

THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS THOMPSON



PROSE: VOLUME III.

Fernando Benin.

THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS THOMPSON
VOLUME III: PROSE

Third Thousand, 1913.



Ernest Wallace Esq. x

Francis Thompson

From a drawing by Everard Meynell
May 1903

THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS THOMPSON
VOLUME III: PROSE

BURNS & OATES LTD
28 Orchard Street
London W

THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS THOMPSON
VOLUME III: PROSE

BURNS & OATES LTD
28 Orchard Street
London W

THE CONTENTS

The Literary Executor's Preface	<i>Page</i> xiii
The Author's Motto and Invocation	xv
Shelley	i
Paganism Old and New	38
In Darkest England	52
The Fourth Order of Humanity	66
Form and Formalism	71
Nature's Immortality	78
Sanctity and Song	89
Don Quixote	93
The Way of Imperfection	97
A Renegade Poet on the Poet	105
Moestitiae Encomium	110
Finis Coronat Opus	116
The Poets' Poet	140
Sidney's Prose	147
Shakespeare's Prose	153
Ben Jonson's Prose	159
Seventeenth Century Prose	164
Goldsmith's Prose	170
Crashaw	175
Coleridge	181
Bacon	190
Milton	195
Pope	203
James Thomson	209
Thomas De Quincey	215

CONTENTS

Macaulay	222
Emerson	231
Dante	238
The Nibelungen Lied	245
Health and Holiness	249
Notes	283

The Preface by Francis Thompson's Literary Executor

IF Francis Thompson's concern for the Prose of Poets is the Reader's too, this volume carries its own proper passport on its title-page. Of this Poet's prose, his *Shelley Essay* stands first among even his own writings. Yet the same ease with which he turns one of its passages of imagery into verse for *An Anthem of Earth* is equally evident in the case of other essays and other poems: a sign of a general closer kinship than is common between the less and the more imaginative modes of expression.

Poetry and Prose he began to write simultaneously. His *Paganism Old and New* (composed before he left the London streets, as one of its allusions betrays) was sent in the same envelope as his *Dream Tryst* to the office of the magazine which produced them; and the *Shelley Essay* and *The Hound of Heaven* were contemporaries—one could say twins. But whereas his Poetry was written, at intervals, almost wholly during the decade of years 1888 to 1897, he continued to write Prose, if a little fitfully, during the remaining decade of his life. To the earlier period belong the imaginative papers: such as the *Moestitiae Encomium*, written when he had been reading Blake and De Quincey, his 'very own Thomas De Quincey'; and the *Finis Coronat Opus*, a fantasia which he might appropriately have produced in competition with Mary Shelley, but one which, for all its artificiality, and its hardly hidden

PREFACE

irony, has hints of that slaying of domesticities which went to his own making of 'a poet out of a man.'

Later his literary criticisms had a friendly welcome in several quarters, notably in *The Academy*, under Charles Lewis Hind, and in *The Athenæum*, first under Norman Maccoll and finally under Vernon Rendall. The reprinting of such articles and reviews, written in haste, must be something of a hazardous adventure. But I am fortified in making it by the fact that he himself projected a Prose volume; appointing for it some of the articles here printed, and even formally correcting them for the Press. And if my choice, where left unaided, is a faulty one, I know that the very failures and unexpectednesses of a man of genius serve a sound purpose, though a biographical, rather than a literary one.

W. M.

May 1913.

MOTTO & INVOCATION

OMNIA PER IPSUM, ET SINE IPSO NIHIL

St John's Gospel, chap. 1, v. 3, abbreviated.

PARDON, O Saint John Divine,
That I change a word of thee—
None the less, aid thou me!
And Siena's Catharine!
Lofty Doctor, Augustine,
Glorious penitent! And be
Assisi's Francis also mine!
Mine be Padua's Anthony:
And that other Francis, he
Called of Sales! Let all combine
To counsel (of great charity)
What I write! Thy wings incline,
Ah, my Angel, o'er the line!
Last and first, O Queen Mary,
Of thy white Immaculacy,
If my work may profit aught,
Fill with lilies every thought!
I surmise
What is white will then be wise.

To which I add: Thomas More,
Teach (thereof my need is sore)
What thou showedst well on earth—
Good writ, good wit, make goodly mirth!

F.T.

SHELLEY

THE Church, which was once the mother of poets no less than of saints, during the last two centuries has relinquished to aliens the chief glories of poetry, if the chief glories of holiness she has preserved for her own. The palm and the laurel, Dominic and Dante, sanctity and song, grew together in her soil: she has retained the palm, but forgone the laurel. Poetry in its widest sense,* and when not professedly irreligious, has been too much and too long either misprised or distrusted; too much and too generally the feeling has been that it is at best superfluous, at worst pernicious, most often dangerous. Once poetry was, as she should be, the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church; the minister to the mind, as the Church to the soul. But poetry sinned, poetry fell; and, in place of lovingly reclaiming her, Catholicism cast her from the door to follow the feet of her pagan seducer. The separation has been ill for poetry; it has not been well for religion.

Fathers of the Church (we would say), pastors of the Church, pious laics of the Church: you are taking from its walls the panoply of Aquinas; take also from its walls the psalter of Alighieri. Unrol the precedents of the Church's past; recall to your minds that Francis of Assisi was among the precursors of Dante; that sworn to

* That is to say, taken as the general animating spirit of the Fine Arts.

SHELLEY

Poverty he forswore not Beauty, but discerned through the lamp Beauty the Light God; that he was even more a poet in his miracles than in his melody; that poetry clung round the cowls of his Order. Follow his footsteps; you who have blessings for men, have you no blessing for the birds? Recall to your memory that, in their minor kind, the love poems of Dante shed no less honour on Catholicism than did the great religious poem which is itself pivoted on love; that in singing of heaven he sang of Beatrice—this supporting angel was still carven on his harp even when he stirred its strings in Paradise. What you theoretically know, vividly realize: that with many the religion of beauty must always be a passion and a power, that it is only evil when divorced from the worship of the Primal Beauty. Poetry is the preacher to men of the earthly as you of the Heavenly Fairness; of that earthly fairness which God has fashioned to His own image and likeness. You proclaim the day which the Lord has made, and she exults and rejoices in it. You praise the Creator for His works, and she shows you that they are very good. Beware how you misprise this potent ally, for hers is the art of Giotto and Dante: beware how you misprise this insidious foe, for hers is the art of modern France and of Byron. Her value, if you know it not, God knows, and know the enemies of God. If you have no room for her beneath the wings of the Holy One, there is place for her beneath the webs of the

SHELLEY

Evil One: whom you discard, he embraces; whom you cast down from an honourable seat, he will advance to a haughty throne; the brows you dislaurel of a just respect, he will bind with baleful splendours; the stone which you builders reject, he will make his head of the corner. May she not prophesy in the temple? then there is ready for her the tripod of Delphi. Eye her not askance if she seldom sing directly of religion: the bird gives glory to God though it sings only of its innocent loves. Suspicion creates its own cause; distrust begets reason for distrust. This beautiful, wild, feline poetry, wild because left to range the wilds, restore to the hearth of your charity, shelter under the rafter of your Faith; discipline her to the sweet restraints of your household, feed her with the meat from your table, soften her with the amity of your children; tame her, fondle her, cherish her—you will no longer then need to flee her. Suffer her to wanton, suffer her to play, so she play round the foot of the Cross!

There is a change of late years: the Wanderer is being called to her Father's house, but we would have the call yet louder, we would have the proffered welcome more unstinted. There are still stray remnants of the old intolerant distrust. It is still possible for even a French historian of the Church to enumerate among the articles cast upon Savonarola's famous pile, *poésies érotiques, tant des anciens que des modernes, livres impies ou corrupteurs, Ovide,*

SHELLEY

Tibulle, Properce, pour ne nommer que les plus connus, Dante, Pétrarque, Boccace, tous ces auteurs Italiens qui déjà souillaient les âmes et ruinaient les mœurs, en créant ou perfectionnant la langue. Blameworthy carelessness, at the least, which can class the *Vita Nuova* with the *Ars Amandi* and the *Decameron!* With few exceptions, whatsoever in our best poets is great and good to the non-Catholic, is great and good also to the Catholic; and though Faber threw his edition of Shelley into the fire and never regretted the act; though, moreover, Shelley is so little read among us that we can still tolerate in our churches the religious parody which Faber should have thrown after his three-volumed Shelley;*—in spite of this, we are not disposed to number among such exceptions that straying spirit of light.

We have among us at the present day no lineal descendant, in the poetical order, of Shelley; and any such offspring of the abundantly spontaneous Shelley is hardly possible, still less likely, on account of the defect by which (we think) contemporary poetry in general, as compared with the poetry of the early nineteenth century, is mildewed. That defect is the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul. We do not say the *defect* of inspiration. The warrior is there, but he is hampered by his armour. Writers of high aim in

* The hymn, 'I rise from dreams of time.'

SHELLEY

all branches of literature, even when they are not—as Mr Swinburne, for instance, is—lavish in expression, are generally over-deliberate in expression. Mr Henry James, delineating a fictitious writer clearly intended to be the ideal of an artist, makes him regret that he has sometimes allowed himself to take the second-best word instead of searching for the best. Theoretically, of course, one ought always to try for the best word. But practically, the habit of excessive care in word-selection frequently results in loss of spontaneity; and, still worse, the habit of always taking the best word too easily becomes the habit of always taking the most ornate word, the word most removed from ordinary speech. In consequence of this, poetic diction has become latterly a kaleidoscope, and one's chief curiosity is as to the precise combinations into which the pieces will be shifted. There is, in fact, a certain band of words, the Prætorian cohorts of poetry, whose prescriptive aid is invoked by every aspirant to the poetical purple, and without whose prescriptive aid none dares aspire to the poetical purple; against these it is time some banner should be raised. Perhaps it is almost impossible for a contemporary writer quite to evade the services of the freelances whom one encounters under so many standards.* But it is at any rate curious to note

* We are a little surprised at the fact, because so many Victorian poets are, or have been, prose-writers as well. Now, according to our theory, the practice of prose should main-

SHELLEY

that the literary revolution against the despotic diction of Pope seems issuing, like political revolutions, in a despotism of its own making.

This, then, we cannot but think, distinguishes the literary period of Shelley from our own. It distinguishes even the unquestionable treasures and masterpieces of to-day from similar treasures and masterpieces of the precedent day; even *The Lotus-Eaters* from *Kubla Khan*; even Rossetti's ballads from *Christabel*. It is present in the restraint of Matthew Arnold no less than in the exuberance of Swinburne, and affects our writers who aim at simplicity no less than those who seek richness. Indeed, nothing is so artificial as our simplicity. It is the simplicity of the French stage *ingénue*. We are self-conscious to the finger-tips; and this inherent quality, entailing on our poetry the inevitable loss of spontaneity, ensures that whatever poets, of whatever excellence, may be born to us from the Shelleian stock, its founder's spirit can take among us no reincarnation. An age that is ceasing to produce child-like children cannot

tain fresh and comprehensive a poet's diction, should save him from falling into the hands of an exclusive coterie of poetic words. It should react upon his metrical vocabulary to its beneficial expansion, by taking him outside his aristocratic circle of language, and keeping him in touch with the great commonalty, the proletariat of speech. For it is with words as with men: constant intermarriage within the limits of a patrician clan begets effete refinement; and to reinvigorate the stock, its veins must be replenished from hardy plebeian blood.

SHELLEY

produce a Shelley. For both as poet and man he was essentially a child.

Yet, just as in the effete French society before the Revolution the Queen played at Arcadia, the King played at being a mechanic, every one played at simplicity and universal philanthropy, leaving for most durable outcome of their philanthropy the guillotine, as the most durable outcome of ours may be execution by electricity;—so in our own society the talk of benevolence and the cult of childhood are the very fashion of the hour. We, of this self-conscious, incredulous generation, sentimentalize our children, analyse our children, think we are endowed with a special capacity to sympathize and identify ourselves with children; we play at being children. And the result is that we are not more child-like, but our children are less child-like. It is so tiring to stoop to the child, so much easier to lift the child up to you. Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

SHELLEY

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour;

it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death. When we become conscious in dreaming that we dream, the dream is on the point of breaking; when we become conscious in living that we live, the ill dream is but just beginning. Now if Shelley was but too conscious of the dream, in other respects Dryden's false and famous line might have been applied to him with very much less than its usual untruth.* To the last, in a degree uncommon even among poets, he retained the idiosyncrasy of childhood, expanded and matured without differentiation. To the last he was the enchanted child.

This was, as is well known, patent in his life. It is as really, though perhaps less obviously, manifest in his poetry, the sincere effluence of his life. And it may not, therefore, be amiss to consider whether it was conditioned by anything beyond his congenital nature. For our part, we believe it to have been equally largely the outcome of his early and long isolation. Men given to retirement and abstract study are

* Wordsworth's adaptation of it, however, is true. Men are not 'children of a larger growth,' but the child is father of the man, since the parent is only partially reproduced in his offspring.

SHELLEY

notoriously liable to contract a certain degree of childlikeness: and if this be the case when we segregate a man, how much more when we segregate a child! It is when they are taken into the solution of school-life that children, by the reciprocal interchange of influence with their fellows, undergo the series of reactions which converts them from children into boys and from boys into men. The intermediate stage must be traversed to reach the final one.

Now Shelley never could have been a man, for he never was a boy. And the reason lay in the persecution which overclouded his school-days. Of that persecution's effect upon him he has left us, in *The Revolt of Islam*, a picture which to many or most people very probably seems a poetical exaggeration; partly because Shelley appears to have escaped physical brutality, partly because adults are inclined to smile tenderly at childish sorrows which are not caused by physical suffering. That he escaped for the most part bodily violence is nothing to the purpose. It is the petty malignant annoyance recurring hour by hour, day by day, month by month, until its accumulation becomes an agony; it is this which is the most terrible weapon that boys have against their fellow boy, who is powerless to shun it because, unlike the man, he has virtually no privacy. His is the torture which the ancients used, when they anointed their victim with honey and exposed him naked to the restless fever of the

SHELLEY

flies. He is a little St Sebastian, sinking under the incessant flight of shafts which skilfully avoid the vital parts.

We do not, therefore, suspect Shelley of exaggeration: he was, no doubt, in terrible misery. Those who think otherwise must forget their own past. Most people, we suppose, *must* forget what they were like when they were children: otherwise they would know that the griefs of their childhood were passionate abandonment, *déchirants* (to use a characteristically favourite phrase of modern French literature) as the griefs of their maturity. Children's griefs are little, certainly; but so is the child, so is its endurance, so is its field of vision, while its nervous impressionability is keener than ours. Grief is a matter of relativity; the sorrow should be estimated by its proportion to the sorrower; a gash is as painful to one as an amputation to another. Pour a puddle into a thimble, or an Atlantic into Etna; both thimble and mountain overflow. Adult fools! would not the angels smile at *our* griefs, were not angels too wise to smile at them?

So beset, the child fled into the tower of his own soul, and raised the drawbridge. He threw out a reserve, encysted in which he grew to maturity unaffected by the intercourses that modify the maturity of others into the thing we call a man. The encysted child developed until it reached years of virility, until those later Oxford days in which Hogg encountered

SHELLEY

it; then, bursting at once from its cyst and the university, it swam into a world not illegitimately perplexed by such a whim of the gods. It was, of course, only the completeness and duration of this seclusion—lasting from the gate of boyhood to the threshold of youth—which was peculiar to Shelley. Most poets, probably, like most saints, are prepared for their mission by an initial segregation, as the seed is buried to germinate: before they can utter the oracle of poetry, they must first be divided from the body of men. It is the severed head that makes the seraph.

Shelley's life frequently exhibits in him the magnified child. It is seen in his fondness for apparently futile amusements, such as the sailing of paper boats. This was, in the truest sense of the word, child-like; not, as it is frequently called and considered, childish. That is to say, it was not a mindless triviality, but the genuine child's power of investing little things with imaginative interest; the same power, though differently devoted, which produced much of his poetry. Very possibly in the paper boat he saw the magic bark of Laon and Cythna, or

That thinnest boat
In which the mother of the months is borne
By ebbing night into her western cave.

In fact, if you mark how favourite an idea, under varying forms, is this in his verse, you will perceive that all the charmed boats which glide

SHELLEY

down the stream of his poetry are but glorified resurrections of the little paper argosies which trembled down the Isis.

And the child appeared no less often in Shelley the philosopher than in Shelley the idler. It is seen in his repellent no less than in his amiable weaknesses; in the unteachable folly of a love that made its goal its starting-point, and firmly expected spiritual rest from each new divinity, though it had found none from the divinities antecedent. For we are clear that this was no mere straying of sensual appetite, but a straying, strange and deplorable, of the spirit; that (contrary to what Coventry Patmore has said) he left a woman not because he was tired of her arms, but because he was tired of her soul. When he found Mary Shelley wanting, he seems to have fallen into the mistake of Wordsworth, who complained in a charming piece of unreasonableness that his wife's love, which had been a fountain, was now only a well:

Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

Wordsworth probably learned, what Shelley was incapable of learning, that love can never permanently be a fountain. A living poet, in an article* which you almost fear to breathe upon lest you should flutter some of the frail pastel-like bloom, has said the thing: 'Love

* *The Rhythm of Life*, by Alice Meynell.

SHELLEY

itself has tidal moments, lapses and flows due to the metrical rule of the interior heart.' Elementary reason should proclaim this true. Love is an affection, its display an emotion: love is the air, its display is the wind. An affection may be constant; an emotion can no more be constant than the wind can constantly blow. All, therefore, that a man can reasonably ask of his wife is that her love should be indeed a well. A well; but a Bethesda-well, into which from time to time the angel of tenderness descends to trouble the waters for the healing of the beloved. Such a love Shelley's second wife appears unquestionably to have given him. Nay, she was content that he should veer while she remained true; she companioned him intellectually, shared his views, entered into his aspirations, and yet—yet, even at the date of *Epipsy-chidion*, the foolish child, her husband, assigned her the part of moon to Emilia Viviani's sun, and lamented that he was barred from final, certain, irreversible happiness by a cold and callous society. Yet few poets were so mated before, and no poet was so mated afterwards, until Browning stooped and picked up a fair-coined soul that lay rusting in a pool of tears.

In truth, his very unhappiness and discontent with life, in so far as it was not the inevitable penalty of the ethical anarchy, can only be ascribed to this same childlike irrationality—though in such a form it is irrationality hardly peculiar to Shelley. Pity, if you will, his

SHELLEY

spiritual ruins, and the neglected early training which was largely their cause; but the pity due to his outward circumstances has been strangely exaggerated. The obloquy from which he suffered he deliberately and wantonly courted. For the rest, his lot was one that many a young poet might envy. He had faithful friends, a faithful wife, an income small but assured. Poverty never dictated to his pen; the designs on his bright imagination were never etched by the sharp fumes of necessity.

If, as has chanced to others—as chanced, for example, to Mangan—outcast from home, health and hope, with a charred past and a bleared future, an anchorite without detachment, and self-cloistered without self-sufficiency, deposed from a world which he had not abdicated, pierced with thorns which formed no crown, a poet hopeless of the bays, and a martyr hopeless of the palm, a land cursed against the dews of love, an exile banned and proscribed even from the innocent arms of childhood—he were burning helpless at the stake of his unquenchable heart, then he might have been inconsolable, then might he have cast the gorge at life, then have cowered in the darkening chamber of his being, tapestried with mouldering hopes, and hearkened to the winds that swept across the illimitable wastes of death. But no such hapless lot was Shelley's as that of his own contemporaries—Keats, half-chewed in the jaws of London and spit dying

SHELLEY

on to Italy; De Quincey, who, if he escaped, escaped rent and maimed from those cruel jaws; Coleridge, whom they dully mumbled for the major portion of his life. Shelley had competence, poetry, love; yet he wailed that he could lie down like a tired child and weep away his life of care! Is it ever so with you, sad brother? is it ever so with me? and is there no drinking of pearls except they be dissolved in biting tears? 'Which of us has his desire, or having it, is satisfied?'

It is true that he shared the fate of nearly all the great poets contemporary with him, in being unappreciated. Like them, he suffered from critics who were for ever shearing the wild tresses of poetry between rusty rules, who could never see a literary bough project beyond the trim level of its day but they must lop it with a crooked criticism, who kept indomitably planting in the defile of fame the 'established canons' that had been spiked by poet after poet. But we decline to believe that a singer of Shelley's calibre could be seriously grieved by want of vogue. Not that we suppose him to have found consolation in that senseless superstition, 'the applause of posterity.' Posterity, posterity! posterity which goes to Rome, weeps large-sized tears, carves beautiful inscriptions, over the tomb of Keats; and the worm must wriggle her curtsey to it all, since the dead boy, wherever he be, has quite other gear to tend. Never a bone less dry for all the tears!

SHELLEY

A poet must to some extent be a chameleon, and feed on air. But it need not be the musty breath of the multitude. He can find his needful support in the judgement of those whose judgement he knows valuable, and such support Shelley had:

La gloire
Ne compte pas toujours les voix;
Elle les pèse quelquefois.

Yet if this might be needful to him as support, neither this, nor the applause of the present, nor the applause of posterity, could have been needful to him as motive: the one all-sufficing motive for a great poet's singing is that expressed by Keats:

I was taught in Paradise
To ease my breast of melodies.

Precisely so. The overcharged breast can find no ease but in suckling the baby-song. No enmity of outward circumstances, therefore, but his own nature, was responsible for Shelley's doom.

A being with so much about it of childlike unreasonableness, and yet withal so much of the beautiful attraction luminous in a child's sweet unreasonableness, would seem fore-fated by its very essence to the transience of the bubble and the rainbow, of all things filmy and fair. Did some shadow of this destiny bear part in his sadness? Certain it is that, by a curious

SHELLEY

chance, he himself in *Julian and Maddalo* jestingly foretold the manner of his end. 'O ho! You talk as in years past,' said Maddalo (Byron) to Julian (Shelley); 'if you can't swim, Beware of Providence.' Did no unearthly *dixisti* sound in his ears as he wrote it? But a brief while, and Shelley, who could not swim, was weltering on the waters of Lerici. We know not how this may affect others, but over us it is a coincidence which has long tyrannized with an absorbing inveteracy of impression (strengthened rather than diminished by the contrast between the levity of the utterance and its fatal fulfilment)—thus to behold, heralding itself in warning mockery through the very lips of its predestined victim, the Doom upon whose breath his locks were lifting along the coasts of Campania. The death which he had prophesied came upon him, and Spezzia enrolled another name among the mournful Marcelli of our tongue; Venetian glasses which foamed and burst before the poisoned wine of life had risen to their brims.

Coming to Shelley's poetry, we peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child. Perhaps none of his poems is more purely and typically Shelleian than *The Cloud*, and it is interesting to note how essentially it springs from the faculty of make-believe. The same thing is conspicuous, though less purely conspicuous,

SHELLEY

throughout his singing; it is the child's faculty of make-believe raised to the n^{th} power. He is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song.

This it was which, in spite of his essentially modern character as a singer, qualified Shelley to be the poet of *Prometheus Unbound*, for it made him, in the truest sense of the word, a mythological poet. This child-like quality assimilated him to the child-like peoples among whom mythologies have their rise. Those Nature myths which, according to many, are the basis of all mythology, are likewise the very basis of Shelley's poetry. The lark that is the gossip of heaven, the winds that pluck the grey from the beards of the billows, the clouds that are snorted from the sea's broad nostril, all the

SHELLEY

elemental spirits of Nature, take from his verse perpetual incarnation and reincarnation, pass in a thousand glorious transmigrations through the radiant forms of his imagery.

Thus, but not in the Wordsworthian sense, he is a veritable poet of Nature. For with Nature the Wordsworthians will admit no tampering: they exact the direct interpretative reproduction of her; that the poet should follow her as a mistress, not use her as a handmaid. To such following of Nature, Shelley felt no call. He saw in her not a picture set for his copying, but a palette set for his brush; not a habitation prepared for his inhabiting, but a Coliseum whence he might quarry stones for his own palaces. Even in his descriptive passages the dream-character of his scenery is notorious; it is not the clear, recognizable scenery of Wordsworth, but a landscape that hovers athwart the heat and haze arising from his crackling fantasies. The materials for such visionary Edens have evidently been accumulated from direct experience, but they are recomposed by him into such scenes as never mortal eye beheld. 'Don't you wish you had?' as Turner said. The one justification for classing Shelley with the Lake poet is that he loved Nature with a love even more passionate, though perhaps less profound. Wordsworth's *Nightingale and Stockdove* sums up the contrast between the two, as though it had been written for such a purpose. Shelley is the 'creature of ebullient heart,' who

SHELLEY

Sings as if the god of wine
Had helped him to a valentine.

