enough in its loins to beget some one who will one of these days be as good an ancient as any of them.

Another striking quality in Hamlet's nature is his perpetual inclination to irony. I think this has been generally passed over too lightly, as if it were something external and accidental, rather assumed as a mask than part of the real nature of the man. It seems to me to go deeper, to be something innate, and not merely factitious. It is nothing like the grave irony of Socrates, which was the weapon of a man thoroughly in earnest—the boomerang of argument, which one throws in the opposite direction of what he means to hit, and which seems to be flying away from the adversary, who will presently find himself knocked down by it. It is not like the irony of Timon, which is but the wilful refraction of a clear mind twisting awry whatever enters it—or of Iago, which is the slime that a nature essentially evil loves to trail over all beauty and goodness to taint them with distrust: it is the half-jest, half-earnest of an inactive temperament that has not quite made up its mind whether life is a reality or no, whether men were not made in jest, and which amuses itself equally with finding a deep meaning in trivial things and a trifling one in the profoundest mysteries of being, because the want of earnestness in its own essence infects everything else with its own indifference. If there be now and then an unmannerly rudeness and bitterness in it, as in the scenes with Polonius and Osrick, we must remember that Hamlet was just in the condition which spurs men to allies of this kind: dissatisfied, at one neither with the world nor with himself, and accordingly casting about for something out of himself to vent his spleen upon. But even in these passages there is no hint of earnestness, of any purpose beyond the moment; they are mere cat's-paws of vexation, and not the deep-raking ground-swell of passion, as we see it in the sarcasm of Lear.

The question of Hamlet's madness has been much discussed and variously decided. High medical authority has pronounced, as usual, on both sides of the question. But the induction has been drawn from too narrow premises, being based on a mere diagnosis of the *case*, and not on an appreciation of the character in its completeness. We have a case of pretended madness in the Edgar of *King Lear;* and it is

certainly true that that is a charcoal sketch, coarsely outlined, compared with the delicate drawing, the lights, shades, and half-tints of the portraiture in Hamlet. But does this tend to prove that the madness of the latter, because truer to the recorded observation of experts, is real, and meant to be real, as the other to be fictitious? Not in the least, as it appears to me. Hamlet, among all the characters of Shakespeare, is the most eminently a metaphysician and psychologist. He is a close observer, continually analysing his own nature and that of others, letting fall his little drops of acid irony on all who come near him, to make them show what they are made of. Even Ophelia is not too sacred, Osrick not too contemptible, for experiment. If a man assumed madness, he would play his part perfectly. If Shakespeare himself, without going mad, could so observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms as to be able to reproduce them in Hamlet, why should it be beyond the power of Hamlet to reproduce them in himself? If you deprive Hamlet of reason, there is no truly tragic motive left. He would be a fit subject for Bedlam, but not for the stage. We might have pathology enough, but no pathos. Ajax first becomes tragic when he recovers his wits. If Hamlet is irresponsible, the whole play is a chaos. That he is not so might be proved by evidence enough, were it not labour thrown away.

This feigned madness of Hamlet's is one of the few points in which Shakespeare has kept close to the old story on which he founded his play; and as he never decided without deliberation, so he never acted without unerring judgment. Hamlet *drifts* through the whole tragedy. He never keeps on one tack long enough to get steerage-way, even if, in a nature like his, with those electric streamers of whim and fancy for ever wavering across the vault of his brain, the needle of judgment would point in one direction long enough to strike a course by. The scheme of simulated insanity is precisely the one he would have been likely to hit upon, because it enabled him to follow his own bent, and to drift with an apparent purpose, postponing decisive action by the very means he adopts to arrive at its accomplishment, and satisfying himself with the show of doing something that he may escape so much the longer the dreaded necessity of really doing anything at all. It enables him to *play* with

