lectures of Pedler and Parson. Wordsworth apparently felt that this would be so, and accordingly never saw his way clear to finishing the poem. But the treatment, whether a panacea or not, is certainly wholesome inasmuch as it inculcates abstinence, exercise, and uncontaminate air. I am not sure, indeed, that the Nature-cure theory does not tend to foster in constitutions less vigorous than Wordsworth's what Milton would call a fugitive and cloistered virtue at a dear expense of manlier qualities. The ancients and our own Elizabethans, ere spiritual megrims had become fashionable, perhaps made more out of life by taking a frank delight in its action and passion and by grappling with the facts of this world, rather than muddling themselves over the insoluble problems of another. If they had not discovered the picturesque, as we understand it, they found surprisingly fine scenery in man and his destiny, and would have seen something ludicrous, it may be suspected, in the spectacle of a grown man running to hide his head in the apron of the Mighty Mother whenever he had an ache in his finger or got a bruise in the tussle for existence.

But when, as I have said, our impartiality has made all those qualifications and deductions against which even the greatest poet may not plead his privilege, what is left to Wordsworth is enough to justify his fame. Even where his genius is wrapped in clouds, the unconquerable lightning of imagination struggles through, flashing out unexpected vistas, and illuminating the humdrum pathway of our daily thought with a radiance of momentary consciousness that seems like a revelation. If it be the most delightful function of the poet to set our lives to music, yet perhaps he will be even more sure of our maturer gratitude if he do his part also as moralist and philosopher to purify and enlighten; if he define and encourage our vacillating perceptions of duty; if he piece together our fragmentary apprehensions of our own life and that larger life whose unconscious instruments we are, making of the jumbled bits of our dissected map of experience a coherent chart. In the great poets there is an exquisite sensibility both of soul and sense that sympathises like gossamer sea-moss with every movement

of the element in which it floats, but which is rooted on the solid rock of our common sympathies. Wordsworth shows less of this finer feminine fibre of organisation than one or two of his contemporaries, notably than Coleridge or Shelley; but he was a masculine thinker, and in his more characteristic poems there is always a kernel of firm conclusion from far-reaching principles that stimulates thought and challenges meditation. Groping in the dark passages of life, we come upon some axiom of his, as it were a wall that gives us our bearings and enables us to find an outlet. Compared with Goethe we feel that he lacks that serene impartiality of mind which results from breadth of culture; nay, he seems narrow, insular, almost provincial. He reminds us of those saints of Dante who gather brightness by revolving on their own axis. But through this very limitation of range he gains perhaps in intensity and the impressiveness which results from eagerness of personal conviction. If we read Wordsworth through, as I have just done, we find ourselves changing our mind about him at every other page, so uneven is he. If we read our favourite poems or passages only, he will seem uniformly great. And even as regards "The Excursion" we should remember how few long poems will bear consecutive reading. For my part I know of but one—the "Odyssey."

None of our great poets can be called popular in any exact sense of the word, for the highest poetry deals with thoughts and emotions which inhabit, like rarest sea-mosses, the doubtful limits of that shore between our abiding divine and our fluctuating human nature, rooted in the one, but living in the other, seldom laid bare, and otherwise visible only at exceptional moments of entire calm and clearness. Of no other poet except Shakespeare have so many phrases become household words as of Wordsworth. If Pope has made current more epigrams of worldly wisdom, to Wordsworth belongs the nobler praise of having defined for us, and given us for a daily possession, those faint and vague suggestions of other-worldliness of whose gentle ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of life scarcely ever allowed us to be conscious. He

has won for himself a secure immortality by a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their best hours worthy, or indeed capable, of his companionship, and by a homely sincerity of human sympathy which reaches the humblest heart. Our language owes him gratitude for the habitual purity and abstinence of his style, and we who speak it, for having emboldened us to take delight in simple things, and to trust ourselves to our own instincts. And he hath his reward. It needs not to bid

> " Renowned Chaucer lie a thought more nigh
> To rare Beaumond, and learned Beaumond lie
> A little nearer Spenser ;"

for there is no fear of crowding in that little society with whom he is now enrolled as fifth in the succession of the great English Poets.

KEATS.

THERE are few poets whose works contain slighter hints of their personal history than those of Keats ; yet there are, perhaps, even fewer whose real lives, or rather the conditions upon which they lived, are more clearly traceable in what they have written. To write the life of a man was formerly understood to mean the cataloguing and placing of circumstances, of those things which stood about the life and were more or less related to it, but were not the life itself. But Biography from day to day holds dates cheaper and facts dearer. A man's life, so far as its outward events are concerned, may be made for him, as his clothes are by the tailor, of this cut or that, of finer or coarser material ; but the gait and gesture show through, and give to trappings, in themselves characterless, an individuality that belongs to the man himself. It is those essential facts which underlie the life and make the individual man that are of importance, and it is the cropping out of these upon the surface that give us indications by which to judge of the true nature hidden below. Every man has his block given him, and the figure he cuts will depend very much upon the shape of that—upon the knots and twists which existed in it from the beginning. We were designed in the cradle, perhaps earlier, and it is in finding out this design, and shaping ourselves to it, that our years are spent wisely. It is the vain endeavour to make ourselves what we are not that has strewn history with so many broken purposes and lives left in the rough.

Keats hardly lived long enough to develop a well-outlined character, for that results commonly from the resistance made by temperament to the many influences by which the world, as

it may happen then to be, endeavours to mould every one in its own image. What his temperament was we can see clearly, and also that it subordinated itself more and more to the discipline of art.

JOHN KEATS, the second of four children, like Chaucer and Spenser, was a Londoner, but, unlike them, he was certainly not of gentle blood. Lord Houghton, who seems to have had a kindly wish to create him gentleman by brevet, says that he was "born in the upper ranks of the middle class." This shows a commendable tenderness for the nerves of English society, and reminds one of Northcote's story of the violin-player who, wishing to compliment his pupil, George III., divided all fiddlers into three classes—those who could not play at all, those who played very badly, and those who played very well—assuring his Majesty that he had made such commendable progress as to have already reached the second rank. We shall not be too greatly shocked by knowing that the father of Keats (as Lord Houghton has told us in an earlier biography) "was employed in the establishment of Mr. Jennings, the proprietor of large livery-stables on the Pavement in Moorfields, nearly opposite the entrance into Finsbury Circus." So that, after all, it was not so bad; for, first, Mr. Jennings was a *proprietor;* second, he was the proprietor of an *establishment;* third, he was the proprietor of a *large* establishment; and fourth, this large establishment was *nearly* opposite Finsbury Circus—a name which vaguely dilates the imagination with all sorts of potential grandeurs. It is true that Leigh Hunt asserts that Keats "was a little too sensitive on the score of his origin,"* but we can find no trace of such a feeling either in his poetry or in such of his letters as have been printed. We suspect the fact to have been that he resented with becoming pride the vulgar *Blackwood* and *Quarterly* standard, which measured genius by genealogies. It is enough that his poetical pedigree is of the best, tracing through Spenser to Chaucer, and

* *Hunt's Autobiography* (Am. ed.), vol. ii., p. 36.

that Pegasus does not stand at livery even in the largest establishments in Moorfields.

As well as we can make out, then, the father of Keats was a groom in the service of Mr. Jennings, and married the daughter of his master. Thus, on the mother's side, at least, we find a grandfather; on the father's there is no hint of such an ancestor, and we must charitably take him for granted. It is of more importance that the elder Keats was a man of sense and energy, and that his wife was a "lively and intelligent woman, who hastened the birth of the poet by her passionate love of amusement," bringing him into the world, a seven-months' child, on the 29th October 1795, instead of the 29th December, as would have been conventionally proper. Lord Houghton describes her as "tall, with a large oval face, and a somewhat saturnine demeanour." This last circumstance does not agree very well with what he had just before told us of her liveliness, but he consoles us by adding that "she succeeded, *however*, in inspiring her children with the profoundest affection." This was particularly true of John, who once, when between four and five years old, mounted guard at her chamber door with an old sword, when she was ill and the doctor had ordered her not to be disturbed.*

In 1804, Keats being in his ninth year, his father was killed by a fall from his horse. His mother seems to have been ambitious for her children, and there was some talk of sending John to Harrow. Fortunately this plan was thought too expensive, and he was sent instead to the school of Mr. Clarke at Enfield, with his brothers. A maternal uncle, who had distinguished himself by his courage under Duncan at Camperdown, was the hero of his nephews, and they went to school resolved to maintain the family reputation for courage. John was always fighting, and was chiefly noted among his schoolfellows as a strange compound of pluck and sensibility. He attacked an usher who had boxed his brother's ears; and when

* Haydon tells the story differently, but I think Lord Houghton's version the best.

his mother died, in 1810, was moodily inconsolable, hiding himself for several days in a nook under the master's desk, and refusing all comfort from teacher or friend.

He was popular at school, as boys of spirit always are, and impressed his companions with a sense of his power. They thought he would one day be a famous soldier. This may have been owing to the stories he told them of the heroic uncle, whose deeds, we may be sure, were properly famoused by the boy Homer, and whom they probably took for an admiral at the least, as it would have been well for Keats's literary prosperity if he had been. At any rate, they thought John would be a great man, which is the main thing, for the public opinion of the playground is truer and more discerning than that of the world, and if you tell us what the boy was, we will tell you what the man longs to be, however he may be repressed by necessity or fear of the police reports.

Lord Houghton has failed to discover anything else especially worthy of record in the school-life of Keats. He translated the twelve books of the *Æneid*, read *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Incas of Peru*, and looked into *Shakespeare*. He left school in 1810, with little Latin and no Greek, but he had studied Spence's *Polymetis*, Tooke's *Pantheon*, and Lempriere's Dictionary, and knew gods, nymphs, and heroes, which were quite as good company perhaps for him as aorists and aspirates. It is pleasant to fancy the horror of those respectable writers if their pages could suddenly have become alive under their pens with all that the young poet saw in them.*

On leaving school he was apprenticed for five years to a

* There is always some one willing to make himself a sort of accessary after the fact in any success; always an old woman or two, ready to remember omens of all quantities and qualities in the childhood of persons who have become distinguished. Accordingly, a certain "Mrs. Grafty, of Craven Street, Finsbury, assures Mr. George Keats, when he tells her that John is determined to be a poet, "that this was very odd, because when he could just speak, instead of answering questions put to him, he would always make a rhyme to the last word people said, and then laugh." The early histories of heroes, like those of nations are always more or less

surgeon at Edmonton. His master was a Mr. Hammond, "of some eminence" in his profession, as Lord Houghton takes care to assure us. The place was of more importance than the master, for its neighbourhood to Enfield enabled him to keep up his intimacy with the family of his former teacher, Mr. Clarke, and to borrow books of them. In 1812, when he was in his seventeenth year, Mr. Charles Cowden Clarke lent him the "Faerie Queen." Nothing that is told of Orpheus or Amphion is more wonderful than this miracle of Spenser's, transforming a surgeon's apprentice into a great poet. Keats learned at once the secret of his birth, and henceforward his indentures ran to Apollo instead of Mr. Hammond. Thus could the Muse defend her son. It is the old story—the lost heir discovered by his aptitude for what is gentle and knightly. Haydon tells us "that he used sometimes to say to his brother he feared he should never be a poet, and if he was not he would destroy himself." This was perhaps a half-conscious reminiscence of Chatterton, with whose genius and fate he had an intense sympathy, it may be from an inward foreboding of the shortness of his own career.*

Before long we find him studying Chaucer, then Shakespeare, and afterwards Milton. But Chapman's translations had a more abiding influence on his style both for good and evil. That he read wisely, his comments on the "Paradise Lost" are enough to prove. He now also commenced poet himself, but does not appear to have neglected the study of his profession.

mythical, and I give the story for what it is worth. Doubtless there is a gleam of intelligence in it, for the old lady pronounces it odd that any one should *determine* to be a poet, and seems to have wished to hint that the matter was determined earlier and by a higher disposing power. There are few children who do not soon discover the charm of rhyme, and perhaps fewer who can resist making fun of the Mrs. Grafty, of Craven Street, Finsbury, when they have the chance. See *Haydon's Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 361.

* "I never saw the poet Keats but once, but he then read some lines from (I think) the 'Bristowe Tragedy' withan enthusiasm of admiration such as could be felt only by a poet, and which true poetry only could have excited."—J. H. C., in *Notes and Queries*, 4th s. x. 157.

He was a youth of energy and purpose, and though he no doubt penned many a stanza when he should have been anatomising, and walked the hospitals accompanied by the early gods, nevertheless passed a very creditable examination in 1817. In the spring of this year, also, he prepared to take his first degree as poet, and accordingly published a small volume containing a selection of his earlier essays in verse. It attracted little attention, and the rest of this year seems to have been occupied with a journey on foot in Scotland, and the composition of "Endymion," which was published in 1818. Milton's "Tetrachordon" was not better abused; but Milton's assailants were unorganised, and were obliged each to print and pay for his own dingy little quarto, trusting to the natural laws of demand and supply to furnish him with readers. Keats was arraigned by the constituted authorities of literary justice. They might be, nay, they were Jeffrieses and Scroggses, but the sentence was published, and the penalty inflicted before all England. The difference between his fortune and Milton's was that between being pelted by a mob of personal enemies and being set in the pillory. In the first case, the annoyance brushes off mostly with the mud; in the last, there is no solace but the consciousness of suffering in a great cause. This solace, to a certain extent, Keats had; for his ambition was noble, and he hoped not to make a great reputation, but to be a great poet. Haydon says that Wordsworth and Keats were the only men he had ever seen who looked conscious of a lofty purpose.

It is curious that men should resent more fiercely what they suspect to be good verses, than what they know to be bad morals. Is it because they feel themselves incapable of the one and not of the other? Probably a certain amount of honest loyalty to old idols in danger of dethronement is to be taken into account, and quite as much of the cruelty of criticism is due to want of thought as to deliberate injustice. However it be, the best poetry has been the most savagely attacked, and men who scrupulously practised the Ten Commandments as if there were never a *not* in any of them, felt every sentiment of their

better nature outraged by the *Lyrical Ballads*. It is idle to attempt to show that Keats did not suffer keenly from the vulgarities of *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly*. He suffered in proportion as his ideal was high, and he was conscious of falling below it. In England, especially, it is not pleasant to be ridiculous, even if you are a lord; but to be ridiculous and an apothecary at the same time is almost as bad as it was formerly to be excommunicated. *A priori*, there was something absurd in poetry written by the son of an assistant in the livery-stables of Mr. Jennings, even though they were an establishment, and a large establishment, and nearly opposite Finsbury Circus. Mr. Gifford, the ex-cobbler, thought so in the *Quarterly*, and Mr. Terry, the actor,* thought so even more distinctly in *Blackwood*, bidding the young apothecary "back to his gallipots!" It is not pleasant to be talked down upon by your inferiors who happen to have the advantage of position, nor to be drenched with ditch-water, though you know it to be thrown by a scullion in a garret.

Keats, as his was a temperament in which sensibility was excessive, could not but be galled by this treatment. He was galled the more that he was also a man of strong sense, and capable of understanding clearly how hard it is to make men acknowledge solid value in a person whom they have once heartily laughed at. Reputation is in itself only a farthing-candle, of wavering and uncertain flame, and easily blown out, but it is the light by which the world looks for and finds merit. Keats longed for fame, but longed above all to deserve it. To his friend Taylor he writes, "There is but one way for me. The road lies through study, application, and thought." Thrilling with the electric touch of sacred leaves, he saw in vision, like Dante, that small procession of the elder poets to which only elect centuries can add another laurelled head. Might he, too, deserve from posterity the love and reverence which he paid to those antique glories? It was no unworthy ambition, but

* Haydon (*Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 379) says that he "strongly suspects" Terry to have written the articles in *Blackwood*.

everything was against him—birth, health, even friends, since it was partly on their account that he was sneered at. His very name stood in his way, for Fame loves best such syllables as are sweet and sonorous on the tongue, like Spenserian, Shakespearian. In spite of Juliet, there is a great deal in names, and when the fairies come with their gifts to the cradle of the selected child, let one, wiser than the rest, choose a name for him from which well-sounding derivatives can be made, and, best of all, with a termination in *on*. Men judge the current coin of opinion by the ring, and are readier to take without question whatever is Platonic, Baconian, Newtonian, Johnsonian, Washingtonian, Jeffersonian, Napoleonic, and all the rest. You cannot make a good adjective out of Keats—the more pity—and to say a thing is *Keatsy* is to contemn it. Fortune likes fine names.

Haydon tells us that Keats was very much depressed by the fortunes of his book. This was natural enough, but he took it all in a manly way, and determined to revenge himself by writing better poetry. He knew that activity, and not despondency, is the true counterpoise to misfortune. Haydon is sure of the change in his spirits, because he would come to the painting-room and sit silent for hours. But we rather think that the conversation, where Mr. Haydon was, resembled that in a young author's first play, where the other interlocutors are only brought in as convenient points for the hero to hitch the interminable web of his monologue upon. Besides, Keats had been continuing his education this year, by a course of Elgin marbles and pictures by the great Italians, and might very naturally have found little to say about Mr. Haydon's extensive works, that he would have cared to hear. Lord Houghton, on the other hand, in his eagerness to prove that Keats was not killed by the article in the *Quarterly*, is carried too far toward the opposite extreme, and more than hints that he was not even hurt by it. This would have been true of Wordsworth, who, by a constant companionship with mountains, had acquired something of their manners, but was simply impossible to a man of Keats's temperament.

On the whole, perhaps, we need not respect Keats the less for having been gifted with sensibility, and may even say what we believe to be true, that his health was injured by the failure of his book. A man cannot have a sensuous nature and be pachydermatous at the same time, and if he be imaginative as well as sensuous, he suffers just in proportion to the amount of his imagination. It is perfectly true that what we call the world, in these affairs, is nothing more than a mere Brocken spectre, the projected shadow of ourselves; but as long as we do not know it, it is a very passable giant. We are not without experience of natures so purely intellectual that their bodies had no more concern in their mental doings and sufferings than a house has with the good or ill fortune of its occupant. But poets are not built on this plan, and especially poets like Keats, in whom the moral seems to have so perfectly interfused the physical man, that you might almost say he could feel sorrow with his hands, so truly did his body, like that of Donne's Mistress Boulstred, think and remember and forebode. The healthiest poet of whom our civilisation has been capable says that when he beholds

> "desert a beggar born,
> And strength by limping sway disabled,
> And art made tongue-tied by authority,"

alluding, plainly enough, to the Giffords of his day,

> "And simple truth miscalled simplicity,"

as it was long afterwards in Wordsworth's case,

> "And captive Good attending Captain Ill,"

that then even he, the poet to whom, of all others, life seems to have been dearest, as it was also the fullest of enjoyment, "tired of all these," had nothing for it but to cry for "restful Death."

Keats, to all appearance, accepted his ill-fortune courageously. He certainly did not over-estimate "Endymion," and perhaps a sense of humour which was not wanting in him may have served as a buffer against the too importunate shock of disappointment

"He made Ritchie promise," says Haydon, "he would carry his 'Endymion' to the great desert of Sahara and fling it in the midst." On the 9th October 1818 he writes to his publisher, Mr. Hessey, "I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could inflict; and also, when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary reperception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to 'the slipshod "Endymion.'" That it is so is no fault of mine. No! though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*. I may write independently and *with judgment*, hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In 'Endymion' I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest."

This was undoubtedly true, and it was naturally the side which a large-minded person would display to a friend. This is what he thought, but whether it was what he *felt*, I think doubtful. I look upon it rather as one of the phenomena of that multanimous nature of the poet, which makes him for the moment that of which he has an intellectual perception. Elsewhere he says something which seems to hint at the true state

of the case. "I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man: *they make our prime objects a refuge as well as a passion.*" One cannot help contrasting Keats with Wordsworth —the one altogether poet; the other essentially a Wordsworth, with the poetic faculty added—the one shifting from form to form, and from style to style, and pouring his hot throbbing life into every mould; the other remaining always the individual, producing works, and not so much living in his poems as memorially recording his life in them. When Wordsworth alludes to the foolish criticisms on his writings, he speaks serenely and generously of Wordsworth the poet, as if he were an unbiassed third person, who takes up the argument merely in the interest of literature. He towers into a bald egotism which is quite above and beyond selfishness. Poesy was his employment; it was Keats's very existence, and he felt the rough treatment of his verses as if it had been the wounding of a limb. To Wordsworth, composing was a healthy exercise; his slow pulse and imperturbable self-trust gave him assurance of a life so long that he could wait; and when we read his poems we should never suspect the existence in him of any sense but that of observation, as if Wordsworth the poet were a half-mad land-surveyor, accompanied by Mr. Wordsworth the distributor of stamps, as a kind of keeper. But every one of Keats's poems was a sacrifice of vitality; a virtue went away from him into every one of them; even yet, as we turn the leaves, they seem to warm and thrill our fingers with the flush of his fine senses, and the flutter of his electrical nerves, and we do not wonder he felt that what he did was to be done swiftly.