Wordsworth's is the

—Love with quiet blending,
Slow to begin and never ending,

the 'serious faith and inward glee.'

But if Shelley, instead of culling Nature, crossed with its pollen the blossoms of his own soul, that Babylonian garden is his marvellous and best apology. For astounding figurative opulence he yields only to Shakespeare, and even to Shakespeare not in absolute fecundity but in range of images. The sources of his figurative wealth are specialized, while the sources of Shakespeare's are universal. It would have been as conscious an effort for him to speak without figure as it is for most men to speak with figure. Suspended in the dripping well of his imagination the commonest object becomes encrusted with imagery. Herein again he deviates from the true Nature poet, the normal Wordsworth type of Nature poet: imagery was to him not a mere means of expression, not even a mere means of adornment, it was a delight for its own sake.

And herein we find the trail by which we would classify him. He belongs to a school of which not impossibly he may hardly have read a line—the Metaphysical School. To a large extent, he *is* what the Metaphysical School

SHELLEY

should have been. That school was a certain kind of poetry trying for a range. Shelley is the range found. Crashaw and Shelley sprang from the same seed; but in the one case the seed was choked with thorns, in the other case it fell on good ground. The Metaphysical School was in its direct results an abortive movement, though indirectly much came of it—for Dryden came of it. Dryden, to a greater extent than is (we imagine) generally perceived, was Cowley systematized; and Cowley, who sank into the arms of Dryden, rose from the lap of Donne.

But the movement was so abortive that few will thank us for connecting with it the name of Shelley. This is because to most people the Metaphysical School means Donne, whereas it ought to mean Crashaw. We judge the direction of a development by its highest form, though that form may have been produced but once, and produced imperfectly. Now the highest product of the Metaphysical School was Crashaw, and Crashaw was a Shelley *manqué*; he never reached the Promised Land, but he had fervid visions of it. The Metaphysical School, like Shelley, loved imagery for its own sake: and how beautiful a thing the frank toying with imagery may be, let *The Skylark* and *The Cloud* witness. It is only evil when the poet, on the straight way to a fixed object, lags continually from the path to play. This is commendable neither in poet nor errand-boy. The Metaphysical School failed, not because it toyed with

SHELLEY

(imagery, but because it toyed with it frostily. To sport with the tangles of Neæra's hair may be trivial idleness or caressing tenderness, exactly as your relation to Neæra is that of heartless gallantry or of love. So you may toy with imagery in mere intellectual ingenuity, and then you might as well go write acrostics: or you may toy with it in raptures, and then you may write a *Sensitive Plant*. In fact, the Metaphysical poets when they went astray cannot be said to have done anything so dainty as is implied by *toying* with imagery. They cut it into shapes with a pair of scissors. From all such danger Shelley was saved by his passionate spontaneity; no trappings are too splendid for the swift steeds of sunrise. His sword-hilt may be rough with jewels, but it is the hilt of an Excalibur. His thoughts scorch through all the folds of expression. His cloth of gold bursts at the flexures, and shows the naked poetry.

It is this gift of not merely embodying but apprehending everything in figure which co-operates towards creating one of his rarest characteristics, so almost preternaturally developed in no other poet, namely, his well-known power to condense the most hydrogenic abstraction. Science can now educe threads of such exquisite tenuity that only the feet of the tiniest infant-spiders can ascend them; but up the filmiest insubstantiality Shelley runs with agile ease. To him, in truth, nothing is abstract. The dustiest abstractions

SHELLEY

Start, and tremble under his feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

The coldest moon of an idea rises haloed through his vaporous imagination. The dimmest-sparked chip of a conception blazes and scintillates in the subtle oxygen of his mind. The most wrinkled Æson of an abstruseness leaps rosy out of his bubbling genius. In a more intensified signification than it is probable that Shakespeare dreamed of, Shelley gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name. Here afresh he touches the Metaphysical School, whose very title was drawn from this habitual pursuit of abstractions, and who failed in that pursuit from the one cause omnipresent with them, because in all their poetic smithy they had left never a place for a forge. They laid their fancies chill on the anvil. Crashaw, indeed, partially anticipated Shelley's success, and yet further did a later poet, so much further that we find it difficult to understand why a generation that worships Shelley should be reviving Gray, yet almost forget the name of Collins. The generality of readers, when they know him at all, usually know him by his *Ode on the Passions*. In this, despite its beauty, there is still a *souçon* of formalism, a lingering trace of powder from the eighteenth century periwig, dimming the bright locks of poetry. Only the literary student reads that little masterpiece, the *Ode to Evening*, which sometimes heralds the Shelleian strain, while other passages are

SHELLEY

the sole things in the language comparable to the miniatures of *Il Penseroso*. Crashaw, Collins, Shelley—three ricochets of the one pebble, three jets from three bounds of the one Pegasus! Collins's Pity, 'with eyes of dewy light,' is near of kin to Shelley's Sleep, 'the filmy-eyed'; and the 'shadowy tribes of mind' are the lineal progenitors of 'Thought's crowned powers.' This, however, is personification, wherein both Collins and Shelley build on Spenser: the dizzying achievement to which the modern poet carried personification accounts for but a moiety, if a large moiety, of his vivifying power over abstractions. Take the passage (already alluded to) in that glorious chorus telling how the Hours come

From those skiey towers
Where Thought's crowned powers
Sit watching your dance, ye happy Hours;

* * * * *

From the temples high
Of Man's ear and eye,
Roofed over Sculpture and Poesy,
Our feet now, every palm,
Are sandalled with calm,
And the dew of our wings is a rain of balm;
And beyond our eyes
The human love lies
Which makes all it gazes on Paradise.

Any partial explanation will break in our hands before it reaches the root of such a power. The

SHELLEY

root, we take it, is this. He had an instinctive perception (immense in range and fertility, astonishing for its delicate intuition) of the underlying analogies, the secret subterranean passages, between matter and soul; the chromatic scales, whereat we dimly guess, by which the Almighty modulates through all the keys of creation. Because, the more we consider it, the more likely does it appear that Nature is but an imperfect actress, whose constant changes of dress never change her manner and method, who is the same in all her parts.

To Shelley's ethereal vision the most rarefied mental or spiritual music traced its beautiful corresponding forms on the sand of outward things. He stood thus at the very junction-lines of the visible and invisible, and could shift the points as he willed. His thoughts became a mounted infantry, passing with baffling swiftness from horse to foot or foot to horse. He could express as he listed the material and the immaterial in terms of each other. Never has a poet in the past rivalled him as regards this gift, and hardly will any poet rival him as regards it in the future: men are like first to see the promised doom lay its hand on the tree of heaven and shake down the golden leaves.*

The finest specimens of this faculty are probably to be sought in that Shelleian treasury,

* 'And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' (Rev. vi, 13.)

SHELLEY

Prometheus Unbound. It is unquestionably the greatest and most prodigal exhibition of Shelley's powers, this amazing lyric world, where immortal clarities sigh past in the perfumes of the blossoms, populate the breathings of the breeze, throng and twinkle in the leaves that twirl upon the bough; where the very grass is all a-rustle with lovely spirit-things, and a weeping mist of music fills the air. The final scenes especially are such a Bacchic reel and rout and revelry of beauty as leaves one staggered and giddy; poetry is spilt like wine, music runs to drunken waste. The choruses sweep down the wind, tirelessly, flight after flight, till the breathless soul almost cries for respite from the unrolling splendours. Yet these scenes, so wonderful from a purely poetical standpoint that no one could wish them away, are (to our humble thinking) nevertheless the artistic error of the poem. Abstractedly, the development of Shelley's idea required that he should show the earthly paradise which was to follow the fall of Zeus. But dramatically with that fall the action ceases, and the drama should have ceased with it. A final chorus, or choral series, of rejoicings (such as does ultimately end the drama where Prometheus appears on the scene) would have been legitimate enough. Instead, however, the bewildered reader finds the drama unfolding itself through scene after scene which leaves the action precisely where it found it, because there is no longer an action to advance. It is as if the

SHELLEY

choral *finale* of an opera were prolonged through two acts.

We have, nevertheless, called *Prometheus* Shelley's greatest poem, because it is the most comprehensive storehouse of his power. Were we asked to name the most *perfect* among his longer efforts, we should name the poem in which he lamented Keats; under the shed petals of his lovely fancy giving the slain bird a silken burial. Seldom is the death of a poet mourned in true poetry. Not often is the singer coffined in laurel-wood. Among the very few exceptions to such a rule, the greatest is *Adonais*. In the English language only *Lycidas* competes with it; and when we prefer *Adonais* to *Lycidas*, we are following the precedent set in the case of Cicero: *Adonais* is the longer. As regards command over abstraction, it is no less characteristically Shelleian than *Prometheus*. It is throughout a series of abstractions vitalized with daring exquisiteness, from Morning who sought

Her eastern watch-tower, and her hair unbound,
Wet with the tears which should adorn the ground,

and who

Dimmed the aerial eyes that kindle day,

to the Dreams that were the flock of the dead
shepherd, the Dreams

SHELLEY

Whom near the living streams
Of his young spirit he fed; and whom he taught
The love that was its music;

of whom one sees, as she hangs mourning over
him,

Upon the silken fringe of his faint eyes,
Like dew upon a sleeping flower, there lies
A tear some Dream has loosened from his brain!
Lost angel of a ruined Paradise!
She knew not 'twas her own; as with no stain
She faded like a cloud which had outwept its rain.

In the solar spectrum, beyond the extreme red and extreme violet rays, are whole series of colours, demonstrable, but imperceptible to gross human vision. Such writing as this we have quoted renders visible the invisibilities of imaginative colour.

One thing prevents *Adonais* from being ideally perfect: its lack of Christian hope. Yet we remember well the writer of a popular memoir on Keats proposing as "the best consolation for the mind pained by this sad record" Shelley's inexpressibly sad exposition of Pantheistic immortality:

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely, etc.

What utter desolation can it be that discerns comfort in this hope, whose wan countenance is as the countenance of a despair? Nay, was not

SHELLEY

indeed *wanhope* the Saxon for despair? What deepest depth of agony is it that finds consolation in this immortality: an immortality which thrusts you into death, the maw of Nature, that your dissolved elements may circulate through her veins?

Yet such, the poet tells me, is my sole balm for the hurts of life. I am as the vocal breath floating from an organ. I too shall fade on the winds, a cadence soon forgotten. So I dissolve and die, and am lost in the ears of men: the particles of my being twine in newer melodies, and from my one death arise a hundred lives. Why, through the thin partition of this consolation Pantheism can hear the groans of its neighbour, Pessimism. Better almost the black resignation which the fatalist draws from his own hopelessness, from the fierce kisses of misery that hiss against his tears.

With some gleams, it is true, of more than mock solace, *Adonais* is lighted; but they are obtained by implicitly assuming the personal immortality which the poem explicitly denies; as when, for instance, to greet the dead youth,

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought
Far in the unapparent.

And again the final stanza of the poem:

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven

SHELLEY

Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given:
The massy earth, the spherèd skies are riven;
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar,
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,
The soul of Adonais like a star
Beacons from the abode where the eternal are.

The soul of Adonais?—Adonais, who is but

A portion of that loveliness
Which once he made more lovely.

After all, to finish where we began, perhaps the poems on which the lover of Shelley leans most lovingly, which he has oftenest in his mind, which best represent Shelley to him, and which he instinctively reverts to when Shelley's name is mentioned, are some of the shorter poems and detached lyrics. Here Shelley forgets for a while all that ever makes his verse turbid; forgets that he is anything but a poet, forgets sometimes that he is anything but a child; lies back in his skiff, and looks at the clouds. He plays truant from earth, slips through the wicket of fancy into heaven's meadow, and goes gathering stars. Here we have that absolute virgin-gold of song which is the scarcest among human products, and for which we can go to but three poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Chopin,*

* Such analogies between masters in sister-arts are often interesting. In some respects, is not Brahms the Browning of music?

SHELLEY

and perhaps we should add Keats:—*Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*; *The Skylark*, *The Cloud*, and *The Sensitive Plant* (in its first two parts); *The Eve of Saint Agnes* and *The Nightingale*; certain of the Nocturnes; these things make very quintessentialized loveliness. It is attar of poetry.

Remark, as a thing worth remarking, that, although Shelley's diction is at other times singularly rich, it ceases in these poems to be rich, or to obtrude itself at all; it is imperceptible; his Muse has become a veritable Echo, whose body has dissolved from about her voice.) Indeed, when his diction is richest, nevertheless the poetry so dominates the expression that we only feel the latter as an atmosphere until we are satiated with the former; then we discover with surprise to how imperial a vesture we had been blinded by gazing on the face of his song. A lesson, this, deserving to be conned by a generation so opposite in tendency as our own: a lesson that in poetry, as in the Kingdom of God, we should not take thought too greatly wherewith we shall be clothed, but seek first* the spirit, and all these things will be added unto us.

On the marvellous music of Shelley's verse we need not dwell, except to note that he avoids that metronomic beat of rhythm which Edgar Poe introduced into modern lyric measures, as Pope introduced it into the

* Seek first, not seek only.

SHELLEY

(rhyming heroics of his day. Our varied metres are becoming as painfully over-polished as Pope's one metre. Shelley could at need sacrifice smoothness to fitness. He could write an anapæst that would send Mr Swinburne into strong shudders (e.g., 'stream did glide') when he instinctively felt that by so forgoing the more obvious music of melody he would better secure the higher music of harmony. If we have to add that in other ways he was far from escaping the defects of his merits, and would sometimes have to acknowledge that his Nilotic flood too often overflowed its banks, what is this but saying that he died young?

It may be thought that in our casual comments on Shelley's life we have been blind to its evil side. That, however, is not the case. We see clearly that he committed grave sins, and one cruel crime; but we remember also that he was an Atheist from his boyhood; we reflect how gross must have been the moral neglect in the training of a child who *could* be an Atheist from his boyhood: and we decline to judge so unhappy a being by the rules which we should apply to a Catholic. It seems to us that Shelley was struggling—blindly, weakly, stumblingly, but still struggling—towards higher things. His Pantheism is an indication of it. Pantheism is a half-way house, and marks ascent or descent according to the direction from which it is approached. Now Shelley came to it from

SHELLEY

absolute Atheism; therefore in his case it meant rise. Again, his poetry alone would lead us to the same conclusion, for we do not believe that a truly corrupted spirit can write consistently ethereal poetry. We should believe in nothing if we believed that, for it would be the consecration of a lie. Poetry is a thermometer: by taking its average height you can estimate the normal temperature of its writer's mind. The devil can do many things. But the devil cannot write poetry. He may mar a poet, but he cannot make a poet. Among all the temptations wherewith he tempted St Anthony, though we have often seen it stated that he howled, we have never seen it stated that he sang.

Shelley's anarchic principles were as a rule held by him with some misdirected view to truth. He disbelieved in kings. And is it not a mere fact—regret it if you will—that in all European countries, except two, monarchs are a mere survival, the obsolete buttons on the coat-tails of rule, which serve no purpose but to be continually coming off? It is a miserable thing to note how every little Balkan State, having obtained liberty (save the mark!) by Act of Congress, straightway proceeds to secure the service of a professional king. These gentlemen are plentiful in Europe. They are the 'noble Chairmen' who lend their names for a consideration to any enterprising company which may be speculating in Liberty. When we see these things, we revert to the old lines in which

SHELLEY

Persius tells how you cannot turn Dama into a freeman by twirling him round your finger and calling him Marcus Dama.

Again, Shelley desired a religion of humanity, and that meant, to him, a religion for humanity, a religion which, unlike the spectral Christianity about him, should permeate and regulate the whole organization of men. And the feeling is one with which a Catholic must sympathize, in an age where—if we may say so without irreverence—the Almighty has been made a constitutional Deity, with certain state-grants of worship, but no influence over political affairs. In these matters Shelley's aims were generous, if his methods were perniciously mistaken. In his theory of Free Love alone, borrowed like the rest from the Revolution, his aim was as mischievous as his method. At the same time he was at least logical. His theory was repulsive, but comprehensible. Whereas from our present *via media*—facilitation of divorce—can only result the era when the young lady in reduced circumstances will no longer turn governess, but will be open to engagement as wife at a reasonable stipend.

We spoke of the purity of Shelley's poetry. We know of but three passages to which exception can be taken. One is happily hidden under a heap of Shelleian rubbish. Another is offensive because it presents his theory of Free Love in its most odious form. The third is very much a matter, we think, for the individual

SHELLEY

conscience. Compare with this the genuinely corrupt Byron, through the cracks and fissures of whose heaving versification steam up perpetually the sulphurous vapours from his central iniquity. We cannot credit that any Christian ever had his faith shaken through reading Shelley, unless his faith were shaken before he read Shelley. Is any safely-havened bark likely to slip its cable, and make for a flag planted on the very reef where the planter himself was wrecked?

Why indeed (one is tempted to ask in concluding) should it be that the poets who have written for us the poetry richest in skiey grain, most free from admixture with the duller things of earth—the Shelleys, the Coleridges, the Keats'—are the very poets whose lives are among the saddest records in literature? Is it that (by some subtile mystery of analogy) sorrow, passion, and fantasy are indissolubly connected, like water, fire, and cloud; that as from sun and dew are born the vapours, so from fire and tears ascend the 'visions of aërial joy'; that the harvest waves richest over the battle-fields of the soul; that the heart, like the earth, smells sweetest after rain; that the spell on which depend such necromantic castles is some spirit of pain charm-prisoned at their base?*

* We hope that we need not refer the reader, for the methods of magic architecture, to Ariosto and that Atlas among enchanters, Beckford.

SHELLEY

Such a poet, it may be, mists with sighs the window of his life until the tears run down it; then some air of searching poetry, like an air of searching frost, turns it to a crystal wonder. The god of golden song is the god, too, of the golden sun; so peradventure songlight is like sunlight, and darkens the countenance of the soul. Perhaps the rays are to the stars what thorns are to the flowers; and so the poet, after wandering over heaven, returns with bleeding feet. Less tragic in its merely temporal aspect than the life of Keats or Coleridge, the life of Shelley in its moral aspect is, perhaps, more tragical than that of either; his dying seems a myth, a figure of his living; the material shipwreck a figure of the immaterial.

Enchanted child, born into a world unchild-like; spoiled darling of Nature, playmate of her elemental daughters; 'pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift,' laired amidst the burning fastnesses of his own fervid mind; bold foot along the verges of precipitous dream; light leaper from crag to crag of inaccessible fancies; towering Genius, whose soul rose like a ladder between heaven and earth with the angels of song ascending and descending it;—he is shrunken into the little vessel of death, and sealed with the unshatterable seal of doom, and cast down deep below the rolling tides of Time. Mighty meat for little guests, when the heart of Shelley was laid in the cemetery of Caius Cestius! Beauty, music, sweetness, tears—the

SHELLEY

mouth of the worm has fed of them all. Into that sacred bridal-gloom of death where he holds his nuptials with eternity let not our rash speculations follow him; let us hope rather that as, amidst material nature, where our dull eyes see only ruin, the finer eye of science has discovered life in putridity and vigour in decay, seeing dissolution even and disintegration, which in the mouth of man symbolize disorder, to be in the works of God undeviating order, and the manner of our corruption to be no less wonderful than the manner of our health,—so, amidst the supernatural universe, some tender undreamed surprise of life in doom awaited that wild nature, which, worn by warfare with itself, its Maker, and all the world, now

Sleeps, and never palates more the dug,
The beggar's nurse, and Cæsar's.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

PAGANISM, a natural religion obviously capable of accommodating itself to widely different natures by reason of its flexibility, can also surround itself with the prestige of a great past—though a dead past; of a poetry—though a dead poetry; of a sculpture—though a dead sculpture; of an idealizing retrospection which is *not* dead. And it can proclaim that, with the revival of dead Paganism, these other dead things too shall live. The old gods, say its advocates, were warm with human life, and akin to human sympathy: beautiful gods whose names were poetry. Then the daily gracefulness of Pagan life and religion! The ceremonial pageants, with the fluent grace of their processional maidens, as they

— shook a most divine dance from their feet;

or the solemn chastity of their vestal virgins; the symmetry of their temples with their effigies of benignant powers; the street, adorned with noble statuary, invested with a crystal air, and bright with its moving throng in garments of unlaboured elegance; and the theatre unroofed to the smokeless sky, where an audience, in which the merest cobbler had some vision beyond his last, heard in the language of Æschylus or Sophocles the ancestral legends of its native land.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

With all this, these advocates contrast the condition of to-day: the cold formalities of an outworn worship; our *ne plus ultra* of pageantry, a Lord Mayor's Show; the dryadless woods regarded chiefly as potential timber; the grimy street, the grimy air, the disfiguring statues, the Stygian crowd; the temple to the reigning goddess Gelasma, which mocks the name of theatre; last and worst, the fatal degradation of popular perception, which has gazed so long on ugliness that it takes her to its bosom. In our capitals the very heavens have lost their innocence. Aurora may rise over our cities, but she has forgotten how to blush.

And those who, like the present writer, tread as on thorns amidst the sordidness and ugliness, the ugly sordidness and the sordid ugliness, the dull materiality and weariness of this unhonoured old age of the world,—cannot but sympathize with these feelings; nay, even look back with a certain passionate regret to the beauty which invested at least the outward life of those days. But, in truth, with this outward life the vesture of beauty ceases: the rest is a day-dream, lovely it is true, but none the less a dream. Heathenism is lovely *because* it is dead. To read Keats is to grow in love with Paganism; but it is the Paganism of Keats. Pagan Paganism was not poetical.

Literally, this assertion is untenable. Almost every religion becomes a centre of poetry. But, if not absolutely true, it is at least true with

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

relation to Christianity. The poetry of Paganism is chiefly a modern creation; in the hands of the Pagans themselves it was not even developed to its full capabilities. The gods of Homer are braggarts and gluttons; and the gods of Virgil are cold and unreal. The kiss of Dian was a frigid kiss till it glowed in the fancy of the barbarian Fletcher: there was little halo around Latmos' top, till it was thrown around it by the modern Keats. No pagan eye ever visioned the nymphs of Shelley. In truth there was around the Olympian heaven no such halo and native air of poetry as, for Christian singers, clothed the Christian heaven. To the heathen mind its divinities were graceful, handsome, noble gods; powerful, and therefore to be propitiated with worship; cold in their sublime selfishness, and therefore unlovable. No Pagan ever loved his god. Love he might, perhaps, some humble rustic or domestic deity,—but no Olympian. ex. Whereas, in the Christian religion, the Madonna, and a greater than the Madonna, were at once high enough for worship and low enough for love. Now, without love no poetry can be beautiful; for all beautiful poetry comes from the heart. With love it was that Wordsworth and Shelley purchased the right to sing sweetly of Nature. Keats wrote lovingly of his Pagan hierarchy, because what he wrote about he loved. Hence for no antique poet was it possible to make, or even conceive, a Pagan Paradise. We, who love the gods, do not worship them.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

The ancients, who worshipped the gods, did not love them. Whence is this?

Coleridge, in those beautiful lines from *Wallenstein*, has given us his explanation. It is true, yet only half the truth. For in very deed that beautiful mythology has a beauty beyond anything it ever possessed in its worshipped days; and that beauty came to it in dower when it gave its hand to Christianity. Christianity it was that stripped the weeds from that garden of Paganism, broke its statue of Priapus, and delivered it smiling and fair to the nations for their pleasure-ground. She found Mars the type of brute violence, and made of him the god of valour. She took Venus, and made of her the type of Beauty,—Beauty, which the average heathen hardly knew. There is no more striking instance of the poetizing influence exerted on the ancient mythology by Christianity than the contrast between the ancient and modern views of this goddess. Any school-boy will tell you that she was the Goddess of Love and Beauty. ‘Goddess of Love,’ is true only in the lowest sense—but ‘Goddess of Beauty’? It exhibits an essentially modern attitude towards Venus, and would be hard to support from the ancient poets. No doubt there are passages in which she is styled the beautiful goddess; but the phrases are scarcely to my point. If, in the early days of the Second Empire, you came across a writer who described the Empress Eugénie as ‘the beautiful Empress,’

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

you would hardly be fair in deducing from *that* his devotion to her as the Empress of Beauty. No; when Heine, addressing the Venus of Melos, called her 'Our Lady of Beauty,' the idea, no less than the expression, was centrally modern. I will go further. It was centrally Christian.