life and duty, instead of taking them by the rougher side, where alone any firm grip is possible—to feel that he is on the way toward accomplishing somewhat, when he is really paltering with his own irresolution. Nothing, I think, could be more finely imagined than this. Voltaire complains that he goes mad without any sufficient object or result. Perfectly true, and precisely what was most natural for him to do, and, accordingly, precisely what Shakespeare meant that he should do. It was delightful to him to indulge his imagination and humour, to prove his capacity for something by playing a part; the one thing he could not do was to bring himself to *act*, unless when surprised by a sudden impulse of suspicion—as where he kills Polonius, and there he could not see his victim. He discourses admirably of suicide, but does not kill himself; he talks daggers, but uses none. He puts by the chance to kill the king with the excuse that he will not do it while he is praying, lest his soul be saved thereby, though it is more than doubtful whether he believed it himself. He allows himself to be packed off to England, without any motive except that it would for the time take him farther from a present duty: the more disagreeable to a nature like his because it *was* present, and not a mere matter for speculative consideration. When Goethe made his famous comparison of the acorn planted in a vase which it bursts with its growth, and says that in like manner Hamlet is a nature which breaks down under the weight of a duty too great for it to bear, he seems to have considered the character too much from one side. Had Hamlet actually killed himself to escape his too onerous commission, Goethe's conception of him would have been satisfactory enough. But Hamlet was hardly a sentimentalist, like Werther; on the contrary, he saw things only too clearly in the dry north-light of the intellect. It is chance that at last brings him to his end. It would appear rather that Shakespeare intended to show us an imaginative temperament brought face to face with actualities, into any clear relation of sympathy with which it cannot bring itself. The very means that Shakespeare makes use of to lay upon him the obligation of acting—the ghost—really seems to make it all the harder for him to act; for the spectre but gives an additional excitement to his imagination and a fresh topic for his scepticism.

I shall not attempt to evolve any high moral significance from the play, even if I thought it possible; for that would be aside from the present purpose. The scope of the higher drama is to represent life, not every-day life, it is true, but life lifted above the plane of bread-and-butter associations, by nobler reaches of language, by the influence at once inspiring and modulating of verse, by an intenser play of passion condensing that misty mixture of feeling and reflection which makes the ordinary atmosphere of existence into flashes of thought and phrase whose brief, but terrible, illumination prints the outworn landscape of every-day upon our brains, with its little motives and mean results, in lines of tell-tale fire. The moral office of tragedy is to show us our own weaknesses idealised in grander figures and more awful results—to teach us that what we pardon in ourselves as venial faults, if they seem to have but slight influence on our immediate fortunes, have arms as long as those of kings, and reach forward to the catastrophe of our lives, that they are dry-rotting the very fibre of will and conscience, so that, if we should be brought to the test of a great temptation or a stringent emergency, we must be involved in a ruin as sudden and complete as that we shudder at in the unreal scene of the theatre. But the primary *object* of a tragedy is not to inculcate a formal moral. Representing life, it teaches, like life, by indirection, by those nods and winks that are thrown away on us blind horses in such profusion. We may learn, to be sure, plenty of lessons from Shakespeare. We are not likely to have kingdoms to divide, crowns foretold us by weird sisters, a father's death to avenge, or to kill our wives from jealousy; but Lear may teach us to draw the line more clearly between a wise generosity and a loose-handed weakness of giving; Macbeth, how one sin involves another, and for ever another, by a fatal parthenogenesis, and that the key which unlocks forbidden doors to our will or passion leaves a stain on the hand, that may not be so dark as blood, but that will not out; Hamlet, that all the noblest gifts of person, temperament, and mind slip like sand through the grasp of an infirm purpose; Othello, that the perpetual silt of some one weakness, the eddies of a suspicious temper depositing their one impalpable layer after another, may build up a shoal on which an heroic life and an otherwise magnanimous nature may bilge and go to pieces.

All this we may learn, and much more, and Shakespeare was no doubt well aware of all this and more; but I do not believe that he wrote his plays with any such didactic purpose. He knew human nature too well not to know that one thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of warning—that where one shapes his life by precept and example, there are a thousand who have it shaped for them by impulse and by circumstances. He did not mean his great tragedies for scarecrows, as if the nailing of one hawk to the barn-door would prevent the next from coming down souse into the hen-yard. No, it is not the poor bleaching victim hung up to moult its draggled feathers in the rain that he wishes to show us. He loves the hawk-nature as well as the hen-nature: and if he is unequalled in anything, it is in that sunny breadth of view, that impregnability of reason, that looks down all ranks and conditions of men, all fortune and misfortune, with the equal eye of the pure artist.