In the meantime his younger brother languished and died, his elder seems to have been in some way unfortunate, and had gone to America, and Keats himself showed symptoms of the hereditary disease which caused his death at last. It is in October 1818 that we find the first allusion to a passion which was, ere long, to consume him. It is plain enough beforehand, that those were not moral or mental graces that should attract a man like Keats. His intellect was satisfied and absorbed by his art, his books, and his friends. He could have companionship

and appreciation from men; what he craved of woman was only repose. That luxurious nature, which would have tossed uneasily on a crumpled rose-leaf, must have something softer to rest upon than intellect, something less ethereal than culture. It was his body that needed to have its equilibrium restored, the waste of his nervous energy that must be repaired by deep draughts of the overflowing life and drowsy tropical force of an abundant and healthily poised womanhood. Writing to his sister-in-law, he says of this nameless person: "She is not a Cleopatra, but is, at least, a Charmian; she has a rich Eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes the same impression as the beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any man who may address her. From habit, she thinks that *nothing particular*. I always find myself at ease with such a woman; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or in a tremble. I forget myself entirely, because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her, so, before I go any farther, I will tell you that I am not. She kept me awake one night, as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement, than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the very *yes* and *no* of whose life is to me a banquet. . . . I like her and her like, because one has no *sensation;* what we both are is taken for granted. . . . She walks across a room in such a manner that a man is drawn toward her with magnetic power. . . . I believe, though, she has faults, the same as a Cleopatra or a Charmian might have had. Yet she is a fine thing, speaking in a worldly way; for there are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things—the worldly, theatrical, and pantomimical; and the unearthly, spiritual, and ethereal. In the former, Bonaparte, Lord Byron, and this Charmian hold the first place in our minds; in the latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and you, my dear sister, are the conquering feelings. As a

man of the world, I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal being, I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me."

It is pleasant always to see Love hiding his head with such pains, while his whole body is so clearly visible, as in this extract. This lady, it seems, is not a Cleopatra, only a Charmian; but presently we find that she is imperial. He does not love her, but he would just like to be ruined by her, nothing more. This glimpse of her, with her leopardess beauty, crossing the room and drawing men after her magnetically, is all we have. She seems to have been still living in 1848, and, as Lord Houghton tells us, kept the memory of the poet sacred. "She is an East-Indian," Keats says, "and ought to be her grandfather's heir." Her name we do not know.* It appears from Dilke's *Papers of a Critic* that they were betrothed: "It is quite a settled thing between John Keats and Miss ——. God help them. It is a bad thing for them. The mother says she cannot prevent it, and that her only hope is that it will go off. He don't like anyone to look at her or to speak to her." Alas, the tropical warmth became a consuming fire!

> "His passion cruel grown took on a hue
> Fierce and sanguineous."

Between this time and the spring of 1820 he seems to have worked assiduously. Of course, worldly success was of more importance than ever. He began "Hyperion," but had given it up in September 1819, because as he said, "there were too many Miltonic inversions in it." He wrote "Lamia" after an attentive study of Dryden's versification. This period also produced the "Eve of St. Agnes," "Isabella," and the odes to the "Nightingale" and to the "Grecian Urn." He studied Italian, read Ariosto, and wrote part of a humorous poem, "The Cap and Bells." He tried his hand at tragedy, and Lord Houghton has published among his *Remains*, "Otho the

* The sale at public auction of Keats's love-letters has, since this essay was written, made the name known only too well. Her name was Fanny Brawne.—[ED.]

Great," and all that was ever written of "King Stephen." We think he did unwisely, for a biographer is hardly called upon to show how ill his *biographee* could do anything.

In the winter of 1820 he was chilled in riding on the top of a stage-coach, and came home in a state of feverish excitement. He was persuaded to go to bed, and in getting between the cold sheets coughed slightly. "That is blood in my mouth," he said; "bring me the candle; let me see this blood." It was of a brilliant red, and his medical knowledge enabled him to interpret the augury. Those narcotic odours that seem to breathe seaward, and steep in repose the senses of the voyager who is drifting towards the shore of the mysterious Other World, appeared to envelop him, and, looking up with a sudden calmness, he said, "I know the colour of that blood; it is arterial blood; I cannot be deceived in that colour. That drop is my death-warrant; I must die."

There was a slight rally during the summer of that year, but toward autumn he grew worse again, and it was decided that he should go to Italy. He was accompanied thither by his friend, Mr. Severn, an artist. After embarking, he wrote to his friend, Mr. Brown. We give a part of this letter, which is so deeply tragic that the sentences we take almost seem to break away from the rest with a cry of anguish, like the branches of Dante's lamentable wood.

"I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much. There is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping—you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but Death is the great divorcer forever. When the pang

of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. I often wish for you, that you might flatter me with the best. I think, without my mentioning it, for my sake, you would be a friend to Miss —— when I am dead. You think she has many faults, but for my sake think she has not one. If there is anything you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman, merely as woman, can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss —— and my sister is amazing—the one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my brother and sister in America; the thought of leaving Miss —— is beyond everything horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me—I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing; some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be; we cannot be created for this sort of suffering."

To the same friend he writes again from Naples, 1st November 1820:—

"The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her. O God! God! God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling-cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her, I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. This was the case when I was in England; I cannot recollect, without shuddering, the time that I was a prisoner at Hunt's, and used to keep my eyes fixed on Hampstead all day. Then there was a good hope of seeing her again—now!—O that I could be buried near where she lives! I am afraid to write to her, to receive a letter from her—to see her handwriting would break my heart. Even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more

than I can bear. My dear Brown, what am I to do? Where can I look for consolation or ease? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me. Indeed, through the whole of my illness, both at your house and at Kentish Town, this fever has never ceased wearing me out."

The two friends went almost immediately from Naples to Rome, where Keats was treated with great kindness by the distinguished physician, Dr. (afterward Sir James) Clark.* But there was no hope from the first. His disease was beyond remedy, as his heart was beyond comfort. The very fact that life might be happy deepened his despair. He might not have sunk so soon, but the waves in which he was struggling looked only the blacker that they were shone upon by the signal-torch that promised safety and love and rest.

It is good to know that one of Keats's last pleasures was in hearing Severn read aloud from a volume of Jeremy Taylor. On first coming to Rome, he had bought a copy of Alfieri, but, finding on the second page these lines,

> "Misera me! sollievo a me non resta
> Altro che il pianto, ed il pianto è delitto,"

he laid down the book and opened it no more. On the 14th February 1821 Severn speaks of a change that had taken place in him toward greater quietness and peace. He talked much, and fell at last into a sweet sleep, in which he seemed to have happy dreams. Perhaps he heard the soft footfall of the angel of Death, pacing to and fro under his window, to be his Valentine. That night he asked to have this epitaph inscribed upon his gravestone—

"HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER."

On the 23rd he died, without pain and as if falling asleep. His last words were, "I am dying; I shall die easy; don't be frightened, be firm and thank God it has come!"

* The lodging of Keats was on the Piazza di Spagna, in the first house on the right hand in going up the Scalinata. Mr. Severn's Studio is said to have been in the Cancello over the garden gate of the Villa Negroni, pleasantly familiar to all Americans as the Roman home of their countryman Crawford.

He was buried in the Protestant burial-ground at Rome, in that part of it which is now disused and secluded from the rest. A short time before his death he told Severn that he thought his intensest pleasure in life had been to watch the growth of flowers; and once, after lying peacefully awhile, he said, "I feel the flowers growing over me." His grave is marked by a little headstone, on which are carved somewhat rudely his name and age, and the epitaph dictated by himself. No tree or shrub has been planted near it, but the daisies, faithful to their buried lover, crowd his small mound with a galaxy of their innocent stars, more prosperous than those under which he lived.

In person, Keats was below the middle height, with a head small in proportion to the breadth of his shoulders. His hair was brown and fine, falling in natural ringlets about a face in which energy and sensibility were remarkably mixed. Every feature was delicately cut; the chin was bold; and about the mouth something of a pugnacious expression. His eyes were mellow and glowing, large, dark, and sensitive. At the recital of a noble action or a beautiful thought they would suffuse with tears, and his mouth trembled.† Haydon says that his eyes had an inward Delphian look that was perfectly divine.

The faults of Keat's poetry are obvious enough, but it should be remembered that he died at twenty-five, and that he offends by superabundance and not poverty. That he was over-languaged at first there can be no doubt, and in this was implied the possibility of falling back to the perfect mean of diction. It is only by the rich that the costly plainness, which at once satisfies the taste and the imagination, is attainable.

* Written in 1856. O irony of Time! Ten years after the poet's death the woman he had so loved wrote to his friend, Mr. Dilke, that "the kindest act would be to let him rest forever in the obscurity to which circumstances had condemned him!" (*Papers of a Critic*, i., 11.) O Time, the atoner! In 1874 I found the grave planted with shrubs and flowers, the pious homage of the daughter of our most eminent American sculptor.

† *Leigh Hunt's Autobiography*, ii., 43.

Whether Keats was original or not, I do not think it useful to discuss until it has been settled what originality is. Lord Houghton tells us that this merit (whatever it is) has been denied to Keats, because his poems take the colour of the authors he happened to be reading at the time he wrote them. But men have their intellectual ancestry, and the likeness of some one of them is for ever unexpectedly flashing out in the features of a descendant, it may be after a gap of several generations. In the parliament of the present every man represents a constituency of the past. It is true that Keats has the accent of the men from whom he learned to speak, but this is to make originality a mere question of externals, and in this sense the author of a dictionary might bring an action of trover against every author who used his words. It is the man behind the words that gives them value, and if Shakespeare help himself to a verse or a phrase, it is with ears that have learned of him to listen that we feel the harmony of the one, and it is the mass of his intellect that makes the other weighty with meaning. Enough that we recognise in Keats that indefinable newness and unexpectedness which we call genius. The sunset is original every evening, though for thousands of years it has built out of the same light and vapour its visionary cities with domes and pinnacles, and its delectable mountains which night shall utterly abase and destroy.

Three men, almost contemporaneous with each other—Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron—were the great means of bringing back English poetry from the sandy deserts of rhetoric, and recovering for her her triple inheritance of simplicity, sensuousness, and passion. Of these, Wordsworth was the only conscious reformer, and his hostility to the existing formalism injured his earlier poems by tinging them with something of iconoclastic extravagance. He was the deepest thinker, Keats the most essentially a poet, and Byron the most keenly intellectual of the three. Keats had the broadest mind, or at least his mind was open on more sides, and he was able to understand Wordsworth and judge Byron, equally conscious, through his artistic sense, of the greatnesses

of the one and the many littlenesses of the other, while Wordsworth was isolated in a feeling of his prophetic character, and Byron had only an uneasy and jealous instinct of contemporary merit. The poems of Wordsworth, as he was the most individual, accordingly reflect the moods of his own nature; those of Keats, from sensitiveness of organisation, the moods of his own taste and feeling; and those of Byron, who was impressible chiefly through the understanding, the intellectual and moral wants of the time in which he lived. Wordsworth has influenced most the ideas of succeeding poets; Keats, their forms; and Byron, interesting to men of imagination less for his writings than for what his writings indicate, reappears no more in poetry, but presents an ideal to youth made restless with vague desires not yet regulated by experience nor supplied with motives by the duties of life.

Keats certainly had more of the penetrative and sympathetic imagination which belongs to the poet, of that imagination which identifies itself with the momentary object of its contemplation, than any man of these later days. It is not merely that he has studied the Elizabethans and caught their turn of thought, but that he really sees things with their sovereign eye, and feels them with their electrified senses. His imagination was his bliss and bane. Was he cheerful, he "hops about the gravel with the sparrows;" was he morbid, he "would reject a Petrarchal coronation—on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers." So impressible was he as to say that he "had no nature," meaning character. But he knew what the faculty was worth, and says finely, "The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: he awoke and found it truth." He had an unerring instinct for the poetic uses of things, and for him they had no other use. We are apt to talk of the classic *renaissance* as of a phenomenon long past, nor ever to be renewed, and to think the Greeks and Romans alone had the mighty magic to work such a miracle. To me one of the most interesting aspects of Keats is that in him we have an example of the *renaissance* going on almost under our own eyes, and that the intellectual

ferment was in him kindled by a purely English leaven. He had properly no scholarship, any more than Shakespeare had, but like him he assimilated at a touch whatever could serve his purpose. His delicate senses absorbed culture at every pore. Of the self-denial to which he trained himself (unexampled in one so young) the second draft of "Hyperion" as compared with the first, is a conclusive proof. And far indeed is his "Lamia" from the lavish indiscrimination of "Endymion." In his Odes he showed a sense of form and proportion which we seek vainly in almost any other English poet, and some of his sonnets (taking all qualities into consideration) are the most perfect in our language. No doubt there is something tropical and of strange overgrowth in his sudden maturity, but it *was* maturity nevertheless. Happy the young poet who has the saving fault of exuberance, if he have also the shaping faculty that sooner or later will amend it!

As every young person goes through all the world-old experiences, fancying them something peculiar and personal to himself, so it is with every new generation, whose youth always finds its representatives in its poets. Keats rediscovered the delight and wonder that lay enchanted in the dictionary. Wordsworth revolted at the poetic diction which he found in vogue, but his own language rarely rises above it, except when it is upborne by the thought. Keats had an instinct for fine words, which are in themselves pictures and ideas, and had more of the power of poetic expression than any modern English poet. And by poetic expression I do not mean merely a vividness in particulars, but the right feeling which heightens or subdues a passage or a whole poem to the proper tone, and gives entireness to the effect. There is a great deal more than is commonly supposed in this choice of words. Men's thoughts and opinions are in a great degree vassals of him who invents a new phrase or reapplies an old epithet. The thought or feeling a thousand times repeated becomes his at last who utters it best. This power of language is veiled in the old legends which make the invisible powers the servants of some word. As soon as we have discovered the word for our joy or sorrow

we are no longer its serfs, but its lords. We reward the discoverer of an anæsthetic for the body, and make him member of all the societies, but him who finds a nepenthe for the soul we elect into the small academy of the immortals.

The poems of Keats mark an epoch in English poetry; for, however often we may find traces of it in others, in them found its most unconscious expression that reaction against the barrel-organ style which had been reigning by a kind of sleepy divine right for half a century. The lowest point was indicated when there was such an utter confounding of the common and the uncommon sense that Dr. Johnson wrote verse and Burke prose. The most profound gospel of criticism was, that nothing was good poetry that could not be translated into good prose, as if one should say that the test of sufficient moonlight was that tallow-candles could be made of it. We find Keats at first going to the other extreme, and endeavouring to extract green cucumbers from the rays of tallow; but we see also incontestable proof of the greatness and purity of his poetic gift in the constant return toward equilibrium and repose in his later poems. And it is a repose always lofty and clear-aired, like that of the eagle balanced in incommunicable sunshine. In him a vigorous understanding developed itself in equal measure with the divine faculty; thought emancipated itself from expression without becoming its tyrant; and music and meaning floated together, accordant as swan and shadow, on the smooth element of his verse. Without losing its sensuousness, his poetry refined itself and grew more inward, and the sensational was elevated into the typical by the control of that finer sense which underlies the senses and is the spirit of them.

LESSING.*

WHEN Burns's humour gave its last pathetic flicker in his "John, don't let the awkward squad fire over me," was he thinking of actual brother-volunteers, or of possible biographers? Did his words betray only the rhythmic sensitiveness of poetic nerves, or were they a foreboding of that helpless future, when the poet lies at the mercy of the plodder—of that bi-voluminous shape in which dulness overtakes and revenges itself on genius at last? Certainly Burns has suffered as much as most large-natured creatures from well-meaning efforts to account for him, to explain him away, to bring him into harmony with those well-regulated minds which, during a good part of the last century, found out a way, through rhyme, to snatch a prosiness beyond the reach of prose. Nay, he has been wronged also by that other want of true appreciation, which deals in panegyric, and would put asunder those two things which God has joined—the poet and the man—as if it were not the same rash improvidence that was the happiness of the verse and the misfortune of the gauger. But his death-bed was at least not haunted by the unappeasable apprehension of a German for his biographer; and that the fame of Lessing should have four times survived this cunningest assault of oblivion is proof enough that its base is broad and deep-set.

There seems to be, in the average German mind, an inability or a disinclination to see a thing as it really is, unless it be a

* G. E. LESSING. *Sein Leben und seine Werke.* Von ADOLF STAHR. Vermehrte und verbesserte Volks-Ausgabe. Dritte Auflage. Berlin, 1864.

The same. Translated by E. P. EVANS, Ph. D., Professor, etc., in the University of Michigan. Boston: W. V. Spencer. 1866. 2 vols.

G. E. Lessing's Sämmtliche Schriften, herausgegeben von Karl Lachmann. 1853-57. 12 Bände.

matter of science. It finds its keenest pleasure in divining a profound significance in the most trifling things, and the number of mare's-nests that have been stared into by the German *Gelehrter* through his spectacles passes calculation. They are the one object of contemplation that makes that singular being perfectly happy, and they seem to be as common as those of the stork. In the dark forest of æsthetics, particularly, he finds them at every turn—"fanno tutto il loco varo." If the greater part of our English criticism is apt only to skim the surface, the German, by way of being profound, too often burrows in delighted darkness quite beneath its subject, till the reader feels the ground hollow beneath him, and is fearful of caving into unknown depths of stagnant metaphysic air at every step. The Commentary on Shakespeare of Gervinus, a really superior man, reminds one of the Roman Campagna, penetrated underground in all directions by strange winding caverns, the work of human borers in search of we know not what. Above are the divine poet's larks and daisies, his incommunicable skies, his broad prospects of life and nature; and meanwhile our Teutonic *teredo* worms his way below, and offers to be our guide into an obscurity of his own contriving. The reaction of language upon style, and even upon thought, by its limitations on the one hand, and its suggestions on the other, is so apparent to any one who has made even a slight study of comparative literature, that we have sometimes thought the German tongue at least an accessory before the fact, if nothing more, in the offences of German literature. The language has such a fatal genius for going stern-foremost, for yawing, and for not minding the helm without some ten minutes' notice in advance, that he must be a great sailor indeed who can safely make it the vehicle for anything but imperishable commodities. Vischer's *Æsthetik*, the best treatise on the subject, ancient or modern, is such a book as none but a German could write, and it is written as none but a German could have written it. The abstracts of its sections are sometimes nearly as long as the sections themselves, and it is as hard to make out which head belongs to which tail, as in a knot of snakes thawing themselves into

sluggish individuality under a spring sun. The average German professor spends his life in making lanterns fit to guide us through the obscurest passages of all the *ologies* and *ysics*, and there are none in the world of such honest workmanship. They are durable, they have intensifying glasses, reflectors of the most scientific make, capital sockets in which to set a light, and a handsome lump of potentially illuminating tallow is thrown in. But, in order to *see* by them, the explorer must make his own candle, supply his own cohesive wick of common-sense, and light it himself. And yet the admirable thoroughness of the German intellect! We should be ungrateful indeed if we did not acknowledge that it has supplied the raw material in almost every branch of science for the defter wits of other nations to work on; yet we have a suspicion that there are certain lighter departments of literature in which it may be misapplied, and turn into something very like clumsiness. Delightful as Jean Paul's humour is, how much more so would it be if he only knew when to stop! Ethereally deep as is his sentiment, should we not feel it more if he sometimes gave us a little less of it—if he would only not always deal out his wine by beer-measure? *So* thorough is the German mind, that might it not seem now and then to work quite through its subject, and expatiate in cheerful unconsciousness on the other side thereof?