To the average Pagan, Venus was simply the personification of the generative principle in nature; and her offspring was Cupid,—Desire, Eros—sexual passion. Far other is she to the modern. To him she is the Principle of Earthly Beauty, who, being of necessity entirely pure, walks naked and is not ashamed, garmented in the light of her unchanging whiteness. This worship of Beauty in the abstract, this conception of the Lady Beauty as an all-amiable power, to register the least glance of whose eye, to catch the least trail of whose locks, were worth the devotion of a life,—all this is characteristic of the Christian and Gothic poet, unknown to the Pagan poet. No antique singer ever saw Sibylla Palmifera; no antique artist's hand ever shook in her pursuit.* The sculptors, I suspect, had known something of Sibylla, in the elder days, before Praxiteles made of the Queen of Beauty merely the Queen of Fair Women. The

* Philosophers and 'dreaming Platonists,' perhaps, had scaled her craggy heights after their own manner, but none will pretend that Platonic dreams of the 'First and Only Fair' were the offspring of Paganism. Rather were they a contravention of it.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

Venus of Melos remains to hint so much. But, besides that Greek sculpture is virtually dead and unrevivable in civilized lands, I do not purpose in this narrow space to deal with subjects so wide as Sculpture or Art. Suffice it if I can suggest a few of the irreparable losses to Poetry which would result from the supersession of the Christian by the Pagan spirit.

If there are two things on which the larger portion of our finest modern verse may be said to hinge, they are surely Nature and Love. Yet it would be the merest platitude to say that neither the one nor the other, as glorified by our great modern poets, was known to the singers of old. Their insensibility to landscape was accompanied and perhaps conditioned by an insensibility to all the subtler and more spiritual qualities of beauty; so that it would hardly be more than a pardonable exaggeration to call Christianity (in so far as it has influenced the arts) the religion of beauty, and Paganism the religion of form and sense. Perhaps it is incorrect to say that the ancients were indifferent to landscape: rather they were indifferent to Nature. Cicero luxuriates in his 'country,' Horace in his Socrate and fitful glimpses of scenery; but both merely as factors in the composition of enjoyment: the bees, the doves, of Virgil are mere ministers to luxury and sleep. 'The fool,' says Blake in a most pregnant aphorism, 'The fool sees not the same tree as a wise man sees.' And assuredly no heathen

Note

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

ever saw the same tree as Wordsworth. For it is a noteworthy fact that the intellect of man seems unable to seize the divine beauty of Nature, until moving beyond that outward beauty it gazes on the spirit of Nature: even as the mind seems unable to appreciate the beautiful face of woman until it has learned to appreciate the more beautiful beauty of her soul.

That Paganism had no real sense of the exquisite in female features is evident from its statues and few extant paintings: mere regularity of form is all it sees. Or again, compare the ancient erotic poets, delighting in the figure and bodily charms of their mistresses, with the modern love-poets, whose first care is to dwell on the heavenly breathings of their ladies' faces. Significant is it, from this point of view, that the very word in favourite use among the Latin poets to express beauty should be *forma*, form, grace of body and line. When Catullus pronounces on the charms of a rival to his mistress, he never even mentions her face. 'Candida, longa, recta;' that is all: 'She is fair, tall, straight.'

But the most surprising indication of this blindness to the subtler qualities of beauty is the indifference of the ancient singers to what in our estimation is the most lovely and important feature in woman—the eye. This may have some connexion with their apparent deadness to colour. But so it is. In all Catullus there is only a single *indirect* allusion to the

curious

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

colour of Lesbia's eyes. There is, to the best of my recollection, no such allusion at all throughout Tibullus, Propertius, or Ovid. This one fact reveals a desert of arid feeling in the old erotic poets which a modern imagination refuses to traverse. In the name of all the Muses, what treason against Love and Beauty! Why, from the poetical Spring of Chaucer to the Indian-Summer of William Morris, their ladies' eyes have been the cynosure of modern love-poets!

Debonair, good, glad, and sad,
are the admirably chosen words in which Chaucer describes his Duchess' eyes; and this is the beautiful passage in which Morris sets *his* lady's eyes before us:

Her great eyes, standing far apart,
Draw up some memory from her heart,
And gaze out very mournfully;
 Beata mea Domina!—
So beautiful and kind they are,
But most times looking out afar,
Waiting for something, not for me.
 Beata mea Domina!

The value which Morris' master, Rossetti, had for this feature in feminine attraction is conspicuous. Witness his Blessed Damozel, whose

— Eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even.

In his mistress' portrait he notes that

The shadowed eyes remember and forget.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

Tennyson's Isabel has

Eyes not down-dropt nor over-bright, but fed
With the clear-pointed flame of chastity.

And almost all his heroines have their characteristic eyes: the Gardener's Daughter, violet, Amy of Locksley Hall, hazel,

All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel
eyes;

Enid, meek blue eyes; and so on. Wordsworth, again, notes his wife's

Eyes like stars of twilight fair;

and has many a beautiful passage on female eyes. Shelley overflows with such passages, showing splendid power in conveying the idea of *depth*: the following is a random example:

— deep her eyes as are
Two openings of unfathomable night
Seen through a tempest's cloven roof.

Will any one forget the eyes of the dreaming Christabel?

Both blue eyes, more bright than clear,
Each about to have a tear.

One could multiply instances; but take as a last one those magnificent eyes of De Quincey's *Mater Suspiriarum*: 'Her eyes were filled with perishing dreams, and wrecks of forgotten delirium.'

Again, what a magnificent means of characterization—especially in personification—do

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

our poets make of the eye. Could anything be more felicitous than Collins' Pity

With eyes of dewy light?

And equally marvellous is Shelley's epithet for sleep:

Thy sweet child Sleep, the *filmy-eyed*.

Yet all this superfluity of poetic beauty remained a sealed fountain for the Pagan poets! After such a revelation it can excite little surprise that, compared with Christian writers, they lay little stress on the grace of female hair.

But, after all, the most beautiful thing in love-poetry is Love. Now Love is the last thing any scholar will look for in ancient erotic poetry.* Body differs not more from soul than the Amor of Catullus or Ovid differs from the Love of Dante or Shelley;† and the root of this difference is the root of the whole difference between this class of poetry in antique and contemporary periods. The rite of marriage was to the Pagan the goal and attainment of Love—Love, which he regarded as a transitory and

* It will not do to say that this was solely owing to the impossibility of what we call courtship in heathen society; and that heathen love was postnuptial. It is sufficiently apparent from Martial's allusions that the married poems of Sulpicia, styled and considered 'chaste' because addressed to her husband, would have justly incurred among us the reproach of licentiousness in treatment.

† An Anti-Christian in ethics. But the blood in the veins of his Muse was Christian. The spirit of his treatment of Love is—with few, if any, exceptions—entirely Christian.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

perishable passion, born of the body and decaying with the body. On the wings of Christianity came the great truth that Love is of the soul, and with the soul coeval.

It was most just and natural, therefore, that from the Christian poets should come the full development of this truth. To Dante and the followers of Dante we must go for its ripe announcement. Not in marriage, they proclaim, is the fulfilment of Love, though its earthly and temporal fulfilment may be therein; for how can Love, which is the desire of soul for soul, attain satisfaction in the conjunction of body with body? Poor, indeed, if this were all the promise which Love unfolded to us—the encountering light of two flames from within their close-shut lanterns. Therefore sings Dante, and sing all noble poets after him, that Love in this world is a pilgrim and a wanderer, journeying to the New Jerusalem: not here is the consummation of his yearnings, in that mere knocking at the gates of union which we christen marriage, but beyond the pillars of death and the corridors of the grave, in the union of spirit to spirit within the containing Spirit of God.

The distance between Catullus and the *Vita Nuova*, between Ovid and the *House of Life*, can be measured only by Christianity. And the lover of poetry owes a double gratitude to his Creator, Who, not content with giving us salvation on the cross, gave us also, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Love. For there

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

Love was consecrated, and declared the child of Jehovah, not of Jove; there virtually was inaugurated the whole successive order of those love-poets who have shown the world that passion, in putting on chastity, put on also tenfold beauty. For purity is the sum of all loveliness, as whiteness is the sum of all colours.

A detailed comparison would be possible between the treatment of the Pagan Olympus by the ancients and by the moderns, with Keats at their head, in order to demonstrate what I have in these pages merely advanced. One point, however, I must briefly notice. This is the false idea that a modern Paganism could perpetuate, from a purely artistic sense, the beauty proper to Christian literature: that it is possible for the imaginative worker, like the conspirator in Massinger, to paint and perfume with the illusion of life a corpse. For refutation, witness the failure of our English painters, with all their art, to paint a Madonna which can hang beside the simplest old Florentine Virgin without exhibiting the absence of the ancient religious feeling.* And what has befallen the loveliness of Catholicity would—in a few generations, when Christianity had faded out of the blood of men—befall the loveliness of Christianity.

Bring back, then, even the best age of Paganism, and you smite beauty on the cheek.

* Rossetti is perhaps an exception. But he had Catholic blood in his veins, and could not escape from it. His heart worshipped.

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

But you *cannot* bring back the best age of Paganism, the age when Paganism was a faith. None will again behold Apollo in the forefront of the morning, or see Aphrodite in the upper air loose the long lustre of her golden locks. But you *may* bring back—*dii avertant omen*—the Paganism of the days of Pliny, and Statius, and Juvenal; of much philosophy and little belief; of superb villas and superb taste; of banquets for the palate in the shape of cookery, and banquets for the eye in the shape of art; of poetry singing dead songs on dead themes with the most polished and artistic vocalization; of everything most polished, from the manners to the marble floors; of Vice carefully drained out of sight, and large fountains of Virtue springing in the open air;—in one word, a most shining Paganism indeed—as putrescence also shines.

This Paganism it is which already stoops on Paris,* and wheels in shadowy menace over England. Bring back *this*—and make of poetry a dancing-girl, and of art a pandar. This is the Paganism which is formidable, and not the

* Paris, it may be said, is not scrupulous as to draining her vice underground. But it is kept underground exactly to the same extent as vice was in the Plinian days. Private vice is winked at with a decorous platitude about 'the sanctity of private life.' If evil literature is openly written, what Roman or Italian of the younger Pliny's day thought anything of writing '*facetiae*'? If indecent pictures are displayed in the windows, what, I should like to know, if photography had flourished under Rome, would have been the state of the shop-windows of Pompeii?

PAGANISM OLD AND NEW

antique lamp whose feeding oil is spent, whose light has not outlasted the damps of its long sepulture. She who created Zeus and Here, Phœbus and Artemis, Pallas Athene and the fair-haired Aphrodite, is dead, and lives only in her corruption; nor have we lost by her death one scintillation of beauty. For the poetry of Paganism (with reference to England) was born in the days of Elizabeth, and entered on its inheritance in the days of Keats. But could Paganism indeed grow supple in her cere-cloths, and open her tarnished eyes to the light of our modern sun—in that same hour the poetry of Paganism would sicken and fall to decay. For Pagan Paganism was not poetical.

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

I

I N certain all too frequent moods, when I behold in the sphinx Life not so much that inscrutable face of hers, nor yet her nurturing breasts, but rather her lion's claws; in such moods, a contrast rises before me. I see, as it were, upon my right hand and upon my left, two regions; separated only by a few hours' journey along our iron roads. I see upon my right hand a land of lanes, and hedgerows, and meadowed green; whose people's casual tread is over blossoming yellow, white, and purple, far-shining as the constellations that sand their nightly heaven; where the very winter rains, into which the deciduous foliage rots, cover the naked boughs with a vividness of dusted emerald.

I look upon my left hand, and I see another region—is it not rather another universe? A region whose hedgerows have set to brick, whose soil is chilled to stone; where flowers are sold and women, where the men wither and the stars; whose streets to me on the most glittering day are black. For I unveil their secret meanings. I read their human hieroglyphs. I diagnose from a hundred occult signs the disease which perturbs their populous pulses. Misery cries out to me from the kerb-stone, despair passes me by in the ways; I discern limbs laden with fetters impalpable, but not imponderable;

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

I hear the shaking of invisible lashes, I see men dabbled with their own oozing life. This contrast rises before me; and I ask myself whether there be indeed an Ormuzd and an Ahriman, and whether Ahriman be the stronger of the twain. From the claws of the sphinx my eyes have risen to her countenance which no eyes read.

Because, therefore, I have these thoughts; and because also I have knowledge, not indeed great or wide, but within certain narrow limits more intimate than most men's, of this life which is not a life; to which food is as the fuel of hunger; sleep, our common sleep, precious, costly, and fallible, as water in a wilderness; in which men rob and women vend themselves—for fourpence; because I have such thoughts and such knowledge, I read with painful sympathy the book just put forward by a singular personality.* I rise from the reading of it with a strong impression that here is a proposal which they who will not bless would do well to abstain from banning. Here is at last a man who has formulated a comprehensive scheme, and has dared to take upon himself its execution. That the terrible welter of London misery has not been left undealt with during recent years, that a multitude of agencies have long been making on it a scattered guerilla warfare, I know. But from their efforts I derived not hope, but despair; they served only to render darkness

* *In Darkest England*, by General Booth.

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

visible. Before me stretched an immense, soundless, bitter ocean. On its shore stood a string of benevolent children, equipped with sugar-basins. What were they doing? They were throwing lumps of sugar into the waves, to sweeten the sea. Here was this vast putrescence strangling the air at our very doors, and what scavengers of charity might endeavour its removal? Now comes by a man, and offers to take on himself the responsibility of that removal: in God's name, give him the contract! one inclines to exclaim.

What, then, is his book? The first part is an unexaggerated statement of the facts—too surely facts—regarding the existence of our London outcasts. It is the kind of thing which the public has had so often lately, under one form or another, that I suppose it has ceased to be roused by it. I will therefore only note in it a single point, which for more than one reason I cannot here dwell upon. Let those who are robust enough not to take injury from the terrible directness with which things are stated read the chapter entitled *The Children of the Lost*. For it drives home a truth which I fear the English public, with all its compassion for our destitute children, scarcely realizes, knows but in a vague, general way; namely, that they are brought up in sin from their cradles, that they know evil before they know good, that the boys are ruffians and profligates, the girls harlots in the mother's womb. This, to me the

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

most nightmarish idea in all the nightmare of those poor little lives, I have never been able to perceive that people had any true grasp on. And having mentioned it, though it is a subject very near my heart, I will say no more; nor enforce it, as I might well do, from my own sad knowledge.

In the name of the Mother of Sorrows, our derelict Catholic men and women shall not have to wait till the Salvation Army has bruised our heel. We have done much already, considering our means; therefore it is that we shall do more. Take, for instance, General Booth's Slum Sisters, themselves living in a house like the tenements around them, cleaning in the dwellings of the poor, and nursing their sick. Then read the constitution given by St Vincent de Paul to his Sisters of Charity. They were 'to consist of girls, and widows unencumbered with children, destined to seek out the poor in the alleys and streets of cities. They were to have for monastery the houses of the sick; for cell, a hired room; for their chapel, the parish church; for their cloister, the streets of the town or the wards of the hospital; for enclosure, obedience; for grating, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty.*' The genesis of the Slum Sisters is

* The Little Sisters of the Assumption, who have houses in London, as a matter of fact were founded within late years exclusively to nurse and work for the poor in their own homes. They are debarred from going to any but the entirely destitute who can procure no other help.

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

evident. It would appear that we have forgotten what manner of men we are; let us look, then, into this Salvation glass and see. When Professor Huxley incidentally compared the Salvation Army to the Franciscans, in an article in the *Pall Mall*, I took up the comparison with alacrity, and extended it.

The very chivalrous militarism of St Francis has been caught and vulgarized in the outward military symbolism of the Salvation Army. That joyous spirit which St Francis so peculiarly fostered is claimed by General Booth as an integral and essential feature in his own followers. The street-preaching, in which the Salvationists are so energetic, received its first special extension from the Franciscans. Mother of street-preaching, where are your street-preachers? To gather the multitude into our churches something more than the sound of a bell has become necessary; let us go forth into the highways and byways like the Franciscan Friars of old. And it is for the Friars to do it. The priest, worn almost to breaking by the cares of his own poor parish, has no strength or time to go forth among that nomad population which is of no parish and of all parishes. Why should the Franciscans hide behind their caricatures? The scarf and scarlet jersey is crying in street, in slum-dwelling, in common lodging-house, such God's truth as is in it to cry; where is the brown frock and the cord?

But the preaching Friar can only subserve a

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

portion of the uses subserved by the Salvation Army. Consider what the Salvation Army is. It is not merely a sect, it is virtually a Religious Order, but a Religious Order of a peculiar kind. It consists of men and women living in the world the life of the world, pursuing their businesses, marrying, bringing up families; yet united by rule and discipline, and pushing forward active work of charity and religious influence among the forsaken poor. It possesses, moreover, the advantage of numerous recruits from the ranks of the poor, through whom it can obtain intimate knowledge of the condition and requirements of their class.

May it be that here, too, the Salvation Army has but studied St Francis? Here, too, has the Assisian left us a weapon which but needs a little practice to adapt it to the necessity of the day? Even so. Our army is in the midst of us, enrolled under the banner of the Stigmata, quartered throughout the kingdom; an army over 13,000 strong, following the barrack routine of religious peace, diligently pipe-claying its spiritual accoutrements, practising what that other Army calls 'knee-drill,' turning out for periodical inspection, and dreaming of no conflict at hand. Sound to it the trumpet. Sound to the militia of Assisi that the enemy is about them, that they must take the field; sound to the Tertiaries of St Francis. Yes, the Franciscan Tertiaries are this army. They are men and women who live in the world the life of the world—though not

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

a worldly life; who marry, rear their families, attend to their worldly vocations; yet they are a Religious Order, with rule and observance. They include numbers of men and women among the poor. Nay, the resemblance extends to minor matters. Like the Salvationists, they exact from their women plainness of dress; though unlike the Salvationists, and most like their Poet-founder, they do not exact ugliness of dress. Like the Salvationists, again, they are an essentially democratic body: a Tertiary peeress, writing to a Tertiary factory girl, addresses her as 'sister.'

It rests with themselves to complete the resemblance in the one point now lacking. They are saying their Office, holding their monthly meetings, sanctifying themselves; it is excellent, but only half that for which their Founder destined them. He intended them likewise for active works of charity. They are the Third Order of St Francis; their founder's spirit should be theirs; and with the ecstatic of Alverno, contemplation was never allowed to divert him from activity. He who penanced Brother Ruffino because the visionary was overpowering in him the worker, with what alacrity would he have thrown his Tertiaries on the battle-field where reserves are so needed; with what alacrity would he have bidden them come down from Alverno, and descend into the streets! Nay, Pope Leo XIII, as if he had foreseen the task which might call upon them,

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

has released them from the weight of fasts and prayers which burdened them, reducing their fasts to two in the year, their prayers to twelve daily *Paters* and *Aves*. They are freed from their spiritual austerities, and at liberty for external labours. They, therefore, if their founder live at all in them, seem the organization ready constituted for this work. In whatever town there was a Congregation of Tertiaries, they would endeavour to combine for the establishment of Shelters, and whatever, in the process of development, might ultimately grow out of them.

Let us, then, put this thing to the test, in God's name! And, except in God's name, it were indeed wanton to try it. It may fail, true; it may be much of a leap in the dark, true; but every community must make its leaps in the dark, and make them often for far less clamorous cause. We English at large were nigh on bringing our Home Rule prodigy to birth; though astrologers hardly cast its horoscope alike, though there were not wanting prophets who boded the apparition of an armed head from our seething Irish cauldron. But long and crying suffering waited redress, we had tried palliatives which fell short, and we had all but determined (wisely, I think, determined) to test a heroic remedy. Here, at your own lintel, is long and crying suffering, worse than that of the Irish peasant, who has at least the consolation of his God, his priest, his neighbour, and his conscience; here, too, you have tried palliatives

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

which have fallen short; here, too, then, venture a heroic remedy. The most disastrous daring is better in such a matter than but-too-certainly-disastrous quiescence. I do not like Mohammed, but I like less Moloch: the code of the Koran is ill; is the code of Cotytto better? But to this it shall not come.

Things hard, not unachievable, I have set before you, children of Assisi; not unachievable, much less unattemptable. Scorn you may have, contumely you may have: but witness that these Salvationists, being of a verity blind prophets, yet endured all this; and you, who know whereof you prophesy, shall you not endure it? Can men conjure in the ways with the name of Booth, and not with the name of Manning? If they are shielded by the red jersey, you shall be shielded by the reflex of that princely red at Westminster. But rather will I cry to you, lineage of Alverno: Gird on your weakness as a hauberk of proof! *They* have grown strong because they were weak, and esteemed because they were despised; you shall grow stronger because weaker, and more esteemed because more despised. What sword have they, but you have a keener? For blood and fire, gentle humility; for the joy of a religious alcoholism, the joy of that peace which passeth understanding; for the tumults, the depths of the spirit; for the discipline of trumpets, the discipline of the Sacraments; for the chiming of tambourines, Mary's name pensile like a bell-tongue in men's

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

resonant souls; for hearts clashed open by a whirlwind, the soft summons of Him Who stands at the door and knocks. If with these you cannot conquer, then you could not with chariots and horsemen.

II

THIS is a day which, with all its admitted and most lamentable evils, many of us are most glad that we have lived to see: for it is a day wherein a bad old order is fast giving place to a new; and the new, we trust, through whatever struggle and gradual transformation, will finally prove a higher order than the old. Free education is in the air. It is one among many signs of the common tendency. It involves the negation of individualism. The hearts of men are softening to each other: we will no longer suffer unchecked the rehatched 'dragons of the prime': many minds, with many thoughts, many aims, are uniting with a common watchword against a common foe.

We, are we not formed as notes of music are
For one another, though dissimilar?

We are raising from the dust a fallen standard of Christianity: not in phrase merely, but in practice, not by lips only, but by lives also, we are re-affirming the Brotherhood of Man.

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

Rousseau said it. But so did Jesus Christ. It is the doctrine of the red cap. But it is likewise the doctrine of the red cassock. While on the antagonistic side is the conspicuous and significant figure of Professor Huxley, the map of life is crumpled between the convolutions of Darwin's brain: he cannot so much as attack Rousseau-ism, without unconsciously postulating as his argumentative basis the omnigenous truth of Darwinism. Now, Individualism was simply Natural Selection applied to the social order.

The Individualist theory had its scaffolding of excellence; O let us confess it! The walls of no theory can rise far from the ground without that. Our neighbours have this in common with heaven—they only help those who are perfectly able to help themselves. In the days when the blatant beast of Individualism held the field, that was a truth. It is now almost a cynicism—a cynicism with the whiff of truth which makes most cynicisms piquant; but, thank God, fast becoming cynicism. This was the scaffolding whereby the Individualist edifice arose; the precept, always true within rigid limitations and safeguards, of self-help. But, in practice, the script of self-help has been the script of selfishness, has been the maxim of Cain; in practice, self-help has meant 'devil take the hindmost.' By its fruits you shall know it. Look at your darkest England; look at your darkest London. Zohar-snakes which guard

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

the flesh they grow from; your Goths, O Rome of the sea-ways, your Goths within your own gates. You have sown your dragon's teeth, and you shall reap—armed men? Nay, I tell you, but dragons. From dragon's teeth, dragons; and from devil's teaching, devils. His evangel you have preached, by word and deed, throughout this century; do you fear his kingdom at hand? You have prepared the way of your lord, you have made straight his paths; and now you tremble at his coming. For diabolical this doctrine of Individualism is; it is the outcome of the proud teaching which declares it despicable for men to bow before their fellow-men. It has meant, not that a man should be individual, but that he should be independent. Now this I take to be an altogether deadly lie. A man *should* be individual, but not independent. The very laws of Nature forbid independence, which have made man in a thousand ways inevitably dependent on his fellows.

Vain is the belief that man can convert to permanent evil that which is in itself good. It has been sought to do so with science; and some of us have been seriously frightened at science. Folly. Certain temporary evil has been wrought through it in the present, which seems very great because it *is* present. That will pass, the good will remain; and men will wonder how they with whom was truth could ever have feared research. Scientists, those eyeless worms

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

who loosen the soil for the crops of God, have declared that they are proving miracles false, because they are contrary to the laws of Nature. I can see that in fifty years' time they will have proved miracles true, because they are based on the laws of Nature. So much good, at least, will come from the researches of Nancy and the Charité, of the followers of Bernheim and the followers of Charcot. If any, being evil, offer to us good things, I say: Take; for ours must be the ultimate harvest from them. Good steel wins in the hands that can wield it longest; and those hands are ours.