Whether I have fancied anything into Hamlet which the author never dreamed of putting there I do not greatly concern myself to inquire. Poets are always entitled to a royalty on whatever we find in their works; for these fine creations as truly build themselves up in the brain as they are built up with deliberate forethought. Praise art as we will, that which the artist did not mean to put into his work, but which found itself there by some generous process of Nature of which he was as unaware as the blue river is of its rhyme with the blue sky, has somewhat in it that snatches us into sympathy with higher things than those which come by plot and observation. Goethe wrote his *Faust* in its earliest form without a thought of the deeper meaning which the exposition of an age of criticism was to find in it: without foremeaning it, he had impersonated in Mephistopheles the genius of his century. Shall this subtract from the debt we owe him? Not at all. If originality were conscious of itself, it would have lost its right to be original. I believe that Shakespeare intended to impersonate in Hamlet not a mere metaphysical entity, but a man of flesh and blood: yet it is certainly curious how prophetically typical the character is of that introversion of mind which is so constant a phenomenon of these latter days, of that over-consciousness which wastes itself in analysing the motives of action instead of acting.

The old painters had a rule, that all compositions should be pyramidal in form—a central figure, from which the others slope gradually away on the two sides. Shakespeare probably had never heard of this rule, and, if he had, would not have been likely to respect it more than he has the so-called classical unities of time and place. But he understood perfectly the artistic advantages of gradation, contrast, and relief. Taking Hamlet as the key-note, we find in him weakness of character, which, on the one hand, is contrasted with the feebleness that springs from overweening conceit in Polonius and with frailty of temperament in Ophelia, while, on the other hand, it is brought into fuller relief by the steady force of Horatio and the impulsive violence of Laertes, who is resolute from thoughtlessness, just as Hamlet is irresolute from overplus of thought.

If we must draw a moral from Hamlet, it would seem to be, that Will is Fate, and that, Will once abdicating, the inevitable successor in the regency is Chance. Had Hamlet acted, instead of musing how good it would be to act, the king might have been the only victim. As it is, all the main actors in the story are the fortuitous sacrifice of his irresolution. We see how a single great vice of character at last draws to itself as allies and confederates all other weaknesses of the man, as in civil wars the timid and the selfish wait to throw themselves upon the stronger side.

> "In Life's small things be resolute and great
> To keep thy muscles trained: know'st thou when Fate
> Thy measure takes? or when she'll say to thee,
> 'I find thee worthy, do this thing for me'?"

I have said that it was doubtful if Shakespeare had any conscious moral intention in his writings. I meant only that he was purely and primarily poet. And while he was an English poet in a sense that is true of no other, his method was thoroughly Greek, yet with this remarkable difference—that, while the Greek dramatists took purely national themes and gave them a universal interest by their mode of treatment, he took what may be called cosmopolitan traditions, legends of human nature, and nationalised them by the infusion of his perfectly Anglican breadth of character and solidity of understanding. Wonderful as his imagination and fancy are, his perspicacity and artistic discretion are more so. This country tradesman's son, coming up to

London, could set high-bred wits, like Beaumont, uncopyable lessons in drawing gentlemen such as are seen nowhere else but on the canvas of Titian; he could take Ulysses away from Homer and expand the shrewd and crafty islander into a statesman whose words are the pith of history. But what makes him yet more exceptional was his utterly unimpeachable judgment, and that poise of character which enabled him to be at once the greatest of poets and so unnoticeable a good citizen as to leave no incidents for biography. His material was never far-sought (it is still disputed whether the fullest head of which we have record were cultivated beyond the range of grammar-school precedent!); but he used it with a poetic instinct which we cannot parallel, identified himself with it, yet remained always its born and questionless master. He finds the Clown and Fool upon the stage—he makes them the tools of his pleasantry, his satire, and even his pathos; he finds a fading rustic superstition, and shapes out of it ideal Pucks, Titanias, and Ariels, in whose existence statesmen and scholars believe for ever. Always poet, he subjects all to the ends of his art, and gives in *Hamlet* the churchyard ghost, but with the cothurnus on—the messenger of God's revenge against murder; always philosopher, he traces in *Macbeth* the metaphysics of apparitions, painting the shadowy Banquo only on the o'erwrought brain of the murderer, and staining the hand of his wife-accomplice (because she was the more refined and higher nature) with the disgustful blood-spot that is not there. We say he had no moral intention, for the reason, that, as artist, it was not his to deal with the realities, but only with the shows of things; yet, with a temperament so just, an insight so inevitable as his, it was impossible that the moral reality, which underlies the *mirage* of the poet's vision, should not always be suggested. His humour and satire are never of the destructive kind; what he does in that way is suggestive only—not breaking bubbles with Thor's hammer, but puffing them away with the breath of a Clown, or shivering them with the light laugh of a genial cynic. Men go about to prove the existence of a God! Was it a bit of phosphorus, that brain whose creations are so real, that, mixing with them, we feel as if we ourselves were but fleeting magic-lantern shadows?