With all its merits of a higher and deeper kind, it yet seems to us that German literature has not quite satisfactorily answered that so long-standing question of the French Abbé about *esprit*. Hard as it is for a German to be clear, still harder to be light, he is more than ever awkward in his attempts to produce that quality of style, so peculiarly French, which is neither wit nor liveliness taken singly, but a mixture of the two that must be drunk while the effervescence lasts, and will not bear exportation into any other language. German criticism, excellent in other respects, and immeasurably superior to that of any other nation in its constructive faculty, in its instinct for getting at whatever principle of life lies at the heart of a work of genius, is seldom lucid, almost never entertaining. It may turn its light, if we have patience, into every obscurest cranny of its subject, one

after another, but it never flashes light *out* of the subject itself, as Sainte-Beuve, for example, so often does, and with such unexpected charm. We should be inclined to put Julian Schmidt at the head of living critics in all the more essential elements of his outfit; but with him is not one conscious at too frequent intervals of the professorial grind—of that German tendency to bear on too heavily, where a French critic would touch and go with such exquisite measure? The Great Nation, as it cheerfully calls itself, is in nothing greater than its talent for saying little things agreeably, which is perhaps the very top of mere culture, and in literature is the next best thing to the power of saying great things as easily as if they were little. German learning, like the elephants of Pyrrhus, is always in danger of turning upon what it was intended to adorn and reinforce, and trampling it ponderously to death. And yet what do we not owe it? Mastering all languages, all records of intellectual man, it has been able, or has enabled others, to strip away the husks of nationality and conventionalism from the literatures of many races, and to disengage that kernel of human truth which is the germinating principle of them all. Nay, it has taught us to recognise also a certain value in those very husks, whether as shelter for the unripe or food for the fallen seed.

That the general want of style in German authors is not wholly the fault of the language is shown by Heine (a man of mixed blood), who can be daintily light in German; that it is not altogether a matter of race, is clear from the graceful airiness of Erasmus and Reuchlin in Latin, and of Grimm in French. The sense of heaviness which creeps over the reader from so many German books is mainly due, we suspect, to the language, which seems well-nigh incapable of that aerial perspective so delightful in first-rate French, and even English, writing. But there must also be in the national character an insensibility to proportion, a want of that instinctive discretion which we call tact. Nothing short of this will account for the perpetual groping of German imaginative literature after some foreign mould in which to cast its thought

or feeling, now trying a Lous Qautorze pattern, then something supposed to be Shakespearian, and at last going back to ancient Greece, or even Persia. Goethe himself, limpidly perfect as are many of his shorter poems, often fails in giving artistic coherence to his longer works. Leaving deeper qualities wholly out of the question, *Wilhelm Meister* seems a mere aggregation of episodes if compared with such a masterpiece as *Paul and Virginia*, or even with a happy improvisation like the *Vicar of Wakefield*. The second part of *Faust*, too, is rather a reflection of Goethe's own changed view of life and man's relation to it, than an harmonious completion of the original conception. Full of placid wisdom and exquisite poetry it certainly is; but if we look at it as a poem, it seems more as if the author had striven to get in all he could, than to leave out all he might. We cannot help asking what business have paper money and political economy and geognosy here? We confess that "Thales" and the "Homunculus" weary us not a little, unless, indeed, a poem be nothing, after all, but a prolonged conundrum. Many of Schiller's lyrical poems—though the best of them find no match in modern verse for rapid energy, the very axles of language kindling with swiftness—seem disproportionately long in parts, and the thought too often has the life well-nigh squeezed out of it in the sevenfold coils of diction, dappled though it be with splendid imagery.

In German sentiment, which runs over so easily into sentimentalism, a foreigner cannot help being struck with a certain incongruousness. What can be odder, for example, than the mixture of sensibility and sausages in some of Goethe's earlier notes to "Frau von Stein," unless, to be sure, the publishing them? It would appear that Germans were less sensible to the ludicrous—and we are far from saying that this may not have its compensatory advantages—than either the English or the French. And what is the source of this sensibility, if it be not an instinctive perception of the incongruous and disproportionate? Among all races, the English has ever shown itself most keenly alive to the fear of making itself ridiculous; and among all, none has produced so

many humorists, only one of them, indeed, so profound as Cervantes, yet all masters in their several ways. What English-speaking man, except Boswell, could have arrived at Weimar, as Goethe did, in that absurd *Werthermontirung*? And where, out of Germany, could he have found a reigning Grand Duke to put his whole court into the same sentimental livery of blue and yellow, leather breeches, boots, and all, excepting only Herder, and that not on account of his clerical profession, but of his age? To be sure, it might be asked also where else in Europe was a prince to be met with capable of manly friendship with a man whose only decoration was his genius? But the comicality of the other fact no less remains. Certainly the German character is in no way so little remarkable as for its humour. If we were to trust the evidence of Herr Hub's dreary *Deutsche komische und humoristische Dichtung*, we should believe that no German had even so much as a suspicion of what humour meant, unless the book itself, as we are half inclined to suspect, be a joke in three volumes, the *want* of fun being the real point thereof. If German patriotism can be induced to find a grave delight in it, we congratulate Herr Hub's publishers, and for ourselves advise any sober-minded man who may hereafter "be merry," not to "sing psalms," but to read Hub as the more serious amusement of the two. There are epigrams there that make life more solemn, and, if taken in sufficient doses, would make it more precarious. Even Jean Paul, the greatest of German humorous authors, and never surpassed in comic conception or in the pathetic quality of humour, is not to be named with his master, Sterne, as a creative humorist. What are Siebenkäs, Fixlein, Schmelzle, and Fibel (a single lay-figure to be draped at will with whimsical sentiment and reflection, and put in various attitudes), compared with the living reality of Walter Shandy and his brother Toby, characters which we do not see merely as puppets in the author's mind, but poetically projected from it in an independent being of their own? Heine himself, the most graceful, sometimes the most touching, of modern poets, and clearly the most easy of German humorists, seems to me

wanting in a refined perception of that inward propriety which is only another name for poetic proportion, and shocks us sometimes with an *Unfläthigkeit*, as at the end of his *Deutschland*, which, if it make Germans laugh, as we should be sorry to believe, makes other people hold their noses. Such things have not been possible in English since Swift, and the *persifleur* Heine cannot offer the same excuse of savage cynicism that might be pleaded for the Irishman.

I have hinted that Herr Stahr's *Life of Lessing* is not precisely the kind of biography that would have been most pleasing to the man who could not conceive that an author should be satisfied with anything more than truth in praise, or anything less in criticism. My respect for what Lessing was, and for what he did, is profound. In the history of literature it would be hard to find a man so stalwart, so kindly, so sincere,* so capable of great ideas, whether in their influence on the intellect or the life, so unswervingly true to the truth, so free from the common weaknesses of his class. Since Luther, Germany has given birth to no such intellectual athlete—to no son so German to the core. Greater poets she has had, but no greater writer; no nature more finely tempered. Nay, may we not say that great character is as rare a thing as great genius, if it be not even a nobler form of it? For surely it is easier to embody fine thinking, or delicate sentiment, or lofty aspiration, in a book than in a life. The written leaf, if it be, as some few are, a safe-keeper and conductor of celestial fire, is secure. Poverty cannot pinch, passion swerve, or trial shake it. But the man Lessing, harassed and striving life-long, always poor and always hopeful, with no patron but his own right-hand, the very shuttlecock of fortune, who saw ruin's ploughshare drive through the hearth on which his first home-fire was hardly kindled, and who, through all, was faithful to himself, to his friend, to his duty, and to his ideal, is something more inspiring for us than the most glorious utterance of merely intellectual power. The figure of Goethe is grand, it is

* "If I write at all, it is not possible for me to write otherwise than just as I think and feel."—Lessing to his father, 21st December 1767.

rightfully pre-eminent, it has something of the calm, and something of the coldness, of the immortals ; but the Valhalla of German letters can show one form, in its simple manhood, statelier even than his.

Manliness and simplicity, if they are not necessary coefficients in producing character of the purest tone, were certainly leading elements in the Lessing who is still so noteworthy and lovable to us when eighty-six years have passed since his bodily presence vanished from among men. He loved clearness, he hated exaggeration in all its forms. He was the first German who had any conception of style, and who could be full without spilling over on all sides. Herr Stahr, we think, is not just the biographer he would have chosen for himself. His book is rather a panegyric than a biography. There is sometimes an almost comic disproportion between the matter and the manner, especially in the epic details of Lessing's onslaughts on the nameless herd of German authors. It is as if Sophocles should have given a strophe to every bullock slain by Ajax in his mad foray upon the Grecian commissary stores. He is too fond of striking an attitude, and his tone rises unpleasantly near a scream, as he calls the personal attention of heaven and earth to something which Lessing himself would have thought a very matter-of-course affair. He who lays it down as an axiom, that "genius loves simplicity," would hardly have been pleased to hear the *Letters on Literature* called the "burning thunderbolts of his annihilating criticism," or the Anti-Götze pamphlets, "the hurtling arrows that sped from the bow of the immortal hero." Nor would he with whom accuracy was a matter of conscience have heard patiently that the Letters "appeared in a period distinguished for its lofty tone of mind, and in their own towering boldness they are a true picture of the intrepid character of the age."* If the age was what Herr Stahr represents it to have been, where is the

* "I am sure that Kleist would rather have taken another wound with him into his grave than have such stuff jabbered over him (*sich solch Zeug nachschwatzen lassen*)."—Lessing to Gleim, 6th September 1759.

great merit of Lessing? He would have smiled, we suspect, a little contemptuously, at Herr Stahr's repeatedly quoting a certificate from the "historian of the proud Britons," that he was "the first critic in Europe." Whether we admit or not Lord Macaulay's competence in the matter, we are sure that Lessing would not have thanked his biographer for this soup-ticket to a ladleful of fame. If ever a man stood firmly on his own feet, and asked help of none, that man was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

Herr Stahr's desire to *make* a hero of his subject, and his love for sonorous sentences like those we have quoted above, are apt to stand somewhat in the way of our chance at taking a fair measure of the man, and seeing in what his heroism really lay. He furnishes little material for a comparative estimate of Lessing, or for judging of the foreign influences which helped from time to time in making him what he was. Nothing is harder than to worry out a date from Herr Stahr's hay-stacks of praise and quotation. Yet dates are of special value in tracing the progress of an intellect like Lessing's, which, little actuated by an inward creative energy, was commonly stirred to motion by the impulse of other minds, and struck out its brightest flashes by collision with them. He himself tells us that a critic should "first seek out some one with whom he can contend," and quotes in justification from one of Aristotle's commentators, *Solet Aristoteles quærere pugnam in suis libris.* This Lessing was always wont to do. He could only feel his own strength, and make others feel it—could only call it into full play in an intellectual wrestling-bout. He was always anointed and ready for the ring, but with this distinction, that he was no mere prize-fighter, or bully, for the side that would pay him best, nor even a contender for mere sentiment, but a self-forgetful champion for the truth as he saw it. Nor is this true of him only as a critic. His more purely imaginative works —his "Minna," his "Emilia," his "Nathan"—were all written, not to satisfy the craving of a poetic instinct, nor to rid head and heart of troublous guests by building them a lodging outside himself, as Goethe used to do, but to prove some thesis of

criticism or morals by which Truth could be served. His zeal for her was perfectly unselfish. "Does one write, then, for the sake of being always in the right? I think I have been as serviceable to Truth," he says, "when I miss her, and my failure is the occasion of another's discovering her, as if I had discovered her myself."* One would almost be inclined to think, from Herr Stahr's account of the matter, that Lessing had been an autochthonous birth of the German soil, without intellectual ancestry or helpful kindred. That this is the sufficient natural history of no original mind we need hardly say, since originality consists quite as much in the power of using to purpose what it finds ready to its hand, as in that of producing what is absolutely new. Perhaps we might say that it was nothing more than the faculty of combining the separate, and therefore ineffectual, conceptions of others, and making them into living thought by the breath of its own organising spirit. A great man without a past, if he be not an impossibility, will certainly have no future. He would be like those conjectural Miltons and Cromwells of Gray's imaginary Hamlet. The only privilege of the original man is, that, like other sovereign princes, he has the right to call in the current coin and reissue it stamped with his own image, as was the practice of Lessing.

Herr Stahr's over-intensity of phrase is less offensive than amusing when applied to Lessing's early efforts in criticism. Speaking of poor old Gottsched, he says: "Lessing assailed him sometimes with cutting criticism, and again with exquisite humour. In the notice of Gottsched's poems, he says, among other things, 'The exterior of the volume is so handsome that it will do great credit to the bookstores, and it is to be hoped that it will continue to do so for a long time. But to give a satisfactory idea of the interior surpasses our powers.' And in conclusion he adds, 'These poems cost two thalers and four groschen. The two thalers pay for the ridiculous, and the four groschen pretty much for the useful.'" Again, he tells us that Lessing concludes his notice of Klopstock's

* Letter to Klotz, 9th June 1766.

"Ode to God" "with these inimitably roguish words: 'What presumption to beg thus earnestly for a woman!' Does not a whole book of criticism lie in these nine words?" For a young man of twenty-two, Lessing's criticisms show a great deal of independence and maturity of thought; but humour he never had, and his wit was always of the bluntest—crushing rather than cutting. The mace, and not the scymitar, was his weapon. Let Herr Stahr put all Lessing's "inimitably roguish words" together, and compare them with these few intranslatable lines from Voltaire's letter to Rousseau, thanking him for his *Discours sur l'Inégalité:* "On n'a jamais employé tant d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre bêtes; il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes quand on lit votre ouvrage." Lessing from the first was something far better than a wit. Force was always much more characteristic of him than cleverness. Sometimes Herr Stahr's hero-worship leads him into positive misstatement. For example, speaking of Lessing's preface to the *Contributions to the History and Reform of the Theatre*, he tells us that "his eye was directed chiefly to the English theatre and Shakespeare." Lessing at that time (1749) was only twenty, and knew little more than the names of any foreign dramatists except the French. In this very preface his English list skips from Shakespeare to Dryden, and in the Spanish he omits Calderon, Tirso de Molina, and Alarcon. Accordingly, we suspect that the date is wrongly assigned to Lessing's translation of *Toda da Vida es Sueño.* His mind was hardly yet ready to feel the strange charm of this most imaginative of Calderon's dramas.

Even where Herr Stahr undertakes to give us light on the *sources* of Lessing, it is something of the dimmest. He attributes "Miss Sara Sampson" to the influence of the "Merchant of London," as Mr. Evans translates it literally from the German, meaning our old friend, "George Barnwell." But we are strongly inclined to suspect from internal evidence that Moore's more recent "Gamester" gave the prevailing impulse. And if Herr Stahr must needs tell us anything of the "Tragedy of Middle-Class Life," he ought to have known that on the

English stage it preceded "Lillo" by more than a century—witness the "Yorkshire Tragedy"—and that something very like it was even much older in France. We are inclined to complain, also, that he does not bring out more clearly how much Lessing owed to Diderot both as dramatist and critic, nor give us so much as a hint of what already existing English criticism did for him in the way of suggestion and guidance. But though we feel it to be our duty to say so much of Herr Stahr's positive faults and negative shortcomings, yet we leave him in very good humour. While he is altogether too full upon certain points of merely transitory importance—such as the quarrel with Klotz—yet we are bound to thank him both for the abundance of his extracts from Lessing, and for the judgment he has shown in the choice of them. Any one not familiar with his writings will be able to get a very good notion of the quality of his mind, and the amount of his literary performance, from these volumes; and that, after all, is the chief matter. As to the absolute merit of his works other than critical, Herr Stahr's judgment is too much at the mercy of his partiality to be of great value.

Of Mr. Evans's translation we can speak for the most part with high commendation. There are great difficulties in translating German prose; and whatever other good things Herr Stahr may have learned from Lessing, terseness and clearness are not among them. We have seldom seen a translation which read more easily, or was generally more faithful. That Mr. Evans should nod now and then we do not wonder, nor that he should sometimes choose the wrong word. We have only compared him with the original where we saw reason for suspecting a slip; but, though we have not found much to complain of, we have found enough to satisfy us that his book will gain by a careful revision. We select a few oversights, mainly from the first volume, as examples. On page 34, comparing Lessing with Goethe on arriving at the University, Mr. Evans, we think, obscures, if he does not wholly lose the meaning, when he translates *Leben* by "social relations," and is altogether wrong in rendering

Patrizier by "aristocrat." At the top of the next page, too, "suspicious" is not the word for *bedenklich*. Had he been writing English, he would surely have said "questionable." On page 47, "overtrodden shoes" is hardly so good as the idiomatic "down at the heel." On page 104, "A very humorous representation" is oddly made to "confirm the documentary evidence." The reverse is meant. On page 115, the sentence beginning "the tendency in both" needs revising. On page 138, Mr. Evans speaks of the "Poetical Village-younker of Destouches." This, we think, is hardly the English of *Le Poète Campagnard*, and almost recalls Lieberkühn's theory of translation, toward which Lessing was so unrelenting —"When I do not understand a passage, why, I translate it word for word." On page 149, "Miss Sara Sampson" is called "the first social tragedy of the German Drama." All tragedies surely are *social*, except the "Prometheus.' *Bürgerliche Tragödie* means a tragedy in which the protagonist is taken from common life, and perhaps cannot be translated clearly into English except by "tragedy of middle-class life." So on page 170 we find Emilia Galotti called a "Virginia *bourgeoise*," and on page 172 a hospital becomes a *lazaretto*. On page 190 we have a sentence ending in this strange fashion: "in an episode of the English original, which Wieland omitted entirely, one of its characters nevertheless appeared in the German tragedy." On page 205 we have the Seven Years' War called "a bloody *process*." This is mere carelessness, for Mr. Evans, in the second volume, translates it rightly "*law-suit*." What English reader would know what "You are intriguing me" means, on page 228? On page 264, vol. ii., we find a passage inaccurately rendered, which we consider of more consequence, because it is a quotation from Lessing. "O, out upon the man who claims, Almighty God, to be a preacher of Thy word, and yet so impudently asserts that, in order to attain Thy purposes, there was only one way in which it pleased *Thee* to make *Thyself* known to him!" This is very far from *nur den einzigen Weg gehabt den Du Dir gefallen lassen ihm kund zu machen!* The *ihm* is scornfully emphatic. We hope Professor

Evans will go over his version for a second edition much more carefully than we have had any occasion to do. He has done an excellent service to our literature, for which we heartily thank him, in choosing a book of this kind to translate, and translating it so well. We would not look such a gift horse too narrowly in the mouth.

Let us now endeavour to sum up the result of Lessing's life and labour with what success we may.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born (January 22, 1729) at Camenz, in Upper Lusatia, the second child and eldest son of John Gottfried Lessing, a Lutheran clergyman. Those who believe in the persistent qualities of race, or the cumulative property of culture, will find something to their purpose in his Saxon blood and his clerical and juristic ancestry. It is worth mentioning, that his grandfather, in the thesis for his doctor's degree, defended the right to entire freedom of religious belief. The name first comes to the surface in Parson Clement Lessigk, nearly three centuries ago, and survives to the present day in a painter of some distinction. It has almost passed into a proverb, that the mothers of remarkable children have been something beyond the common. If there be any truth in the theory, the case of Lessing was an exception, as might have been inferred, perhaps, from the peculiarly masculine type of his character and intellect. His mother was in no wise superior, but his father seems to have been a man somewhat above the pedantic average of the provincial clergymen of his day, and to have been a scholar in the ampler meaning of the word. Besides the classics, he had possessed himself of French and English, and was somewhat versed in the Oriental languages. The temper of his theology may be guessed from his having been, as his son tells us with some pride, one of "the earliest translators of Tillotson." We can only conjecture him from the letters which Lessing wrote to him, from which we should fancy him as on the whole a decided and even choleric old gentleman, in whom the wig, though not a predominant, was yet a notable feature, and who was, like many other fathers, permanently astonished at the fruit of his loins. He would

have preferred one of the so-called learned professions for his son—theology above all—and would seem to have never quite reconciled himself to his son's distinction, as being in none of the three careers which alone were legitimate. Lessing's bearing towards him, always independent, is really beautiful in its union of respectful tenderness with unswerving self-assertion. When he wished to evade the maternal eye, Gotthold used in his letters to set up a screen of Latin between himself and her; and we conjecture the worthy Pastor Primarius playing over again in his study at Camenz, with some scruples of conscience, the old trick of Chaucer's fox:—

> "Mulier est hominis confusio;
> Madam, the sentence of this Latin is,
> Woman is mannës joy and mannës bliss."

He appears to have snatched a fearful and but ill-concealed joy from the sight of the first collected edition of his son's works, unlike Tillotson as they certainly were. Ah, had they only been *Opera!* Yet were they not volumes, after all, and able to stand on their own edges beside the immortals, if nothing more?