No scheme, be it General Booth's or another's, will avail to save more than a fraction—may it be a large fraction—out of that drift of adult misery wherewith the iniquitous neglect of our forefathers has encumbered the streets. But the children! There is the chance; there, alas, also is the fear. Think of it! If Christ stood amidst your London slums, He could not say: 'Except ye become as one of *these* little children.' For better your children were cast from the bridges of London than they should become as one of those little ones. Could they be gathered together and educated in the truest sense of the word; could the children of the nation at large be so educated as to cut off future recruits to the ranks of Darkest England; then it would need no astrology to cast the horoscope of to-morrow. *La tête de l'homme du peuple*, or rather, *de l'enfant du peuple*—around

IN DARKEST ENGLAND

that sways the conflict. Who grasps the child grasps the future.

The grim old superstition was right. When man would build to a lasting finish, he must found his building over a child. There is not a secret society in Europe, there is not a Secularist in France, in Germany, in Italy, in England, but knows it; everywhere these gangs of coiners are at their work of stamping and uttering base humanity. We, too, have recognized it; we on our part have not been idle, we least of all; but we are hard put to it for labourers in the task. In the school-satchel lie the keys of to-morrow. What gate shall be opened into that morrow, whether a gate of horn, or the gate of ivory wherethrough the inheritors of our own poor day passed surrounded by so many vain dreams into their inheritance, must rest with them who are still

In that sweet age
When Heaven's our side the lark.

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

IN the beginning of things came man, sequent to him woman; on woman followed the child, and on the child the doll. It is a climax of development; and the crown of these is the doll.

To the doll's supremacy in beauty woman's self bears testimony, implicit, if unconscious. For ages has she tricked her face in pigment, and her brows in alien hair; her *contours* she has filled to counterfeit roundness, her eyes and lashes tinged: and all in a frustrate essay to compass by Art what in the doll is right of Nature. Even the child exhibits distinct inferiorities. It is full of thwartness and eating and drinking, and selffulness (selfishness were a term too dully immitigate), and a plentiful lack of that repose wherein the doll is nearest to the quiet gods. For my own part, I profess that much acquaintance only increases my consideration for this fourth order of humanity: always excepting the very light-blue-eyed doll, in whose regard there is a certain chill *hauteur* against which my diffidence is not proof.

Consider the life of dolls. At the whim of some *debonair* maternal tyranness, they veer on every wind of mutability; are the sport of imputed moods, suffer qualities over which they have no election,—are sorry or glad, indocile

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

or amiable, at their mistress' whim and mandate; they are visited with stripes, or the soft aspersion of kisses; with love delectably persecuted, or consigned to the clement quiet of neglect; exalted to the dimple of their mistress' cheek, or dejected to the servile floor; rent and mutilated, or rocked and murmured over; blamed or petted, be-rated or loved. Nor why it is thus or thus with them, are they any-wise witting; wherefore these things should be, they know not at all.

Consider the life of us—
Oh, my cousins the dolls!

Some consciousness, I take it, there was; some secret sense of this occult co-rivalry in fate, which withheld me even in childhood from the youthful male's contempt for these short-lived parasites of the nursery. I questioned, with wounded feelings, the straitened feminine intolerance which said to the boy: 'Thou shalt not hold a baby; thou shalt not possess a doll.' In the matter of babies, I was hopeless to shake the illiberal prejudice; in the matter of dolls, I essayed to confound it. By eloquence and fine diplomacy I wrung from my sisters a concession of dolls; whence I date my knowledge of the kind.

But ineluctible sex declared itself. I dramatized them, I fell in love with them; I did not father them; intolerance was justified of its children. One in particular I selected, one with

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

surpassing fairness crowned, and bowed before the fourteen inches of her skirt. She was beautiful. She was one of Shakespeare's heroines. She was an amity of inter-removed miracles; all wrangling excellencies at pact in one sole doll; the frontiers of jealous virtues marched in her, yet trespassed not against her peace. I desired for her some worthy name; and asked of my mother: Who was the fairest among living women? Laughingly was I answered that I was a hard questioner, but that perhaps the Empress of the French bore the bell for beauty. Hence, accordingly, my Princess of puppetdom received her style; and at this hour, though she has long since vanished to some realm where all sawdust is wiped for ever from dolls' wounds, I cannot hear that name but the Past touches me with a rigid agglomeration of small china fingers.

But why with childhood and with her should I close the blushing recital of my puppet-loves? Men are but children of a larger growth; and your statue, I warrant me, is but your crescent doll. Wherefore, then, should I leave unmemorized the statue which thrall'd my youth in a passion such as feminine mortality was skill-less to instigate? Nor at this let any boggle; for *she* was a goddess. Statue I have called her; but indeed she was a bust, a head, a face—and who that saw that face could have thought to regard further? She stood nameless in the gallery of sculptural casts which she

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

strangely deigned to inhabit; but I have since learned that men called her the Vatican Melpomene. Rightly stood she nameless, for Melpomene she never was: never went words of hers from bronzed lyre in tragic order; never through *her* enspelled lips moaned any syllables of woe. Rather, with her leaf-twined locks, she seemed some strayed Bacchante, indissolubly filmed in secular reverie. The expression which gave her divinity resistless I have always suspected for an accident of the cast; since in frequent engravings of her prototype I never met any such aspect. The secret of this indecipherable significance, I slowly discerned, lurked in the singularly diverse set of the two corners of the mouth; so that her profile wholly shifted its meaning according as it was viewed from the right or left. In one corner of her mouth the little languorous firstling of a smile had gone to sleep; as if she had fallen a-dream, and forgotten that it was there. The other had drooped, as of its own listless weight, into a something which guessed at sadness; guessed, but so as indolent lids are easily grieved by the pricks of the slate-blue dawn. And on the full countenance those two expressions blended to a single expression inexpressible; as if pensiveness had played the Mænad, and now her arms grew heavy under the cymbals. Thither each evening, as twilight fell, I stole to meditate and worship the baffling mysteries of her meaning: as twilight fell, and the blank noon surceased

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

arrest upon her life, and in the vaguening countenance the eyes broke out from their day-long ambushade. Eyes of violet blue, drowsed-amorous, which surveyed me not, but looked ever beyond, where a spell enfixed them,

Waiting for something, not for me.

And I was content. Content; for by such tenure of unnoticedness I knew that I held my privilege to worship: had she beheld me, she would have denied, have contemned my gaze. Between us, now, are years and tears: but the years waste her not, and the tears wet her not; neither misses she me or any man. There, I think, she is standing yet; there, I think, she will stand for ever: the divinity of an accident, awaiting a divine thing impossible, which can never come to her, and she knows this not.

For I reject the vain fable that the ambrosial creature is really an unspiritual compound of lime, which the gross ignorant call plaster of Paris. If Paris indeed had to do with her, it was he of Ida. And for him, perchance, she waits.

FORM AND FORMALISM

MANY think in the head; but it is the thinking in the heart that is most wanted. Theology and philosophy are the soul of truth; but they must be clothed with flesh, to create an organism which can come down and live among men. Therefore Christ became incarnate, to create Christianity. Be it spoken with reverence, a great poet, for example, who is likewise a great thinker, does for truth what Christ did for God, the Supreme Truth. And though the world may be loath to admit it, the saint does for truth even more; for he gives to truth his own flesh. What of the man who—like the illustrious English Canon of Loreto—should be poet and saint? Ah, ‘hard and rarest union’ indeed! for he is a twofold incarnation of truth. He gives to it one body which has the life of man, another which has the life of humanity and the diuturnal hills.

This is a concrete example of an abstract principle—the supreme necessity under which truth is bound to give itself a definite shape. Of such immutable importance is form that without this effigy and witness of spirit, spirit walks invisible among men. Yet, except in literature (and possibly in art), where a materialistic worship of form curiously prevails, form is a special object of the age’s blasphemy. In politics, music, society, ethics, the cry is: ‘*Dirumpamus vincula eorum!*’ I am led to this

FORM AND FORMALISM

reflection by the strange misconceptions which have beset even so wise and sympathetic a teacher as Mr Ruskin, when he has touched on Religious Orders; and the passage which led to it is a passage in one of his most wise and charming books, the *Ethics of the Dust*.

‘Half the monastic system,’ he says, ‘rose out of the notion of future reward acting on the occult pride and ambition of good people. . . . There is always a considerable quantity of pride, to begin with, in what is called “giving oneself to God.” As if one had ever belonged to anybody else! . . . When it had become the principal amusement, and the most admired art, of Christian men, to cut one another’s throats, and burn one another’s towns, of course the few feeble or reasonable persons left, who desired quiet, safety, and kind fellowship, got into cloisters; and the gentlest, thought-fullest, noblest men and women shut themselves up, precisely where they could be of least use.’

It is a most representative passage, for many reasons. Mr Ruskin is, as he truly says, a witness favourable to the monasteries. So it comes about that his words represent not mere Protestant prejudice, but the current secular prejudice of the age. ‘All the good people,’ as he says further on, ‘getting themselves hung up out of the way of mischief.’ That then, as now, it was only the minority, even of ‘good people,’ who became monks; that, numerous though monks were, the world must have been in a worse way than in the days

FORM AND FORMALISM

of Sodom and Gomorrah, if these were all its just; that the majority of monks by no means let the world slide, but very actively combated it;—on all this a professed thinker might have been expected to think.

But confine monasticism, if you will, to contemplative monasticism. Not by the good in general, but by the good with a contemplative bent, are contemplative Orders entered. Is it unlawful to lead the life contemplative, only when the object of contemplation is God? Was Wordsworth right, St Bernard wrong? Or does Mr Ruskin consider the poet's contemplation fruitful, but the saint's unfruitful? Yes, there is the root of it; and there again is Mr Ruskin representative. The modern world profoundly and hopelessly disbelieves the power of prayer. It is not always scornful, this modern world; it simply does not comprehend, and is doubtful whether anything may lawfully be supposed to exist which it cannot comprehend. Yet I would sooner be prayed for by John of Patmos than written for by John of Coniston.

But Mr Ruskin's words indicate that not only the Religious Orders, but the Religious life itself is held by him 'suspect.' In what is called 'giving oneself to God' he sees pride. He desires life, in fact, to be religious without the form of religion; even as, in his own later tendencies, he has apparently aimed to be a Catholic without Catholic belief. One sees this revolt from form, with its inevitable con-

FORM AND FORMALISM

sequences, in his teaching and in his thought. In his teaching, which is full of insulated and capricious beauty, but has little unity beyond that of his own individuality. And that makes artistic, not ethical, unity. In his thought, which is often strangely unprecise. He can, for instance, as the basis of his diatribe against monasticism, assert that 'nothing is ever done so as really to please our Great Father, unless we would also have done it, though we had had no Father to know of it.' Why, then, are we to do it? 'Because it is right,' Mr Ruskin implies. Which is so dearly fine in sound, that it is a pity it should be so childishly empty in sense. We are not to do a thing for the pleasure of God; but we are to do it because it is right—i.e., the pleasure of God. For what is right, but the pleasure of God? If Mr Ruskin had asked himself that question, he would not have spun this Penelope-web. It is an example, not of thinking in the heart (which I have averred to be so much needed), but of thinking *with* the heart, which is quite another thing, and the peculiar curse of sentimentalists.

But in such utterances, and in his protest against the formal 'giving oneself to God,' Mr Ruskin has latter-day feeling at his back. Formalism is the repressor of vitality: therefore let us away with form. Let us all stop short where the young man stopped, who went to Christ for a counsel of perfection, and departed sad at heart. When a maid takes a man

FORM AND FORMALISM

to husband, she goes forth from her father's house; and none cries out upon the inhuman sundering of family ties by the relentless system of marriage. But when a soul takes Christ to husband, and goes forth from her father's house, we will cry, like them that cried Diana great. Christ alone we admit not to have His spouse all to Himself. Without form, formalism is impossible; then let us give short shrift to dogma! The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth; then let us have the Essence without the Word!

What, you builders of futurity! You will have life, yet not form? Such thing is not known to man as life without form. To avoid formalism by destroying form, is to remedy carnality by committing suicide. You have the spirit freed from the letter then, with a vengeance; but the spirit, somehow, no longer quickens. Yet may not form change? Yes, in so far as the life changes, not otherwise. The Church is like man's body: which grows to completion altering or adding a little in superficialities and details of figure, but unchanging in essential line and structure. Each bone, muscle, nerve, and blood-vessel, though it have increase, is in form, position, and constitution immutable. And with the Church, also, which is Christ's body, you may add in non-essentials, you may develop in essentials; but you shall not alter in essentials by so much as a clause of its dogmatic theology. 'That the Scripture may

FORM AND FORMALISM

be fulfilled: You shall not break a bone of Him.'

In things more general, the same confusion of form with its abuse, the same uncomprehending iconoclasm, is patent. What is the widest ideal of this age? 'The parliament of man, the federation of the world.' Universal federation, in government or in no government, in religion or in no religion. And the decided tendency of what are called 'popular leaders' is towards federation with the minimum of government, and no religion. Yet when it comes (as come I believe it will), it can only be federation in both government and religion of plenary and ordered dominance. I see only two religions constant enough to effect this: each based upon the past—which is stability; each growing according to an interior law—which is strength. Paganism and Christianity; the religion of the queen of heaven* who is Astarte, and of the queen of heaven who is Mary.

'Under which king?' For under a king it must be, not merely a flag. No common aim can triumph, till it is crystallized in an individual, at once its child and ruler. Man himself must become incarnate in a man before his cause can triumph. Thus the universal Word became the individual Christ; that total God

* 'We offer sacrifice to the queen of heaven.' (Jer. xlv, 19.) The Phœnicians represented Astarte with a veil blown out by the wind, and the crescent moon under her feet.

FORM AND FORMALISM

and total man being particularized in a single symbol, the cause of God and man might triumph. In Christ, therefore, centres and is solved that supreme problem of life—the marriage of the Unit with the Sum. In Him is perfectly shown forth the All for one and One for all, which is the justificatory essence of that substance we call Kingship; and from which, in so far as each particular kingship derogates, it forfeits justificatory right. When the new heavens and the new earth, which multitudinous Titans are so restlessly forging, at length stand visible to resting man, it needs no prophecy to foretell that they will be like the old, with head, and form, and hierarchic memberment, as the six-foot bracken is like the bracken at your knee. For out of all its disintegrations and confusion earth emerges, like a strong though buffeted swimmer, nearer to the unseen model and term of all social growth; which is the civil constitution of angeldom, and Uranian statecraft of imperial God.

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

IN the days when days were fable, before the grim Tartar fled from Cathay,* or the hardy Goth from the shafted Tartar; before the hardy Goth rolled on the hot Kelt, or the hot Kelt on Italy; before the wolf-cubs lolled tongues of prey, or Rhodian galleys sheered the brine, an isle there was which has passed into the dreams of men, itself

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

* [This passage Francis Thompson translated into verse, as the Prologue of a Pastoral that was, however, never finished.]

Ere the fierce Tartar fled Cathay,
The stark Goth shafted Tartary,
The fiery Kelt the Gothic fray,—
And the Kelt rolled on Italy;
Ere the wolf-cubs lolled tongues of prey,
Or Rhodian galleys sheered the sea,
An isle there was—where is't to-day?—
The Muses called it Sicily.
Was it, and is it not?—Aye me,
Where's Eden, or Taprobane?

Where now does old Simæthus flow?
You take a map (great Poesy,
Have they mapped Heaven!) and thereon show—
What?—the dust-heap of Italy!
The Ausonian mainland from its toe
Spurns it aside contemptuously.
You point to it, you man that know,
And this, you say, is Sicily.
I know not how the thing may be—
It is not Sicily to me!

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

And when the Muses talked, they named it Sicily. Was it, and is it not? Alas, where's Eden, or Taprobane? Where flows Alpheus now? You take a map (great Poetry! have they mapped Heaven?) and show me—what? The dust-heap of Italy; a thing spurned contemptuously from the toe of the Ausonian mainland; you point to it, you man of knowledge, and this, you say, is Sicily. You may be right, I know not; but it is not Sicily to me.

Yet that olden Sicily could not, cannot pass. Dew but your eyes with the euphrasy of fancy, and purge your ears with the poet's singing; then, to the ear within the ear, and the eye within the eye, shall come the green of the ever-vernal forests, the babble of the imperishable streams. For within this life of ache and dread, like the greenness in the rain, like the solace in the tear, we may have each of us a dreamful Sicily. And since we can project it where we will, for me, seeking those same 'sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing,' for me perchance, Sicily may be Little Cloddington.

What balm, then, for hurt minds has my Sicily? In the old Sicily, 'Shepherds piped on oaten straws,' and the inhabitants were entirely worthy of their surroundings. But that cultivating influence of beauty which our æsthetes preach has somehow broken down in the case of Little Cloddington, and one begins to have an uneasy suspicion that the constant imbibing of beauty, like the constant imbibing of wine,

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

dulls the brain which it is supposed to stimulate. Yet, to commune with the heart of Nature—this has been the accredited mode since the days of Wordsworth. Nature, Coleridge assures us, has ministrations by which she heals her erring and distempered child; and it is notorious how effectual were her ministrations in the case of Coleridge.

Well, she is a very lovely Nature in this Sicily of mine; yet I confess a heinous doubt whether rustic stolidity may not be a secret effluence from her. You speak, and you think she answers you. It is the echo of your own voice. You think you hear the throbbing of her heart, and it is the throbbing of your own. I do not believe that Nature has a heart; and I suspect that, like many another beauty, she has been credited with a heart because of her face. You go to her, this great, beautiful, tranquil, self-satisfied Nature, and you look for—sympathy? Yes; the sympathy of a cat, sitting by the fire and blinking at you. What, indeed, does she want with a heart or brain? She knows that she is beautiful, and she is placidly content with the knowledge; she was made to be gazed on, and she fulfils the end of her creation. After a careful anatomization of Nature, I pronounce that she has nothing more than a lymphatic vesicle. She cannot give what she does not need; and if we were but similarly organized, we should be independent of sympathy. A man cannot go straight to his objects, because he has a

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

heart; he cannot eat, drink, sleep, make money, and be satisfied, because he has a heart. It is a mischievous thing, and wise men accordingly take the earliest opportunity of giving it away.

Yet the thing is, after all, too deep for jest. What is this heart of Nature, if it exist at all? Is it, according to the conventional doctrine derived from Wordsworth and Shelley, a heart of love, according with the heart of man, and stealing out to him through a thousand avenues of mute sympathy? No; in this sense I repeat seriously what I said lightly: Nature has no heart.

I sit now, alone and melancholy, with that melancholy which comes to all of us when the waters of sad knowledge have left their ineffaceable delta in the soul. As I write, a calm, faint-tinted evening sky sinks like a nestward bird to its sleep. At a little distance is a dark wall of fir-wood; while close at hand a small group of larches rise like funeral plumes against that tranquil sky, and seem to say, 'Night cometh.' They alone are in harmony with me. All else speaks to me of a beautiful, peaceful world in which I have no part. And did I go up to yonder hill, and behold at my feet the spacious amphitheatre of hill-girt wood and mead, overhead the mighty aerial *velarium*, I should feel that my human sadness was a higher and deeper and wider thing than all. O Titan Nature! a petty race, which has dwarfed its spirit in dwellings, and bounded

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

it in selfish shallows of art, may find you too vast, may shrink from you into its earths: but though you be a very large thing, and my heart a very little thing, yet Titan as you are, my heart is too great for you. Coleridge—speaking, not as Wordsworth had taught him to speak, but from his own bitter experience—said the truth:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

The truth, in relation to ourselves; though not the truth with regard to Nature absolutely. Absolute Nature lives not in our life, nor yet is lifeless, but lives in the life of God: and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God.

Yet higher, yet further let us go. Is this daughter of God mortal; can her foot not pass the grave? Is Nature, as men tell us, but a veil concealing the Eternal,

A fold
Of Heaven and earth across His Face,

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

which we must rend to behold that Face? Do our eyes indeed close for ever on the beauty of earth when they open on the beauty of Heaven? I think not so; I would fain beguile even death itself with a sweet fantasy, if it be no more than fantasy: I believe that in Heaven is earth. Plato's doctrine of Ideals, as I conceive, laid its hand upon the very breast of truth, yet missed her breathing. For beauty—such is my faith—is beauty for eternity.

If the Trinity were not revealed, I should nevertheless be induced to suspect the existence of such a master-key by the trinities through which expounds itself the spirit of man. Such a trinity is the trinity of beauty—Poetry, Art, Music. Although its office is to create beauty, I call it the trinity of beauty, because it is the property of earthly as of the heavenly beauty to create everything to its own image and likeness. Painting is the eye of passion, Poetry is the voice of passion, Music is the throbbing of her heart. For all beauty is passionate, though it may be a passionless passion. So absolutely are these three the distinct manifestations of a single essence that, in considering the general operation of any one of them we consider the general operation of all; and hence, as most easily understood because most definitely objective in its result, I take Art. Not the so-called Art which aims at the mere photographic representation of external objects, for that can only reproduce; but the creative Art

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

which alone is one essence with Poetry and Music.

In the artist's creation there are two distinct stages or processes, the second of which is but a revelation of the first. There is the ideal and the image of the ideal, the painting. To be more exact I should distinguish an intermediate stage, only theoretically separable in order of process from the first stage, with which it is, or may be, practically synchronous. There is first the ideal, secondly the mental image of the ideal (i.e., the picture of it in form and colour formed on the mental eye*), thirdly the external or objective reproduction of the mental image in material form and colour, in pigments. Now of these three stages, which is the most perfect creation, and therefore the most beautiful? They lessen in perfection as they become material; the ideal is the most perfect; the mental image less perfect; the objective image, the painting, least perfect.

'But,' you say, 'this ideal is an abstract thing, without real existence.' The commonest of errors, that the ideal is the unreal; and the more pernicious because founded on a truth. It is impossible to speak here with the distinctions and modifications necessary for accuracy; but generally I may say this:—The

* *On the mental eye.*—I use the popular expression. In reality this image is as really, as physically (I do not say as vividly) seen as is a ray of sunlight. It is therefore material, not spiritual. But this is not the place for a physiological discussion, and the popular phrase subserves my object, if it does not subserve accuracy.

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

reality of the artist's ideal is not the reality of, e.g., a star; for one is man's creation, the other directly from God. Nor is the reality of the artist's ideal the same in kind as the reality of its objective image, of the painting. The one exists externally, and the senses are cognizant of it; the other within his spirit, and the senses can take no account of it. Yet both are real, actual. If there be an advantage, it is not on the side of the painting; for in no true sense can the image be more real than the thing imaged. I admit that in man the ideal has not the continuous vividness of its objective image. The ideal may be dimmed or even forgotten; though I hold that in such a case it is merely put away from spiritual cognizance as the painting might be put out of physical sight, and that it still exists in the soul. But were the artist omniscient, so that he could hold all things in perpetual and simultaneous contemplation, the ideal would have an existence as unintermittent as that of the painting, and, unlike that of the painting, coeval with the artist's soul.

In Painting and Music the same thing holds good. In both there is the conception (a term perhaps less suggesting unreality than the term 'ideal') with its material expression; and between these two stages a mental expression which the material expression cannot realize. The mental expression in its turn cannot represent all the qualities of the conception; and

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

the conception, whose essence is the same in all three arts, has a subtlety which the expressional union of all three could not adequately render, because expression never fully expresses. Yet (and it is on this that I insist) the conception is an actually existent thing, an existence within an existence, real as the spirit in which it exists, *the* reality of which the objective reality is but the necessarily less perfect image, and transcending in beauty the image as body is transcended by soul. Can it be adequately revealed by one mortal to another? No. Could it be so revealed? Yes. If the spirit of man were untrammelled by his body, conception could be communicated by the interpenetration of soul and soul.

Let us apply this.* The Supreme Spirit, creating, reveals His conceptions to man in the material forms of Nature. There is no necessity here for any intermediate process, because nobody obstructs the free passage of conception into expression. An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Painter; and straightway over the eternal dikes rush forth the flooding tides of night, the blue of Heaven ripples into stars; Nature, from Alp to Alpine flower, rises lovely with the betrayal of the Divine thought. An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Poet; and there

* Be it observed that I am not trying to *explain* anything, metaphysically or otherwise, and consequently my language is not to be taken metaphysically. I am merely endeavouring analogically to *suggest* an idea. And the whole thing is put forward as a fantasy, which the writer likes to think may be a dim shadowing of truth.