But higher even than the genius we rate the character of

this unique man, and the grand impersonality of what he wrote. What has he told us of himself? In our self-exploiting nineteenth century, with its melancholy liver-complaint, how serene and high he seems! If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind; and if, as poets are wont to whine, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frost-work of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul.

NEW ENGLAND TWO CENTURIES AGO [1]

THE history of New England is written imperishably on the face of a continent, and in characters as beneficent as they are enduring. In the Old World national pride feeds itself with the record of battles and conquests;—battles which proved nothing and settled nothing; conquests which shifted a boundary on the map, and put one ugly head instead of another on the coin which the people paid to the tax-gatherer. But wherever the New-Englander travels among the sturdy commonwealths which have sprung from the seed of the *Mayflower*, churches, schools, colleges, tell him where the men of his race have been, or their influence penetrated; and an intelligent freedom is the monument of conquests whose results are not to be measured in square miles. Next to the fugitives whom Moses led out of Egypt, the little ship-load of outcasts who landed at Plymouth two centuries and a half ago are destined to influence the future of the world. The spiritual thirst of mankind has for ages been quenched at Hebrew fountains; but the embodiment in human institutions of truths uttered by the Son of man eighteen centuries ago was to be mainly the work of Puritan thought and Puritan self-devotion. Leave New England out in the cold! While you are plotting it, she sits by every fireside in the land where there is piety, culture, and free thought.

Faith in God, faith in man, faith in work—this is the short formula in which we may sum up the teaching of the founders of New England, a creed ample enough for this life and the next. If their municipal regulations smack somewhat of Judaism, yet there can be no nobler aim or more practical wisdom than theirs; for it was to make the law of man a

[1] *History of New England during the Stuart Dynasty.* By John Gorham Palfrey. Vol. iii. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1864. pp. xxii. 648.
Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Third Series, vols. ix. and x. Fourth Series, vols. vi. vii.

living counterpart of the law of God, in their highest conception of it. Were they too earnest in the strife to save their souls alive? That is still the problem which every wise and brave man is lifelong in solving. If the devil take a less hateful shape to us than to our fathers, he is as busy with us as with them; and if we cannot find it in our hearts to break with a gentleman of so much worldly wisdom, who gives such admirable dinners, and whose manners are so perfect, so much the worse for us.

Looked at on the outside, New England history is dry and unpicturesque. There is no rustle of silks, no waving of plumes, no clink of golden spurs. Our sympathies are not awakened by the changeful destinies, the rise and fall, of great families, whose doom was in their blood. Instead of all this, we have the homespun fates of Cephas and Prudence repeated in an infinite series of peaceable sameness, and finding space enough for record in the family Bible; we have the noise of axe and hammer and saw, an apotheosis of dogged work, where, reversing the fairy-tale, nothing is left to luck, and, if there be any poetry, it is something that cannot be helped—the waste of the water over the dam. Extrinsically, it is prosaic and plebeian; intrinsically, it is poetic and noble; for it is, perhaps, the most perfect incarnation of an idea the world has ever seen. That idea was not to found a democracy, nor to charter the city of New Jerusalem by an act of the General Court, as gentlemen seem to think whose notions of history and human nature rise like an exhalation from the good things at a Pilgrim Society dinner. Not in the least. They had no faith in the Divine institution of a system which gives Teague, because he can dig, as much influence as Ralph, because he can think, nor in personal at the expense of general freedom. Their view of human rights was not so limited that it could not take in human relations and duties also. They would have been likely to answer the claim, "I am as good as anybody," by a quiet "Yes, for some things, but not for others; as good, doubtless, in your place, where all things are good." What the early settlers in Massachusetts *did* intend, and what they accomplished, was the founding here of a *new* England, and a better one, where the political superstitions and abuses of the old should never have leave to take root. So much, we may say, they deliberately intended. No nobles, either lay