After grinding with private-tutor Mylius the requisite time, Lessing entered the school of Camenz, and in his thirteenth year was sent to the higher institution at Meissen. We learn little of his career there, except that Theophrastus, Plautus, and Terence were already his favourite authors, that he once characteristically distinguished himself by a courageous truthfulness, and that he wrote a Latin poem on the valour of the Saxon soldiers, which his father very sensibly advised him to shorten. In 1750, four years after leaving the school, he writes to his father: "I believed even when I was at Meissen that one must learn much there which he cannot make the least use of in real life (*der Welt*), and I now [after trying Leipzig and Wittenberg] see it all the more clearly"—a melancholy observation which many other young men have made under similar circumstances. Sent to Leipzig in his seventeenth year, he finds himself an awkward, ungainly lad, and sets

diligently to perfecting himself in the somewhat unscholastic accomplishments of riding, dancing, and fencing. He also sedulously frequents the theatre, and wrote a play, "The Young Scholar," which attained the honour of representation. Meanwhile his most intimate companion was a younger brother of his old tutor Mylius, a young man of more than questionable morals, and who had even written a satire on the elders of Camenz, for which—over-confidently trusting himself in the outraged city—he had been fined and imprisoned; so little could the German Muse, celebrated by Klopstock for her swiftness of foot, protect her son. With this scandalous person and with play-actors, more than probably of both sexes, did the young Lessing share a Christmas cake sent him by his mother. Such news was not long in reaching Camenz, and we can easily fancy how tragic it seemed in the little parsonage there, to what cabinet councils it gave rise in the paternal study, to what ominous shaking of the clerical wig in that domestic Olympus. A pious fraud is practised on the boy, who hurries home thinly clad through the winter weather, his ill-eaten Christmas cake wringing him with remorseful indigestion, to receive the last blessing, if such a prodigal might hope for it, of a broken-hearted mother. He finds the good dame in excellent health, and softened toward him by a cold he has taken on his pious journey. He remains at home several months, now writing Anacreontics of such warmth that his sister (as volunteer representative of the common hangman) burns them in the family stove; now composing sermons to convince his mother that "he could be a preacher any day"—a theory of that sacred office unhappily not yet extinct. At Easter, 1747, he gets back to Leipzig again, with some scant supply of money in his pocket, but is obliged to make his escape thence between two days somewhere toward the middle of the next year, leaving behind him some histrionic debts (chiefly, we fear, of a certain Mademoiselle Lorenz) for which he had confidingly made himself security. Stranded, by want of floating or other capital, at Wittenberg, he enters himself, with help from home, as a student there, but soon migrates

again to Berlin, which had been his goal when making his hegira from Leipzig. In Berlin he remained three years, applying himself to his chosen calling of author at all work, by doing whatever honest job offered itself—verse, criticism, or translation—and profitably studious in a very wide range of languages and their literature. Above all, he learned the great secret, which his stalwart English contemporary, Johnson, also acquired, of being able to "dine heartily" for threepence.

Meanwhile he continues in a kind of colonial dependence on the parsonage at Camenz, the bonds gradually slackening, sometimes shaken a little rudely, and always giving alarming hints of approaching and inevitable autonomy. From the few home letters of Lessing which remain (covering the period before 1753, there are only eight in all), we are able to surmise that a pretty constant maternal cluck and shrill paternal warning were kept up from the home coop. We find Lessing defending the morality of the stage and his own private morals against charges and suspicions of his parents, and even making the awful confession that he does not consider the Christian religion itself as a thing "to be taken on trust," nor a Christian by mere tradition so valuable a member of society as "one who has *prudently* doubted, and by the way of examination has arrived at conviction, or at least striven to arrive." Boyish scepticism of the superficial sort is a common phenomenon enough, but the Lessing variety of it seems to us sufficiently rare in a youth of twenty. What strikes us mainly in the letters of these years is not merely the maturity they show, though that is remarkable, but the tone. We see already in them the cheerful and never overweening self-confidence which always so pleasantly distinguished Lessing, and that strength of tackle, so seldom found in literary men, which brings the mind well home to its anchor, enabling it to find holding-ground and secure riding in any sea. "What care I to live in plenty," he asks gaily, "if I only live?" Indeed, Lessing learned early, and never forgot, that whoever would be life's master, and not its drudge, must make it a means, and never allow it to become an end. He could say more truly than Goethe, *Mein Acker ist*

die Zeit, since he not only sowed in it the seed of thought for other men and other times, but cropped it for his daily bread. Above all, we find Lessing even thus early endowed with the power of keeping his eyes wide open to what he was after, to what would help or hinder him—a much more singular gift than is commonly supposed. Among other jobs of this first Berlin period, he had undertaken to arrange the library of a certain Herr Rüdiger, getting therefor his meals and "other receipts," whatever they may have been. His father seems to have heard with anxiety that this arrangement had ceased, and Lessing writes to him: "I never wished to have anything to do with this old man longer than *until I had made myself thoroughly acquainted with his great library*. This is now accomplished, and we have accordingly parted." This was in his twenty-first year, and we have no doubt, from the *range* of scholarship which Lessing had at command so young, that it was perfectly true. All through his life he was thoroughly German in this respect also, that he never *quite* smelted his knowledge clear from some slag of learning.

In the early part of the first Berlin residence, Pastor Primarius Lessing, hearing that his son meditated a movement on Vienna, was much exercised with fears of the temptation to Popery he would be exposed to in that capital. We suspect that the attraction thitherward had its source in a perhaps equally catholic, but less theological magnet—the Mademoiselle Lorenz above mentioned. Let us remember the perfectly innocent passion of Mozart for an actress, and be comforted. There is not the slightest evidence that Lessing's life at this time, or any other, though careless, was in any way debauched. No scandal was ever coupled with his name, nor is any biographic chemistry needed to bleach spots out of his reputation. What cannot be said of Wieland, of Goethe, of Schiller, of Jean Paul, may be safely affirmed of this busy and single-minded man. The parental fear of Popery brought him a seasonable supply of money from home, which enabled him to clothe himself decently enough to push his literary fortunes, and put on a bold front with publishers.

Poor enough he often was, but never in so shabby a pass that he was forced to write behind a screen, like Johnson.

It was during this first stay in Berlin that Lessing was brought into personal relations with Voltaire. Through an acquaintance with the great man's secretary, Richier, he was employed as translator in the scandalous Hirschel lawsuit, so dramatically set forth by Carlyle in his *Life of Frederick*, though Lessing's share in it seems to have been unknown to him. The service could hardly have been other than distasteful to him; but it must have been with some thrill of the *anche io!* kind that the poor youth, just fleshing his maiden pen in criticism, stood face to face with the famous author, with whose name all Europe rang from side to side. This was in February 1751. Young as he was, we fancy those cool eyes of his making some strange discoveries as to the real nature of that lean nightmare of Jesuits and dunces. Afterwards the same secretary lent him the manuscript of the *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and Lessing thoughtlessly taking it into the country with him, it was not forthcoming when called for by the author. Voltaire naturally enough danced with rage, screamed all manner of unpleasant things about robbery and the like, cashiered the secretary, and was, we see no reason to doubt, really afraid of a pirated edition. *This* time his cry of wolf must have had a quaver of sincerity in it. Herr Stahr, who can never keep separate the Lessing as he then was and the Lessing as he afterwards became, takes fire at what he chooses to consider an unworthy suspicion of the Frenchman, and treats himself to some rather cheap indignation on the subject. For ourselves, we think Voltaire altogether in the right, and we respect Lessing's honesty too much to suppose, with his biographer, that it was this which led him, years afterwards, to do such severe justice to "Merope," and other tragedies of the same author. The affair happened in December 1751, and a year later Lessing calls Voltaire "a great man," and says of his "Amalie," that "it has not only beautiful passages, it is beautiful throughout, and the tears of a reader of feeling will justify our

judgment." Surely there is no resentment here. Our only wonder would be at its being written after the Hirschel business. At any rate, we cannot allow Herr Stahr to shake our faith in the sincerity of Lessing's motives in criticism—he could not in the soundness of the criticism itself—by tracing it up to a spring at once so petty and so personal.

During a part of 1752* Lessing was at Wittenberg again as student of medicine, the parental notion of a strictly professional career of some kind not having yet been abandoned. We must give his father the credit of having done his best, in a well-meaning paternal fashion, to make his son over again in his own image, and to thwart the design of nature by coaxing or driving him into the pinfold of a prosperous obscurity. But Gotthold, with all his gifts, had no talent whatever for contented routine. His was a mind always in solution, which the divine order of things, as it is called, could not precipitate into any of the traditional forms of crystallisation, and in which the time to come was already fermenting. The principle of growth was in the young literary hack, and he must obey it or die. He was to the last a *natura naturans*, never a *naturata*. Lessing seems to have done what he could to be a dutiful failure. But there was something in him stronger and more sacred than even filial piety; and the good old pastor is remembered now only as the father of a son who would have shared the benign oblivion of his own theological works, if he could only have had his wise way with him. Even after never so many biographies and review articles, genius continues to be a marvellous and inspiring thing. At the same time, considering the then condition of what was pleasantly called literature in

* Herr Stahr heads the fifth chapter of his Second Book, "Lessing at Wittenberg. December 1751 to November 1752." But we never feel quite sure of his dates. The Richier affair puts Lessing in Berlin in December 1751, and he took his Master's degree at Wittenberg, 29th April 1752. We are told that he finally left Wittenberg "toward the end" of that year. He himself, writing from Berlin in 1754, says that he has been absent from that city *nur ein halbes Jahr* since 1748. There is only one letter for 1752, dated at Wittenberg, 9th June.

Germany, there was not a little to be said on the paternal side of the question, though it may not seem now a very heavy mulct to give up one son out of ten to immortality—at least the Fates seldom decimate in *this* way. Lessing had now, if we accept the common standard in such matters, "completed his education," and the result may be summed up in his own words to Michaelis, 16th October 1754: "I have studied at the Fürstenschule at Meissen, and after that at Leipzig and Wittenberg. But I should be greatly embarrassed if I were asked to tell *what*." As early as his twentieth year he had arrived at some singular notions as to the uses of learning. On the 20th of January 1749 he writes to his mother: "I found out that books, indeed, would make me learned, *but never make me a man*." Like most men of great knowledge, as distinguished from mere scholars, he seems to have been always a rather indiscriminate reader, and to have been fond, as Johnson was, of "browsing" in libraries. Johnson neither in amplitude of literature nor exactness of scholarship could be deemed a match for Lessing; but they were alike in the power of readily applying whatever they had learned, whether for purposes of illustration or argument. They resemble each other, also, in a kind of absolute common-sense, and in the force with which they could plant a direct blow with the whole weight both of their training and their temperament behind it. As a critic, Johnson ends where Lessing begins. The one is happy in the lower region of the understanding: the other can breathe freely in the ampler air of reason alone. Johnson acquired learning, and stopped short from indolence at a certain point. Lessing assimilated it, and accordingly his education ceased only with his life. Both had something of the intellectual sluggishness that is apt to go with great strength; and both had to be baited by the antagonism of circumstances or opinions, not only into the exhibition, but into the possession of their entire force. Both may be more properly called original men than, in the highest sense, original writers.

From 1752 to 1760, with an interval of something over two years spent in Leipzig to be near a good theatre, Lessing was

settled in Berlin, and gave himself wholly and earnestly to the life of a man of letters. A thoroughly healthy, cheerful nature he most surely had, with something at first of the careless light-heartedness of youth. Healthy he was not always to be, not always cheerful, often very far from light-hearted, but manly from first to last he eminently was. Downcast he could never be, for his strongest instinct, invaluable to him also as a critic, was to see things as they really are. And this not in the sense of a cynic, but of one who measures himself as well as his circumstances—who loves truth as the most beautiful of all things and the only permanent possession, as being of one substance with the soul. In a man like Lessing, whose character is even more interesting than his works, the tone and turn of thought are what we like to get glimpses of. And for this his letters are more helpful than those of most authors, as might be expected of one who said of himself, that, in his more serious work, "he must profit by his first heat to accomplish anything." He began, we say, light-heartedly. He did not believe that "one should thank God only for good things." "He who is only in good health, and is willing to work, has nothing to fear in the world." "What another man would call want, I call comfort." "Must not one often act thoughtlessly, if one would provoke Fortune to do something for him?" In his first inexperience, the life of "the sparrow on the house-top" (which we find oddly translated "roof") was the one he would choose for himself. Later in life, when he wished to marry, he was of another mind, and perhaps discovered that there was something in the old father's notion of a fixed position. "The life of the sparrow on the house-top is only right good if one need not expect any end to it. If it cannot always last, every day it lasts too long"—he writes to Ebert in 1770. Yet even then he takes the manly view. "Everything in the world has its time, everything may be overlived and overlooked, if one only have health." Nor let any one suppose that Lessing, full of courage as he was, found professional authorship a garden of Alcinoüs. From creative literature he continually sought refuge, and even repose, in the driest drudgery of mere scholar-

ship. On the 26th of April 1768 he writes to his brother with something of his old gaiety: "Thank God, the time will soon come when I cannot call a penny in the world my own but I must first earn it. I am unhappy if it must be by writing." And again in May 1771: "Among all the wretched, I think him the most wretched who must work with his head, even if he is not conscious of having one. But what is the good of complaining?" Lessing's life, if it is a noble example, so far as it concerned himself alone, is also a warning when another is to be asked to share it. He too would have profited had he earlier learned and more constantly borne in mind the profoundest wisdom of that old saying, *Si sit prudentia*. Let the young poet, however he may believe of his art that "all other pleasures are not worth its pains," consider well what it is to call down fire from heaven to keep the pot boiling, before he commit himself to a life of authorship as something fine and easy. That fire will not condescend to such office, though it come without asking on ceremonial days to the free service of the altar.

Lessing, however, never would, even if he could, have so desecrated his better powers. For a bare livelihood, he always went sturdily to the market of hack-work, where his learning would fetch him a price. But it was only in extremest need that he would claim that benefit of clergy. "I am worried," he writes to his brother Karl, 8th April 1773, "and work because working is the only means to cease being so. But you and Voss are very much mistaken if you think that it could ever be indifferent to me, under such circumstances, on what I work. Nothing less true, whether as respects the work itself or the principal object wherefor I work. I have been in my life before now in very wretched circumstances, yet never in such that I would have written for bread in the true meaning of the word. I have begun my 'Contributions' because this work helps me . . . to live from one day to another." It is plain that he does not call this kind of thing in any high sense writing. Of that he had far other notions; for though he honestly disclaimed the title, yet his dream was always to be a

poet. But he *was* willing to work, as he claimed to be, because he had one ideal higher than that of being a poet—namely, to be thoroughly a man. To Nicolai he writes in 1758—"All ways of earning his bread are alike becoming to an honest man, whether to split wood or to sit at the helm of state. It does not concern his conscience how useful he is, but how useful he would be." Goethe's poetic sense was the Minotaur to which he sacrificed everything. To make a study, he would soil the maiden petals of a woman's soul; to get the delicious sensation of a reflex sorrow, he would wring a heart. All that saves his egoism from being hateful is, that, with its immense reaches, it cheats the sense into a feeling of something like sublimity. A patch of sand is unpleasing; a desert has all the awe of ocean. Lessing also felt the duty of self-culture; but it was not so much for the sake of feeding fat this or that faculty as of strengthening character—the only soil in which real mental power can root itself and find sustenance. His advice to his brother Karl, who was beginning to write for the stage, is two parts moral to one literary. "Study ethics diligently, learn to express yourself well and correctly, and cultivate your own character. Without that I cannot conceive a good dramatic author." Marvellous counsel this will seem to those who think that wisdom is only to be found in the fool's paradise of Bohemia!

We said that Lessing's dream was to be a poet. In comparison with success as a dramatist, he looked on all other achievement as inferior in kind. In 1767 he writes to Gleim (speaking of his call to Hamburg)—"Such circumstances were needed to rekindle in me an almost extinguished love for the theatre. I was just beginning to lose myself in other studies which would have made me unfit for any work of genius. My *Laocoön* is now a secondary labour." And yet he never fell into the mistake of overvaluing what he valued so highly. His unflinching common-sense would have saved him from that, as it afterwards enabled him to see that something was wanting in him which must enter into the making of true poetry, whose distinction from prose is an inward one of

nature, and not an outward one of form. While yet under thirty, he assures Mendelssohn that he was quite right in neglecting poetry for philosophy, because "only a part of our youth should be given up to the arts of the beautiful. We must practise ourselves in weightier things before we die. An old man, who lifelong has done nothing but rhyme, and an old man who lifelong has done nothing but pass his breath through a stick with holes in it—I doubt much whether such an old man has arrived at what he was meant for."

This period of Lessing's life was a productive one, though none of its printed results can be counted of permanent value, except his share in the *Letters on German Literature*. And even these must be reckoned as belonging to the years of his apprenticeship and training for the master-workman he afterwards became. The small fry of authors and translators were hardly fitted to call out his full strength, but his vivisection of them taught him the value of certain structural principles. "To one dissection of the fore quarter of an ass," says Haydon in his diary, "I owe my information." Yet even in his earliest criticisms we are struck with the same penetration and steadiness of judgment, the same firm grasp of the essential and permanent, that were afterwards to make his opinions law in the courts of taste. For example, he says of Thomson, that, "as a dramatic poet, he had the fault of never knowing when to leave off; he lets every character talk so long as anything can be said; accordingly, during these prolonged conversations, the action stands still, and the story becomes tedious." Of *Roderick Random*, he says that "its author is neither a Richardson nor a Fielding; he is one of those writers of whom there are plenty among the Germans and French." We cite these merely because their firmness of tone seems to us uncommon in a youth of twenty-four. In the *Letters*, the range is much wider, and the application of principles more consequent. He had already secured for himself a position among the literary men of that day, and was beginning to be feared for the inexorable justice of his criticisms. His *Fables* and his "Miss Sarah Sampson" had been translated into French, and

had attracted the attention of Grimm, who says of them (December 1754): "These Fables commonly contain in a few lines a new and profound moral meaning. M. Lessing has much wit, genius, and invention; the dissertations which follow the Fables prove moreover that he is an excellent critic." In Berlin, Lessing made friendships, especially with Mendelssohn, Von Kleist, Nicolai, Gleim, and Ramler. For Mendelssohn and Von Kleist he seems to have felt a real love; for the others at most a liking, as the best material that could be had. It certainly was not of the juiciest. He seems to have worked hard and played hard, equally at home in his study and Baumann's wine-cellar. He was busy, poor, and happy.

But he was restless. We suspect that the necessity of forever picking up crumbs, and their occasional scarcity, made the life of the sparrow on the house-top less agreeable than he had expected. The imagined freedom was not quite so free after all, for necessity is as short a tether as dependence, or official duty, or what not, and the regular occupation of grub-hunting is as tame and wearisome as another. Moreover, Lessing had probably by this time sucked his friends dry of any intellectual stimulus they could yield him; and when friendship reaches that pass, it is apt to be anything but inspiring. Except Mendelssohn and Von Kleist, they were not men capable of rating him at his true value; and Lessing was one of those who always burn up the fuel of life at a fearful rate. Admirably dry as the supplies of Ramler and the rest no doubt were, they had not substance enough to keep his mind at the high temperature it needed, and he would soon be driven to the cutting of green stuff from his own wood-lot, more rich in smoke than fire. Besides this, he could hardly have been at ease among intimates, most of whom could not even conceive of that intellectual honesty, that total disregard of all personal interests where truth was concerned, which was an innate quality of Lessing's mind. Their theory of criticism was, Truth, or even worse, if possible, for all who do not belong to our set; for us, that delicious falsehood which is no doubt a slow poison, but then so *very* slow. Their nerves were unbraced

by that fierce democracy of thought, trampling on all prescription, all tradition, in which Lessing loved to shoulder his way and advance his insupportable foot. "What is called a heretic," he says in his Preface to *Berengarius*, "has a very good side. It is a man who at least *wishes* to see with his own eyes." And again, "I know not if it be a duty to offer up fortune and life to the truth; . . but I know it *is* a duty, if one undertake to teach the truth, to teach the whole of it, or none at all." Such men as Gleim and Ramler were mere *dilettanti*, and could have no notion how sacred his convictions are to a militant thinker like Lessing. His creed as to the rights of friendship in criticism might be put in the words of Selden, the firm tread of whose mind was like his own: "Opinion and affection extremely differ. Opinion is something wherein I go about to give reason why all the world should think as I think. Affection is a thing wherein I look after the pleasing of myself." How little his friends were capable of appreciating this view of the matter is plain from a letter of Ramler to Gleim, cited by Herr Stahr. Lessing had shown up the weaknesses of a certain work by the Abbé Batteux (long ago gathered to his literary fathers as conclusively as poor old Ramler himself), without regard to the important fact that the Abbé's book had been translated by a friend. Horrible to think of at best, thrice horrible when the friend's name was Ramler! The impression thereby made on the friendly heart may be conceived. A ray of light penetrated the rather opaque substance of Herr Ramler's mind, and revealed to him the dangerous character of Lessing. "I know well," he says, "that Herr Lessing means to speak his own opinion, and"—what is the dreadful inference?—"and, by suppressing others, to gain air, and make room for himself. This disposition is not to be overcome."* Fortunately not, for Lessing's opinion always meant something, and was worth having. Gleim no doubt sympathised deeply with the sufferer by this treason, for he, too,

* "Ramler," writes Georg Forster, "ist die Ziererei, die Eigenliebe, die Eitelkeit in eigener Person."

had been shocked at some disrespect for La Fontaine, as a disciple of whom he had announced himself.