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

chimes the rhythm of an ordered universe. An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Musician; and Creation vibrates with the harmony, from the palpitating throat of the bird to the surges of His thunder as they burst in fire along the roaring strand of Heaven; nay, as Coleridge says,

The silent air
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

Earthly beauty is but heavenly beauty taking to itself flesh. Yet, though this objective presentment of the Divine Ideal be relatively more perfect than any human presentment of a human ideal, though it be the most flawless of possible embodiments; yet is even the Divine embodiment transcendently inferior to the Divine Ideal.

Within the Spirit Who is Heaven lies Earth; for within Him rests the great conception of Creation. There are the woods, the streams, the meads, the hills, the seas that we have known in life, but breathing indeed 'an ampler ether, a diviner air,' themselves beautiful with a beauty which, for even the highest created spirit utterly to apprehend were 'swooning destruction.'

Yet there the soul shall enter which hath earned
That privilege by virtue.

As in the participation of human spirits some are naturally more qualified for interpenetration

NATURE'S IMMORTALITY

than others—in ordinary language, as one man is more able than his fellows to enter into another's mind, so in proportion as each of us by virtue has become kin to God, will he penetrate the Supreme Spirit, and identify himself with the Divine Ideals. There is the immortal Sicily, there the Elysian Fields, there all visions, all fairness engirdled with the Eternal Fair. This, my faith, is laid up in my bosom.

SANCTITY AND SONG

THREE Canticles are assigned to St Francis in his collected writings. It is dubious whether they are actually his; it is not dubious that they are early Franciscan work. Of these, the *Canticle of the Sun* is well known, and generally admired. The other two, which are never likely to win general admiration, may or may not be the work of the Saint, but certainly they are the work of a saint, and a saint admitted to the highest privileges of Divine Love. The manifest personal experience which notes them, the intimate secrets of that experience, are sufficient proofs of this. Because of that intimate secrecy of personal experience it is that I have said they are never likely to be generally admired. 'The fool,' says Lord Verulam, 'the fool receives not the words of the wise, unless thou speakest the things that are in his heart.' And not only the fool. By the law of Nature, no man can admire, for no man can understand, that of which he has no echo in himself. Such an echo implies an experience kindred, if not equal, to that of the utterer. Now, to the majority of men, Saintship is an uncomprehended word,

A doubtful tale from fairyland,
Hard for the non-elect to understand.

Tell them its meaning, and your words will be
to them a sound, signifying nothing. Saintship

SANCTITY AND SONG

is the touch of God. To most, even good people, God is a belief. To the saints He is an embrace. They have felt the wind of His locks, His Heart has beaten against their side. They do not believe in Him, for they know Him.

Therefore to the many these Canticles must seem strained and fantastic things, touching in them no corresponding realities of their own experience. If it is hard for such men to seize the aloofness of the purely lyrical poet, how much harder for them to seize the aloofness of the lyrical saint! Take the first of the two Canticles to which I have referred. Saint Francis recounts the purifying struggles of Divine Love under the image of a warfare with Christ. Christ strikes him with dart and lance, overwhelms him with stones, until he falls with pierced heart, dying on the ground.

But lo! I did not die;
For my beloved Lord,
To crown His victory,
My life anew restored,
So keen and fresh that I
That moment could have soared
To join the saints on high.

How many will see in this finely daring allegory anything but the bizarre and tortured fancy of an 'ascetic'—word of reprobation! Yet mark. A young poet has recently revived in happy verse a mediæval fable—'Le Chevalier Malheur.' He is encountered by an armed

SANCTITY AND SONG

knight, who overthrows him, and then, as his 'poor heart lies dead,' pierces his bosom and thrusts in a gauntleted hand. Whereupon

A new, a noble heart
Within me woke.

The coincidence is striking; but it is the result of both poems being based upon a fact of human nature. The purifying power of suffering was known even to the heathen. In the Egyptian obsequies, the removal of the most perishable parts of the body, the preservation of the rest by steeping and burning nitre, signified the cleansing of the human being by pain; and the symbolism was emphasized by the words spoken over the embalmed corpse: 'Thou art pure, Osiris, thou art pure.'

Now grace does not supersede, but acts along the lines of, Nature. This mysterious strife of the soul with Christ is manifestly prefigured in the Old Testament by the struggle of Jacob with the angel. Yet St Francis has a higher mystery to symbolize. Revivified and strengthened, he hastens again to the heavenly contest, and in that final strife,

I conquered Christ my Lord;

he has passed beyond the ken of profane eyes; to saints and a few readers of the mystics only is the meaning of that final triumphant image known. 'My dwelling,' says Wisdom, 'is in a pillar of a cloud.'

SANCTITY AND SONG

The second Canticle, less profoundly mystical, is perhaps to many even more profoundly unreal. It emphasizes the fire and torments of that Love which the Saint has rashly tempted—to find, alas! that the gates of the beatific Love are guarded by the purgatorial Love.

Though held, I run; I rise, yet fall;
I speak, though mute I am become;
Pursue, and am pursued withal.

O Love eternal, why
Am I a fool for Thee?
Wherefore hast Thou cast me
In such a fire to die?

Christ answers in rebuke: Francis suffers because his love has broken rule, within which Charity, like all other virtues, should contain itself. Then, with a daring born of the love which casteth out fear, the Saint turns on his Lord, and tells Him that his own follies are Christ's, since Christ is transformed to him: nay, no folly to which love can lead him may equal the folly to which it led Christ:

Was that Love wise, O Saviour mine,
Which drew Thee down to earth below?

.....
This Love which makes me foolish, lo!
It took away Thy Wisdom quite;
This love which makes me languish so,
It robbed Thee of Thy very might.

And the poem ends in transports which are veritable foolishness to men.

DON QUIXOTE

WAS there ever so strange a book as this *Don Quixote*? To what class shall we assign it? Solitary, singular, it will not be pigeon-holed; your literary entomologists shall ticket it, *genus* and *sub-genus* it, at their peril. It is complex beyond measure. It is a piece of literary duplicity without precedent or succession; nay, duplicity within duplicity, a sword turning all ways, like that which guarded 'unpermitted Eden' to quote a cancelled verse of Rossetti's *Love's Nocturn*.

Let not Swift say that he was born to introduce and refine irony. The irony of Cervantes is refined and dangerous beyond the irony of Swift; Swift's is obvious beside it. All irony is double-tongued; but whether it be the irony of Swift, or Swift's predecessors, or Swift's successors, it has this characteristic: that its duplicity is (so to speak) a one-sided duplicity; if you do not take the inner meaning, you read baffled, without pleasure, without admiration, without comprehension. But this strange irony, this grave irony, this broadly-laughing irony, of the strange, grave, humorous Spaniard, delights even those who have not a touch of the ironic in their composition. They laugh at the comic mask, who cannot see the melancholy face behind it. It is the Knight of the Rueful Countenance in the vizard of Sancho Panza; and all laugh, while some few have tears in

DON QUIXOTE

their laughter. And they know not that their derision is derided; that they are trapped and cozened into jeers; that Cervantes, from behind his mask, beholds their grins with a sardonic smile.

A core of scornful and melancholy protest, set about with a pulp of satire, and outside all a rind of thick burlesque—that is *Don Quixote*. It never ‘laughed Spain’s chivalry away.’ Chivalry was no more, in a country where it could be written. Where it could be thought an impeachment of idealism, idealism had ceased to be. Against this very state of things its secret but lofty contempt is aimed. Herein lies its curious complexity. Outwardly Cervantes falls in with the waxing materialism of the day, and professes to satirize everything that is chivalrous and ideal. Behind all that, is subtle, suppressed, mordant satire of the material spirit in all its forms: the clownish materialism of the boor; the comfortable materialism of the *bourgeois*; the pedantic materialism of the scholar and the mundane cleric; the idle, luxurious, arrogant materialism of the noble—all agreeing in derisive conceit of superiority to the poor madman who still believes in grave, exalted, heroic ideas of life and duty. Finally, at the deepest core of the strange and wonderful satire, in which the hidden mockery is so opposite to the seeming mockery, lies a sympathy even to tears with all height and heroism insulated and out of date,

DON QUIXOTE

mad to the eyes of a purblind world: nay, a bitter confession that such nobility is, indeed, mad and phantasmal, in so much as it imputes its own greatness to a petty and clay-content society. Even Sancho is held up to admiration mixed with smiles, because he has the dim yet tough insight to follow what he does not understand, yet obscurely feels to be worthy of love and following. The author of the heroic *Numantia* a contemner of the lofty and ideal! It could not be. Surely Don Quixote has much of the writer's self; of his poetic discontent with the earthy and money-seeking society around him. There is no true laughter in literature with such a hidden sadness as that of Cervantes.

Yet it is laughter, and not all sad. The man is a humorist, and feels that if the world be full of mournful humour, yet life would go nigh to madness if there were not some honest laughter as well—laughter from the full lungs. Therefore he gives us Sancho—rich, unctuous, Shakespearean humour to the marrow of him. The mockers of the Don, with their practical jests on him, furnish the understanding reader with but pitying and half-reluctant laughter; but the faithful compost of fat and flesh who cleaves to the meagre visionary allows us mirth unstinted and unqualified. Many a touch in this creation of the great Spaniard reminds us of like touches in the greatest of Englishmen. Sancho's blunt rejection of titles, for

DON QUIXOTE

example: 'Don does not belong to me, nor ever did to any of my family: I am called plain Sancho Panza, my father was a Sancho, and my grandfather a Sancho, and they were all Panzas, without any addition of Dons or Donnas.' Who does not remember at once the drunken tinker's 'What! am I not Christopher Sly?' etc. The two passages are delightfully kindred in style and humour. How like, too, are Sancho's meandering telling of his story at the Duke's table, and Dame Quickly's narrative style, when she recounts Falstaff's promise of marriage! Unadulterated peasant nature both—the same in Spain as in East-cheap. What more gloriously characteristic than Sancho's rebutting of the charge that he may prove ungrateful in advancement to high station? 'Souls like mine are covered four inches thick with the grease of the old Christian.'

But enough. With all the inward gravity of his irony, Cervantes has abundantly provided that we need not take his seriousness too seriously: there is laughter even for those who enter deepest into that grave core.

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

VID, with the possible exception of Catullus, is the most modern-minded of Latin poets. It is therefore with delight that we first encounter his dictum, so essentially modern, so opposed to the æsthetic feeling of the ancient world, *decentiorem esse faciem in quâ aliquis nævus esset*. It was a dictum borne out by his own practice, a practice at heart essentially romantic rather than classic; and there can therefore be little wonder that the saying was scouted by his contemporaries as an eccentricity of genius. The dominant cult of classicism was the worship of perfection, and the Goth was its iconoclast. Then at length literature reposed in the beneficent and quickening shadow of imperfection, which gave us for consummate product Shakespeare, in whom greatness and imperfection reached their height. Since him, however, there has been a gradual decline from imperfection. Milton, at his most typical, was far too perfect; Pope was ruined by his quest for the quality; and if Dryden partially escaped, it was because of the rich faultiness with which Nature had endowed him. The stand made by the poets of the early part of the nineteenth century was only temporarily successful; and now [1889], we suppose, no thoughtful person can contemplate without alarm the hold which the renascent principle has gained over the contemporary mind. Unless some voice be raised

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

in timely protest, we feel that English art (in its widest sense) must soon dwindle to the extinction of unendurable excellence.

Over the whole contemporary mind is the trail of this serpent perfection. It even affects the realm of colour, where it begets cloying, enervating harmonies, destitute of those stimulating contrasts by which the great colourists threw into relief the general agreement of their hues. It leads in poetry to the love of miniature finish, and *that* in turn (because minute finish is most completely attainable in short poems) leads to the tyranny of sonnet, ballade, rondeau, triolet, and their kind. The principle leads again to æstheticism; which is simply the aspiration for a hot-house seclusion of beauty in a world which Nature has tempered by bracing gusts of ugliness.

The most nobly conceived character in assuming *vraisemblance* takes up a certain quantity of imperfection; it is its water of crystallization: expel this, and far from securing, as the artist fondly deems, a more perfect crystal, the character falls to powder. We by no means desire those improbable incongruities which, frequent enough in actual life, should in art be confined to comedy. But even incongruities may find their place in serious art, if they be artistic incongruities, not too glaring or suggestive of unlikelihood; incongruities which are felt by the reader to have a whimsical hidden keeping with the congruities of the

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

character, which enhance the consent of the general qualities by an artistically modulated dissent; which just lend, and no more than lend, the ratifying seal of Nature to the dominating regularities of characterization.

From the neglect of all this have come the hero and heroine; and among all prevalent types of heroine, *the* worst is one apparently founded on Pope's famous dictum,

Most women have no characters at all—

a dictum which we should denounce with scorn, if so acute an observer as De Quincey did not stagger us by defending it. He defends it to attack Pope. Pope (says De Quincey) did not see that what he advances as a reproach against women constitutes the very beauty of them. It is the absence of any definite character which enables their character to be moulded by others: and it is this soft plasticity which renders them such charming companions as wives. We should be inclined to say that the feminine characteristic which De Quincey considered plasticity was rather elasticity. Now the most elastic substance in Nature is probably ivory. What are the odds, you subtle, paradoxical, delightful ghost of delicate thought, what *are* the odds on your moulding a billiard ball?

Does anyone believe in Patient Grizzel? Still more, does anyone believe in the Nut-brown Maid? Yet their descendants infest literature, from Spenser to Dickens and Tennyson, from

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

Una to Enid; made tolerable in the poem only by their ideal surroundings. The dream of 'a perfect woman nobly planned' underlies the thing; albeit Wordsworth goes on to show that his 'perfect woman' had her little failings. Shakespeare was not afraid to touch with such failings his finest heroines; he knew that these defects serve only to enhance the large nobilities of character, as the tender imperfections and wayward wilfulnesses of individual rose-petals enhance the prevalent symmetry of the rose. His most consummate woman, Imogen, possesses her little naturalizing traits. Take the situation where she is confronted with her husband's order for her murder. What the Patient Grizzel heroine would have done we all know. She would have behaved with unimpeachable resignation, and prepared for death with a pathos ordered according to the best canons of art. What does this glorious Imogen do? Why (and we publicly thank Heaven for it), after the first paroxysm of weeping, which makes the blank verse sob, she bursts into a fit of thoroughly feminine and altogether charming jealousy. A perfect woman indeed, for she is imperfect! Imogen, however, it may be urged, is not a Patient Grizzel. Take, then, Desdemona, who is. That is to say, Desdemona represents the type in nature which Patient Grizzel misrepresents. Mark now the difference in treatment. Shakespeare knew that these gentle, affectionate, yielding, all-submissive and all-suffering dis-

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

positions are founded on weakness, and accordingly he gave Desdemona the defects of her qualities. He would have no perfection in *his* characters. Rather than face the anger of the man whom she so passionately loves, Desdemona will lie—a slight lie, but one to which the ideal distortion of her would never be allowed to yield. Yet the weakness but makes Shakespeare's lady more credible, more piteous, perhaps even more lovable.

From the later developments of contemporary fiction the faultless hero and heroine have, we admit, relievingly disappeared. So much good has been wrought by the craze for 'human documents.' But alas! the disease expelled, who will expel the medicine? And the hydra perfection merely shoots up a new head. It is now a desire for the perfect reproduction of Nature, uninterfered with by the writer's ideals or sympathies; so that we have novelists who stand coldly aloof from their characters, and exhibit them with passionless countenance. We all admire the representations which result: 'How beautifully drawn! how exactly like Nature!' Yes, beautifully drawn; but they do not live. They resemble the mask in *Phaedrus*—a cunning semblance, *at animam non habet*. This attitude of the novelist is fatal to artistic illusion: his personages do not move us because they do not move him. Partridge believed in the ghost because 'the little man on the stage was more frightened than I'; and in novel-

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

reading we are all Partridges, we only believe in the novelist's creations when he shows us that he believes in them himself. Finally, this pestilence attacks in literature the form no less than the essence, the integuments even more than the vitals. Hence arises the dominant belief that mannerism is vicious; and accordingly critics have erected the ideal of a style stripped of everything special or peculiar, a style which should be to thought what light is to the sun. Now this pure white light of style is as impossible as undesirable; it *must* be splintered into colour by the refracting media of the individual mind, and humanity will always prefer the colour. Theoretically we ought to have no mannerisms; practically we cannot help having them, and without them style would be flavourless—'faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null.' Men will not drink distilled water; it is entirely pure and entirely insipid. The object of writing is to communicate individuality, the object of style adequately to embody that individuality; and since in every individuality worth anything there are characteristic peculiarities, these must needs be reproduced in the embodiment. So reproduced we call them mannerisms. They correspond to those little unconscious tricks of voice, manner, gesture, in a friend which are to us the friend himself, and which we would not forgo. It is affected to imitate another's tricks of demeanour: similarly, it is affected to imitate another's mannerisms.

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

We should avoid as far as possible in conversation passing conventionalities of speech, because they are brainless; similarly, we should avoid as far as possible in writing the mannerisms of our age, because they corrupt originality. But in essence, mannerisms—individual mannerisms, are a season of style, and happily unavoidable. It is, for instance, stated in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that De Quincey is not a manneristic writer; and, so put, the assertion has much truth. Yet he is full of mannerisms, mannerisms which every student lovingly knows, and without which the essayist would not be our very own De Quincey.

We say, therefore: Guard against this seductive principle of perfection. Order yourselves to a wise conformity with that Nature who cannot for the life of her create a brain without making one half of it weaker than the other half, or even a fool without a flaw in his folly; who cannot set a nose straight on a man's face, and whose geometrical drawing would be tittered at by half the pupils of South Kensington. Consider who is the standing modern oracle of perfection, and what resulted from *his* interpretation of it. 'Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.' No; it is half a pound of muscle to the square inch—and *that* is no trifle. One satisfactory reflection we have in concluding. Wherever else the reader may be grieved by perfection, this article, at least, is sacred from the accursed thing.

THE WAY OF IMPERFECTION

Now, how much of all this do we mean? Hearken, O reader, to an apologue.

Once on a time there was a hypochondriac, who—though his digestion was excellent—believed that his delicate system required a most winnowed choice of viands. His physician, in order to humour him, prescribed a light and carefully varied diet. But the hypochondriac was not satisfied.

‘I want to know, Doctor,’ he said, ‘how much of this food really contributes to the building up of my system, and how much is waste material!’

‘That,’ observed the sage physician, ‘I cannot possibly tell you without recondite analysis and nice calculation.’

‘Then,’ said the hypochondriac, in a rage, ‘I will not eat your food. You are an impostor, Sir, and a charlatan, and I believe now your friends who told me that you were a homœopath in disguise.’

‘My dear Sir,’ replied the unmoved physician, ‘if you will eat nothing but what is entire nutriment, you will soon need to consult, not a doctor, but a chameleon. To what purpose are your digestive organs, unless to secrete what is nutritious, and excrete what is innutritious!’

And the moral is—no, the reader shall have a pleasure denied to him in his outraged childhood. He that hath understanding, let him understand.

A RENEGADE POET ON THE POET

A POET is one who endeavours to make the worst of both worlds. For he is thought seldom to make provision for himself in the next life, and 'tis odds if he gets any in this. The world will have nothing with his writings because they are not of the world; nor the religious, because they are not of religion. He is suspect of the worldly, because of his unworldliness, and of the religious for the same reason. For there is a way of the world in religion, no less than in irreligion. Nay, though he should frankly cast in his lot with the profane, he is in no better case with them; for he alone of men, though he travel to the Pit, picks up no company by the way; but has a contrivance to evade Scripture, and find out a narrow road to damnation. Indeed, if the majority of men go to the nether abodes, 'tis the most hopeful argument I know of his salvation; for 'tis inconceivable he should ever do as other men.

Mr Robert Louis Stevenson does not stick to affirm that the *littérateur* in general is but a poor devil of a fellow, who lives to please, and earns his bread by doing what he likes. Let this mere son of joy, says Mr Stevenson, sleek down his fine airs before men who are of some use in the world. Yet if religion be useful, so is poetry

A RENEGADE POET ON THE POET

For poetry is the teacher of beauty; and without beauty men would soon lose the conception of a God, and exchange God for the devil: as indeed happens at this day among many savages where the worships of ugliness and of the devil flourish together. Whence it was, doubtless, that poetry and religion were of old so united, as is seen in the prophetic books of the Bible. Where men are not kept in mind of beauty they become lower than the beasts; for a dog, I will maintain, is a very tolerable judge of beauty, as appears from the fact that any liberally educated dog does, in a general way, prefer a woman to a man. The instinct of men is against this *renegado* of a Robert Louis. Though Butler justly observes that all men love and admire clothes, but scorn and despise him that made them, 'tis of tailors that he speaks. A *modiste* is held in as fair a reverence as any tradesman; and 'tis evident that the ground of the difference is because a *modiste* has some connexion with art and beauty, but a tailor only with ugliness and utility. There is no utilitarian but will class a soapmaker as a worthy and useful member of the community; yet is there no necessity why a man should use soap. Nay, if necessity be any criterion of usefulness (and surely that is useful which is necessary), the universal practice of mankind will prove poetry to be more useful than soap; since there is no recorded age in which men did not use poetry, but for some odd thousand years the world got

A RENEGADE POET ON THE POET

on very tolerably well without soap. Look closely into the matter, and there are no people really useful to a man, in the strict utilitarian sense, but butchers and bakers, for they feed man; builders, for they house a man; women, for they help him into the world; and doctors and soldiers, for they help him out of it.

Then, too, this rogue of an R. L. S., I doubt me (plague on him! I cannot get him out of my head), has found writing pretty utilitarian—to himself; and utility begins at home, I take it. Does he not eat and drink romances, and has he not dug up Heaven knows what riches (the adventurer!) in *Treasure Island*? And as for usefulness to other men, since we must have that or be ignoble, it seems—is there no utility in pleasure, pray you, when it makes a man's heart the better for it; as do, I am very certain, sun, and flowers, and Stevensons?

Did we give in to that sad dog of a Robert Louis, we must needs set down the poor useless poet as a son of joy. But the title were an irony more mordant than the title of the hapless ones to whom it likens him. *Filles de joie*? O rather *filles d'amertume*! And if the pleasure they so mournfully purvey were lofty and purging as it is abysmal and corrupting, then would Stevenson's parallel be just; but *then*, too, from ignoble victims they would become noble ministrants. 'Tis a difference which vitiates the whole comparison, O careless player with the toys of the gods! whom we have taken, I warrant

A RENEGADE POET ON THE POET

me, more gravely than you take your whimsical self in this odd pleasantry!

Like his sad sisters, but with *that* transfiguring distinction, the poet sows in sorrow that men may reap in joy. He serves his pleasure, say you, R. L. S.? 'Tis a strange pleasure, if so it be. He loves his art? No, his art loves *him*; cleaves to him when she has become unwelcome, a very weariness of the flesh. He is the sorry sport of a mischievous convention. The traditions of his craft, fortified by the unreasonable and misleading lessons of those sages who have ever instructed the poet in the things that make for his better misery, persuade him that he can be no true singer except he slight the world. Wordsworth has taught him a most unnecessary apprehension lest the world should be too much with him; which, to be sure, was very singular in Wordsworth, who never had the world with him till he was come near to going out of it. The poor fool, therefore, devotes assiduous practice to acquiring an art which comes least natural to him of all men; and, after employing a world of pains to scorn the world, is strangely huffed that it should return the compliment in kind. There is left him no better remedy but, having spent his youth in alienating its opinion, to spend his manhood in learning to despise its opinion. And though it be a hard matter to contemn the world, 'tis a yet harder matter to contemn its contempt. I regard the villainous misleaders of poets who have preached up these doctrines as

A RENEGADE POET ON THE POET

all one for selfish cruelty with those who maintained the tradition of operatic eunuchs; and would have them equally suppressed by Christian sentiment. For they have procured the severance of the one from his kind to gratify their understanding, as of the other to gratify their ear.

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

MARSH, and night. There are sounds; no man shall say what sounds. There are shadows; no man shall say what shadows. There is light; were there not shadow, no man should call it light. The landscape is a sketch blotted in with smoke of Erebus, and greys from the cheek of death: those trees which threaten from the horizon—they are ranked apparitions, no boon of gracious God. The heaven is a blear copy of the land. Athwart the saturnine marsh, runs long, pitilessly straight, ghastly with an inward pallor (for no gleam dwells on it from the sky), the leprous, pined, infernal watercourse; a water for the Plutonian naiads—exhaling cold perturbation. It is a stream, a land, a heaven, pernicious to the heart of man; created only for

The abhorred estate
Of empty shades, and disembodied elves.