or cleric, no great landed estates, and no universal ignorance as the seed-plot of vice and unreason; but an elective magistracy and clergy, land for all who would till it, and reading and writing, will ye nill ye, instead. Here at last, it would seem, simple manhood is to have a chance to play his stake against Fortune with honest dice, uncogged by those three hoary sharpers, Prerogative, Patricianism, and Priestcraft. Whoever has looked into the pamphlets published in England during the Great Rebellion cannot but have been struck by the fact, that the principles and practice of the Puritan Colony had begun to react with considerable force on the mother country; and the policy of the retrograde party there, after the Restoration, in its dealings with New England, finds a curious parallel as to its motives (time will show whether as to its results) in the conduct of the same party towards America during the last four years.[1] This influence and this fear alike bear witness to the energy of the principles at work here.

We have said that the details of New England history were essentially dry and unpoetic. Everything is near, authentic, and petty. There is no mist of distance to soften outlines, no mirage of tradition to give characters and events an imaginative loom. So much downright work was perhaps never wrought on the earth's surface in the same space of time as during the first forty years after the settlement. But mere work is unpicturesque, and void of sentiment. Irving instinctively divined and admirably illustrated in his *Knickerbocker* the humorous element which lies in this nearness of view, this clear prosaic daylight of modernness, and this poverty of stage properties which makes the actors and the deeds they were concerned in seem ludicrously small, when contrasted with the semi-mythic grandeur in which we have clothed them, as we look backward from the crowned result, and fancy a cause as majestic as our conception of the effect. There was, indeed, one poetic side to the existence otherwise so narrow and practical; and to have conceived this, however partially, is the one original and American thing in Cooper. This diviner glimpse illumines the lives of our Daniel Boones, the man of civilisation and old-world ideas confronted with our forest solitudes—confronted, too, for the first time, with his real self, and so led gradually to

[1] Written in December 1864.

disentangle the original substance of his manhood from the artificial results of culture. Here was our new Adam of the wilderness, forced to name anew, not the visible creation of God, but the invisible creation of man, in those forms that lie at the base of social institutions, so insensibly moulding personal character and controlling individual action. Here is the protagonist of our New World epic, a figure as poetic as that of Achilles, as ideally representative as that of Don Quixote, as romantic in its relation to our home-spun and plebian mythus as Arthur in his to the mailed and plumed cycle of chivalry. We do not mean, of course, that Cooper's *Leatherstocking* is all this or anything like it, but that the character typified in him is ideally and potentially all this and more.

But whatever was poetical in the lives of the early New-Englanders had something shy, if not sombre, about it. If their natures flowered, it was out of sight, like the fern. It was in the practical that they showed their true quality, as Englishmen are wont. It has been the fashion lately with a few feeble-minded persons to undervalue the New England Puritans, as if they were nothing more than gloomy and narrow-minded fanatics. But all the charges brought against these large-minded and far-seeing men are precisely those which a really able fanatic, Joseph de Maistre, lays at the door of Protestantism. Neither a knowledge of human nature nor of history, justifies us in confounding, as is commonly done, the Puritans of Old and New England, or the English Puritans of the third with those of the fifth decade of the seventeenth century. Fanaticism, or, to call it by its milder name, enthusiasm, is only powerful and active so long as it is aggressive. Establish it firmly in power, and it becomes conservatism, whether it will or no. A sceptre once put in the hand, the grip is instinctive; and he who is firmly seated in authority soon learns to think security, and not progress, the highest lesson of statecraft. From the summit of power men no longer turn their eyes upward, but begin to look about them. Aspiration sees only one side of every question; possession, many. And the English Puritans, after their revolution was accomplished, stood in even a more precarious position than most successful assailants of the prerogative of whatever *is* to continue in being. They had carried a political end by means of a religious revival. The