Berlin was hardly the place for Lessing, if he could not take a step in any direction without risk of treading on somebody's gouty foot. This was not the last time that he was to have experience of the fact that the critic's pen, the more it has of truth's celestial temper, the more it is apt to reverse the miracle of the archangel's spear, and to bring out whatever is toadlike in the nature of him it touches. We can well understand the sadness with which he said—

"Der Blick des Forscher's fand
Nicht selten mehr als er zu finden wünschte."

Here, better than anywhere, we may cite something which he wrote of himself to a friend of Klotz. Lessing, it will be remembered, had literally "suppressed" Klotz. "What do you apprehend, then, from me? The more faults and errors you point out to me, so much the more I shall learn of you; the more I learn of you the more thankful shall I be. . . . I wish you knew me more thoroughly. If the opinion you have of my learning and genius (*Geist*) should perhaps suffer thereby, yet I am sure the idea I would like you to form of my character would gain. I am not the insufferable, unmannerly, proud, slanderous man Herr Klotz proclaims me. It cost me a great deal of trouble and compulsion to be a little bitter against him."* Ramler and the rest had contrived a nice little society for mutual admiration, much like that described by Goldsmith, if, indeed, he did not convey it from the French, as was not uncommon with him. "'What, have you never heard of the admirable Brandellius or the ingenious Mogusius, one the eye and the other the heart of our University, known all over the world?' 'Never,' cried the traveller; 'but pray inform me what Brandellius is particularly remarkable for.' 'You must be little acquainted with the republic of letters,' said the other, 'to ask such a question.

* Lessing to Von Murr, 25th November 1768. The whole letter is well worth reading.

Brandellius has written a most sublime panegyric on Mogusius.' 'And, prithee, what has Mogusius done to deserve so great a favour?' 'He has written an excellent poem in praise of Brandellius.'" Lessing was not the man who could narrow himself to the proportions of a clique; lifelong he was the terror of the Brandellii and Mogusii, and, at the signal given by him,

> "They, but now who seemed
> In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons,
> Now less than smallest dwarfs in narrow room
> Throng numberless."

Besides whatever other reasons Lessing may have had for leaving Berlin, we fancy that his having exhausted whatever means it had of helping his spiritual growth was the chief. Nine years later, he gave as a reason for not wishing to stay long in Brunswick, "Not that I do not like Brunswick, but because nothing comes of being long in a place which one likes."* Whatever the reason, Lessing, in 1760, left Berlin for Breslau, where the post of secretary had been offered him under Frederick's tough old General Tauentzien. "I will spin myself in for a while like an ugly worm, that I may be able to come to light again as a brilliant winged creature," says his diary. Shortly after his leaving Berlin, he was chosen a member of the Academy of Sciences there. Herr Stahr, who has no little fondness for the foot-light style of phrase, says, "It may easily be imagined that he himself regarded his appointment as an insult rather than as an honour." Lessing himself merely says that it was a matter of indifference to him, which is much more in keeping with his character and with the value of the intended honour.

The Seven Years' War began four years before Lessing took up his abode in Breslau, and it may be asked how he, as a Saxon, was affected by it. We might answer, hardly at all. His position was that of armed neutrality. Long ago at

* A favourite phrase of his, which Egbert has preserved for us with its Saxon accent, was, *Es kommt doch nischt dabey heraus*, implying that one might do something better for a constancy than shearing swine.

Leipzig he had been accused of Prussian leanings; now in Berlin he was thought too Saxon. Though he disclaimed any such sentiment as patriotism, and called himself a cosmopolite, it is plain enough that his position was simply that of a German. Love of country, except in a very narrow parochial way, was as impossible in Germany then as in America during the Colonial period. Lessing himself, in the latter years of his life, was librarian of one of those petty princelets who sold their subjects to be shot at in America—creatures strong enough to oppress, too weak to protect their people. Whoever would have found a Germany to love must have pieced it together as painfully as Isis did the scattered bits of Osiris. Yet he says that "the true patriot is by no means extinguished" in him. It was the noisy ones that he could not abide; and, writing to Gleim about his "Grenadier" verses, he advises him to soften the tone of them a little, he himself being a "declared enemy of imprecations," which he would leave altogether to the clergy. We think Herr Stahr makes too much of these anti-patriot flings of Lessing, which, with a single exception, occur in his letters to Gleim, and with reference to a kind of verse that could not but be distasteful to him, as needing no more brains than a drum, nor other inspiration than serves a trumpet. Lessing undoubtedly had better uses for his breath than to spend it in shouting for either side in this "bloody lawsuit," as he called it, in which he was not concerned. He showed himself German enough, and in the right way, in his persistent warfare against the tyranny of French taste.

He remained in Breslau the better part of five years, studying life in new phases, gathering a library, which, as commonly happens, he afterwards sold at great loss, and writing his *Minna* and *Laocoön*. He accompanied Tauentzien to the siege of Schweidnitz, where Frederick was present in person. He seems to have lived a rather free-and-easy life during his term of office, kept shockingly late hours, and learned, among other things, to gamble—a fact for which Herr Stahr thinks it needful to account in a high philosophical fashion. We prefer to think that there are *some* motives to which remarkable men

are liable in common with the rest of mankind, and that they may occasionally do a thing merely because it is pleasant, without forethought of medicinal benefit to the mind. Lessing's friends (whose names were *not*, as the reader might be tempted to suppose, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) expected him to make something handsome out of his office; but the pitiful result of those five years of opportunity was nothing more than an immortal book. Unthrifty Lessing, to have been so nice about your fingers (and so near the mint, too), when your general was wise enough to make his fortune! As if ink-stains were the only ones that would wash out, and no others had ever been covered with white kid from the sight of all reasonable men! In July 1764 he had a violent fever, which he turned to account in his usual cheerful way—"The serious epoch of my life is drawing nigh. I am beginning to become a man, and flatter myself that in this burning fever I have raved away the last remains of my youthful follies. Fortunate illness!" He had never intended to bind himself to an official career. To his father he writes—"I have more than once declared that my present engagement could not continue long, that I have not given up my old plan of living, and that I am more than ever resolved to withdraw from any service that is not wholly to my mind. I have passed the middle of my life, and can think of nothing that could compel me to make myself a slave for the poor remainder of it. I write you this, dearest father, and must write you this, in order that you may not be astonished if, before long, you should see me once more very far removed from all hopes of, or claims to, a settled prosperity, as it is called." Before the middle of the next year he was back in Berlin again.

There he remained for nearly two years, trying the house-top way of life again, but with indifferent success, as we have reason to think. Indeed, when the metaphor resolves itself into the plain fact of living just on the other side of the roof—in the garret, namely—and that from hand to mouth, as was Lessing's case, we need not be surprised to find him gradually beginning to see something more agreeable in a *fixirtes Glück* than he had once been willing to allow. At any rate, he was

willing, and even heartily desirous, that his friends should succeed in getting for him the place of royal librarian. But Frederick, for some unexplained reason, would not appoint him. Herr Stahr thinks it had something to do with the old *Siècle* manuscript business. But this seems improbable, for Voltaire's wrath was not directed against Lessing; and even if it had been, the great king could hardly have carried the name of an obscure German author in his memory through all those anxious and warlike years. Whatever the cause, Lessing early in 1767 accepts the position of Theatrical Manager at Hamburg, as usual not too much vexed with disappointment, but quoting gaily—

"Quod non dant proceres, dabit histrio."

Like Burns, he was always "contented wi' little and canty wi' mair." In connection with his place as Manager he was to write a series of dramatic essays and criticisms. It is to this we owe the *Dramaturgie*—next to the *Laocoön* the most valuable of his works. But Lessing—though it is plain that he made his hand as light as he could, and wrapped his lash in velvet—soon found that actors had no more taste for truth than authors. He was obliged to drop his remarks on the special merits or demerits of players, and to confine himself to those of the pieces represented. By this his work gained in value; and the latter part of it, written without reference to a particular stage, and devoted to the discussion of those general principles of dramatic art on which he had meditated long and deeply, is far weightier than the rest. There are few men who can put forth all their muscle in a losing race, and it is characteristic of Lessing that what he wrote under the dispiritment of failure should be the most lively and vigorous. Circumstances might be against him, but he was incapable of believing that a cause could be lost which had once enlisted his conviction.

The theatrical enterprise did not prosper long; but Lessing had meanwhile involved himself as partner in a publishing business which harassed him while it lasted, and when it failed, as was inevitable, left him hampered with debt. Help

came in his appointment (1770) to take charge of the Duke of Brunswick's library at Wolfenbüttel, with a salary of six hundred thalers a-year. This was the more welcome, as he soon after was betrothed with Eva König, widow of a rich manufacturer.* Her husband's affairs, however, had been left in confusion, and this, with Lessing's own embarrassments, prevented their being married till October 1776. Eva König was every way worthy of him. Clever, womanly, discreet, with just enough coyness of the will to be charming when it is joined with sweetness and good sense, she was the true helpmate of such a man—the serious companion of his mind and the playfellow of his affections. There is something infinitely refreshing to me in the love-letters of these two persons. Without wanting sentiment, there is such a bracing air about them as breathes from the higher levels and strongholds of the soul. They show that self-possession which can alone reserve to love the power of new self-surrender—of never cloying, because never wholly possessed. Here is no invasion and conquest of the weaker nature by the stronger, but an equal league of souls, each in its own realm still sovereign. Turn from such letters as these to those of St. Preux and Julie, and you are stifled with the heavy perfume of a demirep's boudoir—to those of Herder to his Caroline, and you sniff no doubtful odour of professional unction from the sermon-case. Manly old Dr. Johnson, who could be tender and true to a plain woman, knew very well what he meant when he wrote that single poetic sentence of his—"The

* I find surprisingly little about Lessing in such of the contemporary correspondence of German literary men as I have read. A letter of Boie to Merck (10th April 1775) gives us a glimpse of him. "Do you know that Lessing will probably marry Reiske's widow and come to Dresden in place of Hagedorn? The restless spirit! How he will get along with the artists, half of them, too, Italians, is to be seen. . . . Liffert and he have met and parted good friends. He has worn ever since on his finger the ring with the skeleton and butterfly which Liffert gave him. He is reported to be much dissatisfied with the theatrical filibustering of Goethe and Lenz, especially with the remarks on the drama in which so little respect is shown for his 'Aristotle,' and the Leipzig folks are said to be greatly rejoiced at getting such an ally."

shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him to be a native of the rocks."

In January 1778 Lessing's wife died from the effects of a difficult childbirth. The child, a boy, hardly survived its birth. The few words wrung out of Lessing by this double sorrow are to me as deeply moving as anything in tragedy. "I wished for once to be as happy *(es so gut haben)* as other men. But it has gone ill with me!" "And I was so loath to lose him, this son!" "My wife is dead; and I have had this experience also. I rejoice that I have not many more such experiences left to make, and am quite cheerful." "If you had known her! But they say that to praise one's wife is self-praise. Well, then, I say no more of her! But if you had known her!" *Quite cheerful!* On the 10th of August he writes to Elise Reimarus —he is writing to a woman now, an old friend of his and his wife, and will be less restrained:—"I am left here all alone. I have not a single friend to whom I can wholly confide myself. . . . How often must I curse my ever wishing to be for once as happy as other men! How often have I wished myself back again in my old, isolated condition—to be nothing, to wish nothing, to do nothing, but what the present moment brings with it! . . . Yet I am too proud to think myself unhappy. I just grind my teeth, and let the boat go as pleases wind and waves. Enough that I will not overset it myself." It is plain from this letter that suicide had been in his mind, and, with his antique way of thinking on many subjects, he would hardly have looked on it as a crime. But he was too brave a man to throw up the sponge to fate, and had work to do yet. Within a few days of his wife's death he wrote to Eschenburg: "I am right heartily ashamed if my letter betrayed the least despair. Despair is not nearly so much my failing as levity, which often expresses itself with a little bitterness and misanthropy." A stoic, not from insensibility or cowardice, as so many are, but from stoutness of heart, he blushes at a moment's abdication of self-command. And he will not roil the clear memory of his love with any tinge of the sentimentality so much the fashion, and to be had so cheap, in that generation.

There is a moderation of sincerity peculiar to Lessing in the epithet of the following sentence: "How dearly must I pay for the single year I have lived with a *sensible* wife!" *Werther* had then been published four years. Lessing's grief has that pathos which he praised in sculpture—he may writhe, but he must not scream. Nor is this a new thing with him. On the death of a younger brother, he wrote to his father, fourteen years before: "Why should those who grieve communicate their grief to each other purposely to increase it? . . . Many mourn in death what they loved not living. I will love in life what Nature bids me love, and after death strive to bewail it as little as I can."

We think Herr Stahr is on his stilts again when he speaks of Lessing's position at Wolfenbüttell. He calls it an "assuming the chains of feudal service, being buried in a corner, a martyrdom that consumed the best powers of his mind and crushed him in body and spirit forever." To crush *forever* is rather a strong phrase, Herr Stahr, to apply to the spirit, if one must ever give heed to the sense as well as the sound of what one is writing. But eloquence has no bowels for its victims. We have no doubt the Duke of Brunswick meant well by Lessing, and the salary he paid him was as large as he would have got from the frugal Frederick. But one whose trade it was to be a Duke could hardly have had much sympathy with his librarian after he had once found out what he really was. For even if he was not, as Herr Stahr affirms, a republican, and we doubt very much if he was, yet he was not a man who could play with ideas in the light French fashion. At the ardent touch of his sincerity, they took fire, and grew dangerous to what is called the social fabric. The logic of wit, with its momentary flash, is a very different thing from that consequent logic of thought, pushing forward its deliberate sap day and night with a fixed object, which belonged to Lessing. The men who attack abuses are not so much to be dreaded by the reigning house of Superstition as those who, as Dante says, syllogise hateful truths. As for "the chains of feudal service," they might serve a

Fenian Head-Centre on a pinch, but are wholly out of place here. The slavery that Lessing had really taken on him was that of a great library, an Alcina that could always too easily witch him away from the more serious duty of his genius. That a mind like his could be buried in a corner is mere twaddle, and of a kind that has done great wrong to the dignity of letters. Wherever Lessing sat, was the head of the table. That he suffered at Wolfenbüttel is true; but was it nothing to be in love and in debt at the same time, and to feel that his fruition of the one must be postponed for uncertain years by his own folly in incurring the other? If the sparrow-life must end, surely a wee bush is better than nae beild. One cause of Lessing's occasional restlessness and discontent Herr Stahr has failed to notice. It is evident from many passages in his letters that he had his share of the hypochondria which goes with an imaginative temperament. But in him it only serves to bring out in stronger relief his deep-rooted manliness. He spent no breath in that melodious whining which, beginning with Rosseau, has hardly yet gone out of fashion. Work of some kind was his medicine for the blues—if not always of the kind he would have chosen, then the best that was to be had; for the useful, too, had for him a sweetness of its own. Sometimes he found a congenial labour in rescuing, as he called it, the memory of some dead scholar or thinker from the wrongs of ignorance or prejudice or falsehood; sometimes in fishing a manuscript out of the ooze of oblivion, and giving it, after a critical cleansing, to the world. Now and then he warmed himself and kept his muscle in trim with buffeting soundly the champions of that shallow artificiality and unctuous wordiness, one of which passed for orthodox in literature, and the other in theology. True religion and creative genius were both so beautiful to him that he could never abide the mediocre counterfeit of either, and he who put so much of his own life into all he wrote could not but hold all scripture sacred in which a divine soul had recorded itself. It would be doing Lessing great wrong to confound his controversial

writing with the paltry quarrels of authors. His own personal relations enter into them surprisingly little, for his quarrel was never with men, but with falsehood, cant, and misleading tradition, in whomsoever incarnated. Save for this, they were no longer readable, and might be relegated to that herbarium of Billingsgate gathered by the elder Disraeli.

So far from being "crushed in spirit" at Wolfenbüttel, the years he spent there were among the most productive of his life. "Emilia Galotti," begun in 1758, was finished there and published in 1771. The controversy with Götze, by far the most important he was engaged in, and the one in which he put forth his maturest powers, was carried on thence. His "Nathan the Wise" (1779), by which almost alone he is known as a poet outside of Germany, was conceived and composed there. The last few years of his life were darkened by ill-health and the depression which it brings. His "Nathan" had not the success he hoped. It is sad to see the strong, self-sufficing man casting about for a little sympathy, even for a little praise. "It is really needful to me that you should have some small good opinion of it ['Nathan'], in order to make me once more contented with myself," he writes to Elise Reimarus in May 1779. That he was weary of polemics, and dissatisfied with himself for letting them distract him from better things, appears from his last pathetic letter to the old friend he loved and valued most—Mendelsshon. "And in truth, dear friend, I sorely need a letter like yours from time to time, if I am not to become wholly out of humour. I think you do not know me as a man that has a very hot hunger for praise. But the coldness with which the world is wont to convince certain people that they do not suit it, if not deadly, yet stiffens one with chill. I am not astonished that *all* I have written lately does not please *you*. . . . At best, a passage here and there may have cheated you by recalling our better days. I, too, was then a sound, slim sapling, and am now such a rotten, gnarled trunk!" This was written on the 19th of December 1780; and on the 15th of February 1781 Lessing died, not quite fifty-two years old.

Goethe was then in his thirty-second year, and Schiller ten years younger.

Of Lessing's relation to metaphysics the reader will find ample discussion in Herr Stahr's volumes. We are not particularly concerned with them, because his interest in such questions was purely speculative, and because he was more concerned to exercise the powers of his mind than to analyse them. His chief business, his master impulse always, was to be a man of letters in the narrower sense of the term. Even into theology he only made occasional raids across the border, as it were, and that not so much with a purpose of reform as in defence of principles which applied equally to the whole domain of thought. He had even less sympathy with heterodoxy than with orthodoxy, and, so far from joining a party or wishing to form one, would have left belief a matter of choice to the individual conscience. "From the bottom of my heart I hate all those people who wish to found sects. For it is not error, but sectarian error, yes, even sectarian truth, that makes men unhappy, or would do so if truth would found a sect."* Again he says, that in his theological controversies he is "much less concerned about theology than about sound common-sense, and only therefore prefer the old orthodox (at bottom *tolerant*) theology to the new (at bottom *intolerant*), because the former openly conflicts with sound common-sense, while the latter would fain corrupt it. I reconcile myself with my open enemies in order the better to be on my guard against my secret ones."† At another time he tells his brother that he has a wholly false notion of his (Lessing's) relation to orthodoxy. "Do you suppose I grudge the world that anybody should seek to enlighten it?—that I do not heartily wish that every one should think rationally about religion? I should loathe myself if even in my scribblings I had any other end than to help forward those great views. But let me choose my

* To his brother Karl, 20th April 1774.
† To the same, 20th March 1777.

own way, which I think best for this purpose. And what is simpler than this way? I would not have the impure water, which has long been unfit to use, preserved; but I would not have it thrown away before we know whence to get purer. . . . Orthodoxy, thank God, we were pretty well done with; a partition-wall had been built between it and Philosophy, behind which each could go her own way without troubling the other. But what are they doing now? They are tearing down this wall, and, under the pretext of making us rational Christians, are making us very irrational philosophers. . . . We are agreed that our old religious system is false; but I cannot say with you that it is a patchwork of bunglers and half-philosophers. I know nothing in the world in which human acuteness has been more displayed or exercised than in that."* Lessing was always for freedom, never for looseness, of thought, still less for laxity of principle. But it must be a real freedom, and not that vain struggle to become a majority, which, if it succeed, escapes from heresy only to make heretics of the other side. *Abire ad plures* would with him have meant, not bodily but spiritual death. He did not love the fanaticism of innovation a whit better than that of conservatism. To his sane understanding, both were equally hateful, as different masks of the same selfish bully. Coleridge said that toleration was impossible till indifference made it worthless. Lessing did not wish for toleration, because that implies authority, nor could his earnest temper have conceived of indifference. But he thought it as absurd to regulate opinion as the colour of the hair. Here, too, he would have agreed with Selden, that "it is a vain thing to talk of an heretic, for a man for his heart cannot think any otherwise than he does think." Herr Stahr's chapters on this point, bating a little exaltation of tone, are very satisfactory; though, in his desire to make a leader of Lessing, he almost represents him as being what he shunned—the founder of a sect. The fact is, that Lessing only formulated in his own way a general movement of thought, and what mainly interests us is

* To the same, 2nd February 1774.

that in him we see a layman, alike indifferent to clerisy and heresy, giving energetic and pointed utterance to those opinions of his class which the clergy are content to ignore so long as they remain esoteric. At present the world has advanced to where Lessing stood, while the Church has done its best to stand stock-still; and it would be a curious were it not a melancholy spectacle, to see the indifference with which the laity look on while theologians thrash their wheatless straw, utterly unconscious that there is no longer any common term possible that could bring their creeds again to any point of bearing on the practical life of men. Fielding never made a profounder stroke of satire than in Squire Western's indignant "Art not in the pulpit now! When art got up there, I never mind what dost say."