Over this comes up of a sudden an unlawful moon. My very heart blanches. But a voice which is not the voice of reed, or sedge, or flag, or wind, yet is as the voice of each, says: 'Fear not; it is I, whom you know.' I know her, this power that has parted from the side of Terror; she is Sadness, and we are companions of old. Yet not here am I most familiar with her presence; far oftener have I found her lurking in the blocked-out, weighty shadows which fall

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

from the tyrannous sun. We love the tyrannous sun, she and I.

I know her, for I am of the age, and the age is hers. Alas for the nineteenth century, with so much pleasure, and so little joy; so much learning, and so little wisdom; so much effort, and so little fruition; so many philosophers, and such little philosophy; so many seers, and such little vision; so many prophets, and such little foresight; so many teachers, and such an infinite wild vortex of doubt! the one divine thing left to us is Sadness. Even our virtues take her stamp; the intimacy of our loves is born of despair; our very gentleness to our children is because we know how short their time. 'Eat,' we say, 'eat, drink, and be merry; for to-morrow ye are men.'

I know her; and praise, knowing. Foolishly we shun this shunless Sadness; fondly we deem of her as but huntress of men, who is tender and the bringer of tenderness to those she visits with her fearful favours. A world without joy were more tolerable than a world without sorrow. Without sadness where were brotherliness? For in joy is no brotherliness, but only a boon-companionship. She is the Spartan sauce which gives gusto to the remainder-viands of life, the broken meats of love. 'The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' Her servitors rise in the hierarchy of being: to woman, in particular, hardly comes the gracious gift of sweetness till her soul has been excavated by pain. Even

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

a dog in sadness is nearer to the level and the heart of man. She has her dark *accolade*, her sombre patents of nobility; but the titles of that abhorred peerage are clemently and benignly unsuccessive. Our sweetest songs are from her, Shelley knew; but he needed not to have limited the benefaction by song. She is not fair, poor Grief; yet in her gift is highest fairness. Love, says Plato, is unbeautiful: yet Love makes all things beautiful. And all things take on beauty which pass into the hueless flame of *her aureole*. It may chance to one, faring through a wet grey day-fall, that suddenly from behind him spurts the light of the sinking sun. Instantly, the far windows of unseen homesteads break into flash through the rain-smoke, the meads run over with yellow light, the scattered trees are splashed with saffron. He turns about towards the fountain of the splendid surprise—sees but a weeping sundown of pallid and sickly gold. So, throughout humanity, my eyes discern a mourning loveliness; so I turn expectant—‘What, pale Sorrow? Could all this have been indeed from you? And give you so much beauty that no dower of it remains for your own?’ Nay, but my vision was unversed when I disvalued her comeliness, and I looked not with the looking of her lovers.

Nay, but to our weak mortality the extremity of immitigate beauty is inapprehensible save through reflection and dilution. Sorrow is fair with an unmortal fairness, which we see not till

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

it is humanized in the sorrowful. The sweetest smiles I know, her rod draws forth from the rock of an abiding melancholy; the faces which haunt me from canvas attest that *she* prescribed to the painter's hand; of the most beautiful among the sons of men it is recorded that, though many had seen Him weep, no man had seen Him smile. Nor with beauty end her gifts to men. Solomon, who found in knowledge but increase of sorrow, might have found in sorrow increase of knowledge: it is less wisdom that reveals mourning, than mourning that reveals wisdom—as the Hindoo gathers secret things from gazing in the pool of ink. Power is the reward of sadness. It was after the Christ had wept over Jerusalem that He uttered some of His most august words; it was when His soul had been sorrowful even unto death that His enemies fell prostrate before His voice. Who suffers, conquers. The bruised is the breaker. By torture the Indians try their braves; by torture Life, too, tries the elected victors of her untriumphal triumphs, and of cypress is the commemoration on their brows. Sadness the king-maker, *morituri te salutant!*

Come, therefore, O Sadness, fair and froward and tender; dolorous coquette of the Abyss, who claspest them that shun thee, with fierce kisses that hiss against their tears; wraith of the mists of sighs; mermaid of the flood Cocytus, of the waves which are salt with the weeping of the generations; most menacing seductress,

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

whose harp is stringed with lamentations, whose voice is fatal with disastrous prescience; draw me down, merge me, under thy waters of wail! Of thy undesired loveliness am I desirous, for I have looked long on thy countenance, and can forget it not, nor the footfalls of thy majesty which still shake the precincts of my heart: under the fringed awnings of the sunsets thou art throned, and *thy* face parts the enfolding pavilions of the Evens; thou art very dear to the heart of Night; thou art mistress of the things unmetable which are dreadful to meted life, mistress of the barren hearth and the barren soul of man, mistress of the weepings of death and of birth; the cry of the bride is thine and the pang of the first kiss, the pain which is mortise to delight, the flowers which trail between the ruined chaps of mortality, the over-foliaging death which chequers all human suns. Of thy beauty undesired am I desirous, for knowledge is with thee, and dominion, and piercing, and healing; thou woundest with a thorn of light; thou sittest portress by the gates of hearts; and a sceptred quiet rests regal in thine eyes' sepulchral solitudes, in the tenebrous desolations of thine eyes.

'The over-foliaging death which chequers all human suns.' Even so. Not by Cocytus is delimited her delimitless realm. For I have a vision; and the manner of the vision is this. I see the Angel of life. It (for it may be of either sex) is a mighty grey-winged Angel, with bowed

MOESTITIAE ENCOMIUM

and hidden face, looking into the river of life. And sometimes a waver of sunshine rests upon its grey wings and folded veil, so that I seem to see its face, and to see it exceeding beautiful; and then again the sunlight fades, and I dare not attempt to penetrate that veil, for I imagine the countenance exceeding awful. And I see that within its sad drapery the Angel weeps, and its tears fall into the water of life: but whether they be tears of joy or sorrow, only its Creator knows, not I. I have tasted the water of life where the tears of the Angel fell; and the taste was bitter as brine.

Then, say you, they were tears of sorrow? The tears of joy are salt, as well as the tears of sorrow. And in that sentence are many meanings.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

IN a city of the future, among a people bearing a name I know not, lived Florentian the poet, whose place was high in the retinue of Fortune. Young, noble, popular, influential, he had succeeded to a rich inheritance, and possessed the natural gifts which gain the love of women. But the seductions which Florentian followed were darker and more baleful than the seductions of women; for they were the seductions of knowledge and intellectual pride. In very early years he had passed from the pursuit of natural to the pursuit of unlawful science; he had conquered power where conquest is disaster, and power servitude.

But the ambition thus gratified had elsewhere suffered check. It was the custom of this people that among their poets he who by universal acclaim outsoared all competitors should be crowned with laurel in public ceremony. Now between Florentian and this distinction there stood a rival. Seraphin was a spirit of higher reach than Florentian, and the time was nearing fast when even the slow eyes of the people must be opened to a supremacy which Florentian himself acknowledged in his own heart. Hence arose in his lawless soul an insane passion; so that all which he had seemed to him as nothing beside that which he had not, and the compassing of this barred achievement became to him the one worthy object of existence. Repeated

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

essay only proved to him the inadequacy of his native genius, and he turned for aid to the power which he served. Nor was the power of evil slow to respond. It promised him assistance that should procure him his heart's desire, but demanded in return a crime before which even the unscrupulous selfishness of Florentian paled. For he had sought and won the hand of Aster, daughter to the Lady Urania, and the sacrifice demanded from him was no other than the sacrifice of his betrothed, the playmate of his childhood. The horror of such a suggestion prevailed for a time over his unslacked ambition. But he, who believed himself a strong worker of ill, was in reality a weak follower of it; he believed himself a Vathek, he was but a Faust: continuous pressure and gradual familiarization could warp him to any sin. Moreover his love for Aster had been gradually and unconsciously sapped by the habitual practice of evil. So God smote Florentian, that his antidote became to him his poison, and love the regenerator love the destroyer. A strong man, he might have been saved by love: a weak man, he was damned by it.

The palace of Florentian was isolated in the environs of the city; and on the night before his marriage he stood in the room known to his domestics as the Chamber of Statues. Both its appearance, and the sounds which (his servants averred) sometimes issued from it, contributed to secure for him the seclusion that he desired

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

whenever he sought this room. It was a chamber in many ways strongly characteristic of its owner, a chamber 'like his desires lift upwards and exalt,' but neither wide nor far-penetrating; while its furnishing revealed his fantastic and somewhat childish fancy. At the extremity which faced the door there stood, beneath a crucifix, a small marble altar, on which burned a fire of that strange greenish tinge communicated by certain salts. Except at this extremity, the walls were draped with deep violet curtains bordered by tawny gold, only half displayed by the partial illumination of the place. The light was furnished from lamps of coloured glass, sparsely hung along the length of the room, but numerous clustered about the altar: lamps of diverse tints, amber, peacock-blue, and changeably mingled harmonies of green like the scales on a beetle's back. Above them were coiled thinnest serpentings of suspended crystal, hued like the tongues in a wintry hearth, flame-colour, violet, and green; so that, as in the heated current from the lamps the snakes twirled and flickered, and their bright shadows twirled upon the wall, they seemed at length to undulate their twines, and the whole altar became surrounded with a fiery fantasy of sinuous stains.

On the right hand side of the chamber there rose—appearing almost animated in the half lustre—three statues of colossal height, painted to resemble life; for in this matter Florentian followed the taste of the ancient Greeks. They

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

were statues of three poets, and, not insignificantly, of three pagan poets. The first two, Homer and Æschylus, presented no singularity beyond their Titanic proportions; but it was altogether otherwise with the third statue, which was unusual in conception. It was the figure of Virgil; not the Virgil whom *we* know, but the Virgil of mediæval legend, Virgil magician and poet. It bent forwards and downwards towards the spectator; its head was uncircled by any laurel, but on the flowing locks was an impression as of where the wreath had rested; its lowered left hand proffered the magician's rod, its outstretched right poised between light finger-tips the wreath of gilded metal whose impress seemed to linger on its hair: the action was as though it were about to place the laurel on the head of some one beneath. This was the carved embodiment of Florentian's fanatical ambition, a perpetual memento of the double end at which his life was aimed. On the necromancer's rod he could lay his hand, but the laurel of poetic supremacy hung yet beyond his reach. The opposite side of the chamber had but one object to arrest attention: a curious head upon a pedestal, a head of copper with a silver beard, the features not unlike those of a Pan, and the tongue protruded as in derision. This, with a large antique clock, completed the noticeable garniture of the room.

Up and down this apartment Florentian

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

paced for long, his countenance expressive of inward struggle, till his gaze fell upon the figure of Virgil. His face grew hard; with an air of sudden decision he began to act. Taking from its place the crucifix he threw it on the ground; taking from its pedestal the head he set it on the altar; and it seemed to Florentian as if he reared therewith a demon on the altar of his heart, round which also coiled burning serpents. He sprinkled, in the flame which burned before the head, some drops from a vial; he wounded his arm, and moistened from the wound the idol's tongue, and, stepping back, he set his foot upon the prostrate cross.

A darkness rose like a fountain from the altar, and curled downward through the room as wine through water, until every light was obliterated. Then from out the darkness grew gradually the visage of the idol, soaked with fire; its face was as the planet Mars, its beard as white-hot wire that seethed and crept with heat; and there issued from the lips a voice that threw Florentian on the ground: 'Whom seekest thou?' Twice was the question repeated; and then, as if the display of power were sufficient, the gloom gathered up its edges like a mantle and swept inwards towards the altar; where it settled in a cloud so dense as to eclipse even the visage of fire. A voice came forth again; but a voice that sounded not the same; a voice that seemed to have withered in crossing the confines of existence,

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

and to traverse illimitable remotenesses beyond the imagining of man; a voice melancholy with a boundless calm, the calm not of a crystalline peace but of a marmoreal despair, 'Knowest thou me; what I am?'

Vanity of man! He who had fallen prostrate before this power now rose to his feet with the haughty answer, 'My deity and my slave!'

The unmoved voice held on its way:

'Scarce high enough for thy deity; too high for thy slave, I am pain exceeding great; and the desolation that is at the heart of things, in the barren heath and the barren soul. I am terror without beauty, and force without strength, and sin without delight. I beat my wings against the cope of Eternity, as thou thine against the window of Time. Thou knowest me not, but I know thee, Florentian, what thou art and what thou wouldst. Thou wouldst have and wouldst not give, thou wouldst not render, yet wouldst receive. This cannot be with me. Thou art but half baptized with my baptism, yet wouldst have thy supreme desire. In thine own blood thou wast baptized, and I gave my power to serve thee; thou wouldst have my spirit to inspire thee—thou must be baptized in blood not thine own!'

'Any way but one way!' said Florentian, shuddering.

'One way; no other way. Knowest thou not that in wedding thee to her thou givest me a rival? Thinkest thou ^w_u my spirit can dwell

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

beside her spirit? Thou must renounce her or me: aye, thou wilt lose not only all thou darest to sin for, but all thou hast already sinned for. Render me her body for my temple, and I render thee my spirit to inhabit it. This supreme price thou must pay for thy supreme wish. I ask not her soul. Give that to the God Whom she serves, give her body to me whom thou servest. Why hesitate? It is too late to hesitate, for the time is at hand to act. Choose, before this cloud dissolve which is now dissolving. But remember: thine ambition thou mightest have had; love thou art too deep damned to have.'

The cloud turned from black to grey. 'I consent!' cried Florentian, impetuously.

* * * * *

Three years—what years! since I planted in the grave the laurel which will soon now reach its height; and the fatal memory is heavy upon me, the shadow of my laurel is as the shadow of funeral yew. If confession indeed give ease, I, who am deprived of all other confession, may yet find some appeasement in confessing to this paper. I am not penitent; yet I will do fiercest penance. With the scourge of inexorable recollection I will tear open my scars. With the cuts of a pitiless analysis I make the post-mortem examen of my crime.

Even now can I feel the passions of that moment when (since the forefated hour was

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

not till midnight), leaving her under the influence of the merciful potion which should save *her* from the agony of knowledge and *me* from the agony of knowing that she knew, I sought, in the air of night and in hurrying swiftness, the resolution of which she had deprived me. The glow-worm lamps went out as I sped by, the stars in rainy pools leaped up and went out, too, as if both worm and star were quenched by the shadow of my passing, until I stopped exhausted on the bridge, and looked down into the river. How dark it ran, how deep, how pauseless; how unruffled by a memory of its ancestral hills! Wisely unruffled, perchance. When it first danced down from its native source, did it not predestine all the issues of its current, every darkness through which it should flow, every bough which it should break, every leaf which it should whirl down in its way? Could it, if it would, revoke its waters, and run upward to the holy hills? No; the first step includes all sequent steps; when I did my first evil, I did also this evil; years ago had this shaft been launched, though it was but now curving to its mark; years ago had I smitten her, though she was but now staggering to her fall. Yet I hesitated to act who had already acted, I ruffled my current which I could not draw in. When at length, after long wandering, I retraced my steps, I had not resolved, I had recognized that I could resolve no longer.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

She only cried three times. Three times, O my God!—no, not *my* God.

It was close on midnight, and I felt her only, (she was not visible,) as she lay at the feet of Virgil, magician and poet. The lamp had fallen from my hand, and I dared not relume it. I even placed myself between her and the light of the altar, though the salt-green fire was but the spectre of a flame. I reared my arm; I shook; I faltered. At that moment, with a deadly voice, the accomplice-hour gave forth its sinister command.

I swear I struck not the first blow. Some violence seized my hand, and drove the poniard down. Whereat she cried; and I, frenzied, dreading detection, dreading, above all, her wakening,—I struck again, and again she cried; and yet again, and yet again she cried. Then—her eyes opened. I *saw* them open, through the gloom I saw them; through the gloom they were revealed to me, that I might see them to my hour of death. An awful recognition, an unspeakable consciousness grew slowly into them. Motionless with horror they were fixed on mine, motionless with horror mine were fixed on them, as she wakened into death.

How long had I seen them? I saw them still. There was a buzzing in my brain as if a bell had ceased to toll. How long had it ceased to toll? I know not. Has any bell been tolling? I know not. All my senses are resolved into one sense, and that is frozen to those eyes. Silence

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

now, at least; abysmal silence; except the sound (or is the sound in me?), the sound of dripping blood; except that the flame upon the altar sputters, and hisses, and bickers, as if it licked its jaws. Yes, there is another sound—hush, hark!—It is the throbbing of my heart. Not—no, nevermore the throbbing of *her* heart! The loud pulse dies slowly away, as I hope my life is dying; and again I hear the licking of the flame.

A mirror hung opposite to me, and for a second, in some mysterious manner, without ever ceasing to behold the eyes, I beheld also the mirrored flame. The hideous, green, writhing tongue was streaked and flaked with *red!* I swooned, if swoon it can be called; swooned to the mirror, swooned to all about me, swooned to myself, but swooned not to those eyes.

Strange, that no one has taken me, me for such long hours shackled in a gaze! It is night again, is it not? Nay, I remember, I have swooned; what now stirs me from my stupor? Light; the guilty gloom is shuddering at the first sick rays of day. Light? not that, not that; anything but that. Ah! the horrible traitorous light, that will denounce me to myself, that will unshroud to me my dead, that will show me all the monstrous fact. I swooned indeed.

When I recovered consciousness, It was risen from the ground, and kissed me with the kisses of Its mouth.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

They told me during the day that the great bell of the cathedral, though no man rang it, had sounded thrice at midnight. It was not a fancy, therefore, that I heard a bell toll *there*, where—when she cried three times. And they asked me jestingly if marriage was ageing me already. I took a mirror to find what they meant. On my forehead were graven three deep wrinkles; and in the locks which fell over my right shoulder I beheld, long and prominent, three white hairs. I carry those marks to this hour. They and a dark stain on the floor at the feet of Virgil are the sole witnesses to that night.

It is three years, I have said, since then; and how have I prospered? Has Tartarus fulfilled its terms of contract, as I faithfully and frightfully fulfilled mine? Yes. In the course which I have driven through every obstacle and every scruple, I have followed at least no phantom-lure. I have risen to the heights of my aspiration, I have overtopped my sole rival. True, it is a tinsel renown; true, Seraphin is still the light-bearer, I but a dragon vomiting infernal fire and smoke which sets the crowd a-gaping. But it is your nature to gape, my good friend of the crowd, and I would have you gape at me. If you prefer to Jove Jove's imitator, what use to be Jove? 'Gods,' you cry; 'what a clatter of swift-footed steeds, and clangour of rapid rolling brazen wheels, and vibrating glare of lamps! Surely, the

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

thunder-maned horses of heaven, the chariot of Olympus; and you must be the mighty Thunderer himself, with the flashing of his awful bolts!' Not so, my short-sighted friend: very laughably otherwise. It is but vain old Salmoneus, gone mad in Elis. I know you, and I know myself. I have what I would have. I work for the present: let Seraphin have the moonshine future, if he lust after it. Present renown means present power; it suffices me that I am supreme in the eyes of my fellow-men. A year since was the laurel decreed to me, and a day ordained for the ceremony: it was only postponed to the present year because of what they thought my calamity. They accounted it calamity, and knew not that it was deliverance. For, my ambition achieved, the compact by which I had achieved it ended, and the demon who had inspired forsook me. Discovery was impossible. A death sudden but natural: how could men know that it was death of the Two-years-dead? I drew breath at length in freedom. For two years It had spoken to me with her lips, used her gestures, smiled her smile:—ingenuity of hell!—for two years the breathing Murder wrought before me, and tortured me in a hundred ways with the living desecration of her form.

Now, relief unspeakable! that vindictive sleuth-hound of my sin has at last lagged from the trail; I have had a year of respite, of release

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

from all torments but those native to my breast; in four days I shall receive the solemn gift of what I already virtually hold; and now, surely, I exult in fruition. If the approach of possession brought not also the approach of recollection, if— Rest, O rest, sad ghost! Is thy grave not deep enough, or the world wide enough, that thou must needs walk the haunted precincts of my heart? Are not spectres there too many, without thee?

Later in the same day. A strange thing has happened to me—if I ought not rather to write a strange nothing. After laying down my pen, I rose and went to the window. I felt the need of some distraction, of escaping from myself. The day, a day in the late autumn, a day of keen winds but bright sunshine, tempted me out: so, putting on cap and mantle, I sallied into the country, where winter pitched his tent on fields yet reddened with the rout of summer. I chose a sheltered lane, whose hedges, little visited by the gust, still retained much verdure; and I walked along, gazing with a sense of physical refreshment at the now rare green. As my eyes so wandered, while the mind for a time let slip its care, they were casually caught by the somewhat peculiar trace which a leaf-eating caterpillar had left on one of the leaves. I carelessly outstretched my hand, plucked from the hedge the leaf, and examined it as I strolled. The marking—a large marking

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

which traversed the greater part of the surface—took the shape of a rude but distinct figure, the figure 3. Such a circumstance, thought I, might by a superstitious man be given a personal application; and I fell idly to speculating how it might be applied to myself.

Curious!—I stirred uneasily; I felt my cheek pale, and a chill which was not from the weather creep through me. Three years since *that*; three strokes—three cries—three tolls of the bell—three lines on my brow—three white hairs in my head! I laughed: but the laugh rang false. Then I said, ‘Childishness,’ threw the leaf away, walked on, hesitated, walked back, picked it up, walked on again, looked at it again. Then, finding I could not laugh myself out of the fancy, I began to reason myself out of it. Even were a supernatural warning probable, a warning refers not to the past but to the future. This referred only to the past, it told me only what I knew already. *Could* it refer to the future? To the bestowal of the laurel? No; that was four days hence, and on the same day was the anniversary of what I feared to name, even in thought. Suddenly I stood still, stabbed to the heart by an idea. I was wrong. The enlaurelling had been postponed to a year from the day on which my supposed affliction was discovered. Now this, although it took place on the day of terrible anniversary, was not known till the day ensuing. Consequently, though it wanted four

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

days to the bestowal of the laurel, it lacked but three days to the date of my crime. The chain of coincidence was complete. I dropped the leaf as if it had death in it, and strove to evade, by rapid motion and thinking of other things, the idea which appalled me. But, as a man walking in a mist circles continually to the point from which he started, so, in whatever direction I turned the footsteps of my mind, they wandered back to that unabandonable thought. I returned trembling to the house.

Of course it is nothing; a mere coincidence, that is all. Yes; a mere coincidence, perhaps, if it had been *one* coincidence. But when it is seven coincidences! Three stabs, three cries, three tolls, three lines, three hairs, three years, three days; and on the very date when these coincidences meet, the key to them is put into my hands by the casual work of an insect on a casual leaf, casually plucked. This day alone of all days in my life the scattered rays converge; they are instantly focussed and flashed on my mind by a leaf! It may be a coincidence, only a coincidence; but it is a coincidence at which my marrow sets. I will write no further till the day comes. If by that time anything has happened to confirm my dread, I will record what has chanced.

One thing broods over me with the oppression of certainty. If this incident be indeed a warning that but three days stand as barriers between me and nearing justice, then doom

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

will come upon me at the unforgettable minute when it came on her.

The third day.—It is an hour before midnight, and I sit in my room of statues. I dare not sleep if I could sleep; and I write, because the rushing thoughts move slower through the turnstile of expression. I have chosen this place to make what may be my last vigil and last notes, partly from obedience to an inexplicable yet comprehensible fascination, partly from a deliberate resolve. I would face the lightning of vengeance on the very spot where I most tempt its stroke, that if it strike not I may cease to fear its striking. Here then I sit to tease with final questioning the Sibyl of my destiny. With *final* questioning; for never since the first shock have I ceased to question her, nor she to return me riddling answers. She unrolls her volume till my sight and heart ache at it together. I have been struck by innumerable deaths; I have perished under a fresh doom every day, every hour—in these last hours, every minute. I write in black thought; and tear, as soon as written, guess after guess at fate till the floor of my brain is littered with them.

That the deed has been discovered—that seems to me most probable, that is the conjecture which oftenest recurs. Appallingly probable! Yet how improbable, could I only reason it. Aye, but I cannot reason it. What reason will be left me, if I survive this hour?