As an author, Lessing began his career at a period when we cannot say that German literature was at its lowest ebb, only because there had not yet been any flood-tide. That may be said to have begun with him. When we say German literature, we mean so much of it as has any interest outside of Germany. That part of the literary histories which treats of the dead waste and middle of the eighteenth century reads like a collection of obituaries, and were better reduced to the conciseness of epitaph, though the authors of them seem to find a melancholy pleasure, much like that of undertakers, in the task by which they live. Gottsched reigned supreme on the legitimate throne of dulness. In Switzerland, Bodmer essayed a more republican form of the same authority. At that time a traveller reports eight hundred authors in Zürich alone! Young aspirants for lettered fame, in imagination clear away the lichens from their forgotten headstones, and read humbly the "As I am, so thou must be," on all! Everybody remembers how Goethe, in the seventh book of his autobiography, tells the story of his visit to Gottsched. He enters by mistake an inner room at the moment when a frightened servant brings the discrowned potentate a periwig large enough to reach to the elbows. That awful emblem of pretentious sham seems to be the best type of the literature then predominant. We always fancy it

set upon a pole, like Gessler's hat, with nothing in it that was not wooden, for all men to bow down before. The periwig style had its natural place in the age of Louis XIV., and there were certainly brains under it. But it had run out in France, as the tie-wig style of Pope had in England. In Germany it was the mere imitation of an imitation. Will it be believed that Gottsched recommends his *Art of Poetry* to beginners, in preference to Breitinger's, because it "*will enable them to produce every species of poem in a correct style*, while out of that no one can learn to make an ode or a cantata?" "Whoever," he says, "buys Breitinger's book *in order to learn how to make poems*, will too late regret his money."* Gottsched, perhaps, did some service even by his advocacy of French models, by calling attention to the fact that there *was* such a thing as style, and that it was of some consequence. But not one of the authors of that time can be said to survive, nor to be known even by name except to Germans, unless it be Klopstock, Herder, Wieland, and Gellert. And the latter's immortality, such as it is, reminds us somewhat of that Lady Gosling's, whose obituary stated that she was "mentioned by Mrs. Barbauld in her *Life of Richardson* 'under the name of Miss M., afterwards Lady G.'" Klopstock himself is rather remembered for what he was than what he is—an immortality of unreadableness; and we much doubt if many Germans put the "Oberon" in their trunks when they start on a journey. Herder alone survives, if not as a contributor to literature, strictly so called, yet as a thinker and as part of the intellectual impulse of the day. But at the time, though there were two parties, yet within the lines of each there was a loyal reciprocity of what is called on such occasions appreciation. Wig ducked to wig, each blockhead had a brother, and there was a universal apotheosis of the mediocrity of our set. If the greatest happiness of the greatest number be the true theory, this was all that could be desired. Even Lessing at one time looked up to Hagedorn as the German Horace. If Hagedorn were pleased,

* *Gervinus*, iv. 62.

what mattered it to Horace? Worse almost than this was the universal pedantry. The solemn bray of one pedagogue was taken up and prolonged in a thousand echoes. There was not only no originality, but no desire for it—perhaps even a dread of it, as something that would break the *entente cordiale* of placid mutual assurance. No great writer had given that tone of good-breeding to the language which would gain it entrance to the society of European literature. No man of genius had made it a necessity of polite culture. It was still as rudely provincial as the Scotch of Allan Ramsay. Frederick the Great was to be forgiven if, with his practical turn, he gave himself wholly to French, which had replaced Latin as a cosmopolitan tongue. It had lightness, ease, fluency, elegance—in short, all the good qualities that German lacked. The study of French models was perhaps the best thing for German literature before it got out of long-clothes. It was bad only when it became a tradition and a tyranny. Lessing did more than any other man to overthrow this foreign usurpation when it had done its work.

The same battle had to be fought on English soil also, and indeed is hardly over yet. For the renewed outbreak of the old quarrel between Classical and Romantic grew out of nothing more than an attempt of the modern spirit to free itself from laws of taste laid down by the *Grand Siècle*. But we must not forget the debt which all modern prose literature owes to France. It is true that Machiavelli was the first to write with classic pith and point in a living language; but he is, for all that, properly an ancient. Montaigne is really the first modern writer—the first who assimilated his Greek and Latin, and showed that an author might be original and charming, even classical, if he did not try too hard. He is also the first modern critic, and his judgments of the writers of antiquity are those of an equal. He made the ancients his servants, to help him think in Gascon French; and, in spite of his endless quotations, began the crusade against pedantry. It was not, however, till a century later that the reform became complete in France, and then crossed the Channel. Milton is

still a pedant in his prose, and not seldom even in his great poem. Dryden was the first Englishman who wrote perfectly easy prose, and he owed his style and turn of thought to his French reading. His learning sits easily on him, and has a modern cut. So far, the French influence was one of unmixed good, for it rescued us from pedantry. It must have done something for Germany in the same direction. For its effect on poetry we cannot say as much; and its traditions had themselves become pedantry in another shape when Lessing made an end of it. He himself certainly learned to write prose of Diderot; and whatever Herr Stahr may think of it, his share in the *Letters on German Literature* got its chief inspiration from France.

It is in the *Dramaturgie* that Lessing first properly enters as an influence into European literature. He may be said to have begun the revolt from pseudo-classicism in poetry, and to have been thus unconsciously the founder of romanticism. Wieland's translation of Shakespeare had, it is true, appeared in 1762; but Lessing was the first critic whose profound knowledge of the Greek drama and apprehension of its principles gave weight to his judgment, who recognised in what the true greatness of the poet consisted, and found him to be really nearer the Greeks than any other modern. This was because Lessing looked always more to the life than the form—because he knew the classics, and did not merely cant about them. But if the authority of Lessing, by making people feel easy in their admiration for Shakespeare, perhaps increased the influence of his works, and if his discussions of Aristotle had given a new starting-point to modern criticism, it may be doubted whether the immediate effect on literature of his own critical essays was so great as Herr Stahr supposes. Surely "Götz" and "The Robbers" are nothing like what he would have called Shakespearian, and the whole *Sturm und Drang* tendency would have roused in him nothing but antipathy. Fixed principles in criticism are useful in helping us to form a judgment of works already produced, but it is questionable whether they are not rather a hindrance than a help to living

production. Ben Jonson was a fine critic, intimate with the classics as few men have either the leisure or the strength of mind to be in this age of many books, and built regular plays long before they were heard of in France. But he continually trips and falls flat over his metewand of classical propriety, his personages are abstractions, and fortunately neither his precepts nor his practice influenced any one of his greater coevals.* In breadth of understanding, and the gravity of purpose that comes of it, he was far above Fletcher or Webster, but how far below either in the subtler, the incalculable, qualities of a dramatic poet! Yet Ben, with his principles off, could soar and sing with the best of them; and there are strains in his lyrics which Herrick, the most Catullian of poets since Catullus, could imitate, but never match. A constant reference to the statutes which taste has codified would only bewilder the creative instinct. Criticism can at best teach writers without genius what is to be avoided or imitated. It cannot communicate life; and its effect, when reduced to rules, has commonly been to produce that correctness which is so praiseworthy and so intolerable. It cannot give taste, it can only demonstrate who has had it. Lessing's essays in this kind were of service to German literature by their manliness of style, whose example was worth a hundred treatises, and by the stimulus there is in all original thinking. Could he have written such a poem as he was capable of conceiving, his influence would have been far greater. It is the living soul, and not the metaphysical abstraction of it, that is genetic in literature. If to do were as easy as to know what were good to be done! It was out of his

* It should be considered, by those sagacious persons who think that the most marvellous intellect of which we have any record could not master so much Latin and Greek as would serve a sophomore, that Shakespeare must through conversation have possessed himself of whatever principles of art Ben Jonson and the other university men had been able to deduce from their study of the classics. That they should not have discussed these matters over their sack at the Mermaid is incredible; that Shakespeare, who left not a drop in any orange he squeezed, could not also have got all the juice out of this one, is even more so.

own failures to reach the ideal he saw so clearly, that Lessing drew the wisdom which made him so admirable a critic. Even here, too, genius can profit by no experience but its own.

For, in spite of Herr Stahr's protest, we must acknowledge the truth of Lessing's own characteristic confession, that he was no poet. A man of genius he unquestionably was, if genius may be claimed no less for force than fineness of mind —for the intensity of conviction that inspires the understanding as much as for that apprehension of beauty which gives energy of will to imagination—but a poetic genius he was not. His mind kindled by friction in the process of thinking, not in the flash of conception, and its delight is in demonstration, not in bodying forth. His prose can leap and run, his verse is always thinking of its feet. Yet in his "Minna" and his "Emilia,"* he shows one faculty of the dramatist, that of construction, in a higher degree than any other German.†

* In "Minna" and "Emilia" Lessing followed the lead of Diderot. In the Preface to the second edition of Diderot's *Théâtre*, he says: "I am very conscious that my taste, without Diderot's example and teaching, would have taken quite another direction. Perhaps one more my own, yet hardly one with which my understanding would in the long run have been so well content." Diderot's choice of prose was dictated and justified by the accentual poverty of his mother-tongue. Lessing certainly revised his judgment on this point (for it was not equally applicable to German), and wrote his maturer "Nathan" in what he took for blank verse. There was much kindred between the minds of the two men. Diderot always seems to us a kind of deboshed Lessing. Lessing was also indebted to Burke, Hume, the two Wartons, and Hurd, among other English writers. Not that he borrowed anything of them but the quickening of his own thought. It should be remembered that Rousseau was seventeen, Diderot and Sterne sixteen, and Winckelmann twelve years older than Lessing. Wieland was four years younger.

† Goethe's appreciation of Lessing grew with his years. He writes to Lavater, 18th March 1781: "Lessing's death has greatly depressed me. I had much pleasure in him and much hope of him." This is a little patronising in tone. But in the last year of his life, talking with Eckermann, he naturally antedates his admiration, as reminiscence is wont to do: "You can conceive what an effect this piece ('Minna') had

Here his critical deductions served him to some purpose. The action moves rapidly, there is no speechifying, and the parts are coherent. Both plays act better than anything of Goethe or Schiller. But it is the story that interests us, and not the characters. These are not, it is true, the incorporation of certain ideas, or, still worse, of certain dogmas, but they certainly seem something like machines by which the motive of the play is carried on; and there is nothing of that interplay of plot and character which makes Shakespeare more real in the closet than other dramatists, with all the helps of the theatre. It is a striking illustration at once of the futility of mere critical insight and of Lessing's want of imagination, that in the "Emilia" he should have thought a Roman motive consistent with modern habits of thought, and that in "Nathan" he should have been guilty of anachronisms which violate not only the accidental truth of fact, but the essential truth of character. Even if we allowed him imagination, it must be only on the lower plane of prose; for of verse as anything more than so many metrical feet he had not the faintest notion. Of that exquisite sympathy with the movement of the mind, with every swifter or slower pulse of passion, which proves it another species from prose, the very ἀφροδίτη καὶ λύρα of speech, and not merely a higher one, he wanted the fineness of sense to conceive. If we compare the prose of Dante or Milton, though both are eloquent, with their verse, we see at once which was the most congenial to them. Lessing has passages of freer and more harmonious utterance in some of his most careless prose essays, than can be found in his "Nathan" from the first line to the last. In the *numeris lege solutis* he is often snatched beyond himself, and becomes truly dithyrambic; in his pentameters the march of the thought is comparatively hampered and irresolute. His best things are not poetically

upon us young people. It was, in fact, a shining meteor. It made us aware that something higher existed than anything whereof that feeble literary epoch had a notion. The first two acts are truly a masterpiece of exposition, from which one learned much and can always learn."

delicate, but have the tougher fibre of proverbs. Is it not enough, then, to be a great prose-writer? They are as rare as great poets, and if Lessing have the gift to stir and to dilate that something deeper than the mind which genius only can reach, what matter if it be not done to music? Of his minor poems we need say little. Verse was always more or less mechanical with him, and his epigrams are almost all stiff, as if they were bad translations from the Latin. Many of them are shockingly coarse, and in liveliness are on a level with those of our Elizabethan period. Herr Stahr, of course, cannot bear to give them up, even though Gervinus be willing. The prettiest of his shorter poems ("Die Namen") has been appropriated by Coleridge, who has given it a grace which it wants in the original. His "Nathan," by a poor translation of which he is chiefly known to English readers, is an Essay on Toleration in the form of a dialogue. As a play, it has not the interest of "Minna" or "Emilia," though the Germans, who have a praiseworthy national stoicism where one of their great writers is concerned, find in seeing it represented a grave satisfaction, like that of subscribing to a monument. There is a sober lustre of reflection in it that makes it very good reading; but it wants the molten interfusion of thought and phrase which only imagination can achieve.

As Lessing's mind was continually advancing—always open to new impressions, and capable, as very few are, of apprehending the many-sidedness of truth—as he had the rare quality of being honest with himself—his works seem fragmentary, and give at first an impression of incompleteness. But one learns at length to recognise and value this very incompleteness as characteristic of the man who was growing lifelong, and to whom the selfish thought that any share of truth could be exclusively *his* was an impossibility. At the end of the ninety-fifth number of the *Dramaturgie* he says:—"I remind my readers here that these pages are by no means intended to contain a dramatic system. I am accordingly not bound to solve all the difficulties which I raise. I am quite willing that my thoughts should seem to want connection—nay, even to contradict each other—if only

there are thoughts in which they [my readers] find material for thinking themselves. I wish to do nothing more than scatter the *fermenta cognitionis*." That is Lessing's great praise, and gives its chief value to his works—a value, indeed, imperishable, and of the noblest kind. No writer can leave a more precious legacy to posterity than this; and beside this shining merit all mere literary splendours look pale and cold. There is that life in Lessing's thought which engenders life, and not only thinks for us, but makes us think. Not sceptical, but forever testing and inquiring, it is out of the cloud of his own doubt that the flash comes at last with sudden and vivid illumination. Flashes they indeed are, his finest intuitions, and of very different quality from the equable north-light of the artist. He felt it, and said it of himself, "Ever so many flashes of lightning do not make daylight." We speak now of those more rememberable passages where his highest individuality reveals itself in what may truly be called a passion of thought. In the *Laocoön* there is daylight of the serenest temper, and never was there a better example of the discourse of reason, though even that is also a fragment.

But it is as a nobly original man, even more than as an original thinker, that Lessing is precious to us, and that he is so considerable in German literature. In a higher sense, but in the same kind, he is to Germans what Dr. Johnson is to us—admirable for what he was. Like Johnson's, too, but still from a loftier plane, a great deal of his thought has a direct bearing on the immediate life and interests of men. His genius was not a St. Elmo's fire, as it so often is with mere poets—as it was in Shelley, for example, playing in ineffectual flame about the points of his thought—but was interfused with his whole nature and made a part of his very being. To the Germans, with their weak nerve of sentimentalism, his brave common-sense is a far wholesomer tonic than the cynicism of Heine, which is, after all, only sentimentalism soured. His jealousy for maintaining the just boundaries, whether of art or speculation, may warn them to check with timely dikes the tendency of their thought to diffuse inundation. Their fondness in æsthetic discussion for a nomen-

clature subtile enough to split a hair at which even a Thomist would have despaired, is rebuked by the clear simplicity of his style.* But he is no exclusive property of Germany. As a complete man, constant, generous, full of honest courage, as a hardy follower of Thought wherever she might lead him ; above all, as a confessor of that Truth which is forever revealing itself to the seeker, and is the more loved because never wholly revealable, he is an ennobling possession of mankind. Let his own striking words characterise him :—

"Not the truth of which anyone is, or supposes himself to be, possessed, but the upright endeavour he has made to arrive at truth, makes the worth of the man. For not by the possession, but by the investigation, of truth are the powers expanded, wherein alone his ever-growing perfection consists. Possession makes us easy, indolent, proud.

"If God held all truth shut in his right hand, and in his left nothing but the ever-restless instinct for truth, though with the condition of for ever and ever erring, and should say to me, Choose ! I should bow humbly to his left hand, and say, Father, give ! pure truth is for Thee alone !"

It is not without reason that fame is awarded only after death. The dust-cloud of notoriety which follows and envelops the men who drive with the wind bewilders contemporary judgment. Lessing, while he lived, had little reward for his labour but the satisfaction inherent in all work faithfully done ; the highest, no doubt, of which human nature is capable, and yet, perhaps, not so sweet as that sympathy of which the world's praise is but an index. But if to perpetuate herself beyond the grave in healthy and ennobling influences be the noblest aspiration of the mind, and its fruition the only reward she would have deemed worthy of herself, then is Lessing to be counted thrice fortunate. Every year since he was laid prematurely in the earth has seen his power for good increase, and made him more precious to the hearts and intellects of men.

* Nothing can be droller than the occasional translation by Vischer of a sentence of Lessing into his own jargon.

"Lessing," said Goethe, "would have declined the lofty title of a Genius; but his enduring influence testifies against himself. On the other hand, we have in literature other and indeed important names of men who, while they lived, were esteemed great geniuses, but whose influence ended with their lives, and who, accordingly, were less than they and others thought. For, as I have said, there is no genius without a productive power that continues forever operative."*

* Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, iii., 229.

ROUSSEAU
AND THE SENTIMENTALISTS.

"WE have had the great professor and founder of the philosophy of Vanity in England. As I had good opportunities of knowing his proceedings almost from day to day, he left no doubt in my mind that he entertained no principle either to influence his heart or to guide his understanding but vanity; with this vice he was possessed to a degree little short of madness. Benevolence to the whole species, and want of feeling for every individual with whom the professors come in contact, form the character of the new philosophy. Setting up for an unsocial independence, this their hero of vanity refuses the just price of common labour, as well as the tribute which opulence owes to genius, and which, when paid, honours the giver and the receiver, and then pleads his beggary as an excuse for his crimes. He melts with tenderness for those only who touch him by the remotest relation, and then, without one natural pang, casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgustful amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings. The bear loves, licks, and forms her young; but bears are not philosophers."

This was Burke's opinion of the only contemporary who can be said to rival him in fervid and sustained eloquence, to surpass him in grace and persuasiveness of style. Perhaps we should have been more thankful to him if he had left us instead

* *Histoire des Idées Morales et Politiques en France au XVIIIme Siècle.* —Par M. JULES BARNI, Professeur à l'Académie de Genève. Tome ii. Paris, 1867.

a record of those "proceedings almost from day to day" which he had such "good opportunities of knowing," but it probably never entered his head that posterity might care as much about the doings of the citizen of Geneva as about the sayings of even a British Right Honourable. Vanity eludes recognition by its victims in more shapes, and more pleasing, than any other passion, and perhaps had Mr. Burke been able imaginatively to translate Swiss Jean Jacques into Irish Edmund, he would have found no juster equivalent for the obnoxious trisyllable than "righteous self-esteem." For Burke was himself also, in the subtler sense of the word, a sentimentalist, that is, a man who took what would now be called an æsthetic view of morals and politics. No man who ever wrote English, except perhaps Mr. Ruskin, more habitually mistook his own personal likes and dislikes, tastes and distastes, for general principles, and this, it may be suspected, is the secret of all merely eloquent writing. He hints at madness as an explanation of Rousseau, and it is curious enough that Mr. Buckle was fain to explain *him* in the same way. It is not, we confess, a solution that we find very satisfactory in this latter case. Burke's fury against the French Revolution was nothing more than was natural to a desperate man in self-defence. It was his own life, or, at least, all that made life dear to him, that was in danger. He had all that abstract political wisdom which may be naturally secreted by a magnanimous nature and a sensitive temperament, absolutely none of that rough-and-tumble kind which is so needful for the conduct of affairs. Fastidiousness is only another form of egotism; and all men who know not where to look for truth save in the narrow well of self will find their own image at the bottom, and mistake it for what they are seeking. Burke's hatred of Rousseau was genuine and instinctive. It was so genuine and so instinctive as no hatred can be but that of self, of our own weaknesses as we see them in another man. But there was also something deeper in it than this. There was mixed with it the natural dread in the political diviner of the political logician—in the empirical, of the theoretic statesman. Burke, confounding the idea of society with the form of

it then existing, would have preserved that as the only specific against anarchy. Rousseau, assuming that society as it then existed was but another name for anarchy, would have reconstituted it on an ideal basis. The one has left behind him some of the profoundest aphorisms of political wisdom; the other, some of the clearest principles of political science. The one, clinging to Divine right, found in the fact that things were, a reason that they ought to be; the other, aiming to solve the problem of the Divine order, would deduce from that abstraction alone the claim of anything to be at all. There seems a mere oppugnancy of nature between the two, and yet both were, in different ways, the dupes of their own imaginations.

Now let us hear the opinion of a philosopher who *was* a bear, whether bears be philosophers or not. Boswell had a genuine relish for what was superior in any way, from genius to claret, and of course he did not let Rousseau escape him. "One evening at the Mitre, Johnson said sarcastically to me, 'It seems, sir, you have kept very good company abroad—Rousseau and Wilkes!' I answered with a smile, 'My dear sir, you don't call Rousseau bad company; do you really think *him* a bad man?' JOHNSON. 'Sir, if you are talking jestingly of this, I don't talk with you. If you mean to be serious, I think him one of the worst of men, a rascal who ought to be hunted out of society, as he has been. Three or four nations have expelled him, and it is a shame that he is protected in this country. Rousseau, sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations.'" *We* were the plantations then, and Rousseau was destined to work there in another and much more wonderful fashion than the gruff old Ursa Major imagined. However, there is always a refreshing heartiness in his growl, a masculine bass with no snarl in it. The Doctor's logic is of that fine old crusted Port sort, the native manufacture of the British conservative mind. Three or four nations *have*, therefore England ought. A few years later, had the Doctor been living, if three or four nations had treated

their kings as France did hers, would he have thought the *ergo* a very stringent one for England?

Mr. Burke, who could speak with studied respect of the Prince of Wales, and of his vices with that charity which thinketh no evil and can afford to think no evil of so important a living member of the British Constitution, surely could have had no unmixed moral repugnance for Rousseau's "disgustful amours." It was because they were *his* that they were so loathsome. Mr. Burke was a snob, though an inspired one. Dr. Johnson, the friend of that wretchedest of lewd fellows, Richard Savage, and of that gay man about town, Topham Beauclerk—himself sprung from an amour that would have been disgustful had it not been royal—must also have felt something more in respect of Rousseau than the mere repugnance of virtue for vice. We must sometimes allow to personal temperament its right of peremptory challenge. Johnson had not that fine sensitiveness to the political atmosphere which made Burke presageful of coming tempest, but both of them felt that there was something dangerous in this man. Their dislike has in it somewhat of the energy of fear. Neither of them had the same feeling toward Voltaire, the man of supreme talent, but both felt that what Rousseau was possessed by was genius, with its terrible force either to attract or repel.

> "By the pricking of my thumbs,
> Something wicked this way comes."

Burke and Johnson were both of them sincere men, both of them men of character as well as of intellectual force; and we cite their opinions of Rousseau with the respect which is due to an honest conviction which has apparent grounds for its adoption, whether we agree with it or no. But it strikes us as a little singular that one whose life was so full of moral inconsistency, whose character is so contemptible in many ways, in some we might almost say so revolting, should yet have exercised so deep and lasting an influence, and on minds so various, should still be an object of minute and earnest

discussion—that he should have had such vigour in his intellectual loins as to have been the father of Châteaubriand, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, and many more in literature, in politics of Jefferson and Thomas Paine—that the spots he had haunted should draw pilgrims so unlike as Gibbon and Napoleon, nay, should draw them still, after the lapse of near a century. Surely there must have been a basis of sincerity in this man seldom matched, if it can prevail against so many reasons for repugnance, aversion, and even disgust. He could not have been the mere sentimentalist and rhetorician for which the rough-and-ready understanding would at first glance be inclined to condemn him. In a certain sense he was both of these, but he was something more. It will bring us a little nearer the point we are aiming at if we quote one other and more recent English opinion of him.

Mr. Thomas Moore, returning pleasantly in a travelling-carriage from a trip to Italy, in which he had never forgotten the poetical shop at home, but had carefully noted down all the pretty images that occurred to him for future use—Mr. Thomas Moore, on his way back from a visit to his noble friend Byron, at Venice, who had there been leading a life so gross as to be talked about, even amid the crash of Napoleon's fall, and who was just writing "Don Juan" for the improvement of the world —Mr. Thomas Moore, fresh from the reading of Byron's *Memoirs*, which were so scandalous that, by some hocus-pocus, three thousand guineas afterward found their way into his own pocket for consenting to suppress them—Mr. Thomas Moore, the *ci-devant* friend of the Prince Regent, and the author of *Little's Poems*, among other objects of pilgrimage visits *Les Charmettes*, where Rousseau had lived with Madame de Warens. So good an opportunity for occasional verses was not to be lost, so good a text for a little virtuous moralising not to be thrown away; and accordingly Mr. Moore pours out several pages of octosyllabic disgust at the sensuality of the dead man of genius. There was no horror for Byron. Toward him all was suavity and decorous *bienséance*. That lively sense of benefits to be received made the Irish Anacreon wink with

both his little eyes. In the judgment of a liberal like Mr. Moore, were not the errors of a lord excusable? But with poor Rousseau the case was very different. The son of a watch-maker, an outcast from boyhood up, always on the perilous edge of poverty—what right had he to indulge himself in any immoralities? So it is always with the sentimentalists. It is never the thing in itself that is bad or good, but the thing in its relation to some conventional and mostly selfish standard. Moore could be a moralist, in this case, without any trouble, and with the advantage of winning Lord Lansdowne's approval; he could write some graceful verses which everybody would buy, and for the rest it is not hard to be a stoic in eight-syllable measure and a travelling-carriage. The next dinner at Bowood will taste none the worse. Accordingly he speaks of

> "The mire, the strife
> And vanities of this man's life,
> Who more than all that e'er have glowed
> With fancy's flame (and it was his
> In fullest warmth and radiance) showed
> What an impostor Genius is;
> How, with that strong mimetic art
> Which forms its life and soul, it takes
> All shapes of thought, all hues of heart,
> Nor feels itself one throb it wakes;
> How, like a gem, its light may shine,
> O'er the dark path by mortals trod,
> Itself as mean a worm the while
> As crawls at midnight o'er the sod;
> . . . . .
> How, with the pencil hardly dry
> From colouring up such scenes of love
> And beauty as make young hearts sigh,
> And dream and think through heaven they rove," etc., etc.

Very spirited, is it not? One has only to overlook a little threadbareness in the similes, and it is very good oratorical verse. But would we believe in it, we must never read Mr. Moore's own journal, and find out how thin a piece of veneering his own life was—how he lived in sham till his very nature had become subdued to it, till he could persuade himself that a

sham could be written into a reality, and actually made experiment thereof in his Diary.

One verse in this diatribe deserves a special comment—

"What an impostor Genius is!"

In two respects there is nothing to be objected to in it. It is of eight syllables, and "is" rhymes unexceptionably with "his." But is there the least filament of truth in it? We venture to assert, not the least. It was not Rousseau's genius that was an impostor. It was the one thing in him that was always true. We grant that, in allowing that a man has genius. Talent is that which is in a man's power; genius is that in whose power a man is. That is the very difference between them. We might turn the tables on Moore, the man of talent, and say truly enough, What an impostor talent is! Moore talks of the mimetic power with a total misapprehension of what it really is. The mimetic power had nothing whatever to do with the affair. Rousseau had none of it; Shakespeare had it in excess; but what difference would it make in our judgment of Hamlet or Othello if a manuscript of Shakespeare's memoirs should turn up, and we should find out that he had been a pitiful fellow? None in the world; for he is not a professed moralist, and his life does not give the warrant to his words. But if Demosthenes, after all his Philippics, throws away his shield and runs, we feel the contemptibleness of the contradiction. With genius itself we never find any fault. It would be an over-nicety that would do that. We do not get invited to nectar and ambrosia so often that we think of grumbling and saying we have better at home. No; the same genius that mastered him who wrote the poem masters us in reading it, and we care for nothing outside the poem itself. How the author lived, what he wore, how he looked—all that is mere gossip, about which we need not trouble ourselves. Whatever he was or did, somehow or other God let him be worthy to write *this*, and that is enough for us. We forgive everything to the genius; we are inexorable to the man. Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns—what have their biographies to do with us? Genius is not a

question of character. It may be sordid, like the lamp of Aladdin, in its externals; what care we, while the touch of it builds palaces for us, makes us rich as only men in dream-land are rich, and lords to the utmost bound of imagination? So, when people talk of the ungrateful way in which the world treats its geniuses, they speak unwisely. There is no work of genius which has not been the delight of mankind, no word of genius to which the human heart and soul have not, sooner or later, responded. But the man whom the genius takes possession of for its pen, for its trowel, for its pencil, for its chisel, *him* the world treats according to his deserts. Does Burns drink? It sets him to gauging casks of gin. For, remember, it is not to the practical world that the genius appeals; it *is* the practical world which judges of the man's fitness for its uses, and has a right so to judge. No amount of patronage could have made distilled liquors less toothsome to Robbie Burns, as no amount of them could make a Burns of the Ettrick Shepherd.

There is an old story in the *Gesta Romanorum* of a priest who was found fault with by one of his parishioners because his life was in painful discordance with his teaching. So one day he takes his critic out to a stream, and, giving him to drink of it, asks him if he does not find it sweet and pure water. The parishioner, having answered that it was, is taken to the source, and finds that what had so refreshed him flowed from between the jaws of a dead dog. "Let this teach thee," said the priest, "that the very best doctrine may take its rise in a very impure and disgustful spring, and that excellent morals may be taught by a man who has no morals at all." It is easy enough to see the fallacy here. Had the man known beforehand from what a carrion fountain-head the stream issued, he could not have drunk of it without loathing. Had the priest merely bidden him to *look* at the stream and see how beautiful it was, instead of tasting it, it would have been quite another matter. And this is precisely the difference between what appeals to our æsthetic and to our moral sense, between what is judged of by the taste and the conscience.

It is when the sentimentalist turns preacher of morals that we investigate his character, and are justified in so doing. He may express as many and as delicate shades of feeling as he likes—for this the sensibility of his organisation perfectly fits him, no other person could d it so well—but the moment he undertakes to establish his feeling as a rule of conduct we ask at once how far are his own life and deeds in accordance with what he preaches? For every man feels instinctively that all the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action; and that while tenderness of feeling and susceptibility to generous emotions are accidents of temperament, goodness is an achievement of the will and a quality of the life. Fine words, says our homely old proverb, butter no parsnips; and if the question be how to render those vegetables palatable, an ounce of butter would be worth more than all the orations of Cicero. The only conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity is that he give *himself* for a principle. Words, money, all things else, are comparatively easy to give away; but when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice, it is plain that the truth, whatever it may be, has taken possession of him. From that sincerity his words gain the force and pertinency of deeds, and his money is no longer the pale drudge 'twixt man and man, but, by a beautiful magic, what erewhile bore the image and superscription of Cæsar seems now to bear the image and superscription of God. It is thus that there is a genius for goodness, for magnanimity, for self-sacrifice, as well as for creative art; and it is thus that by a more refined sort of Platonism the Infinite Beauty dwells in and shapes to its own likeness the soul which gives it body and individuality. But when Moore charges genius with being an impostor, the confusion of his ideas is pitiable. There is nothing so true, so sincere, so downright and forthright, as genius. It is always truer than the man himself is, greater than he. If Shakespeare the man had been as marvellous a creature as the genius that wrote his plays, that genius so comprehensive in its intelligence, so wise even in its play, that its clowns are moralists and

philosophers, so penetrative that a single one of its phrases reveals to us the secret of our own character, would his contemporaries have left us so wholly without record of him as they have done, distinguishing him in no wise from his fellow-players?

Rousseau, no doubt, was weak, nay, more than that, was sometimes despicable, but yet is not fairly to be reckoned among the herd of sentimentalists. It is shocking that a man whose preaching made it fashionable for women of rank to nurse their own children should have sent his own, as soon as born, to the foundling hospital, still more shocking that, in a note to his *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, he should speak of this crime as one of the consequences of our social system. But for all that there was a faith and an ardour of conviction in him that distinguish him from most of the writers of his time. Nor were his practice and his preaching always inconsistent. He contrived to pay regularly, whatever his own circumstances were, a pension of one hundred *livres* a-year to a maternal aunt who had been kind to him in childhood. Nor was his asceticism a sham. He might have turned his gift into laced coats and *châteaux* as easily as Voltaire, had he not held it too sacred to be bartered away in any such losing exchange.

But what is worthy of especial remark is this—that in nearly all that he wrote his leading object was the good of his kind, and that through all the vicissitudes of a life which illness, sensibility of temperament, and the approaches of insanity rendered wretched—the associate of infidels, the foundling child, as it were, of an age without belief, least of all in itself—he professed and evidenty felt deeply a faith in the goodness both of man and of God. There is no such thing as scoffing in his writings. On the other hand, there is no stereotyped morality. He does not ignore the existence of scepticism; he recognises its existence in his own nature, meets it frankly face to face, and makes it confess that there are things in the teaching of Christ that are deeper than its doubt. The influence of his early education at Geneva is apparent here. An intellect so acute as his, trained in the school of Calvin in a republic

where theological discussion was as much the amusement of the people as the opera was at Paris, could not fail to be a good logician. He had the fortitude to follow his logic wherever it led him. If the very impressibility of character which quickened his perception of the beauties of nature, and made him alive to the charm of music and musical expression, prevented him from being in the highest sense an original writer, and if his ideas were mostly suggested to him by books, yet the clearness, consecutiveness, and eloquence with which he stated and enforced them made them his own. There was at least that original fire in him which could fuse them and run them in a novel mould. His power lay in this very ability of manipulating the thoughts of others. Fond of paradox he doubtless was, but he had a way of putting things that arrested attention and excited thought.

It was, perhaps, this very sensibility of the surrounding atmosphere of feeling and speculation, which made Rousseau more directly influential on contemporary thought (or perhaps we should say sentiment) than any writer of his time. And this is rarely consistent with enduring greatness in literature. It forces us to remember, against our will, the oratorical character of his works. They were all pleas, and he a great advocate, with Europe in the jury-box. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm, eloquence produces conviction for the moment, but it is only by truth to nature and the everlasting intuitions of mankind that those abiding influences are won that enlarge from generation to generation. Rousseau was in many respects—as great pleaders always are—a man of the day, who must needs become a mere name to posterity, yet he could not but have had in him some not inconsiderable share of that principle by which man eternises himself. For it is only to such that the night cometh not in which no man shall work, and he is still operative both in politics and literature by the principles he formulated or the emotions to which he gave a voice so piercing and so sympathetic.

In judging Rousseau, it would be unfair not to take note of the malarious atmosphere in which he grew up. The constitution of his mind was thus early infected with a feverish

taint that made him shiveringly sensitive to a temperature which hardier natures found bracing. To him this rough world was but too literally a rack. Good-humoured Mother Nature commonly imbeds the nerves of her children in a padding of self-conceit that serves as a buffer against the ordinary shocks to which even a life of routine is liable, and it would seem at first sight as if Rousseau had been better cared for than usual in this regard. But as his self-conceit was enormous, so was the reaction from it proportionate, and the fretting suspiciousness of temper, sure mark of an unsound mind, which rendered him incapable of intimate friendship, while passionately longing for it, became inevitably, when turned inward, a tormenting self-distrust. To dwell in unrealities is the doom of the sentimentalist; but it should not be forgotten that the same fitful intensity of emotion which makes them real as the means of elation, gives them substance also for torture. Too irritably jealous to endure the rude society of men, he steeped his senses in the enervating incense that women are only too ready to burn. If their friendship be a safeguard to the other sex, their homage is fatal to all but the strongest, and Rousseau was weak both by inheritance and early training. His father was one of those feeble creatures for whom a fine phrase could always satisfactorily fill the void that non-performance leaves behind it. If he neglected duty, he made up for it by that cultivation of the finer sentiments of our common nature which waters flowers of speech with the brineless tears of a flabby remorse, without one fibre of resolve in it, and which impoverishes the character in proportion as it enriches the vocabulary. He was a very Apicius in that digestible kind of woe which makes no man leaner, and had a favourite receipt for cooking you up a sorrow *à la douleur inassouvie* that had just enough delicious sharpness in it to bring tears into the eyes by tickling the palate. "When he said to me, 'Jean Jacques, let us speak of thy mother,' I said to him, 'Well, father, we are going to weep, then,' and this word alone drew tears from him. 'Ah!' said he, groaning, 'give her back to me, console me for her, fill the void she has left in my soul!'" Alas! in such cases,

the void she leaves is only that she found. The grief that seeks any other than its own society will ere long want an object. This admirable parent allowed his son to become an outcast at sixteen, without any attempt to reclaim him, in order to enjoy unmolested a petty inheritance to which the boy was entitled in right of his mother. "This conduct," Rousseau tells us, "of a father whose tenderness and virtue were so well known to me caused me to make reflections on myself which have not a little contributed to make my heart sound. I drew from it this great maxim of morals, the only one perhaps serviceable in practice, to avoid situations which put our duties in opposition to our interest, and which show us our own advantage in the wrong of another, sure that in such situations, *however sincere may be one's love of virtue*, it sooner or later grows weak without our perceiving it, *and that we become unjust and wicked in action without having ceased to be just and good in soul.*"

This maxim may do for that "fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks its adversary," which Milton could not praise—that is, for a manhood whose distinction it is not to be manly—but it is chiefly worth notice as being the characteristic doctrine of sentimentalism. This disjoining of deed from will, of practice from theory, is to put asunder what God has joined by an indissoluble sacrament. The soul must be tainted before the action become corrupt; and there is no self-delusion more fatal than that which makes the conscience dreamy with the anodyne of lofty sentiments, while the life is grovelling and sensual—witness Coleridge. In his case we feel something like disgust. But where, as in his son Hartley, there is hereditary infirmity, where the man sees the principle that might rescue him slip from the clutch of a nerveless will, like a rope through the fingers of a drowning man, and the confession of faith is the moan of despair, there is room for no harsher feeling than pity. Rousseau showed through life a singular proneness for being convinced by his own eloquence; he was always his own first convert; and this reconciles his power as a writer with his weakness as a man. He and all like him mistake emotion for

conviction, velleity for resolve, the brief eddy of sentiment for the mid-current of ever-gathering faith in duty that draws to itself all the affluents of conscience and will, and gives continuity of purpose to life. They are like men who love the stimulus of being under conviction, as it is called, who, forever getting religion, never get capital enough to retire upon and spend for their own need and the common service.

The sentimentalist is the spiritual hypochondriac, with whom fancies become facts, while facts are a discomfort because they will not be evaporated into fancy. In his eyes, Theory is too fine a dame to confess even a country-cousinship with coarse-handed Practice, whose homely ways would disconcert her artificial world. The very susceptibility that makes him quick to feel, makes him also incapable of deep and durable feeling. He loves to think he suffers, and keeps a pet sorrow, a blue-devil familiar, that goes with him everywhere, like Paracelsus's black dog. He takes good care, however, that it shall not be the true sulphurous article that sometimes takes a fancy to fly away with his conjurer. René says: "In my madness I had gone so far as even to wish I might experience a misfortune, so that my suffering might at least have a real object." But no; selfishness is only active egotism, and there is nothing and nobody, with a single exception, which this sort of creature will not sacrifice, rather than give any other than an imaginary pang to his idol. Vicarious pain he is not unwilling to endure, nay, will even commit suicide by proxy, like the German poet who let his wife kill herself to give him a sensation. Had young Jerusalem been anything like Goethe's portrait of him in *Werther*, he would have taken very good care not to blow out the brains which he would have thought only too precious. Real sorrows are uncomfortable things, but purely æsthetic ones are by no means unpleasant, and I have always fancied the handsome young Wolfgang writing those distracted letters to Auguste Stolberg with a looking-glass in front of him to give back an image of his desolation, and finding it rather pleasant than otherwise to shed the tear of sympathy with self that would seem so bitter to his fair correspondent.

The tears that have real salt in them will keep; they are the difficult, manly tears that are shed in secret; but the pathos soon evaporates from that fresh-water with which a man can bedew a dead donkey in public, while his wife is having a good cry over his neglect of her at home. We do not think the worse of Goethe for hypothetically desolating himself in the fashion aforesaid, for with many constitutions it is as purely natural a crisis as dentition, which the stronger worry through, and turn out very sensible, agreeable fellows. But where there is an arrest of development, and the heartbreak of the patient is audibly prolonged through life, we have a spectacle which the toughest heart would wish to get as far away from as possible.