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

What, indeed, have I to do with reason, or has reason to do with this, where all is beyond reason, where the very foundation of my dread is unassailable simply because it is unreasonable? What crime can be interred so cunningly, but it will toss in its grave, and tumble the sleeked earth above it? Or some hidden witness may have beheld me, or the prudently-kept imprudence of this writing may have encountered some unsuspected eye. In any case the issue is the same; the hour which struck down her will also strike down me: I shall perish on the scaffold or at the stake, unaided by my occult powers; for I serve a master who is the prince of cowards, and can fight only from ambush. Be it by these ways, or by any of the countless intricacies that my restless mind has unravelled, the vengeance will come: its occasion may be an accident of the instant, a wandering mote of chance; but the vengeance is pre-ordained and inevitable. When the Alpine avalanche is poised for descent, the most trivial cause—a casual shout—will suffice to start the loosened ruin on its way; and so the mere echoes of the clock that beats out midnight will disintegrate upon me the precipitant wrath.

Repent? Nay, nay, it could not have been otherwise than it was; the defile was close behind me, I could but go forward, forward. If I was merciless to her, was I not more merciless to myself; could I hesitate to sacrifice her life,

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

who did not hesitate to sacrifice my soul? I do not repent, I cannot repent; it is a thing for inconsequent weaklings. To repent your purposes is comprehensible, to repent your deeds most futile. To shake the tree, and then not gather the fruit—a fool's act! Aye, but if the fruit be not worth the gathering? If this fame was not worth the sinning for—this fame, with the multitude's clapping hands half-drowned by the growl of winds that comes in gusts through the unbarred gate of hell? If I am miserable with it, and might have been happy without it? With her, without ambition—yes, it might have been. Wife and child! I have more in my heart than I have hitherto written. I have an intermittent pang of loss. Yes, I, murderer, worse than murderer, have still passions that are not deadly, but tender.

I met a child to-day; a child with great candour of eyes. They who talk of children's instincts are at fault: she knew not that hell was in my soul, she knew only that softness was in my gaze. She had been gathering wild flowers, and offered them to me. To me, to *me!* I was inexpressibly touched and pleased, curiously touched and pleased. I spoke to her gently, and with open confidence she began to talk. Heaven knows it was little enough she talked of! Commonest common things, pettiest childish things, fondest foolish things. Of her school, her toys, the strawberries in her garden, her little brothers and sisters—nothing, surely,

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

to interest any man. Yet I listened enchanted. How simple it all was; how strange, how wonderful, how sweet! And she knew not that my eyes were anhungered of her, she knew not that my ears were gluttonous of her speech, she could not have understood it had I told her; none could, none. For all this exquisiteness is among the commonplaces of life to other men, like the raiment they indue at rising, like the bread they weary of eating, like the daisies they trample under blind feet; knowing not what raiment is to him who has felt the ravening wind, knowing not what bread is to him who has lacked all bread, knowing not what daisies are to him whose feet have wandered in grime. How can these elves be to such men what they are to me, who am damned to the eternal loss of them? Why was I never told that the laurel could soothe no hunger, that the laurel could staunch no pang, that the laurel could return no kiss? But needed I to be told it, did I not know it? Yes, my brain knew it, my heart knew it not. And now——.

At half-past eleven.

O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!

Just! they are the words of that other trafficker in his own soul.* Me, like him, the time tracks swiftly down; I can fly no farther, I fall

* Faustus, in the last scene of Marlowe's play.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

exhausted, the fanged hour fastens on my throat: they will break into the room, my guilt will burst its grave and point at me; I shall be seized, I shall be condemned, I shall be executed; I shall be no longer I, but a nameless lump on which they pasture worms. Or perhaps the hour will herald some yet worse thing, some sudden death, some undreamable, ghastly surprise—ah! what is that at the door there, that, that with *her* eyes? Nothing: the door is shut. Surely, surely, I am not to die now? Destiny steals upon a man asleep or off his guard, not when he is awake, as I am awake, at watch, as I am at watch, wide-eyed, vigilant, alert. Oh, miserable hope! Watch the eaves of your house, to bar the melting of the snow; or guard the gateways of the clouds, to bar the forthgoing of the lightning; or guard the four quarters of the heavens, to bar the way of the winds: but what prescient hand can close the Hecatompyloi of fate, what might arrest the hurrying retributions whose multitudinous tramlings converge upon me in a hundred presages, in a hundred shrivelling menaces, down all the echoing avenues of doom? It is but a question of which shall arrive the fleetest and the first. I cease to think. I am all a waiting and a fear. *Twelve!*

At half-past two. Midnight is stricken, and I am unstricken. Guilt, indeed, makes babies of the wisest. Nothing happened; absolutely

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

nothing. For two hours I watched with lessening expectance: still nothing. I laughed aloud between sudden light-heartedness and scorn. Ineffable fool that I was, I had conjured up death, judgement, doom—heaven knows what, all because a caterpillar had crawled along a leaf! And then, as I might have done before had not terror vitiated my reason, I made essay whether I still retained my power. I retain it. Let me set down for my own enhardiment what the oracle replied to my questioning.

‘Have I not promised and kept my promise, shall I not promise and keep? You would be crowned and you shall be crowned. Does your way to achievement lie through misery?—is not that the way to all worth the achieving? Are not half the mill-wheels of the world turned by waters of pain? Mountain summit that would rise into the clouds, can you not suffer the eternal snows? If your heart fail you, turn; I chain you not. I will restore you your oath. I will cancel your bond. Go to the God Who has tenderness for such weaklings: *my* service requires the strong.’

What a slave of my fancy was I! Excellent fool, what! pay the forfeit of my sin and forgo the recompense, recoil from the very gates of conquest? I fear no longer: the crisis is past, the day of promise has begun, I go forward to my destiny; I triumph.

* * * * *

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

Florentian laid down his pen, and passed into dreams. He saw the crowd, the throne, the waiting laurel, the sunshine, the flashing of rich robes; he heard the universal shout of acclaim, he felt the flush of intoxicating pride. He rose, his form dilating with exultation, and passed, lamp in hand, to the foot of the third statue. The colossal figure leaned above him with its outstretched laurel, its proffered wand, its melancholy face and flowing hair; so lifelike was it that in the wavering flame of the lamp the laurel seemed to move. 'At length, Virgil,' said Florentian, 'at length I am equal with you; Virgil, magician and poet, your crown shall descend on me!'

One. . Two. . Three! The strokes of the great clock shook the chamber, shook the statues; and after the strokes had ceased, the echoes were still prolonged. Was it only an echo?

Boom!

Or—*was it the cathedral bell?*

Boom!

It *was* the cathedral bell. Yet a third time, sombre, surly, ominous as the bay of a nearing bloodhound, the sound came down the wind.

Boom!

Horror clutched his heart. He looked up at the statue. He turned to fly. But a few hairs, tangled round the lowered wand, for a single instant held him like a cord. He knew, without seeing, that they were the three white hairs.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

When, later in the day, a deputation of officials came to escort Florentian to the place fixed for his coronation, they were informed that he had been all night in his Chamber of Statues, nor had he yet made his appearance. They waited while the servant left to fetch him. The man was away some time, and they talked gaily as they waited: a bird beat its wings at the window; through the open door came in a stream of sunlight, and the fragmentary song of a young girl passing:

Oh, syne she tripped, and syne she ran
(The water-lily's a lightsome flower),
All for joy and sunshine weather
The lily and Marjorie danced together,
As he came down from Langley Tower.

There's a blackbird sits on Langley Tower,
And a throstle on Glenlindy's tree;
The throstle sings 'Robin, my heart's love!'
And the blackbird, 'Bonnie, sweet Marjorie!'

The man came running back at last, with a blanched face and a hushed voice. 'Come,' he said, 'and see!'

They went and saw.

At the feet of Virgil's statue Florentian lay dead. A dark pool almost hid that dark stain on the ground, the three lines on his forehead were etched in blood, and across the shattered brow lay a ponderous gilded wreath; while over

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

the extinguished altar-fire the idol seemed to quiver its derisive tongue.

'He is already laurelled,' said one, breaking at length the silence; 'we come too late.'

Too late. The crown of Virgil, magician and poet, had descended on him.

THE POETS' POET

HERE is a poet who is just poetry, and the stuff of poetry; whose narrative—a mere vehicle for his ideas—is a tissue of romantic fancy, careless of manners or character, of interest epic or dramatic. He has been much beloved of poets, and little of that vague entity, the 'general reader.' Shakespeare had read him much: Milton called him master; he made Cowley a poet two hundred years ago, Keats a poet the other day, and who shall say how many in the illustrious line between? Raleigh and Sidney were his lovers in life; for they also were poets. Raleigh might hail in him a double kinship, as poet and explorer. Was not Spenser indeed a great explorer, among the greatest in that age of adventure, when a man got up in the morning and said, 'I have an idea. If you have nothing better to do, let us go continent-hunting.' And he that had not found an island or so was accounted a fellow of no spirit.

Well, Spenser for his share rediscovered Poetry; or, at least, made Poetry possible. It is among the strangest of strange things that the early sixteenth century should have lisped and stammered where the fourteenth had sung with full mouth; that where the middle ages had led with Chaucer, it should follow with Skelton; that Surrey, Wyatt, and Spenser's immediate forerunners should doubtfully experiment in an art of which Chaucer had been consummate master. The tongue of Chaucer was changed;

THE POETS' POET

the methods of Chaucer held good. Yet the poets were a people of a stammering tongue; their art had gone back to infancy; and things were at such a pass that the egregious Harvey was for setting the English Muses to their *gradus ad Parnassum* and the penning (singing were a misnomer) of obscene horrors styled hexameters, elegiacs, and the like. Then came Spenser, and found again that land of Poetry, more golden than any El Dorado towards which Raleigh ever set his bold-questing keel. He joined hands with Chaucer across the years: even the metre of his earlier poems is Chaucer's. A swarm of adventurers followed their Columbus; and English Poetry was.

For all which, outside the poets, he got little more recognition than he gets now. To a cultured Queen and her Court he cried, in new and unmatched verse, that:

Fame with golden wings aloft doth fly
Above the reach of ruinous decay,
And with brave plumes doth beat the azure sky
Admired of base-born men from far away:
Then who so will with virtuous deeds essay
To mount to heaven, on Pegasus must ride,
And with sweet poets' verse be glorified.

For not to have been dipt in Lethe lake
Could save the son of Thetis from to die;
But that blind bard did him immortal make
With verses dipt in dew of Castaly:
Which made the Eastern Conqueror to cry—
'O fortunate young man, whose virtue found
So brave a trump, thy noble acts to sound!'

THE POETS' POET

What deaf adder could withstand such charming? 'With verses dipt in dew of Castaly'—can you not hear the delicate dewy drip of that exquisitely musical line?

Provide, therefore, ye Princes, while ye may,
That of the Muses ye may honoured be,

exhorted the poet in logical conclusion: and the Princes 'provided'—on the cheap. The Cecils and Elizabeths rated their 'immortality' a good deal below the pay of a foreign spy.

'Greatest Gloriane,' like a many be-rhymed ladies, probably yawned over her *Faëry Queen* and one may be sure never got to the end of it. It would be curious to inquire how many lovers of poetry have read through it or *The Excursion*. The *Faëry Queen* is in truth a poem that no man can read through save as a duty, and in a series of arduous campaigns (so to speak). The later books of it steadily fail in power; but that is not all. The Spenserian stanza, beautiful for a time, in the course of four hundred or so pages becomes a very wearisome and cumbrous narrative form. The repetition of it grows monotonous; it fatigues by the perpetual discontinuity. Spenser himself seems to find it sometimes cumbrous, in the end. You have occasional lines like—

Until they both do hear what she to them will say.

No, the *Faëry Queen* must not be read on end; it is a poem to linger over and dip into. It

THE POETS' POET

is, indeed, as much a series of poems as the *Idylls of the King*. It is not a great poem as its model, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, is a great poem; for Spenser has planned on a scale beyond his physical power of endurance, and its completion would have been only so much superfluous evidence of the fact. Its waning power was not caused by waning genius; for in the same year with the latest books he published his magnificent lyrical poems. But if not a great poem it is great poetry; nay, we might say it contains great poems.

The obvious qualities of it and its author are grown mere truisms. He is princely in fancy rather than imagination. His gift of vision (in a specialized sense of the word) is unapproached. Every one has remarked upon that faculty of seeing visions, and presenting them as before the bodily eye: the *Faëry Queen* is a gallery hung with the rarest tapestries, an endless procession of dream-pictures. There is no emotion, save the emotion of beauty. Yet incidentally, like the exclamations of a dreaming man, he will utter brief passages of tenderest pathos, or exultant joy:

Nought is there under heaven's wide hollowness
That moves more dear compassion of mind,
Than beauty brought to unworthy wretchedness.

The mournful sweetness of those lines is unsurpassable; and they are quintessential Spenser. Yet it is unluckily characteristic of

THE POETS' POET

him, too, that he mars half the effect of this perfect passage by not stopping with its completion, but following it with a line which makes an anti-climax, and is too manifestly inserted for rhyme's sake:

Through envy's snares, or fortune's freaks unkind.

One might almost take that little passage as a text for one's whole disquisition on Spenser. For, after all, it is not in the richly luxuriant descriptive embroidery, or the pictures brushed in with words as with line and colour, which are traditionally quoted by this poet's critics, that the highest Spenser lies. The secret of him is shut in those three lines.

Wherein lies their power? The language is so utterly plain that an uninspired poet would have fallen upon baldness. Yet Spenser is a mine of diction (as was remarked to us by a poet who had worked in that mine). But here he had no need for his gorgeous opulence of diction: a few commonest words, and the spell was worked. It is all a matter of relation: the words take life from each other, and become an organism, as with Coleridge. And it is a matter of music; an integral element in the magic of the passage is its sound. In this necromancy, by which the most elementary words, entering into a secret relation of sense and sound, acquire occult property, Spenser is a master. And that which gives electric life to their relation is the Spenserian subtlety of

THE POETS' POET

emotion. Here it is specifically pathos, at another time it is joyous exultation, or again the pleasure of beauty. But behind and underneath all these emotional forms, the central and abiding quality, the essence of his emotion, is peace, and the radiance of peace. The final effect of all, in this and kindred passages, is lyrical.

Yes, lyrical. We are well-nigh minded to write ourselves down arch-heretics, and say that the *Faëry Queen* is a superb error. Spenser, it almost seems to us, was a supreme lyric poet who, by the influence of tradition and example, was allured to spend his strength in narrative poetry, and found his true path only at the close of his literary career. Throughout the *Faëry Queen* he is happy when he drops narration to dream dreams, and touches his serenest height in some brief, casual access of lyric feeling such as we have quoted. And in his last years, before misfortune silenced him, he wrote an all-too-small, precious handful of lyrics, which cover but a few pages, yet are greater than all his 'great' poem together, flowing with milk and honey of poetry though it be.

In those grand Platonic *Hymns to Beauty*, in the *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*, all his finest qualities are gathered into organic wholes, sublimated by a lyric ardour which is the radiant effluence of central peace. Joy never had such expression as in the *Epithalamion*,

THE POETS' POET

so serenely noble that its intensity of joy may almost be missed, as the swift interflux of the blue heaven cheats us with the aspect of perfect calm. To express supreme joy is the most difficult of tasks (as a critic has remarked), far more difficult than to express intense sadness, which is the chosen aim of most modern poetry. Here it is supremely expressed, in connexion with the culminating point of natural joy; and is ennobled by the interfused presence of something loftier and more perfect than joy—that static joy which is peace. How well could we have forgone the full latter half of the *Faëry Queen* for some twenty more of such consummate lyrics! But Spenser found his greatest gift, his truest line of work, all too late, when the night was closing on him wherein no man can work—the night of poverty, ruin, and sorrow-hastened age.

SIDNEY'S PROSE

AMONG prose-writers a peculiar interest attaches to the poets who have written prose, who can both soar and walk. For to this case the image will not apply of the eagle overbalanced in walking by the weight of his great wings. Nay, far from the poets' being astray in prose-writing, it might plausibly be contended that English prose, as an art, is but a secondary stream of the Pierian fount, and owes its very origin to the poets. The first writer one remembers with whom prose became an art was Sir Philip Sidney. And Sidney was a poet.

If Chaucer, as has been said, is Spring, it is modern, premature Spring, followed by an interval of doubtful weather. Sidney is the very Spring—the later May. And in prose he is the authentic, only Spring. It is a prose full of young joy, and young power, and young inexperience, and young melancholy, which is the wilfulness of joy; full of young fertility, wantoning in its own excess. Every nerve of it is steeped in deliciousness, which one might confuse with the softness of a decadent and effeminate age like our own, so much do the extremes of the literary cycle meet. But there is all the difference between the pliancy of youthful growth and the languor of decay. This martial and fiery progeny of a martial and fiery age is merely relaxing himself

SIDNEY'S PROSE

to the full in the interval of his strenuous life's campaign, indulging the blissful dreams of budding manhood—a virile Keats, one might say. You feel these martial spirits revelling in the whole fibre of his style. It is, indeed, the writing of a child; or, perhaps, of an exceptional boy, who still retains the roaming, luxuriant sweetness of a child's fancy; who has broken into the store-closet of literary conserves, and cloyed himself in delicious contempt of law and ignorance of satiety, tasting all capricious dainties as they come. The *Arcadia* runs honey; with a leisurely deliberation of relish, epicureanly savoured to the full, all alien to our hurried and tormented age.

Sidney's prose is treasurable, not only for its absolute merits, but as the bud from which English prose, that gorgeous and varied flower, has unfolded. It is in every way the reverse of modern prose. Our conditions of hurry carry to excess the abrupt style, resolved into its ultimate elements of short and single sentences. Sidney revels in the periodic style—long sentences, holding in suspension many clauses, which are shepherded to a full and sonorous close. But with him this style is inchoate: it is not yet logically compacted, the clauses do not follow inevitably, are not gradually evolved and expanded like the blossom from the seed. The sentences are loose, often inartificial and tyro-like, tacked together by a profuse employment of relatives and present participles. At times the grammar

SIDNEY'S PROSE

becomes confused, and falls to pieces. But this looseness has a characteristic effect: it conduces to the general quality of Sidney's style. Here, truly, the style is the man. The long, fluctuant sentences, impetuously agglomerated rather than organically grown, have a copious and dissolving melody, quite harmonious with the subject-matter and the nature of the man. Jeremy Taylor, too, mounds his magnificent sentences rather than constructs them: but the effect is different and more masculine; nay, they are structural compared with Sidney's—so far had prose travelled during the interim.

The *Arcadia* is tedious to us in its unvarying chivalrous fantasy and unremitting lusciousness long drawn-out. Yet it has at moments a certain primitive tenderness, natural and captivating in no slight degree. No modern romancer could show us a passage like this, so palpitating in its poured-out feminine compassion. The hero has attempted suicide by his mistress's couch:

Therefore, getting with speed her weak, though well-accorded, limbs out of her sweetened bed, as when jewels are hastily pulled out of some rich coffer, she spared not the nakedness of her tender feet, but, I think, borne as fast with desire as fear carried *Daphne*, she came running to *Pyrocles*, and finding his spirits something troubled with the fall, she put by the bar that lay close to him, and straining him in her well-beloved embraces; 'My comfort, my joy, my life,' said she, 'what haste have you to kill your *Philoclea* with the most cruel torment that ever lady suffered?'

SIDNEY'S PROSE

What a delightful chivalry of heart there is in it all! How exquisitely felt that phrase, 'her sweetened bed'! How charmingly fancied the image which follows it; and how beautiful—she spared not the nakedness of her tender feet! How womanly Philoclea's outburst, and the tender eagerness of the whole picture! In other passages Sidney shows his power over that pastoral depiction dear to the Elizabethans—artificial, if you will, refined and courtly, yet simple as the lisp of babes:

There were hills which garnished their proud heights with trees; humble valleys, whose bare estate seemed comforted with the refreshing of silver rivers; meadows, enamelled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets, which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so, too, by a cheerful disposition of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep, feeding with sober security; while the lambs, with bleating oratory, craved the dam's comfort. Here a shepherd's boy piping, as though he should never be old; there a young shepherdess knitting, and withal singing; and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time to her voice-music.

Sidney is not without that artificial balance and antithesis which, in its most excessive form, we know as euphuism. This, and the other features of his style, appear where we should least expect them; for his style has not the flexibility which can adjust itself to varying themes. How shall an age accustomed to the direct battle-music of Kipling and Stevens

SIDNEY'S PROSE

admit such tortuous narratives of conflict as his? Assuredly he might have learned much from the forthright old Northern sagas, if he had known them, in the art of warlike narrative. But his best prose is, after all, to be found, not in the romantic *Arcadia*, but in the *Defence of Poesy*. There he has had a set purpose of conviction, of attack and defence before him, and is not constantly concerned with artistic writing. The result is more truly artistic for having less explicit design of art. We get not only melodiously-woven sentences, but also touches of true fire and vigour: he is even homely on occasion. It is from the *Defence of Poesy* that critics mostly choose their 'Sidneian showers of sweet discourse.'

Very plainly Sidney was no believer in that modern fanaticism—art for art's sake. But from his own standpoint, which is the eternal standpoint, no finer apology for poetry has ever been penned. The construction has not the perfection of subsequent prose—of Raleigh at his best, or Browne. The sentences do not always stop at their climax, but are weakened by a tagged-on continuation. But, for all the partial inexpertness, it is splendid writing, with already the suggestion of the arresting phrase and stately cadences presently to be in English prose. He is specially felicitous in those sayings of direct and homely phrase which have become household words: 'A tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from

SIDNEY'S PROSE

the chimney-corner,' or that other well-known saying that Chevy-Chase moved him 'like the sound of a trumpet.' It was a great and original genius, perhaps in prose (where he had no models) even more than in poetry, which was cut short on the field of Zutphen; even as the Spanish Garcilaso, also young, noble, and a pastoral poet, fell in the breach of a northern town.

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

IT might almost be erected into a rule that a great poet is, if he please, also a master of prose. Tennyson in modern times is the great example of a poet who never spoke without his singing-robes. But we feel an instinctive conviction that Tennyson's prose would have been worth having; that it would have been terse, strong, and picturesque—in another fashion from the pictorial English of the Anglo-Saxon revivalists. Indeed, there is manifest reason why a poet should have command over 'that other harmony of prose,' as a great master of both has called it. The higher includes the lower, the more the less. He who has subdued to his hand all the resources of language under the exaltedly difficult and specialized conditions of metre should be easy lord of them in the unhindered forms of prose. Perhaps it is lack of inclination rather than of ability which indisposes a poet for the effort. Perhaps, also, the metrical restraints are to him veritable aids and pinions, the lack of which is severely felt in prose. Perhaps he suffers, like Claudio, 'from too much liberty.'

Though Shakespeare bequeathed us neither letters nor essays, nor so much as a pamphlet, he has not left us without means of estimating what his touch would have been in prose. The evidences of it are scattered through his plays. There is, of course, the plentiful prose-dialogue.

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

But this can only indirectly give us any notion of what might have been his power as a prose-writer. Dramatic and impersonal, it is directed to reproducing the conversational style of his period, as developed among the picturesque and varying classes of Elizabethan men and women. It is one thing with Rosalind, another with Orlando, another with Beatrice, another with Mistress Ford or Master Page, and yet another with his fools or clowns. Thersites differs from Apemantus, plain-spoken old Lafeu from plain-spoken Kent. At the most we might conjecture hence how Shakespeare talked. And if there be anywhere a suggestion of Shakespeare's talk, we would look for it not so much in the overpowering richness of Falstaff, as in the light, urbane, good-humoured pleasantry of Prince Hal. Prince Hal is evidently a model of the cultivated, quick-witted, intelligent gentleman unbending himself in boon society. In his light dexterity, his high-spirited facility, one seems to discern a reminder of the nimble-witted Shakespeare, as Fuller portrays him in the encounters at the 'Mermaid.' No less do the vein of intermittent seriousness running through his talk, the touches of slightly scornful melancholy, conform to one's idea of what Shakespeare may have been in society. One can imagine him, in some fit of disgust with his companions such as prompted the sonnets complaining of his trade, uttering the contemptuous retort of Prince Hal to Poins:

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

'It would be every man's thought, and thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks; never a man's thought in the world keeps the roadway better than thine.'

The noble speech of Brutus to the Romans would alone prove that Shakespeare had a master's touch in prose. The balance, the antithesis, the terseness, the grave simplicity of diction make it a model in its kind. Yet one can hardly say that this is the fashion in which Shakespeare would have written prose, had he used that vehicle apart from the drama. It was written in this manner for a special purpose—to imitate the laconic style which Plutarch records that Brutus affected. Its laconisms, therefore, exhibit no tendency of the poet's own. To find a passage which we do believe to show his native style we must again go to Prince Hal, in his after-character of Henry V. The whole of the King's encounter with the soldiers, who lay on his shoulders the private consequences of war, affords admirable specimens of prose. But in particular we quote his chief defensive utterance:

There is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrament of swords, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers. Some, peradventure, have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some, of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some, making the wars their bulwark, that have before gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery. Now, if these men have defeated

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

the law, and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God: war is His beadle, war is His vengeance; so that here men are punished, for before-breach of the King's laws, is now the King's quarrel: where they feared the death, they have borne life away; and where they would be safe, they perish. Then if they die unprovided, no more is the King guilty of their damnation, than he was before guilty of those impieties for the which they are now visited. Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience; and dying so, death is to him advantage: or not dying, the time was blessedly lost, wherein such preparation was gained: and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that, making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness, and to teach others how they should prepare.