We would not be supposed to overlook the distinction, too often lost sight of, between sentimentalism and sentiment, the latter being a very excellent thing in its way, as genuine things are apt to be. Sentiment is intellectualised emotion, emotion precipitated, as it were, in pretty crystals by the fancy. This is the delightful staple of the poets of social life like Horace and Béranger, or Thackerary, when he too rarely played with verse. It puts into words for us that decorous average of feeling to the expression of which society can consent without danger of being indiscreetly moved. It is excellent for people who are willing to save their souls alive to any extent that shall not be discomposing. It is even satisfying till some deeper experience has given us a hunger which what we so glibly call "the world" cannot sate, just as a water-ice is nourishment enough to a man who has had his dinner. It is the sufficing lyrical interpreter of those lighter hours that should make part of every healthy man's day, and is noxious only when it palls men's appetite for the truly profound poetry which is very passion of very soul sobered by afterthought and embodied in eternal types by imagination. True sentiment is emotion ripened by a slow ferment of the mind and qualified to an agreeable temperance by that taste which is the conscience of polite society. But the sentimentalist always insists on taking his emotion neat, and, as his sense gradually deadens to the stimulus, increases his

dose till he ends in a kind of moral deliquium. At first the debaucher, he becomes at last the victim of his sensations.

Among the ancients we find no trace of sentimentalism. Their masculine mood both of body and mind left no room for it, and hence the bracing quality of their literature compared with that of recent times, its tonic property, that seems almost too astringent to palates relaxed by a daintier diet. The first great example of the degenerate modern tendency was Petrarch, who may be said to have given it impulse and direction. A more perfect specimen of the type has not since appeared. An intellectual voluptuary, a moral *dilettante*, the first instance of that character, since too common, the gentleman in search of a sensation, seeking a solitude at Vaucluse because it made him more likely to be in demand at Avignon, praising philosophic poverty with a sharp eye to the next rich benefice in the gift of his patron, commending a good life but careful first of a good living, happy only in seclusion but making a dangerous journey to enjoy the theatrical show of a coronation in the Capitol, cherishing a fruitless passion which broke his heart three or four times a year, and yet could not make an end of him till he had reached the ripe age of seventy and survived his mistress a quarter of a century—surely a more exquisite perfection of inconsistency would be hard to find.

When Petrarch returned from his journey into the North of Europe in 1332, he balanced the books of his unrequited passion, and, finding that he had now been in love seven years, thought the time had at last come to call deliberately on Death. Had Death taken him at his word, he would have protested that he was only in fun. For we find him always taking good care of an excellent constitution, avoiding the plague with commendable assiduity, and in the very year when he declares it absolutely essential to his peace of mind to die for good and all, taking refuge in the fortress of Capranica, from a wholesome dread of having his throat cut by robbers. There is such a difference between dying in a sonnet with a cambric handkerchief at one's eyes, and the prosaic reality of demise certified in the parish register! Practically it is inconvenient to be dead.

Among other things, it puts an end to the manufacture of sonnets. But there seems to have been an excellent understanding between Petrarch and Death, for he was brought to that grisly monarch's door so often, that, otherwise, nothing short of a miracle or the nine lives of that animal whom love also makes lyrical could have saved him. "I consent," he cries, "to live and die in Africa among its serpents, upon Caucasus, or Atlas, if, while I live, to breathe a pure air, and after my death a little corner of earth where to bestow my body, may be allowed me. This is all I ask, but this I cannot obtain. Doomed always to wander, and to be a stranger everywhere, O Fortune, Fortune, fix me at last to some one spot! I do not covet thy favours. Let me enjoy a tranquil poverty, let me pass in this retreat the few days that remain to me!" The pathetic stop of Petrarch's poetical organ was one he could pull out at pleasure—and indeed we soon learn to distrust literary tears, as the cheap subterfuge for want of real feeling with natures of this quality. Solitude with him was but the pseudonyme of notoriety. Poverty was the archdeaconry of Parma, with other ecclesiastical pickings. During his retreat at Vaucluse, in the very height of that divine sonneteering love of Laura, of that sensitive purity which called Avignon Babylon, and rebuked the sinfulness of Clement, he was himself begetting that kind of children which we spell with a *b*. We believe that, if Messer Francesco had been present when the woman was taken in adultery, he would have flung the first stone without the slightest feeling of inconsistency, nay, with a sublime sense of virtue. The truth is, that it made very little difference to him what sort of proper sentiment he expressed, provided he could do it elegantly and with unction.

Would any one feel the difference between his faint abstractions and the Platonism of a powerful nature fitted alike for the withdrawal of ideal contemplation and for breasting the storms of life—would any one know how wide a depth divides a noble friendship based on sympathy of pursuit and aspiration, on that mutual help which souls capable of self-sustainment are the readiest to give or to take, and a simulated

passion, true neither to the spiritual nor the sensual part of man—let him compare the sonnets of Petrarch with those which Michel Angelo addressed to Vittoria Colonna. In them the airiest pinnacles of sentiment and speculation are buttressed with solid mason-work of thought, and of an actual, not fancied, experience, and the depth of feeling is measured by the sobriety and reserve of expression, while in Petrarch's all ingenuousness is frittered away into ingenuity. Both are cold, but the coldness of the one is self-restraint, while the other chills with pretence of warmth. In Michel Angelo's, you feel the great architect; in Petrarch's, the artist who can best realise his conception in the limits of a cherry-stone. And yet this man influenced literature longer and more widely than almost any other in modern times. So great is the charm of elegance, so unreal is the larger part of what is written!

Certainly I do not mean to say that a work of art should be looked at by the light of the artist's biography, or measured by our standard of his character. Nor do I reckon what was genuine in Petrarch—his love of letters, his refinement, his skill in the superficial graces of language, that rhetorical art by which the music of words supplants their meaning, and the verse moulds the thought instead of being plastic to it—after any such fashion. I have no ambition for that character of *valet de chambre* which is said to disenchant the most heroic figures into mere everyday personages, for it implies a mean soul no less than a servile condition. But we have a right to demand a certain amount of reality, however small, in the emotion of a man who makes it his business to endeavour at exciting our own. We have a privilege of nature to shiver before a painted flame, how cunningly soever the colours be laid on. Yet our love of minute biographical detail, our desire to make ourselves spies upon the men of the past, seems so much of an instinct in us, that we must look for the spring of it in human nature, and that somewhat deeper than mere curiosity or love of gossip. It should seem to arise from what must be considered on the whole a creditable feeling—namely, that we value character more than any amount of talent—the

skill to *be* something, above that of doing anything but the best of its kind. The highest creative genius, and that only, is privileged from arrest by this personality, for there the thing produced is altogether disengaged from the producer. But in natures incapable of this escape from themselves, the author is inevitably mixed with his work, and we have a feeling that the amount of his sterling character is the security for the notes he issues. Especially we feel so when truth to self, which is always self-forgetful, and not truth to nature, makes an essential part of the value of what is offered us; as where a man undertakes to narrate personal experience or to enforce a dogma. This is particularly true as respects sentimentalists, because of their intrusive self-consciousness; for there is no more universal characteristic of human nature than the instinct of men to apologise to themselves for themselves, and to justify personal failings by generalising them into universal laws. A man would be the keenest devil's advocate against himself, were it not that he has always taken a retaining fee for the defence; for we think that the indirect and mostly unconscious pleas in abatement which we read between the lines in the works of many authors are oftener written to set themselves right in their own eyes than in those of the world. And in the real life of the sentimentalist it is the same. He is under the wretched necessity of keeping up, at least in public, the character he has assumed, till he at last reaches that last shift of bankrupt self-respect, to play the hypocrite with himself. Lamartine, after passing round the hat in Europe and America, takes to his bed from wounded pride when the French senate votes him a subsidy, and sheds tears of humiliation. Ideally he resents it; in practical coin, he will accept the shame without a wry face.

George Sand speaking of Rousseau's *Confessions*, says that an autobiographer always makes himself the hero of his own novel, and cannot help idealising, even if he would. But the weak point of all sentimentalists is that they always have been, and always continue under every conceivable circumstance to be, their own ideals, whether they are writing their own lives or no. Rousseau

opens his book with the statement: "I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe myself unlike any that exists. If I am not worth more, at least I am different." O exquisite cunning of self-flattery! It is this very imagined difference that makes us worth more in our own foolish sight. For while all men are apt to think, or to persuade themselves that they think, all other men their accomplices in vice or weakness, they are not difficult of belief that they are singular in any quality or talent on which they hug themselves. More than this; people who are truly original are the last to find it out, for the moment we become conscious of a virtue it has left us or is getting ready to go. Originality does not consist in a fidgety assertion of selfhood, but in the faculty of getting rid of it altogether, that the truer genius of the man, which commerces with universal nature and with other souls through a common sympathy with that, may take all his powers wholly to itself—and the truly original man could no more be jealous of his peculiar gift, than the grass could take credit to itself for being green. What is the reason that all children are geniuses (though they contrive so soon to outgrow that dangerous quality), except that they never cross-examine themselves on the subject? The moment that process begins, their speech loses its gift of unexpectedness, and they become as tediously impertinent as the rest of us.

If there never was anyone like him, if he constituted a genius in himself, to what end write confessions in which no other human being could ever be in a condition to take the least possible interest? All men are interested in Montaigne in proportion as all men find more of themselves in him, and all men see but one image in the glass which the greatest of poets holds up to nature, an image which at once startles and charms them with its familiarity. Fabulists always endow their animals with the passions and desires of men. But if an ox could dictate his confessions, what glimmer of understanding should we find in those bovine confidences, unless on some theory of pre-existence, some blank misgiving of a creature moving about in worlds not realised? The truth is, that we recognise the common humanity of Rousseau in the very

weakness that betrayed him into this conceit of himself; we find he is just like the rest of us in this very assumption of essential difference, for among all animals man is the only one who tries to pass for more than he is, and so involves himself in the condemnation of seeming less.

But it would be sheer waste of time to hunt Rousseau through all his doublings of inconsistency, and run him to earth in every new paradox. His first two books attacked, one of them literature, and the other society. But this did not prevent him from being diligent with his pen, nor from availing himself of his credit with persons who enjoyed all the advantages of that inequality whose evils he had so pointedly exposed. Indeed, it is curious how little practical communism there has been, how few professors it has had who would not have gained by a general dividend. It is perhaps no frantic effort of generosity in a philosopher with ten crowns in his pocket when he offers to make common stock with a neighbour who has ten thousand of yearly income, nor is it an uncommon thing to see such theories knocked clean out of a man's head by the descent of a thumping legacy. But, consistent or not, Rousseau remains permanently interesting as the highest and most perfect type of the sentimentalist of genius. His was perhaps the acutest mind that was ever mated with an organisation so diseased, the brain most far-reaching in speculation that ever kept itself steady and worked out its problems amid such disordered tumult of the nerves.* His letter to the Archbishop of Paris, admirable for its lucid power and soberness of tone, and his *Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques*, which no man can read and believe him to have been sane, show him to us in his strength and weakness, and give us a more charitable, let us hope therefore a truer, notion of him than his own apology for himself. That he was a man of genius appears unmistakably in his impressibility by the deeper meaning of the epoch in which he lived. Before an eruption, clouds steeped through and through with electric life gather over the crater, as if in

* Perhaps we should except Newton.

sympathy and expectation. As the mountain heaves and cracks, these vapoury masses are seamed with fire, as if they felt and answered the dumb agony that is struggling for utterance below. Just such flashes of eager sympathetic fire break continually from the cloudy volumes of Rousseau, the result at once and the warning of that convulsion of which Paris was to be the crater and all Europe to feel the spasm. There are symptoms enough elsewhere of that want of faith in the existing order which made the Revolution inevitable—even so shallow an observer as Horace Walpole could forebode it so early as 1765—but Rousseau more than all others is the unconscious expression of the groping after something radically new, the instinct for a change that should be organic and pervade every fibre of the social and political body. Freedom of thought owes far more to the jester Voltaire, who also had his solid kernel of earnest, than to the sombre Genevese, whose earnestness is of the deadly kind. Yet, for good or evil, the latter was the father of modern democracy, and without him our Declaration of Independence would have wanted some of those sentences in which the immemorial longings of the poor and the dreams of solitary enthusiasts were at last affirmed as axioms in the manifesto of a nation, so that all the world might hear.

Though Rousseau, like many other fanatics, had a remarkable vein of common-sense in him (witness his remarks on duelling, on landscape-gardening, on French poetry, and much of his thought on education), we cannot trace many practical results to his teaching, least of all in politics. For the great difficulty with his system, if system it may be called, is, that, while it professes to follow nature, it not only assumes as a starting-point that the individual man may be made over again, but proceeds to the conclusion that man himself, that human nature, must be made over again, and governments remodelled on a purely theoretic basis. But when something like an experiment in this direction was made in 1789, not only did it fail as regarded man in general, but even as regards the particular variety of man that inhabited France. The Revolution

accomplished many changes, and beneficent ones, yet it left France peopled, not by a new race without traditions, but by Frenchmen. Still, there could not but be a wonderful force in the words of a man who, above all others, had the secret of making abstractions glow with his own fervour; and his ideas —dispersed now in the atmosphere of thought—have influenced, perhaps still continue to influence, speculative minds, which prefer swift and sure generalisation to hesitating and doubtful experience.

Rousseau has, in one respect, been utterly misrepresented and misunderstood. Even Châteaubriand most unfilially classes him and Voltaire together. It appears to me that the inmost core of his being was religious. Had he remained in the Catholic Church he might have been a saint. Had he come earlier, he might have founded an order. His was precisely the nature on which religious enthusiasm takes the strongest hold—a temperament which finds a sensuous delight in spiritual things, and satisfies its craving for excitement with celestial debauch. He had not the iron temper of a great reformer and organiser like Knox, who, true Scotchman that he was, found a way to weld this world and the other together in a cast-iron creed; but he had as much as any man ever had that gift of a great preacher to make the oratorical fervour which persuades himself while it lasts into the abiding conviction of his hearers. That very persuasion of his, that the soul could remain pure while he life was corrupt, is not unexampled among men who have left holier names than he. His *Confessions*, also, would assign him to that class with whom the religious sentiment is strong, and the moral nature weak. They are apt to believe that they may, as special pleaders say, confess and avoid. Hawthorne has admirably illustrated this in the penance of Mr. Dimmesdale. With all the soil that is upon Rousseau, I cannot help looking on him as one capable beyond any in his generation of being divinely possessed; and if it happened otherwise, when we remember the much that hindered and the little that helped in a life and time like his, we shall be much readier to pity than to condemn. It was his very fitness for being

something better that makes him able to shock us so with what in too many respects he unhappily was. Less gifted, he had been less hardly judged. More than any other of the sentimentalists, except possibly Sterne, he had in him a staple of sincerity. Compared with Châteaubriand, he is honesty, compared with Lamartine, he is manliness itself. His nearest congener in our own tongue is Cowper.

In the whole school there is a sickly taint. The strongest mark which Rousseau has left upon literature is a sensibility to the picturesque in Nature, not with Nature as a strengthener and consoler, a wholesome tonic for a mind ill at ease with itself, but with Nature as a kind of feminine echo to the mood, flattering it with sympathy rather than correcting it with rebuke or lifting it away from its unmanly depression, as in the wholesomer fellow-feeling of Wordsworth. They seek in her an accessory, and not a reproof. It is less a sympathy with Nature than a sympathy with ourselves as we compel her to reflect us. It is solitude, Nature for her estrangement from man, not for her companionship with him—it is desolation and ruin, Nature as she has triumphed over man—with which this order of mind seeks communion, and in which it finds solace. It is with the hostile and destructive power of matter, and not with the spirit of life and renewal that dwells in it, that they ally themselves. And in human character it is the same. St. Preux, René, Werther, Manfred, Quasimodo—they are all anomalies, distortions, ruins; so much easier is it to caricature life from our own sickly conception of it, than to paint it in its noble simplicity; so much cheaper is unreality than truth.

Every man is conscious that he leads two lives—the one trivial and ordinary, the other sacred and recluse; one which he carries to society and the dinner-table, the other in which his youth and aspiration survive for him, and which is a confidence between himself and God. Both may be equally sincere, and there need be no contradiction between them, any more than in a healthy man between soul and body. If the higher life be real and earnest, its result, whether in literature or affairs, will

be real and earnest too. But no man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself, who would not exchange the finest show for the poorest reality, who does not so love his work that he is not only glad to give himself for it, but finds rather a gain than a sacrifice in the surrender. The sentimentalist does not think of what he does so much as of what the world will think of what he does. He translates should into would, looks upon the spheres of duty and beauty as alien to each other, and can never learn how life rounds itself to a noble completeness between these two opposite but mutually sustaining poles of what we long for and what we must.

Did Rousseau, then, lead a life of this quality? Perhaps, when we consider the contrast which every man who looks backward must feel between the life he planned and the life which circumstance within him and without him has made for him, we should rather ask, Was this the life he meant to lead? Perhaps, when we take into account his faculty of self-deception —it may be no greater than our own—we should ask, Was this the life he believed he led? Have we any right to judge this man after our blunt English fashion, and condemn him, as we are wont to do, on the finding of a jury of average householders? Is French reality precisely our reality? Could we tolerate tragedy in rhymed alexandrines, instead of blank verse? The whole life of Rousseau is pitched on this heroic key, and for the most trivial occasion he must be ready with the sublime sentiments that are supposed to suit him rather than it. It is one of the most curious features of the sentimental ailment, that, while it shuns the contact of men, it courts publicity. In proportion as solitude and communion with self lead the sentimentalist to exaggerate the importance of his own personality, he comes to think that the least event connected with it is of consequence to his fellow-men. If he change his shirt, he would have mankind aware of it. Victor Hugo, the greatest living representative of the class, considers it necessary to let the world know by letter from time to time his opinions on every conceivable subject about which it is not asked nor is of

the least value unless we concede to him an immediate inspiration. We men of colder blood, in whom self-consciousness takes the form of pride, and who have deified *mauvaise honte* as if our defect were our virtue, find it especially hard to understand that artistic impulse of more southern races to *pose* themselves properly on every occasion, and not even to die without some tribute of deference to the taste of the world they are leaving. Was not even mighty Cæsar's last thought of his drapery? Let us not condemn Rousseau for what seems to us the indecent exposure of himself in his *Confessions*.

Those who allow an oratorical and purely conventional side disconnected with our private understanding of the facts, and with life, in which everything has a wholly parliamentary sense where truth is made subservient to the momentary exigencies of eloquence, should be charitable to Rousseau. While we encourage a distinction which establishes two kinds of truth, one for the world, and another for the conscience, while we take pleasure in a kind of speech that has no relation to the real thought of speaker or hearer, but to the rostrum only, we must not be hasty to condemn a sentimentalism which we do our best to foster. We listen in public with the gravity of augurs to what we smile at when we meet a brother adept. France is the native land of eulogy, of truth padded out to the size and shape demanded by *comme-il-faut*. The French Academy has, perhaps, done more harm by the vogue it has given to this style, than it has done good by its literary purism; for the best purity of a language depends on the limpidity of its source in veracity of thought. Rousseau was in many respects a typical Frenchman, and it is not to be wondered at if he too often fell in with the fashion of saying what was expected of him, and what he thought due to the situation, rather than what would have been true to his inmost consciousness. Perhaps we should allow something also to the influence of a Calvinistic training, which certainly helps men who have the least natural tendency towards it to set faith above works, and to persuade themselves of the efficacy of an inward grace to offset an outward and visible defection from it.

As the sentimentalist always takes a fanciful, sometimes an unreal, life for an ideal one, it would be too much to say that Rousseau was a man of earnest convictions. But he was a man of fitfully intense ones, as suited so mobile a temperament, and his writings, more than those of any other of his tribe, carry with them that persuasion that was in him while he wrote. In them at least he is as consistent as a man who admits new ideas can ever be. The children of his brain he never abandoned, but clung to them with paternal fidelity. Intellectually he was true and fearless; constitutionally, timid, contradictory, and weak; but never, if we understand him rightly, false. He was a little too credulous of sonorous sentiment, but he was never, like Châteaubriand or Lamartine, the lackey of fine phrases. If, as some fanciful physiologists have assumed, there be a masculine and feminine lobe of the brain, it would seem that in men of sentimental turn the masculine half fell in love with and made an idol of the other, obeying and admiring all the pretty whims of this *folle du logis*. In Rousseau the mistress had some noble elements of character, and less taint of the *demi-monde* than is visible in more recent cases of the same illicit relation.

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