The whole is on a like level, and it is obvious that Shakespeare's interest in his theme has caused him for the moment to forsake dramatic propriety by adopting a structure much more complete and formal than a man would use in unpremeditated talk. It is Shakespeare defending a thesis with the pen, rather than Henry with the tongue. And you have, in consequence, a fine passage of prose, quite original in movement and style, unlike other prose of the period, and characteristic (we venture to think) of Shakespeare himself. You would know that style again. Close-knit, pregnant, with a dexterous use of balance and antithesis,

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

it is yet excellently direct, fluent, and various, the rhetorical arts carefully restrained, and all insistence on them avoided. Despite its closeness, it is not too close; there is space for free motion: and it has a masculine ring, a cut-and-thrust fashion, which removes it far alike from pedantry on the one hand and poetized prose on the other. Such, or something after this manner, would (we think) have been Shakespeare's native style in prose: not the ultra-formal style he put (for a reason) into the mouth of Brutus.

With the Baconian dispute revived, it is interesting to ask how such passages compare with the known prose of Bacon. The speech of Brutus might possibly be Bacon's, who loved the sententious. But surely not a typical passage such as we have quoted. Take an average extract from Bacon's *Essays*:

It is worth observing that there is no passion in the mind of man so weak, but it mates and masters the fear of death; and, therefore, death is no such terrible enemy when a man hath so many attendants about him that can win the combat of him. Revenge triumphs over death; Love delights in it; Honour aspireth to it; Grief flieth to it; nay, we read, after Otho, the Emperor, had slain himself, Pity (which is the tenderest of affections) provoked many to die, out of mere compassion to their Sovereign, and as the truest sort of followers.

Grave, cold, slow, affecting an aphoristic brevity, and erring (when it does err) on the

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

side of pedantry, could this style take on the virile energy and freedom of movement, the equipoise of concision and fluency, which we discern in Henry's speech, as in all Shakespeare's characteristic passages? We cannot think it. And that other style of Bacon's, exemplified in the *Reign of Henry VII*, expanded, formal, in the slow-moving and rather cumbersome periods which he deems appropriate to historic dignity, is yet more distant from Shakespeare. The more one studies Shakespeare, the more clearly one perceives in him a latent but quite individual prose-style, which, had he worked it out, would have been a treasurable addition to the great lineage of English prose.

BEN JONSON'S PROSE

ASKED haphazard to name the poets who were also prose-writers (why have we not developed a single term for the thing, like the French *prosateur?*), few, probably, would think of including Ben Jonson. There is some reason for not thinking of Ben as a prose-writer: he never produced any set and continuous work in prose—not so much as a pamphlet. All he has left us is a collection called *Sylva* or *Timber*, corresponding to the *memorabilia* of what we now call a commonplace book—apparently because it contains the observations which a man thinks are not commonplace. We English have small relish for apophthegms and prose-brevities in general: not among us would a La Rochefoucauld, a Pascal of the *Pensées*, a La Bruyère, have found applause. Selden, or Coleridge's *Table-Talk*, the exceedingly witty 'Characters' of 'Hudibras' Butler, and other admirable literature of the kind, go virtually unread. We want expansion and explanation; we like not being asked to complement the author's wit by our own. So that *Sylva* has small chance, were it better than it is.

We know two Ben Jonsons, it may be said—the Ben of the plays, rugged, strong, pedantic, unsympathetic, often heavy, coarse and repellent even in his humour, where he is strongest; and the Ben of those surprisingly

BEN JONSON'S PROSE

contrasting lyrics, all too few; small, delicate, and exquisite. It is as though Vulcan took to working in filigree. Here, in *Sylva*, is another Ben, who increases our estimation of the man. We have often thought there was a measure of affinity between the two Johnsons—Ben and Sam. Their surnames are the same save in spelling; both have a scriptural Christian name; both were large and burly men, of strong, unbeautiful countenance—‘a mountain belly and a rocky face’ the dramatist ascribed to himself. Both were convivial spirits, with a magnetic tendency to form a personal following; ‘the tribe of Ben’ was paralleled by the tribe of Samuel. Both were men distinguished for learning unusual among the literary men of their time. Both carried it over the verge of pedantry, and at the same time had strong sense. Both were notably combative. Both were mighty talkers, and founded famous literary clubs which made the ‘Mermaid’ and the ‘Mitre’ illustrious among taverns. Both, it seems pretty sure, were overbearing. You can imagine Benjamin as ready to browbeat a man as Samuel. There the parallel ends; Ben was not distinguished for religiosity or benevolence, Ben was never cited as a moralist. But in *Sylva*, it seems to us, we pick it up again.

There is the strong common-sense, and the uncommon sense, which we find in the Doctor’s talk; there is the directness, the straightness

BEN JONSON'S PROSE

to the point. There is, moreover, a robust manliness, an eye which discerns, and a hand which strikes for the pith of any matter, a contained vigour which wastes no stroke. Even the style is not without analogies to the spoken style of the great conversationalist—so different from his written style. It has nothing of the occasional stateliness, the latinities, which appeared even in the Doctor's talk. But on the Doctor's vernacular side it has its kinships. It is clean, hardy, well-knit, excellently idiomatic; pithy and well-poised as an English cudgel. Its marked tendency to the use of balance is a further Johnsonian affinity. We would not, however, be understood to say that it is like the style of Johnson's talk. It is individual, and has the ring common to the Elizabethan style. But it has certain qualities which seem to us akin to the spirit of Johnson's talk. One striking feature is its modernity. It is more modern than Shakespeare's prose. There are many sentences which, with the alteration of a word or so, the substitution of a modern for an archaic inflection, would pass for very good and pure modern prose. It is singular that prose so vernacular should have had no successor, and that so wide an interval should have elapsed between him and Dryden.

Yet, if Jonson influenced no follower, it certainly deserves more notice than it has received that, thus early, prose so native,

BEN JONSON'S PROSE

showing so much the mettle of its English pasture, could be written. The average style is seen at once in such a passage as this:

No man is so foolish, but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise, but may easily err, if he will take no other counsel but his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself, hath a fool for a master.

Save for the antiquated inflection of 'hath,' that is modern enough. Johnson could put a thing with almost—or quite—brutal terseness; but Ben is still more uncompromisingly effective, as in the last sentence of the following quotation:

Many men believe not themselves what they would persuade others, and less do the things which they would impose on others . . . only they set the sign of the Cross over their outer doors, and sacrifice to their guts and their groin in their inner closets.

It has not the sweetness and light of modern culture; it is ursine: but it sticks in the memory. It is interesting, in reading *Sylva*, to note that Jonson had already formed an opinion on the contest between the Ancients and Moderns, long before it became a burning question in the latter Seventeenth, and brought forth Swift's *Battle of the Books* in the Eighteenth Century. If any man might have been looked for to be a bigoted champion of the Ancients, it was Jonson, who marred his own work and

BEN JONSON'S PROSE

would have gone hard to mar that of others by his pedantic insistence on classical authority, and lamented Shakespeare's 'little Latin and less Greek.' Yet he maintains a clear-sighted attitude of respectful independence.

One cannot but smile a little, none the less, at Ben's disclaimer of sects, his 'I will have no man addiēt himself to me': Ben, the focus of disciples and leader in many a literary *fracas*. Yet, despite his upholding of the just rights of the present against the past, he was not satisfied with the present. It is a strange fact that the complaints of decadence in letters, which we hear now, come to us like an echo from the pages of the *Sylva*. In one passage he observes:

I cannot think Nature is so spent and decayed, that she can bring forth nothing worth her former years. She is always the same, like herself, and when she collects her strength, is abler still. Men are decayed, and studies; she is not.

Who could conceive that this last pessimist sentence was written by the friend of Shakespeare, the sharer in the glorious prime of English literature, and one of the great literary periods of the world? Even in his day he evidently felt the scarcity of true appreciation.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

IGNORED by the general voice of the Eighteenth Century, championed by Coleridge, De Quincey, Ruskin, and other writers of the early or middle Nineteenth Century, Seventeenth Century prose has again suffered some eclipse as a profitable model through the more recent revulsion towards the prose of Queen Anne and her immediate successors. And now its claims are again zealously urged by the writer of a very knowledgeable article in the *Quarterly Review*, whose views are sound and discerning, though we cannot say the same of his *obiter dicta*. What, for example, are we to think of the pronouncement that 'of all our writers of great merit, from the Restoration to the present century, Newman alone succeeded in recovering that mastery of rhythm which was the characteristic' of pre-Restoration prose? Was there no 'mastery of rhythm' in Ruskin, none in De Quincey—to name but two? De Quincey's rhythm was not that of the Seventeenth Century, indeed, though based on the rhythm of the Seventeenth Century; but it was a better thing—it was characteristically and recognizably his own. Consider merely that passage in the 'Confessions,' ending with the words 'I awoke . . . and cried, "I will sleep no more!"'—which

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

for superbly marshalled complexity of structure and choric intricacy of sound, for mastery over the counterpoint of rhythmic prose, is perhaps the most amazing in the language. The congregating sentences throng like the assembling of armies, with growing innumerable agitation herded and precipitantly accelerated to the multitudinous crash of the close.

But the writer does not simply extol the prose of the Seventeenth Century for those qualities generally confessed. He seeks to show that it possessed likewise the secret of a vernacular style, available for workaday use. It has been said that the Seventeenth Century men, with all their pomps and splendours, worked out no style fit for average use; whereas the writers who underwent French influence after the Restoration did achieve this aim. To which he answers that the average style of the Restoration and the earlier Eighteenth Century was as bad as it could be. The eminent writers, most of them, were largely dominated by the Seventeenth Century—Swift, for instance, who went back to those earlier writers to get marrow for his style. It was Johnson who founded the average prose style which (in decadence enough) still sways the average man when he takes up his pen; and Johnson based himself on Sir Thomas Browne. But the tradition of a truly vernacular style had never failed from the time of Elizabeth (though the prevalent belief is that it became extinct with the Seventeenth Century

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

giants); and it could have been developed into an excellent common style but for the irruption of French influences. In tracing this vernacular current in the Seventeenth Century to which he mainly devotes his article, the writer fixes with acute perception on Ben Jonson as the restorer and upholder of the Tudor tradition, the popular element in the style of his day.

The resemblance between the sturdy vernacular of Jonson and the sturdy vernacular of Dryden was not, it seems, accidental. Dryden makes express reference to the principles advocated in Jonson's *Sylva*. And Jonson had a chain of successors. One need not, however, go further than Browne himself to show that pre-Restoration prose was not always a tissue of long periodic sentences, now unduly loose, now unduly latinized in construction. Browne was more idiomatic in structure than the Ciceronian Hooker. But the admirable knitting of his sentences was not due merely to a better study of English idiom. He was steeped in classic models more compact and pregnant than Cicero. Like his French contemporaries, he was influenced by the great Latin rhetoricians, Lucan, Ovid, and Seneca; whose rivalry it was to put an idea into the fewest possible words. Lucan, Browne quotes more than any other Latin poet. His style is usually represented by passages such as the opening or closing paragraphs in the famous last chapter of the

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

Urn-Burial; passages which combine severely logical structure with a motion like the solemn winging of many seraphim. But the greater portion of that same chapter is terse and sententious, an aphoristic style. When his thought moves him to eloquent rhetoric, the sentence dispreads like a mounting pinion. But the level style is brief and serried, like this:

There is no antidote against the opium of time, which temporarily considereth all things; our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors. Grave-stones tell truth scarce forty years. Generations pass while some trees stand, and old families last not three oaks.

Or again:

To be nameless in worthy deeds, exceeds an infamous history. The Canaanitish woman lives more happily without a name than Herodias with one.

This style is a far better foundation for a general style than the ponderous structure which Johnson reared upon it. Nor, with all his latinities (the supposed excessive proportion of which is grossly exaggerated) was Browne to seek in the vulgar tongue. On the contrary, he blends it in his prose with an excellent mastery, as may partly be seen even in these brief extracts.

But for direct use of the vernacular, the *Quarterly* reviewer points with justice to men like Fuller, South, Chillingworth, and especially Baxter—whose vigour and plainness he com-

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

pare to Cobbett's. He points, also, to the neglected writers of 'Characters,' and, in particular, the best of them—'Hudibras' Butler. It is another point on which we commend his acumen. We cannot go the length of decrying Butler's verse in order to enhance his prose, as the reviewer does: we are scandalized by the assertion that *Hudibras* is written in 'a clever mechanical kind of verse.' But that the 'Characters' are most undeservedly neglected we have long held. They are witty and full of Hudibrastic point; while the style is vernacular, clear, and strong—though we will not add (with the reviewer) 'as Swift's.' But these, and Izaak Walton, though they prove that vernacular prose was maintained in the Seventeenth Century, do not disturb the fact that the loftier style was in the ascendant, the style of Hooker, Bacon, Taylor, Browne, Milton. There was no Shakespeare of prose in that day, says the reviewer, who wedded and wielded both styles equally. But is a Gallic uniformity of basic style necessary or desirable in English? Does it matter what style is written by the unliterary? Is not the wide latitude and freedom of style among the masters of modern prose, wherein each is free to follow his own affinities, a thing more precious, more suited to our English individualism, than the finished but after all limited perfection of style which France has attained by a contrary method? We think it

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PROSE

is. We think it better that we should bring forth out of our treasuries new things and old, than develop on a fixed and contracting line, however perfect the results secured by such narrowing. Individual freedom is the English heritage, in letters as in life.

GOLDSMITH'S PROSE

IN the prose style of that delightful poet and universal man of letters, Oliver Goldsmith, the man himself counts for so much that it is impossible to write of one without the other. One can trace the derivations of that style, it is true; one can discern that it owes much to French influence. Style does not come out of the blue, be it ever so native to the man, and however authentic his genius. But when you have recognized its Gallic derivation, that which gives it breath of life, and radiates from it in personal fascination, is Goldsmith himself—the careless Goldsmith, the much-tried Goldsmith, the sweet-natured Goldsmith, the Goldsmith who took his troubles like a happy-go-lucky child: an Irish child withal, bright, emotional, and candid.

Yet all this would not have produced the inexpressibly exhilarating mixture we call Goldsmith, limpid and effervescent, touched with the simplest sentiment, enriched with the most varied experience, unailing in dexterous grace, had this Irish child not been also a child of the eighteenth century. Into this artificial, unruffled eighteenth century, which made composure not merely an inward ideal but an external law, was borne this Celtic child, uttering himself right out with a modern sincerity, and an unconsciousness not often modern. The result, at its best, is a combina-

GOLDSMITH'S PROSE

tion of qualities singularly piquant and un-reproducible. Born into the nineteenth century with such a temperament, a life so troublous and largely *manqué*, Goldsmith would have had the *weltschmerz* pretty badly. He would have wailed the impossibility of things; he would have taken the bandage from his sores; his gaiety would have been dashed with some eclipse. Born into the eighteenth century, he had no encouragement to the indulgence of world-smart. He kept his sores under decent covering, knowing there was small sympathy for literary groans; he looked neither back nor forward, took the hour as it came, and piped against his troubles if Fate gave him half a chance. That European tour, when, half scholarly impostor, half minstrel, he alternately challenged disputants (not forthcoming) and fluted for a living, is a type of his whole career. The Irishman of that character no longer exists; and if personal dignity gains by his vanishing, the gaiety of nations suffers. No wonder that the dignifiedly Britannic, and a trifle priggish, Johnsonian circle was half scandalized by the advent amongst it of this improvident creature of Nature.

Johnson, sternly moralizing under adversity, meets Goldie piping against it, and shakes his unambrosial wig. Yet it says much for the formidable old Doctor that he seems to have appreciated the simple, sweet-natured genius better than did the rest of his circle. It is the

GOLDSMITH'S PROSE

fashion to discredit Boswell's stories of Goldsmith on the ground of envy. Jealous they self-evidently are, but they are too racy of the Goldsmith soil not to be true. The *naïf* vanity is the vanity of a child. One can imagine Goldie breaking his shins in imitating a mountebank—and laugh with kindly amusement. Where talk was supremely valued, he would plunge in, sink or swim. But only that bewigged eighteenth century circle could sneer at him for the harmless weakness. He knew he had the brilliance in him, and pathetically hoped he could teach it to shine at the call of the moment. A little ugly man, slow-tongued and unattractive to women, he sought indemnity for his maimed life in plum-coloured coats, Tokay, and the sorry loves of Covent Garden. 'Goldie was wild, sir,' and small cause for wonder.

But all that weakness is strength in his charming prose. There was valiance, could the Doctor have seen it, in that clear fountain of gaiety which turned all his misfortunes to brightness and favour. It is his sunny wit and sweet heart which clarifies his style; his lovable humour draws for us perpetual refreshment from the vicissitudes of a life as hard as ever fell to struggling poet. What modern writer is brave child enough to extract sunshine from the recollection of his own darkest hours? A more admirable example you could not have of Goldsmith's prose than that exquisitely sly description of George's search for a living in the

GOLDSMITH'S PROSE

Vicar of Wakefield. Yet small was the laughter in the experiences which furnished it to poor Goldie; and it was written when he was still struggling for bread. The narrative is saturated with humour as delicate as it is buoyant, and kindly with large good nature towards the very rogues and blockheads who have set their heels on the helpless seeker for bread. The mere technique is that of a master: every sentence deftly shaped, yet easy as the song of a bird; the phrasing unobtrusively perfect, as we have lost the art of perfecting it in our self-conscious age. He had, indeed, the great heritage of eighteenth century prose, which a succession of masters had shaped to the purposes of wit and humour. But he had lightened it, made it nimble and touched it with an artless-seeming grace, as it never was before. This in the very day when Johnson had compelled English prose to the following of his own deep-draughted movement. Yet, by a singular stretch of blind jealousy, Boswell and others accused him of imitating the Gargantuan Doctor!

Perhaps Johnson may have had some influence on his serious and 'elevated' style, which is antithetic and not a little rhetorical. Perhaps Johnson, also, taught him compactness of structure and grammatical accuracy, which are invaluable even in his lightest style. But, though he 'touched nothing he did not adorn,' and was as irresistible in the pathos of poor

GOLDSMITH'S PROSE

Olivia as in the humours of Mr Jenkinson or Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Skeggs, it is as a comedian that one loves him best. That gay humour could pass from demure slyness to the most buoyant farce; and the combination of extravagance with the deftest delicacy is perhaps his most characteristic and felicitous achievement. Beau Tibbs, in the *Citizen of the World*, is farce; but farce which nowadays would pass for comedy. But Beau Tibbs is too great to be displayed in a mere extract; he must be read entire. Why is Goldsmith unknown at the present day by that delightful series of papers? If the cream of his comedy be in the plays and the *Vicar*, yet, for the sake of Beau Tibbs alone, the *Citizen* should be resuscitated. And if this inadequate article sends one fresh reader to those neglected essays, it will not have been written uselessly.

CRASHAW

MODERN poets have singled Crashaw as a man of genius and a source of inspiration. Coleridge declared that Crashaw's *Hymn to St Teresa* was present to his mind while he was writing the second part of *Christabel*; 'if, indeed, by some subtle process of the mind, it did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem.'

Lyric poetry is a very inclusive term. It includes Milton and Herrick, Burns and Shelley, *Tintern Abbey* and *The Grecian Urn*, the odes of Coventry Patmore and the songs of Tennyson. But its highest form—that which is to other lyric forms what the epic is to the narrative poem or the ballad—is the form typically represented by the ode. This order of lyric may again be divided into such lyrics as are distinguished by stately structure, and such as are distinguished by ardent abandonment. In the former kind ardour *may* be present, though under the continual curb of the structure; and this is the highest species of the lyric. In the latter kind the ardour is naked and predominant: it is to the former kind what the flight of the skylark is to the flight of the eagle. The conspicuous first appearance of the former kind in English poetry was the monumental *Epithalamion* of Spenser. Ardour cannot, as a rule, be predicated of Spenser; but *there* is ardour of the most ethereal

CRASHAW

impulse, equipoised throughout with the most imperial and imperious structure. For the development of the latter kind English poetry had to await the poet of *Prometheus Unbound*. But its first, almost unnoticed and unperfected appearance, was in the work of Richard Crashaw. His age gave the preference to Cowley, in whose odes there is unlimited ostentation of dominating ardour without the reality, the result being mere capricious and unmeaning dislocation of form. Too much of the like is there in Crashaw; but every now and again he ascends into real fervour, such as makes metre and diction plastic to its own shaping spirit of inevitable rightness. This is the eminent praise of Crashaw, that he marks an epoch, a turn of the tide in English lyric, though the crest of the tide was not to come till long after, though—like all first innovators—he not only suffered present neglect, but has been overshadowed by those who came a century after him.

He is fraught with suggestion—infinite suggestion. More than one poet has drawn much from him, yet much remains to be drawn. But it is not only for poets he exists. Those who read for enjoyment can find in him abundant delight, if they will be content (as they are content with Wordsworth) to grope through his plenteous infelicity. He is no poet of the human and household emotions; he has not pathos, or warm love, or any of the qualities

CRASHAW

which come home to the natural kindly race of men. But how fecund is his brilliant imagery, rapturous ethereality! He has, at his best, an extraordinary cunning of diction, cleaving like gold-leaf to its object. In such a poem as *The Musician and the Nightingale* the marvel of diction becomes even too conscious; in the moment of wondering at the miracle, we feel that the miracle is too researched: it is the feat of an amazing gymnast in words rather than of an unpremeditating angel. Yet this poem is an extraordinary verbal achievement, and there are numerous other examples in which the miracle seems as unconscious as admirable.

For an example of his sacred poems, take the *Nativity*, which has less deforming conceit than most. Very different from Milton's great Ode, which followed it, yet it has its own characteristic beauty. The shepherds sing it turn by turn—as thus:

Gloomy night embraced the place
Where the noble Infant lay.
The Babe looked up and showed His face;
In spite of darkness, it was day.
It was Thy day, Sweet! and did rise,
Not from the East, but from Thine eyes.

Here is seen one note of Crashaw—the human and lover-like tenderness which informs his sacred poems, differentiating them from the conventional style of English sacred poetry, with its solemn aloofness from celestial things.

CRASHAW

I saw the curled drops, soft and slow
Come hovering o'er the place's head;
Offering their whitest sheets of snow
To furnish the fair Infant's bed:
Forbear, said I; be not too bold,
Your fleece is white, but 'tis too cold.

I saw the obsequious Seraphim
Their rosy fleece of fire bestow,
For well they now can spare their wings,
Since heaven itself lies here below.
Well done, said I; but are you sure
Your down so warm will pass for pure?

In the second stanza is shown the fire of his fancy; in 'The curled drops,' etc., the happiness of his diction. In *The Weeper* (a poem on the Magdalen), amid stanzas of the most frigid conceit, are others of the loveliest art in conception and expression:

The dew no more will weep
The primrose's pale cheek to deck:
The dew no more will sleep
Nuzzled in the Lily's neck;
Much rather would it be thy tear,
And leave them both to tremble here.

Not in the Evening's eyes
When they red with weeping are
For the Sun that dies,
Sits Sorrow with a face so fair.
Nowhere but here did ever meet
Sweetness sad, sadness so sweet,

CRASHAW

Two more alien poets could not be conceived than Crashaw and Browning. Yet in the last couplet of these most exquisite stanzas we have a direct coincidence with Browning's line:

Its sad in sweet, its sweet in sad.

In the *Hymn to St Teresa* are to be found the most beautiful delicacies of language and metre. Listen to this (*à propos* of Teresa's childish attempt to run away and become a martyr among the Moors):

She never undertook to know
What Death with Love should have to do;
Nor has she e'er yet understood
Why to show love she should shed blood;
Yet though she cannot tell you why,
She can love, and she can die.

The wonderfully dainty *Wishes to a Supposed Mistress* shows what Crashaw might have been as an amative poet:

Whoe'er she be,
That not impossible She,
That shall command my heart and me;

Where'er she lie,
Locked up from mortal eye
In shady leaves of Destiny: