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PLATFORM MONOLOGUES

By

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PREFACE

The following monologues were given as public addresses, mostly to semi-academical audiences, and no alteration has been made in their form. Their common object has been to plead the cause of literary study at a time when that study is being depreciated and discouraged. But along with the general plea must go some indication that literature can be studied as well as read. Hence some of the articles attempt—what must always be a difficult task—the crystallizing of the salient principles of literary judgment.

The present collection has been made because the publisher believes that a sufficiently large number of intelligent persons will be interested in reading it. On the whole that appears to be at least as good a reason as any other for printing a book.

The addresses on "The Supreme Literary Gift," "The Making of a Shakespeare," and "Literature and Life," have appeared previously as separate brochures. Those on "Two Successors of Tennyson" and "Hebraism and Hellenism" were printed in the Melbourne *Argus* at the time of their delivery, and are here reproduced by kind permission of that paper. The talk upon "The Future of Poetry" has not hitherto appeared in print.

Though circumstances have prevented any development of the powers and work of the two "Successors of Tennyson," there is nothing either in the criticism of those writers or in the principles applied thereto which seems to call for any modification at this date. For the rest, it is hoped that the lecture will be read in the light of the facts as they were at the time of its delivery.

CONTENTS

The Supreme Literary Gift

When we have been reading some transcendent passage in one of the world's masterpieces we experience that mental sensation which Longinus declares to be the test of true sublimity, to wit, our mind "undergoes a kind of proud elation and delight, as if it had itself begotten the thing we read." We are disposed by such literature very much as we are disposed by the Sistine Madonna or before the Aphrodite of Melos. Things like these exert a sort of overmastering power upon us. Our craving for perfection, for ideal beauty, is for once wholly gratified. Our spirit glows with an intense and complete satisfaction. It would build itself a tabernacle on the spot, for it recognizes that it is good to be there. We do not analyse, we do not criticize, we simply deliver over our souls to a proud elation and delight. Nay, at the moment when we are in the midst of such spontaneous and exquisite enjoyment, we should, in all likelihood, resent any attempt to make us realize exactly *why* this particular creation of art so fills up our souls down to the last cranny of satisfaction while another stops short of that supreme effect.

And yet, afterwards, when we are meditating upon this strange potency of a poem or a building or a statue, or when we are trying to communicate to others the feeling of its charm, do we not find ourselves importunately asking wherein lies the secret of great art? And, in the case of literature, we think it at such times no desecration of our delight to put a passage of Shakespeare or of Milton beside a passage of Homer, of Æschylus, or of Dante, an essay of Lamb beside a chapter of Heine, a lyric of Burns by one of Shelley, and to seek for some common measure of their excellence.

Suppose that, in these more reflective moments, we can come near to some explanation; suppose we can realize what it is that these supreme writers alone achieve; then, when we read again, the very perfection of their achievement springs forward and comes home to us with a still keener delight. We feel all we felt before, but we enjoy it more, because we understand in some degree why we feel it. Say what we will, we are never really content with an admiration which cannot render to itself a reason. What are all the thousand works of literary criticism called forth by, unless it be by that perpetual question which nags for an answer in all intelligent minds, the question "What is the gift which, behind all mere diction, behind all cadence and rhythm and rhyme, behind all mere lucidity, behind all mere intellect, and behind all variety of subject matter, makes writing everlastingly fresh, admirable, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever"?

Alas! we cannot, indeed, necessarily hope to get that gift into our own power because we can perceive it in the great masters. According to the Apostle, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." "Their vigour is of the fire and their origin is celestial," says the pagan. The *cœlestis origo* is unpurchasable. Nevertheless, even for the ordinary being who aspires himself to write, there is this practical benefit to be derived from an insight into the truth—that he will know in what the supreme gift does consist. He will not delude himself into fancying that it means merely grammatical accuracy, or a command of words, or tricks of phrase, or a faculty for rhyming, or logical precision, or any of those other commonplace qualities and dexterities which are almost universally attainable.

He will at least aim at the right thing, and, even if he fails, his work will be all the higher for that aim.

I do not propose to speak in general of great books, but only of great literature. Literature proper is not simply writing. You may tell in writing the most important and unimpeachable truths concerning science and history, concerning nature and man, without being in the least literary. You may argue and teach and describe in books which are of immense vogue and repute, without pretending to be a figure in literature. But, on the other hand, you may be very wrong; logically, scientifically, historically, ethically altogether wrong; and yet you may exercise an irresistible literary fascination over your own generation and all that follow. Charles Lamb speaks

disdainfully of books which are no books, things in books' clothing. He had in mind Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, essays on population, treatises on moral philosophy, and so forth. He meant that such works are works, but no literature. Mill's *Logic*, geographical descriptions, guidebooks, the *Origin of Species*, whatever may be the value of such volumes for thought or knowledge, they are not literature. There is only one test to apply to such books as those. If their statements are true, if their reasoning is accurate, if their exposition is clear, such works are good of their kind. Nevertheless, it is scarcely literary judgment which judges them. You might as well apply "architectural" criticism to our rows of tin-roofed cottages or to the average warehouse or wool-store or tramshed. These are buildings, but they are not architecture.

Meanwhile Herodotus, with all his superstitions, his credulity and mistakes; Plato, with all his blunders in elementary logic; Homer, with all his naïve ignorance of science and the wide world; Dante, despite his cramped outlook; Milton, in spite of his perverse theologizing—these and their like are, and will always be, literature. No matter if Carlyle's *French Revolution* be in reality as far from the literal truth as the work of Froude, yet Carlyle and Froude are literature, along with Herodotus and Livy and Froissart, while the most scrupulously exact of chronicles may be but books.

The charm of supreme literature is independent of its date or country. The current literary taste varies, we know, at different periods and in different places. There are successive fashions and schools of literature and literary principle—an Attic, an Alexandrian, an Augustan, a Renaissance Italian, an Elizabethan, a Louis Quatorze, a Queen Anne, a nineteenth century Romantic. And yet from each and all of these there will stand out one or two writers, sometimes more, whom we have enthroned in the literary Pantheon, and whose place there among the gods seems only to grow the more assured as time goes on.

Now, what is it that is left, the common *residuum*, to all these literary masters; to Homer, Sappho, Æschylus, Plato, Theocritus, Juvenal; to Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Molière; to Goethe, Shelley, Victor Hugo, Carlyle, in spite of all their manifest differences in subject, and style, in ideas and ideals, in range of thought and knowledge? When we have got behind all the varying and often contradictory criticism of their several epochs; when we have stripped away the characteristics which mark a special era; what is there essentially and everlastingly good—in the true sense "classic"—in virtue of which these particular writers renew for themselves with every generation the suffrages of understanding humanity? If there is a "survival of the fittest" anywhere, it is assuredly in art, and especially in the art of literature. Seeing then that writer is so unlike to writer, both in what he says and the way in which he says it, what is that cardinal literary virtue, that quintessential *x*, in virtue of which both alike are masters in their craft?

The answer is very elusive. Let us seek it, in the Socratic spirit, together.

But first let me remind you that in order to find the answer, the seeker must possess both literary cultivation and also breadth of mind. Unless we have read widely in literature of many sorts and kinds; unless we have developed a generous catholicity of taste and appreciation, a many-sidedness of sympathy and interest; unless we have corrected our natural idiosyncrasies by what Matthew Arnold, after Goethe, calls a "harmonious expansion of all our powers," we cannot see clearly; we cannot distinguish between the impressions which we derive from literary power and art, and the impressions which we derive from something else to which we happen to be partial, but which is quite irrelevant to the question. Any one who belongs to a particular "school," whether of style or thought; any one who approaches literature with a spirit overweighted by political bias, scientific bias, or religious bias, is disqualified. He cannot hope to stand equally away from, or equally near to, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe, and, after setting aside their elements of disagreement, distinguish and admire that which is definitely and for ever admirable in their creations. Do we lack sympathy with the tragic feeling? Do we shrink from it? Then we can be no judges of tragic art, of *King Lear* or the *Œdipus*. Have we no sense of humour, or only a gross and vulgar sense of humour? Then we can be no judges of the writings of Cervantes or of Sterne. Are we incapable of ardent idealism? Then we cannot be just to Shelley. Is a capacity for profound reverence and adoration not ours? Then we must not claim to say the last word on Dante. The uncongenial subject prevents us from feeling with the writer, and we therefore fancy a defect of literary power or charm in him, while the defect is all the time in ourselves. We will, for the moment, suppose ourselves to be the ideal critics. And let us first see what the supreme literary gift is *not*.

We may admit that, in all literature which the world will not willingly let die, there must be expressed something worth expressing. The matter must be, in some way, of interest. But it appears to signify little *how* it interests. It may be enlightening, elevating, or inspiriting: it may be profoundly touching: it may be of a fine or gracious sentiment or fancy: it may be startling: it may be simply entertaining. Some people, perhaps, remembering certain French and other fiction, would say that it may even be deliberately wicked. That I do not believe. On the contrary, it is much to the credit of a world which is declared to be so rotten with original sin, that deliberately wicked writing finds so little lasting favour with it. It does gladly let such writing die, however well written. Interest fails, and admiration of the literary skill is speedily swallowed up

in disgust. Moreover it is seldom that the true possessor of the supreme literary gift turns it to base ends.

Consummate literature, we have admitted, must be interesting. It would be truer to say that the possessor of the supreme literary gift will *make* his matter interest us, however light or serious, however literal or imaginative, it may be. But, when once of interest, the matter may be anything you will.

The supreme literary gift, for example, does not imply profundity or originality of thought. Homer and Chaucer are not deep thinkers, nor is Herodotus or Virgil, Burns, Keats, or Tennyson. There need be nothing philosophically epoch-making about a literary creation which is destined to be immortal. Nor yet does the supreme literary gift necessarily imply extraordinary depth of emotion. Of the writers just named Burns and Keats perhaps have this capacity, but the rest—including Tennyson—reveal little of it. We do not find burning passion to be a distinct feature in Plato, in Milton, in Goethe, or in Matthew Arnold, while it is emphatic in Sappho, in Byron, and in Shelley. Again, the supreme literary gift does not imply any special expression of truth or instruction, moral, religious or other. Homer and Dante cannot both be right. If Homer is right, then Dante is lamentably wrong; and if Dante is right, Goethe is unforgivably wrong. Wordsworth cannot be harmonized with Shelley. Milton was a Puritan, Keats a neo-pagan. In the domain of literal and historical truth what becomes of *Gulliver's Travels*, or Scott's novels, or, for the matter of that, *Paradise Lost*?

All this is self-evident. Yet, if we do not ask our superlative writers to be heaven-sent teachers, to be prophets, to be discoverers, what do we ask of them? Is it to write in a particular style, in a given lucid style, a given figurative style, or a given dignified style? Nay, it is only very mediocre writers who could obey such precepts. Every supreme writer has his own style, inalienable and inimitable, which is as much a part of him as his own soul, the look in his eyes, or his tones of voice. Bethink yourselves of Carlyle, how his abrupt, crabbed, but withal sinewy and picturesque, prose compares with the pure crystalline sentences of Cardinal Newman, and how these again compare with the quaintly and pathetically humorous chat, the idealized talk of Charles Lamb. Think how easy it is to recognize a line of Shakespeare, of Milton, or of Wordsworth, almost by the ear; how audibly they are stamped with the character of their creator. There are, in fact, exactly as many styles as there are superlative writers. Indeed this individuality of style is the outward and visible sign of their inward and spiritual literary gift, which is the gift to express —*oneself*.

Then what does the superlative writer do? The fact is that literature in the proper sense is an art, as much an art as painting or sculpture or music. The supreme masters in literature are artists, and the consensus of the world, though unconsciously, comes to judge them simply as such—not as thinkers or teachers, sages or prophets. They are artists.

And what is the province of art? After all the definitions and discussions are exhausted, we are, I believe, brought down to one solid answer, the answer of Goethe, "art is only the giving of shape and form." That is to say, the object of art, whether in words or colours or shapes or sounds, is simply to give expression to a conception, to a thought, a feeling, an imagined picture which exists in the mind of the artist. His aim is to communicate it truly, wholly, perfectly to the minds of his fellow men, by one of the only two possible channels. By means of art mind can communicate itself to mind either through the eyes or through the ears; by spoken words and music through the ears, by painting and sculpture and written words through the eyes.

I need not dwell upon the thought what a wonderful thing this communication is, whereby the pictures and feelings existing in one brain are flashed upon another brain. Nor need I elaborate the point that this communication is rarely absolute, rarely even adequate. To make people understand, even those who know us best, how difficult that is!

The Greek sculptor Praxiteles conceives a human form of perfect beauty, posed in an attitude of perfect grace, wearing an expression of perfect charm and serenity. It exists but as a picture in his brain; but he takes marble and hews it and chisels it till there stands visible and unmistakable before us his very conception. He has given body and form to his imagination. Perfect artist as he is, he communicates with absolute exactness his mental picture to all the world of them who behold his work.

The Italian painter Raphael conceives a woman of infinite loveliness and purity and tenderness to represent the mother of Christ. How are we to be sharers in that conception? He takes brushes and paint, and there grows upon his canvas the Sistine Madonna, that picture of such mystic potency, which to see at Dresden is never to forget. He stamps upon our minds the very image and the very feeling which were upon his own.

The great musician hears imaginary sounds and harmonies within his brain, proceeding from or accompanying emotions of divers kinds. He forthwith, by arrangements and combinations of musical notes, their times and qualities, communicates to us also those sounds and harmonies; he reproduces in us those same emotions.

Do not say that it is the function of an artist to communicate to us beautiful things or ugly things, things graceful or things profound, things of pleasure or things of grief. Say rather, simply, it is

his function, as artist, to communicate—perfectly, absolutely—whatsoever he seeks to communicate, in its form, with its feeling, in its mood; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of his conception and its atmosphere. No doubt the thing of beauty, the profound thing, the thing of joy, is most delightful for the spectator to contemplate; to the artist himself it is apt to be most inspiring, and therefore art seems to be concerned mainly with beauty and joy. But that is the only reason. As artist, his function is simply to body forth, and present to other minds, whatever he conceives, and he is consummate artist just in proportion as he secures that end.

Now take the literary artist. He in his turn conceives a thought, or picture of the imagination or fancy. A feeling may come over him with a gentle grace, a subtle influence, an overmastering passion. A mood—a state of soul—may colour all his view, tinging it with some haunting melancholy or irradiating his whole world till it seems a Paradise. How is he to communicate to us this thought, this picture, this fancy, the grace and subtlety and passion, the precise hues of his mood for sombreness or radiancy? Well, he takes words, and by selecting them, by combining them, by harmonizing them with a master's hand, he sets before us certain magic phrases wrought into a song, an ode, an elegy, or whatsoever form of creation is most apt and true, and he makes us see just what he sees and feel just what he feels, printing it all upon our own brains and hearts.

In this then must lie the essence of the literary gift—in the power of a writer to express himself, to communicate vividly, without mistiness of contents or outline, his own spirit and vision. I repeat that it is irrelevant whether what he sees and feels be beautiful or not, joyful or not, profound or not, even true or not. Nor does it matter either what his style may be. He is a master in the art of writing when he can make his own mind, so to speak, entirely visible or audible to us, when he can express what his inward eye beholds in such terms that we can behold it in the same shape and in the same light—if, for example, when he sees a thing in "the light which never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream," he can make us also see it in that faëry light.

This is no such easy thing. The fact that there are a hundred thousand words in the English dictionary does not make it easier. It is not those who know the most words that can necessarily best express themselves. Neither is it true that, because feeling is real, it can therefore speak. "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh" has no such sense as that. Many and many a fine thought is lost to the world, and all the value of many a deep emotion, because he who thinks or feels cannot voice himself, any more than you or I can necessarily take a brush and paint, like Turner, the unspeakable glories of a sunset which our eyes and soul can nevertheless appreciate to the very full. "What makes a poet?" says Goethe, and he replies, "A heart brimful of some noble passion." No doubt the noble passion must be there *before* a man can be a poet, but equally beyond doubt the passion alone cannot make him one. To say that a heart full of the ardour of religion, of love, of hope, of sorrow or joy, can always express its ardour, is an assertion against which thousands of poor inarticulate human beings would rise in protest. It is simply contrary to experience. There is many a man and woman besides Wordsworth to whom "the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"; but, unlike Wordsworth, no sooner do these less gifted men and women attempt to express one such thought and impart it to others, than lo! the subtle thought evades them and is gone. They can give it no embodiment in language. Their attempt ends in words which they know to be obscure, cold, trivial, hopelessly ineffectual.

How unevenly distributed is this power of expression! Let us begin as low in the scale of verbal art as you choose. Let two observers chance to see some previously unknown plant, with novel leaf and flower and perfume. If they could paint the leaf and flower, well and good; but ask each separately to communicate to you in words a mental picture of that plant. Observe how, with equal education in the matter of language, the one will describe you the forms and colours and fragrance in apt and expressive terms and comparisons, which seem to paint it before your eyes. The other plods and halts and fails, and leaves no clear impression. If to the one the flower is just red and pointed, to the other it is, perhaps, a tongue of flame. The one has but literal facts to tell, the other is full of imagination and similitude.

Take a step higher. Have you seen and heard the lark, and studied his movements and his song aloft in the sky of Europe? Can you express simply what you then saw and heard, so that all who have witnessed the same can see and feel it over again? How many words would you take, and how vivid might your picture be? Then compare your effort with Shelley's famous

Higher still and higher
  From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
  The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still doth soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
  Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
  Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun!

Another step, and we come to a region no longer of outward description, but of thought, of feeling, of delicate fancy, of soaring imagination.

I suppose thousands upon thousands of persons possessed of what our great-grandfathers used to call "sensibility," have felt at eventide, when alone in certain spots, a kind of subduing awe, as if some great spirit-existence pervading all nature were laying a solemn hush upon the world. In various degrees one here and one there can express that feeling, but how many can express it as simply and yet effectually as Wordsworth does:—

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly!

To express and body forth: there is room for the manifestation of this prime literary gift in all sort of subjects. It may be shown in a fable of Æsop, in *Robinson Crusoe*, in a children's story, in Mark Twain's boyish experiences on the Mississippi, in a Barrack-room Ballad of Rudyard Kipling, in Thackeray's *Esmond*, in Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark*, in either a comedy of Shakespeare or his *Hamlet*, in a sonnet of Dante's *Vita Nuova* or in his *Inferno*. Æsop's communication of his point of view is final. So is Defoe's communication of mental pictures. So is Mark Twain's of that Mississippi pilotage. So is Kipling's in his *Drums of the Fore and Aft*, or his *Mandalay*. These men are all admirable literary artists in their own domains. Each fulfils all that is demanded of his art. If we could keep this fact clearly before us, our judgments of writers might be more discriminating. Do we think Kipling possessed of an extraordinary degree of the literary gift? Who could think otherwise, seeing that he can effect exactly what he sets out to effect by means of words? His scenes and his thoughts—such as they are—start forth living before us. But do we then think a Kipling proved equal to a Shakespeare in sheer excellence of his gift? That is another question. The things which Shakespeare realizes and expresses demand powers of realization and expression more far-reaching and more subtle than are required by those things to which a Kipling gives shape and form. In Shakespeare are multitudes of deep and rare reflections, vivid imaginings, penetrations of sympathy and insight, and all so clearly crystallized, with such apparent ease, that they become ours at once, as if they were natural to us. His communication of the most subtle states of mind is complete. But in a Kipling we cannot pretend that there is infinite subtlety and elusiveness, that there is a cosmic condensing of a whole nebula of spiritual experience. His task was less hard.

And what then of Homer? Can we call *his* task a difficult one? Is he, too, full of infinitely delicate or far-reaching thoughts and feelings? No. But his aim is to reproduce all the freshness and breeziness of a fresh and breezy atmosphere, to make us live again amid all that simple wholesome strenuousness of the childhood of the western world. That, too, is exceedingly elusive, and almost impossible to catch—immeasurably more difficult than all those coarsely, if strenuously, marked characteristics of the British soldier and other bold figures on the canvas of Kipling.

That, I believe, is the right attitude to assume, when we endeavour to measure the literary power of one writer against that of another—if we must do such a thing at all. It is not the morality or non-morality, the importance or non-importance, the beauty or ugliness, inherent in what is said, which determine the degree of the literary gift. It is rather the relative elusiveness of the thing said, the difficulty of surrounding it, of condensing it, of giving it perfect body, and communicating it in that body. And that is why it is an error to put, let us say Gray, in the foremost rank of literary artists. How well he does this thing! But was it, after all, so transcendently difficult to do?

The vaguer, the deeper, the more comprehensive, the subtler the thought or feeling or fancy, the greater demand is there upon the literary power. One can say no more. It is as in sculpture, which finds it infinitely easier to give embodiment to straining muscles and an agonized face than to carve a statue in perfect restful beauty and with a countenance of benign and strong tranquillity.

Ask a hundred people to write about the spring—simply to describe it with its sights and sounds and odours—and most of them can perform the task more or less well. Ask them to bring home the physical and emotional influence of spring, and many of those who feel that influence most keenly will give up the task. And then comes Chaucer with his few touches, his "blissful briddes" and "fressche flowres," and tells us how "full is my heart of revel and solace," and behold! the passage breathes to the reader's heart the very spirit of youth and springtide.

A simple statement of a simple fact calls for no "literary" gift. A description of externals demands some, but not often a great, degree of it. A thought or feeling, which is suggested by the fact or object, may require either little or much in proportion as the thought or feeling is fine and fugitive. But a *mood* induced by the thought or feeling generally demands the gift in its highest degree. "A primrose by the river's brim," whether "a yellow primrose 'tis to him," or a

dicotyledon, may be outwardly described more and less well; but we require for that purpose only the rudiments of literary prose. But, next, there is the pure and appealing beauty of the flower; and that evokes gathering recognitions of the beauty of nature and its grace to us. Then upon this there steals a feeling of exhilaration in the glad and gay atmosphere of the re-awakening world; and this, again, may open into a whole vista of recollections far back from childhood; and so the result may be one of many moods. We have all this time been brought up a sort of gradient of literary difficulty; and he is the supreme of supreme literary artists who can body forth the most subtle of all these thoughts and moods.

Let me illustrate. Take for the purpose of contrast this passage of purely external description from Cowper:—

Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcerned
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy and lean and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropped short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow, and now with many a frisk,
Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout:
Then shakes his powdered coat and barks for joy—

and so forth. There you have clear and faithful observation, clearly and faithfully reproduced. I do not want to depreciate the amount of literary skill necessary for putting those right words in their right places. Nevertheless I cannot bring myself to think it particularly remarkable. The picture is distinct, but it is of the eye alone; it involves nothing in the way of imagination, nothing in the way of subtle feeling blending with the sight in the brain of the writer. Next take a stanza from Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis*:—

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
  When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
Before the roses and the longest day—
  When garden walks and all the grassy floor
    With blossoms red and white of fallen May
And chestnut flowers are strewn—
  So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
    From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,
    Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze:
"*The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I.*"

Now to me that passage expresses something immeasurably more difficult of expression. The whole tone of the environment is reproduced in a few touches. We not only realize the scene, but we also feel in its description the same mood of subtle pensiveness, with its flavour of melancholy, in which the writer saw and felt it. For myself I know that the passage brings back to me, exactly and perfectly, not only a mental picture, but also a frame of mind, which I can recognize across the years which now separate me from those English "garden walks and all the grassy floor" strewn with "blossoms red and white of fallen May and chestnut flowers."

If you have never experienced precisely that frame of mind, you cannot, of course, appreciate the literary power, any more than you can appreciate Shelley's all-exquisite

The One remains, the many change and pass;
  Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
  Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments—

unless you have pondered the mystery of life and eternity somewhat as he had done.

Yes! that must be premised all through. You must have had your own mood of profound world-weariness, before you can appreciate the utter completeness of the cry of Beatrice Cenci:—

"Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world,
The wide, gray, lampless, deep unpeopled world!"

The highest attainment then of literary power is the "exquisite expression of exquisite—that is to say, rarely intense or subtle—impressions." The language, said Wordsworth, should be the "incarnation of the thought." The highest gift of the writer is to make his words and their combinations not clever, not dazzling, not merely lucid, but to make them, by their meanings, their associations, and their musical effects, exactly reproduce what he thinks and sees and feels, just in the special light in which he thinks and sees and feels it.

This involves, of course, a perpetual struggle between thought and language. Language is for ever striving to overtake thought and feeling. Browning indeed may say:—

Perceptions whole, like that he sought

To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
As language.

But in this we must not acquiesce. Browning himself, indeed, however immense his range of sympathies, however extraordinary his dramatic insight, falls far short in the purely literary gift. He is not a master of language as Shakespeare was or as Tennyson was. Extremist votaries of Browning are accustomed to say either that he is not obscure at all, or else that his obscurities are inseparable from the thoughts. We must not admit this latter plea until we are prepared to call Isaiah and Shakespeare shallower than Browning.

The transcendent literary artist is always compelling language to express what it had seemed incapable of expressing. Indeed the "advance of literature" often means no more than a greater degree of success in giving recognizable shape to the hitherto vague and elusive, in communicating what was supposed to be incommunicable. Often, when we say that such and such a writer gives us "new glimpses," or "opens up new thoughts," it only means that he has discovered how to express such thoughts, so that we can realize and recognize them. He is not an inventor, but a revealer.

And the highest revealer is the great poet. Poetry is language and music. Musicians tell us that music is intended to impart what language cannot express—something unspeakably more delicate, more subtle, emotionally more powerfully or more tranquillizing. But music must not aim at too much. It cannot really describe action or define thoughts; it can only translate feelings and moods into sounds. Now just as music is always advancing, always endeavouring to fulfil more perfectly the functions of art—which are, as I have said, to communicate the spirit of one human being to his fellows—so language also is ever struggling to enlarge its powers and to do what musicians tell us music alone can do. Language, too, must translate feeling, and moods, but into words. It in a sense invades the region of music. And herein lies the justification—the necessity—for poetry, or for a prose which is virtually poetry in its language and movement and imagination. Poetry, in that broad sense, must always be the literary form for the expression of that which is most difficult to express, I mean of anything which is pervaded by a rare exaltation and passion of feeling, or by a delicate grace and charm.

Some people pretend to think that poetry is a wholly artificial thing; that it is merely a pleasing trick, when it is not an irritating trick, with language. Well, alas! it is quite natural that many stern spirits should be irritated by verses; for it is entirely true that nine-tenths of what is being, or has been, written in verse might better have been written in prose, or rather not written at all. The young author, and, for the matter of that, the old author, who thinks that he has a perfect right to choose between the verse form and the prose form simply according as he can versify or not, is grievously in the wrong. There is no more justification for, say, a purely didactic poem or descriptive poem than there is for the rhyming which begins somebody's treatise on optics with these egregious words:—

When parallel rays
Come opposite ways
And fall upon opposite sides.

Everything depends upon the nature of that which a man has to say.

What are the external marks of poetry as distinct from real prose? These: the choice of words of a special emotional or pictorial force, combined with musical cadences, rhythm, and sometimes rhyme. And why are these employed? To tickle the ear? By no means. It is simply because they are most effective agents in that communication of his mood and spirit which is the aim of the artist. When a mere fact has to be stated, there is no defence for verse, unless as an aid to memory, just as we say—

Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November.

When a thing can be said just as well in prose, there is no excuse for not putting it in prose. That axiom should kill off half our amateur poets and rid the world of a nuisance. On the other hand, when a thought or a feeling is to be communicated from a mind profoundly stirred, exalted, filled with fervour, or from a mind tingling with exquisite perceptions, then there can be no true and full communication to another mind, unless that mind also is stirred, exalted or made to tingle. Music can so dispose that other mind. So too can language; for, under the influence of poetry of perfect sound, we find stealing over us, thanks largely *to* the sound, a mood which could never result from prose; and so our minds are polarized to feel the actual thing expressed exactly as the writer feels it, to see it exactly as he sees it. Verse-poetry, therefore, is no idle invention. It has its sound philosophical basis; and where poetry is really demanded by the subject, it is part and parcel of the supreme literary gift to wed the music of the verse so aptly to the thought, that the communication from soul to soul is utterly complete.

Is verse a mere conviction? Let us see. Does any one pretend that his spirit would be just as much moved by the mere sense of this passage of Tennyson, if it were stripped of its verse form and turned into prose:—

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean.

Tears from the depths of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

and—

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

If he does, let us not envy him his powers of perception or sensation.

Would you feel for Coleridge just the same mood of sympathy, if he told you his sad case in prose, as when he writes:—

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word or sigh or tear.

Listen once more to this:—

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers—
And *that* cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!—
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

Verily I believe a few of these stanzas of Elizabeth Barrett Browning have more effect in moving the average human soul than forty prose sermons and a hundred prose tracts. And why? Because they express, not mere thoughts, not mere arguments, but a mood, a disposition, a soul.

Verse-poetry can never die. It is for evermore inseparable from the art of communicating the spirit in words.

The supreme literary gift then is the power to embody even the most subtle conception in a communicable shape. And is this a mere knack, with which brain-power has little or nothing to do? Not so. Observe what the task implies on the part of the writer, over and above his perfect control of words.

It implies, to wit, that he shall first realize those conceptions luminously to himself. Before he can utter them, his brain must have grasped them, formed a vivid picture of them. Most of us, when we become aware of a fancy or a feeling within ourselves, are unable to get it into focus. The power of undergoing a deep emotion, of thinking a far-reaching thought, of experiencing a keen sensation, is, I assert, by no means rare in the world. But as soon as we begin to look steadfastly at it and try to realize to ourselves exactly what it is like and what it means; when we ask ourselves, "what precisely is it I am thinking and feeling?" it evades us; it begins to break up and fade away, like a phantom or like mist. It is as when we think of some one's face, filled with a certain expression. The face starts out before our mind's eye, and for a moment we see it well and truly. But for most of us, unless we are painters, or possess the gift which might make us painters, it is impossible to keep that face, with that expression, steadily before our inward vision. As we gaze upon it, it changes and passes into a blur and refuses to be held.

But the mental retina of the great painter can hold such things as he has seen till he transfers them to the canvas; so can the brain of the great masters who paint for us in words, till they embody them in delicate prose or exquisite poetry. The lack of power to express often comes of a lack of this power to realize; and that power, I believe, is what is meant by "the vision and the faculty divine," and by "shaping imagination," and by other phrases which get so bandied to and fro that the world almost ceases to attach any meaning to them at all.

I remember some years ago, in an essay on *Literary Judgment*, asserting that the quality which chiefly distinguished the immortal works from the transient was sincerity, single-heartedness, reality of intention and love of the work for the work's sake. That was only a partial view of the truth. It is right in a measure, since that sincerity, that absence of make-believe, in the literary creation is a prime necessity; but it is not sufficient. It is, indeed, a prime necessity, because it means that the superlative writer must write at first hand of things genuinely conceived and realized by his very self. It is, indeed, a prime necessity, because you cannot conjure up vividly

and hold in steady view the communicable picture of your feeling or your thought, *unless* you feel it or think it with all your own being. But the sincerity is only a pre-supposed condition. The supreme literary quality is the power to realize the picture and so body forth the thing thought or felt. The great dramatic genius, for example, first realizes a character and his thoughts and feelings, and then, identifying himself with that character, gives them expression. When Homer imagines Odysseus descending to the nether world and meeting there the shades of heroes whom he had known at Troy, his Odysseus accosts this one or that and receives answer as befits the person. But to Ajax, son of Telamon, Odysseus had indirectly done a wrong, and caused his suicide, and, when the ghost of Ajax appears, Odysseus speaks to it gentle and soothing words of explanation and self-defence. And what does that proud injured Ajax reply? Well, on Homer's brain the picture is very vivid. His brain becomes practically the brain of the very Ajax, and the continuation shows it: "So I spake, but he answered me not a word, and passed on to Erebus after the other spirits of the departed dead." That silence of Ajax is truer than the most scathing of speeches.

So is it with Shakespeare. He sees his characters and realizes their sensations so vividly that his brain and feelings become the brain and feelings of his creations; and thus only does his Lear say with such perfect naturalness, "Pray you, undo this button." Hence, too, all the distinctness of character in his lifelike men and women, be it Hamlet or Falstaff, Cordelia or Lady Macbeth.

"Imagination," "the shaping gift of imagination," is this power of first presenting a thing to your own brain with luminousness. For once etymology lends real aid. *Imaginatio* is "the making of pictures." It is inseparable from the power of perfect expression.

Why did the people of Verona whisper of Dante, "Yonder is the man who has been in Hell?" Simply because of this power. Dante saw the place of torment in his imagination, not as any of us might see it, vaguely terrible, but clear in every dread and horrid detail. And, having so seen it, he lends to that seeing the gift of expression, and with a few simple verbs and nouns and plain forceful similes he makes his readers see what he had seen. So did it come about that he was regarded as the man who had actually "been in Hell." How far does Milton stand below him in this imaginative vision! Milton, too, describes an Inferno, but it lacks the convincingness of one who has seen it for himself. We could never say that Milton was the man who had "been in Hell."

What is the special power of Carlyle in his dealings with history? It is the power of summoning up visions of the past, standing out clear to the last particular, as if lightning illuminated them against the background of the ages.

I do not know whether any better definition of imagination can be given than that of Ruskin in his *Modern Painters*. "Imagination is the power of seeing anything we describe as if it were real, so that, looking at it as we describe, points may strike us which will give a vividness to the description that would not have occurred to vague memory, or been easily borrowed from the expressions of other writers." I do not say we can necessarily describe a thing *because* we so see it, but I do say that we cannot describe it *unless* we so see it. Therefore the supreme literary gift of communicating exactly what we think and feel, exactly as we think and feel it, involves no mere control of language, but, therewith, an imaginative brain to realize conceptions as vivid pictures. To combine these powers is to be a genius of great rarity.

In one part of the *Inferno* of Dante it rains fire. To say that much would be enough for the ordinary writer. But Dante not only sees fire falling; he sees exactly how it falls, and the picture in his mind becomes the picture in ours, when he simply says that it fell silently, steadily "as fall broad flakes of snow when winds are still." Perfectly easy, is it not? Yes, for Dante. But for the ordinary writer it would have been no more than "A rain of fire." But what manner of rain, O thou ordinary and inadequate writer? We do not, indeed, want scorching rhetoric and verse piled on verse. We want the "inevitable" word, the simple and the home-coming, the Dantesque. Byron now and again exhibits the power. Mazeppa is bound naked on the wild horse, and—

> The skies spun like a mighty wheel,
> I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
> And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
> Which saw no further....

With the consummate literary artists the picture, whether it be of a real scene, an imagined scene, or a feeling, is given in few but effective strokes. And it is so given simply because they see it all so distinctly. As Longinus says of Sappho's famous ode of passion, the supreme writer seizes upon the essential and salient features, combines them, and trusts to your and my imagination to supply the rest. When a writer welters in words and lines, when he elaborates touch upon touch, you may be sure that he is trying to fill the picture into his imagination, instead of being possessed by an imagination which determine the picture.

In the *Ancient Mariner* Coleridge describes the passing of the spectral ship:—

> The western wave was all aflame,
> The day was well-nigh done!
> Almost upon the western wave

Rested the broad bright Sun,
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was fleck'd with bars,
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peer'd
With broad and burning face.

Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that Woman's mate?

and then—

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

For my own part those words make me see it all fully, vividly. I do not merely behold the scene: I feel the peculiar awe of the narrator. Can you doubt that Coleridge saw this in his brain exactly as if it were real?

When Keats in his mind's eye saw Madeline praying under that Gothic window which was so "innumerable of stains and splendid dyes" he beheld the scene as if he were positively on the spot to paint it. And how does he paint it? What an opportunity for the display of pictorial technique in words! But Keats is not thinking of that. One does not really perceive a myriad little details at such a time. You never do actually see all the things which you would describe if you sat down to think details out one by one. If you had really fixed your eyes on the kneeling Madeline, as Porphyro did on that eve of St. Agnes, you could not also be taking an inventory of the particulars in the situation. The inferior writer forgets this, because he is writing from his wits, and not, as Keats wrote, from the spontaneous picture of imagination. What Keats sees is this:—

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;
Rose bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross fair amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint.

That is all, and it is enough. A kneeling figure, the wintry moon, and some few of the colours of the glass, described as they fall upon what you would really note, the head and breast and the clasped hands. What would not a Rossetti have done with such material!

These are descriptions. It is the same with emotions. "Pray you, undo this button." The supreme writer does not tear passion rhetorically to pieces. He does not elaborate it till he fritters it away. He condenses it all into the poignant cry which goes straight from heart to heart. What in the circumstances could Burns have said more final than—

Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

I know that there are people who cannot see that these four simple lines are the consummate expression of a vast range of feeling. We can only pray that Heaven will some day be merciful to them.

One word more seems necessary to be said. How can we tell when a writer is succeeding in his effort to communicate, to body forth what he seeks to body forth? Simply by our own complete apprehension, by the universal humanity in us, by the fact that we keenly recognize that such and such a sensation is one in which we have at least shared, but which we have never known how to express. We realize how it has been brought over us by loneliness, mountain solitude, a sunset, great heights, stormy seas, music, sorrow, love, the sound of distant bells, calm evenings, summer and the perfume of the flowers, fine characters, heroic deeds, and a thousand other causes, within us and without: and, when the supreme writer voices it for us, whatever it may be, we feel and know it at once for the final and the perfect.

If that test is not sufficient, I know no other.

Hebraism and Hellenism

Students of the history of society and literature have grown fond of distinguishing between two powerful influences upon our ways of thinking and of looking at life. They find two chief attitudes of mind, two chief animating spirits, so different from each other in the main that they deserve and have received special and practically antithetical names. Our manner of regarding life and society, morals and sentiment, nature and art, is determined by whichever of these two spirits predominates in us. Sometimes one whole nation has its view in almost all things pervaded by the one set of principles; another nation is no less manifestly informed by the other set. At other times it is an individual who stands out in broad spiritual and intellectual contrast with another of the same people and the same age. These two spirits have been called by Matthew Arnold the "Hebraic" and the "Hellenic"; the one Hebraic, because its clearest and most consistent manifestation has been among the Hebrews; the other Hellenic, because its clearest and most consistent manifestation has been among the Hellenes, or ancient Greeks. And not only have these two spirits been specially manifested there, but it is directly from those peoples that two corresponding influences have spread to all the more highly civilized portions of the world. From the Hebrews there has spread one great force, and from the Hellenes another great force, and these two forces have in a larger or smaller measure determined the characters and views of those peoples, who, being neither Hebrews nor Hellenes, had not of themselves developed so intense a spirituality or so active an intellectuality as one or other of these two possessed.

It is rather in their historical aspect that I propose to make some observations upon these two forces.

I feel a natural diffidence and some little constraint in treating such a subject before a specially Hebrew gathering. But the Hebrews of whom I have to speak are not yourselves, but your ancestors, and they are ancestors with a history so remarkable and a spirit so potent that, though I have no share in your pride, I can in a large measure cordially share in your admiration of them. In a large measure, I say, for I propose to show how the mental view and temperament of Israel, when Israel was his truest self, needed to be qualified and corrected by another mental view and temperament—that of the Greeks, when the Greeks were their truest selves. And if there were here any descendant of Pericles or Sophocles or Phidias, I should similarly say to him that, though I feel the keenest zest of admiration for the many sublime things which his Athenian ancestors did and wrote and wrought, yet the full perfection of human character and life was not reached by them, and could not be reached by them, until their own spirit was corrected by another, the spirit exemplified in the Hebrews. You will, I am sure, allow me to say whatever I feel to be just. And that there may be no misconception, let me add that, whenever I speak of the Hebraic spirit, I shall mean, not the spirit which an individual contemporary Hebrew may happen to display, but the spirit which was characteristic of Israel as a nation before the dispersion. In the same way the Hellenic spirit will mean the spirit which was characteristic of the pure Hellene before he was demoralized and adulterated by Roman, Slav, and Turk.

Man, chameleon-like, is apt to take the colour of the land on which he happens to be, and a Jew who lives in modern times, amid social and religious conditions, education, and material circumstances so different from those of ancient Palestine, may differ very widely from the type of the race as we gather it from history and literature. Nor is race everything. Even if the Jews once more gathered together into one nation from all quarters of the earth, we should by no means necessarily behold a people of the same spiritual attributes and ideals as the Hebrews who built the Temple under Ezra, or who fought like lions under the Maccabees. As with the early Saracens, it is often some one great idea or principle which—for the time at least—determines the whole current of a nation's mental and spiritual being. But that idea may gradually lose its intensity and its energizing power, and the Saracen sinks into the voluptuous Mussulman. Hebraism and Hellenism, therefore, mean the diverse spirits of two peoples as they once were, not as they may be now, or will necessarily be again.

One cannot with truth draw absolutely clear and sharp distinctions between the mental processes of different peoples. One cannot say that a Hebrew, in virtue of being a Hebrew, would necessarily act and think thus and thus, while a Greek, in virtue of being a Greek, would necessarily act and think in some other definite way. Here and there a fervid or brooding mind among the Greeks, such as that of Æschylus, might often approach the lines of Hebraism. Here and there some son of Shem must have been mentally constituted more like the sons of Javan. None the less, when we survey the history and study the literature of these two races as a whole, it is impossible not to perceive a clear and consistent difference between their respective ways of looking at things, at life and conduct, sentiment and nature and art.

Max Müller, speaking of the English people, says that we are Jewish in our religion, Greek in our philosophy, Roman in our politics, and Saxon in our morality. This ingenious remark is, as such absolute analyses are apt to be, only partially true. We have, indeed, borrowed from the Jews, from the Greeks, and from the Romans, in those several departments. But those departments over-lap and interpenetrate each other. The fact is that, in us English, with certain Teutonic qualities ineradically at the bottom of our nature, the modes in which our religion, philosophy, politics, and morality have developed themselves have been determined by a blending of all that we have learned from Jews, Greeks, and Romans alike. In the workings of our intellect and morals, Athens and Jerusalem in particular have operated upon us far more than we can now exactly estimate.

Looking at the matter historically, the special quality and type of Hebraism we must deduce from Hebrew literature, from Hebrew history, from the characteristics of eminent Hebrews, and from the average of testimony to Hebrew character supplied to us by reputable authors, Jew and Gentile, in poetry, drama, fiction, or other forms of literary creation. The special quality and type of Hellenism we must deduce from similar material concerning Greeks and things Grecian. And here I must confess that I am no Hebraist. I am not intimately acquainted with the heterogeneous compilation called the Talmud, nor with Alexandrine and mediæval Jewish literature. Nevertheless no one brought up strictly in a Christian Church can help becoming in some measure versed in things Hebraic. To be perpetually exercised from early childhood in reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the one great Hebrew document, the Bible; to have its very words and phrases ready to spring to one's lips; to be saturated with its sentiments; to have been made much more familiar with the sayings and doings of Abraham and Joseph, David and Solomon, Isaiah and Ezekiel, than even with those of the kings, heroes, and poets of one's own people—all this cannot but impart to a receptive mind the power of distinguishing with fair accuracy the Hebraic quality from the un-Hebraic. On the other hand, in Hellenic studies I may be allowed to take a more confident stand; and as sometimes the long august procession of Hebrew history and Hebrew letters passes across the mind, and sometimes again the brilliant march of Grecian deeds and Grecian words, one cannot fail to be more and more impressed with the contrast between the excellences or the shortcomings of the two.

Up till the present time, the life and literature of Europe in general has twice passed beneath Hebraic influences, twice beneath Hellenic. Each influence has been greater or less, more or less durable, in different regions; nevertheless there are two clearly distinguishable invasions of the influences in each case. The intellectual influence of Greece was first felt in pagan times, when Greek ideas and Greek philosophy passed westward to Rome and through Rome permeated the peoples under Roman sway. The spiritual influence of Hebraism was first felt when, soon after this, the Christian Jews carried the doctrine of one God amongst the pagans, and when Christianity,—which, however otherwise diverse from Judaism, is none the less its outcome—became the religion of all the European stocks. The first influence which came from Greece was an intellectual influence, the passing of a fresh and stimulating breeze. The first influence of Jerusalem was a moral re-awakening and revelation, the shaking of a rushing mighty wind. The moral principle of Hebraism, in the special guise of Christianity, transformed the whole life and conduct and ideals of European men. What had been virtues in some cases became vices, what had been weaknesses became virtues.

We need not dwell upon this immense change; its nature is known to all, and its source was Jewish. Centuries pass by. The Christianised world has sunk its intelligence beneath the prescriptions of a demoralized Church; the moral impulse of the religion borrowed from the Hebrews has died down into formalism. I speak of the period immediately preceding the later Renaissance and the Reformation. Strange to say, it was in a large measure the Ottoman Turk who came to the rescue. He over-ran Greece, captured Constantinople, and was the cause of a great westward exodus of Greek talent and learning. Italy in particular was filled with Greeks whose profit and pride it was to spread far and wide the literature and culture of their nation. The avidity with which this new learning was received was marvellous; still more marvellous was the effect. It was, in truth, a *renaissance*, a new birth of intellect. It meant no less than a general revival of the spirit of inquiry, of open-eyed observation, of a desire and a resolve to see things as they were, and not as tradition and dogma had taught men to see them. Italy, France, Germany and England became alive with fresh efforts of the reason, inspired with fresh ideas of taste and beauty in artistic creation, and with new hopes and schemes of progress. The astonishing abundance, the immense variety, and the splendid quality of the Elizabethan literature are due to no other recognisable cause. It was one and the same cause that made Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, and Bacon possible. A new springtime seemed to have dawned upon the world of thought. This was the second period of Hellenic influence, an influence wholly intellectual and artistic.

Following the re-awakening of speculation came the Reformation. The Reformation brought the reading of the Bible at first hand, and a new style of preaching and exhorting directly from it. In religion and morals the reformers fell back upon the Scriptures themselves. They drank in the Scriptures, and therewith the Hebraic spirit which pervades them. In most cases the salutary effect upon character and conduct can hardly be overstated. In other cases there was extravagance and harm. Uncompromisingly, and not very intelligently, did they speak Scripture, think Scripture, and act Scripture, like Hebrews born out of due season. Knox invested himself with the austere authority of the Hebrew prophet; Calvin was fain to hew Agag in pieces before the Lord. The Puritans of England became fanatical in their sombre conception of sin and in the rigour of their exaggerated Hebraism. Here was the second period of Hebraic influence, an influence wholly moral and religious.

In each case the new invasion of the Hellenic spirit precedes, and is the handmaid of, the Hebraic. In each case the influence of Greece is to procure the open mind, that of Jerusalem, to mould the unsteady heart. The Greek works first upon the intellect to make it supple, the Hebrew comes after and gives robustness to the moral will. Such, in the main, is the distinction and the historic sequence of the two forces. We have twice passed under each, and we shall, I believe and hope, feel the strong power of each again, for we sorely need, on the one hand, something to give stamina to our weak moral conceptions, and, on the other, something to give us clear principles of social life, art, and culture.

Let us look a little closer at what our distinction implies.

Physically the unlikeness of Hebrew to Greek was very marked. Allowing for climatic effects, the Hebrew physiognomy has preserved itself until to-day. The true, or at least the ideal, Greek type is almost lost in hybrid forms, yet we know what it was. The ideal Hellene was tall, upright, strong and supple withal, his lightish hair and beard were thick and curling, his features straight and firm, his brow broad, his eyes full and light. The whole form and aspect expressed a healthy zest of life, an open-eyed contemplation of men and things, and a belief in the sovereign virtue of reason. The outward aspect of the Hebrew type is very different from this. The inward difference of the two races was no less great. The essential contrast between them is not one of brow and eye, it is one of thinking and seeing, a contrast between two sets of ideals and principles, two ways of looking at life and the world. Romans like Juvenal, who saw both Greeks and Jews numerous in the imperial city, could only superficially observe that the Jew was unsocial, narrow in his prejudices and obstinate in his superstitions, while the Greek was as devoid of principle as he was brilliantly versatile. The Jew and Greek whom he saw were those of a demoralised period; but in any case the Roman did not understand either; he did not know that each was the representative of a certain important set of principles carried to excess. He would hardly have thought it worth his while to reflect on such a matter. It is otherwise with us, to whom all great human phenomena are of significance for that sound thinking which is essential to progress.

How can we describe in brief and intelligible terms these two spirits, the Hebraic and the Hellenic? One might use many figures of speech. Matthew Arnold's antithesis of Hellenic thinking to Hebraic doing needs much qualification. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that the Hebraic spirit is heat, the Hellenic spirit is light. Hebraism means moral fervour; Hellenism means intellectual sensibility. Hebraism suggests strength of conviction, tenacity of resolve, prophetic vehemence; Hellenism suggests flexibility of thought, adaptability to circumstances, artistic serenity. Hebraism suggests the austere and spiritual life, Hellenism the social and sensuous life. Yet none of these brief antitheses can be wholly or exclusively true. The difference is not thus to be labelled away, any more than one can label the difference between scents of flowers or tones of voices. There are two experiences which are apt to change the whole complexion of things; the one is religious conversion, the other falling in love. Yet how could one sum up the transformation except by those terms "converted" and "in love"? So, when the Hebrew, morally introspective, reliant on some great power outside himself, fervid in his beliefs as in his passions, intense in his imaginations and enthusiasms, is compared with the Hellene, a being intellectually open and curious, artistically sensitive, a cultivator of humanity and its delights, many-sided and self-possessed, by what condensed terms shall one describe their diverse ways of taking the whole of life and its concerns? In default of such terms let us hear a modern descendant of Israel, one who was at the time half thinking of this very distinction. Heinrich Heine, though an apostate from Judaism, and though he liked to fancy himself a Hellene, was nevertheless by constitution a Hebrew. He describes a visit which he paid to Goethe, than whom in form and mind and principle no more perfect Hellene ever lived in Hellas itself. When Heine came face to face with Goethe at Weimar, he tells us that he felt as if Goethe must be Jupiter, and that he involuntarily glanced aside to see whether the eagle was not there with the thunderbolt in his beak. He almost addressed him in Greek, but, finding he "understood German," he made the profound remark that the plums on the road were delicious. And now, hear how Heine draws the contrast between the Hellenic Teuton and himself, the Teutonic Hebrew: "At bottom Goethe and I are opposite natures and mutually repellent. He is essentially a man on whom life sits easily, who looks on enjoyment of life as the highest good, and though at times he has glimpses and vague feelings of the ideal life and expresses them in his poems, yet he has never comprehended it, much less lived it. I, on the contrary, am essentially an enthusiast, that is, so inspired by the ideal as to be ready to offer myself up to it, and even prompted to let myself be absorbed by it. But, as a fact, I have caught at the enjoyments of life, and found pleasure in them; hence the fierce struggle that goes on in me between my clear reason, which approves the enjoyments of life, and rejects the devotion of self-sacrifice as a folly, and my enthusiasm, which is always rising up and laying violent hands on me, and trying to drag me down again to her ancient solitary realm. Up, I ought perhaps to say, for it is still a grave question whether the enthusiast who gives up his life for the idea does not in a single moment live more and feel more than Herr von Goethe in his sixth-and-seventieth year of egotistic tranquillity." Heine was not a typical Hebrew, and hence the struggle of which he speaks; but his words express what we want to have expressed. The true Hellene lives for the sake of life, and for whatsoever things are lovely and charming. The true Hebrew lives for the sake of his idea, and for whatsoever things are of spiritual power.

The consequence is that, while the imagination, the rapture, and the pathos of the Hebrew rose to heights and descended to depths utterly beyond the consciousness of the ordinary Hellene, the Hellenes, on the contrary, attained to a justness of intellectual and artistic perception which formed no part of the ordinary Hebrew culture. The general manner of all the Hebrew prophets, of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, or Joel, is the same—the manner of the fiercest afflatus, of entire abandonment, finding expression in phrases of magnificent solemnity and in imagery of the profoundest awesomeness. This manner the Greeks never show. Not even Æschylus, the most Hebraic of Hellenes, has any passages in which he loses control of his artistic sense. Neither he nor any other Hellene sees ecstatic visions or dreams ecstatic dreams. There is no place in the Greek comprehension for that state of mind which can beget visions like these: "And I looked, and behold! A whirlwind came out of the north, a gray cloud and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire"—with the further visions of living creatures "like burning coals of fire," and the "wheels

within wheels," with the rings of them full of eyes. To this there is not and could not be any parallel in the Greek. When the Persian queen in Æschylus dreams the most startling dream of her life, it is obviously a vision constructed by the poet's intellect alone. When Plato sees visions, they, too, are intellectual constructions with the meaning as clear as the words. There is nothing rapt, nothing fantastic. Greek imagery in this region is to Hebrew imagery what the sculpture of Greece is to those weird creations of symbolism at Nineveh and Babylon, the colossal human-faced bulls and the genii with the eagle-head. And if you remind me that I am comparing prophet with poet, and not prophet with prophet, I answer that the poets are the only analogue of the prophets that Greece possessed; and that very fact illustrates what is meant when we say that the Hellenic spirit had no capacity for, the Hellenic view of life no impulse to, that intensity of feeling which could produce imagery so stupendous in such awe-inspiring phrase.

The Hebraic character, therefore, is one of strength and depth. Even now no Jew in fiction is ever a weakling or a trifler. In whatever light he is presented, a Shylock of Shakespeare, an Isaac of Scott, a Nathan of Lessing, a Sidonia of Disraeli—revengeful, avaricious, bigoted, benevolent, magnificent, talented—he is always a character of striking power and intensity. The ancient type of Greek does not appear in modern fiction. If he did, it would be as a subtle reasoner, perfect critic, polished man of the world, full of the intellectual and social graces, ever adaptable to circumstance, choosing his idea and never letting the idea govern him. And, in the matter of loves and hates, it was rather his maxim that one should neither hate nor love over-much, since he might some day come to hate the person he loved and love the person he hated. The Hellenic watchwords "nothing too much"; and "measure in everything"; the Hellenic hatred of "unseasonableness" and dread of "infatuation"—these things show how the ideal of the Greek was ever to be master of himself by aid of reason. The Hebraic spirit, on the contrary, would strive and cry without scruple of measure or season in any matter on which its conscience or desire was fixed.

The Hebraic spirit is uncompromising; it does not readily admit other points of view. Hebrew history, for example, is wholly one-sided, seen wholly in the colour of a Hebrew's feelings. The peoples with whom Israel comes in contact are either so many impious men made to be slain, or they are wicked tyrants, allowed by Heaven to chastise the chosen for some allotted period. This was the necessary outcome of the theocratic principle. How different from history as written by the Greek Thucydides! To that historian facts are so many facts, to be seen as they are, and to be told without undue enthusiasm, without obtrusive expression of moral approval or disapproval. Never since those Hellenic days has a historian been able so perfectly to contemplate the triumphs and disasters of his own country as if himself quite aloof from personal interest or stake in the result. Unclouded vision, purely intellectual observation, could no further go.

With such temperaments and mental habits, what view of life did the Hebrews entertain, and what the Hellenes? Our view of life is in the greatest measure a matter of religion or non-religion, and the Hebrews possessed a highly spiritualised and devotional religion, while the Greeks, if not easy-going polytheists, had at best some rationalistic system of philosophy. The difference is immense. The Hebrew creed, a real and absorbing belief, involved a certain code of laws for the guidance of conduct, certain definite sentiments, certain definite hopes and fears, certain definite axioms as to the aim and end of existence. The highest good and the worst evil had for the Hebrews unmistakable senses. It was not so with the Greeks. They too—when they thought at all—sought for a systematic conception of life, but not for one in which they should be subordinated to some authority outside themselves. They desired to see life steadily and see it whole, but they must do so by the light of their intellect. Their conduct, aims, sentiments, hopes, fears, must depend upon axioms to which their reasoning brought them. What the Hebrews called sin in the sight of Heaven, the Greeks called an error or an offence to society. It was wrong socially, or it was wrong intellectually. Greece therefore had no place for religious fervour. It was tolerant almost to indifference. Athens might arraign Anaxagoras for impiety or Socrates for heresy, but these charges were either mere pretexts or were viewed simply in their social bearing. When a Hebrew speaks of a valley full of dry bones, and of life being breathed into them, we know that he is speaking in the moral sense. A Hellene would have meant a revival of intelligence. The Hebrew prophet speaks of "taking the heart of stone out of them and giving them a heart of flesh." A Plato would rather have spoken of taking the films from their intellectual gaze and opening their eyes to the pure essences of things. The Hebrew would sit in sackcloth and ashes to atone for his offences and to induce the proper spiritual submission. The Hellene would only fast, if he fasted at all, so that he might by his plain living secure high thinking. No ardent missionaries, Jonahs or Pauls, could come out of Greece; it could produce no martyrs. The *De Profundis* of a Greek would signify, not moral abasement, but physical and mental suffering.

Not that the Hellenes were shallow. Far from it. Racially, indeed, they had neither the Hebraic zeal nor the Hebraic conscience. But of vastly more importance is the fact that in their conception of life they started with different premises. They found themselves in life, their hope ending with life, and their object was to make the best and happiest of it. The hereafter was not pleasant to contemplate. Achilles, when he meets Odysseus in the netherworld, declares that he would rather be a poor labouring thrall on earth than a king among the dead. Had the Hellenes been shown the modern doctrine of evolution, it is easy to fancy how eagerly they would have sprung at it. To the Hebraic spirit it would have been flat, stale, and unprofitable. In a word, while to the best of Hebrews life was almost a sacrament, to the best of Hellenes there was nothing sacramental but intelligence. The national pride of the Hebrews lay in a religious reason—their election as a peculiar people; the national pride of the Greeks lay in the intellectual, social, and artistic culture which distinguished them from the *barbaroi*. If Hellas had had its Zion,

it would have meant a city which was the pre-eminent abode of perfected human thought, society, and arts. "The name of the city of that day shall be the 'Lord is there,'" is of the essence of Hebraism. The Hellene would have thought of a city filled with Hymns to Intellectual Beauty, hymns to Athena, goddess of arts and wisdom, and to Apollo, the embodied idea of light.

In their outlook upon nature, animate and inanimate, there was a corresponding contrast. Neither Greek nor Hebrew, indeed, contemplated nature as we do in modern times. Neither was haunted as with a passion by the beauty and grandeur of woods and streams and hills. To the Hellene, as to Dr. Johnson or to Sydney Smith, nature was but a background for man. Homer's moons and clouds, rainbows and hail-storms, are used for the most part only for similitudes. To the Hebrew the glory of the Heavens and the wonders of the deep are meet subjects upon which to praise the Lord for his wonderful works. At the most, the Hellene found in nature a sensuous delight, a part of the multitudinous joy which, in a healthy condition, he found in all life. It is a mistake, indeed, to suppose that the Greek was insensible to natural beauty. The daffodils, crocuses, anemones, and hyacinths, the countless laughter of the Ægean and the gleaming Cyclades, were delightful to his eye, the trill of the nightingale to his ear; but neither he nor the Hebrew could have felt much sympathy with the state of mind of a Wordsworth, to whom nature, in and for itself, had the effect of a living and inspiring power. Neither would have understood Wordsworth's—

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Of the Hebrew conception of nature as shown in the Psalms or the book of Job we need say nothing. Let us by an instance or two show just how far the Greek appreciation of it went. In Theocritus a number of friends walk into the country to a harvest festival:—"There we reclined on deep beds of fragrant lentisk, and rejoicing we lay in new-stripped leaves of the vine. And high above our heads waved many a poplar, while close at hand the sacred water from the nymphs' own cave welled forth with murmurs musical. On shadowy boughs the brown cicalas kept their chattering toil. Far off the little owl cried; in the thick thorn-brake the lark and finches sang; the ringdove moaned; the yellow bees were flitting round the springs. All breathed the scent of opulent summer, of the season of fruits. The pears at our feet and apples by our side were rolling plentiful; the tender branches, with wild plums laden, were earthward bowed." Here, it will be seen, the delight is purely sensuous, a delight in sweet sighs, sweet sounds, sweet smells. In the *Œdipus Coloneus* of Sophocles there is a choral song of somewhat higher note than this: "Stranger, thou hast come to earth's fairest home, to white Colonus, where the nightingale, a constant guest, trills her clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the God's inviolate bowers, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by wind of any storm; where the reveller Dionysus ever walks the ground, companion of the Nymphs, and, fed by heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms morn by morn with fair clusters, crown of the great Goddess from of yore, and the crocus blooms with golden beam. Nor fail the sleepless founts whence the waters of Cephisus wander, but each day with stainless tide he moveth over the land's swelling bosom for the giving of quick increase."

Yet here, too, so far as the charm is not merely sensuous, Nature is but the background for the passing of the bright Gods to whom humanity owes progress and delights. There is nothing awesome, nothing pride-abasing, in nature to the Hellene as to the Hebrew.

When we come to deal with art, whether plastic art or the art of letters, there stands out the same difference of spirit. And on all sides it is admitted that in this region Hellenism reached nearly to perfection. It is scarcely worth while here to descant upon the work of Phidias or Sophocles, and to analyse its excellence. In the domain of art the word 'Hellenic' implies absolute truth of form, absolute truth of taste, grace and elegance. It means the selecting and simplifying of essentials into an ideal shape; and therefore it implies the absence of all superfluity, incongruousness, bombast, extravagance or purposelessness. The Parthenon and the statue of the grey-eyed goddess standing up in faultless symmetry against the clear blue sky of Attica; Plato's *Apology of Socrates* breathing serene and lucid thought in language lucid and serene—these are the types of art as understood by the Hellenic spirit. We nowadays prate much of real and ideal. The Greek combined them without prating. The anatomy of a Grecian statue is anatomically true in proportion and in pose, while the whole figure is none the less of an ideal beauty which could rarely have existed outside the imagination. To the French the word *emphase* has come to mean, not emphasis, but fustian. To the Greeks, with their love of measure, their instinctive avoidance of the "too much," *emphase* in letters or other arts was irritating and distressful. Mr. Andrew Lang selects a sentence of Macaulay: "Even the wretched phantom who still bore the imperial title stooped to pay this ignominious blackmail." And Mr. Lang justly says: "The picture of a phantom who is not only a phantom, but wretched, stooping to pay blackmail which is not only blackmail, but ignominious, may divert the reader." The Greeks were neither deceived nor diverted by such bad art; their sympathies were chilled, and they called the thing "frigid." Meanwhile the special art of the Hebrews is, perhaps, the art of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, music which is so often joined to profound emotional susceptibility. They had no statuary, their architecture does not remain for us to criticise it, their literature alone supplies us with material for comparison, and even in this there is not that diversity of epic, dramatic, and lyric matter, of history, oratory and philosophy, which we have from Greece. Nevertheless, so far as material offers itself, we find in Hebrew art just those qualities we might expect from Hebraism.

The Hebrews had none of the Hellenic instinct for simplicity and grace and directness. They

delighted in deep symbolism and parable, in thunder and lightning of diction and imagery, in pomp and state and grandeur. They felt no scruples about going beyond the golden mean. With them all art of writing or creating was but means to an end, and not an end in itself. Let any one read the Bible and observe its unqualified figures of speech—how the hills skip and the floods clap their hands—and then let them ponder this Hellenic criticism of Longinus: "Æschylus, with a strange violence of language, represents the palace of Lycurgus as 'possessed' at the appearance of Dionysus: '*The hills with rapture thrill, the roof's inspired.*' Here Euripides, in borrowing the image, softens its extravagance: *and all the mountain felt the God*.'"

The Hellene, you observe, is not to let his intellect lose control over his imagination; the Hebrew wholly abandons his imagination to his master passion.

This, you may say, is merely the difference between being inspired and not being inspired; and it may be urged that Plato himself puts the Greek conception otherwise:

"All good poets compose their beautiful poems, not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed ... for the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired. When he has not attained to this state he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles. Many are the noble words in which poets speak of the actions which they record, but they do not speak of them by any rules of art, they are inspired to utter that to which the Muse impels them, and that only."

All of which is true enough, but what it amounts to is this—that artistic rules cannot invent the poetic thought and utterance; it does not mean that the inventing Muse ever ignores the rules of art. And, as a matter of fact, there never is, in Hellenic poetry, anything of utter abandonment. There is reason, warmed and coloured by sentiment and imagination, but reason is never imperilled by any conflagration of emotion.

We began by saying that in all our modern thought and conduct we are either more Hebraic or more Hellenic one than another. In what Carlyle would call our heroes, in our writers, and in our own lives, the one spirit or the other predominates. Happy, but exceeding rare, is he who blends the best elements of both. Literature, perhaps, affords the readiest means of illustration. Not every sentiment, it is true, of modern European letters has been either distinctly Hellenic or distinctly Hebraic in its character. The spirit of romantic poetry, and of the poetry of nature, has no analogy in Greece or Palestine. Nevertheless, inasmuch as no great European writer has failed to pass under the moral influence of Christianity or of Judaism, or to feel directly or indirectly the intellectual influence of Greece, we may, in those great voices of a generation who are called its great writers, listen for the differing tones of these differing forces, as betrayed either in their substance or in their form.

It is not easy to select complete types of one or the other. Roughly, perhaps, one might speak of the Hebraic Dante, Bunyan, or Carlyle; of the Hellenic Johnson, Goethe or Tennyson: but one could not rightly draw up two catalogues of authors and set them in contrast as perfect embodiments, the one of Hebraism, the other of Hellenism. On the other hand, it is not so difficult in the case of a great writer to distinguish his Hebraic from his Hellenic moods and manners, and to gather how far the one element or the other holds the chief sway in him. That Dante's moral force is Hebraic is the natural and correct impression of one who compares the *Divine Comedy* with the *Odyssey* of Homer on the one side, and with the *Psalms* or Isaiah on the other. Yet even in Dante there is a certain repose of contemplation and a careful justness of language which belong rather to the Hellene. The character of Luther, again, might seem wholly Hebraic to those who see him only as a zealot of fiery controversy, so carried out of himself that his very visions of Beelzebub acquired all the vividness of reality. Yet there are times when another spirit is upon him, when his reasoning is cool and colourless as that of a Greek philosopher. The misfortune of Luther is that he could not, as a Melancthon in large measure could, amalgamate the best elements of these complementary natures.

If from the names of English literature one were asked to choose our most Hebraic poet, the name of Milton would perhaps be the first to offer itself to many minds. Yet this would be a mere illusion. We must not confound the subject of poetry with its spirit. The subject of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* is Hebraic; the spirit and manner are by no means so. Distinguish in these works all that which cannot properly be said to belong to the poet himself, the evident paraphrase of Bible language and Bible narrative; set by itself that which is Milton's own imagining; mark the spirit and manner which pervade it; and it will be seen that prophetic fervour is hardly there, profound moral enthusiasm is hardly there. What we chiefly discover is the intellect of a theological student, working in a certain rich material, the magnificent Miltonic diction. The true Hebraic note is rather struck in the sonnet, "*Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold*," in that fierce reproach of the Church in *Lycidas*, and in certain passages of his prose. Milton is in fact a Hellene made subject to Hebraic moods by his Hebrew studies, the Puritan Hebraism of his training, and the Hebrew connexion of his subjects. It is when he writes *Comus* or *L'Allegro* that he is giving expression to his natural poetic bent. It may seem a paradox if, on the other hand, we say that there was much of Hebraism in one whose purity and justness of language and grace of form seem wholly Hellenic; I mean Shelley. Shelley was intense in imagination, capable of boundless rapture and absorption, subject to white heats of passion and conflagration of moral wrath. In truth his nature was a rare blending, left crude by his early death. As faultless in diction as a Hellene, in philosophical speculation almost a copy of Plato, he was in capacity for reaching the heights and depths of spiritual possession the equal of any Hebrew. And this it is which makes one think that

Shelley's early death robbed us of much that would have been of quite supremest worth in poetry.

This is not the time and place to take authors and deal with them one by one, showing how the moral Hebraism is entirely possessed of Bunyan, how entirely Hellenic are the spirit and style of Goethe and the clear criticism and unperturbed intellectual processes of Johnson. I will content myself with touching in no ordered way upon the Hebraic and Hellenic note as it is uttered by one or two passages which I choose almost at random. And first let us hear this passage of Carlyle:—

"A second thing I know. This lesson will have to be learned under penalties. England will either learn it or England also will cease to exist amongst nations. England will either learn to reverence its heroes, and discriminate them from its sham heroes and valets and gas-lighted histories, and to prize them as the audible God's voice amid all inane jargons and temporary market-cries, and say to them with heart loyalty, 'Be ye King and Priest and Gospel and guidance for us,' or else England will continue to worship new and ever new forms of Quackhood and so, with what resiliences and reboundings matter little, go down to the Father of Quacks. Can I dread such things of England? Wretched, thick-eyed, gross-hearted mortals, why will ye worship lies and stuffed cloth suits, created by the ninth parts of men? It is not your purses that suffer, your farm rents, your commerces, your mill revenues—loud as ye lament over these things. No, it is not these alone, but a far deeper than these. It is your *souls* that lie dead, crushed down under despicable nightmares, atheisms, brain fumes."

What is there here but the uncompromising moral attitude and denunciation of the Hebrew seer? What is there but the same stormy phrase, tumultuous almost to chaos? Carlyle is our own era's type of the Hebraic temperament. Behind him follows Ruskin, a Carlyle tempered by the spirit of Hellenic art without the balance of Hellenic calm. In what Ruskin has to say on how we live and think, his sentences are one and all of Grecian form, but the breath they breathe is Hebrew. I read in Swinburne this address to England:—

Oh thou clothed round with raiment of white waves,
Thy brave brows brightening through the gray wet air,
Thou lulled with sea-sounds of a thousand caves
And lit with sea-shine to thine inland lair:
Whose freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves
And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare:
O! by the centuries of thy glorious graves,
By the live light of th' earth that was thy care,
Live! thou must not be dead!
Live! let thine armoured head
Lift itself to sunward and the fair
Daylight of time and man,
Thine head republican,
With the same splendour on thine helmless hair
Within his eyes kept up a light,
Who on thy glory gazed away their sacred sight.

These verses might almost be the verses of a Greek. And this is true not merely of the art and grace of form; it is equally true of the mental condition of the writer. The sentiment is intellectually just, and the expression is artistically just. Exhortation there is, a certain ardour there is, but it is the sober and restrained ardour of the Greeks; it is not Hebraic. But I read again of how the Armada flies:—

Torn by the scourge of the storm-wind that smites as a harper smites
  on a lyre,
And consumed of the storm as the sacrifice, loved of their God, is
  consumed with fire,
And devoured of the darkness as men that are slain in the fires of his
  love are devoured,
And deflowered of their lives by the storms as by priests is the spirit
  of life deflowered.

And here is neither Hellenic seasonableness and proportion, nor Hebraic fervour, nor truth as it is understood by either Hebrew or Hellene. It is the work of a man who endeavours to lash himself into an intensity which is not of him, and who trifles with a Hebraism which rejects him.

Tennyson is, in point of the adaptation of form to matter, in the absolute justice and delicacy of his diction, in the perfect proportion and symmetry of his images, the completest reproduction among moderns of the Hellenic literary artist. What could be more luminously seen or more luminously expressed than

The curled white of the coming wave,
Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks?

Hellenic Tennyson is also in his appreciation of all beauty. More important, he is Hellenic in his tranquil open-eyed outlook upon the world. It is in these things that he is his best self. He is least himself when he seeks to pass into the prophetic sphere. He is *poeta* more than *vates*, and he is least Tennysonian in a poem like "Maud." The Hebraic element in Tennyson is not innate, it is but

what he has gathered from his training in Hebraic morality and the sentiment which comes of it. "His strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart was pure" is not a sentiment natural to a pagan Greek, but it is natural enough to a christianised Hellene whose Hellenic temperament is otherwise quite unchanged.

But we must not let ourselves be lured on by specimen after specimen over the wide field of literature. Rather let us return to some practical bearing of this whole question. For a practical bearing it has. It is this. Life consists of knowing, acting, admiring, loving, and hoping. The ideal man would be at the same time sage, poet, artist, man of virtue, and man of deeds. The perfect man would have all his faculties of thinking, feeling, and doing wholesomely blended. Now neither Hebraism nor Hellenism could produce the ideal man or harmoniously develop all his best powers. Each had its defects. The Hebrew, along with his intense spirituality and his moral strenuousness, lacked intellectual justness, sense of proportion, social appreciativeness, artistic truth and sobriety. The Hellene, along with his lucidity of intellect, his justness of perception in art, and his social aptitudes, lacked that sustained zeal for some moral principle which leads either to the doing of great things or to the attainment of sublime character. The dangers of Hebraism lay in excess of absorption, in a proneness to fanaticism, in an obstinacy which might become rabidness, in a certain misplaced loudness and disregard of dignity. The dangers of Hellenism lay in proneness to sacrifice character to talent, and deeds to thought. Hebraism tended towards asceticism and bigotry; Hellenism towards indifference and self-indulgence. The narrow Puritans of the seventeenth century revealed some of the dangers of excessive Hebraism; some of the dangers of excessive Hellenism have appeared in France. The modern French are in many things, though by no means in all things, a copy of the ancient Greeks. They are so in their passion for clear ideas. France is the land of the *philosophes* and the critics. The French are Hellenic in their dislike of *emphase* and of *originalité*, a word which comes to mean not so much originality as eccentricity. And in such a connotation of *originalité*, there betrays itself an important fact—that France is hardly the best country for the production of great characters. "The great Frenchmen," it has been said, "are apt to be Italians." Greece, too, failed to produce great characters. Homer's heroes, like the eminent figures of Grecian history, are of little moral force. Where the correct state of mind is to have *point de zèle*, as at Paris and Athens, mankind may avoid the ridiculous, but can scarcely reach the sublime. Where the guiding force is some clear idea, men may rise to some signal effort, like the battle of Salamis or the French Revolution; but intellectual impulse has none of the durability of moral impulse, and the fibre of resolve is soon relaxed into languid discontent. Thus much may be said of Hellenism in excess. Yet its services are immense. The social and material progress of the world requires free play of thought, a certain boldness and open-mindedness of inquiry; and for this we look rather to the spirit of the *audax Iapeti genus*—the Hellenic spirit—than to the firm-set minds of the sons of Shem. And, on the contrary, whatever may be urged against Hebraism in excess, it is all the better for human life that men should have the capacity for emotional depth and fervour, for tenacious adherence to some high moral purpose. In these days of clamour and dispute we need a diffusion of the Hellenic spirit to enable us to look out on things exactly as they are, and to deliver us from fads and fatuous agitations. But in these same days of weak convictions we need a measure of Hebraic ardour and Hebraic fortitude to make our conduct answer to what we see, and to prevent our seeing from ending in thoughts and words.

What is principally needed is a blending in just proportion of the two spirits. We want Hellenism for knowing and enjoying, Hebraism for acting, loving, and hoping. "Without haste, without rest," should be our maxim for progress. And that is equivalent to saying that neither the Hebraic zeal nor the Hellenic repose can of itself satisfy our needs.

This blending could be obtained, more than we now seek to obtain it. The leopard cannot change his spots, and the human being cannot wholly rid himself of his congenital qualities. Nevertheless culture and habit are second nature. There is scarcely a disposition of mind or manner of sentiment into which we cannot bring ourselves by steadily encouraging it. The faculties of the mind are like the muscles of the body. They shrink to nothing if not exercised; they can be exercised symmetrically; or some can be exercised at the expense of the rest. What we want is a school culture, and a self-culture, which shall bring out all our best powers, not one only of them or some few of them. At present our system is all for knowledge. We seek for understanding of facts, but we do not seek for a systematic view of life, for clear principles of art, or for social many-sidedness. Of the best elements of the Hebraic spirit, we are almost ceasing to seek anything at all. And this is wholly bad. We shall breed up a race not only without what Matthew Arnold calls distinction, but without any common animating soul, unless it be a general selfishness and a general Philistinism.

What we want is a broader, less mechanical culture. We want to be steeped not only in facts, but in stimulating thoughts, religious and poetical. Splendid culture means splendid ideals, and if a nation could acquire the clear thinking of Hellenism combined with the immense moral resolve of Hebraism, that nation, knowing its aims, and making steadily towards them, would afford a spectacle of grandeur and of power such as no nation now presents.

The Principles of Criticism Applied to

Two Successors of Tennyson

It is perhaps hardly necessary to explain that in the words "successors of Tennyson" I make no reference to an actual or a prospective Poet Laureate. The position primarily held by Tennyson in his lifetime, and the only position in which posterity will regard him, is the position of the poet. That he was the laureate also is no doubt a matter of some biographical interest, but it is of little further significance. It will be doing no injustice to the large quantity of agreeable verse-writing which has been executed by Mr. Alfred Austin if we take it for granted that his appointment carries the laureateship back to what it was before Wordsworth and Tennyson lent it the lustre of their names. The laureate is now, as in the days of Southey, a literary officer in the Queen's service, chosen, as other officers are wont to be chosen, by the political powers that be. Our present interest is rather in those who come after Tennyson as pre-eminent among the free and single-hearted servants of the Muses.

Again, by his "successors" I mean simply those who come after—those masters of younger birth who seem most nearly to take his place now that he is gone—not any avowed disciples, still less servile imitators of his thought or style. Following upon Homer there was the school of the Homeridæ, or "sons of Homer." A cluster of poets at the beginning of the seventeenth century were styled "the sons of Ben Jonson." There are no doubt "sons of Tennyson" at this present date. With these we have now no concern. They are but satellites, while that for which we are scanning the poetical horizon is a rising star of a magnitude in some degree comparable with the stars which have set with the deaths of Matthew Arnold, Browning and Tennyson. There is, I believe, more than one such star already well advanced into the firmament. I am one of those who believe that this is an age unusually rich in genuine poetry. There are to-day singing in the English tongue enough of so-called minor poets to have made the poetical fortune of any epoch between the Elizabethan period and our own. This century has seen re-enthroned the Miltonic doctrine that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate"; it has learned from Wordsworth of the divinity in Nature, from Shelley of the passion in it, from Tennyson how to express its moods; it has learned from Byron how to be frank about humanity, from Wordsworth how to sympathize with it, from Browning how to understand it; it has been taught by Shelley how to write with melody, by Keats how to write with richness, by Wordsworth with simplicity, by Tennyson with grace and luminousness, by Arnold with chasteness. It has availed itself of these great examples to such good purpose that the average of reputable verse written to-day is more instinct with feeling, more vitalised with thought, more satisfying in expression, than much which is studied and belauded and quoted because it was written a century or two ago.

With great boldness perhaps, but with no less deliberateness of judgment, I maintain that contemporary men and women might better spare for the living, breathing, and often very beautiful work of their contemporaries, some of the time and appreciation which they do not grudge to give over and over again, even if it be with some conscious effort, to the elaborate conceits of the seventeenth century, to the rather frigid frugalities of a Gray, the laborious melancholies of a Collins, or the cold transparencies of a Landor. No doubt justice will be done in the end, but why not do as much of it as possible at once?

It is for these reasons that I beg your attention to an attempt at an appreciation of two contemporary singers, both excellent, though differing in the nature of their excellence. Their names are John Davidson and William Watson.

But first it would be well to look a little closely at that word "appreciation," and to examine frankly the considerations which make up a literary judgment. I am induced to take this course after a somewhat amused survey of a series of criticisms which have been passed upon the two poets who are our immediate subject. One writer, for instance, speaks of Mr. Davidson's works as "marked from end to end by the careless fecundity of power," while the next tells us of the self-same verses that they have "the severe restraint and very deliberately willed simplicity of M. Guy de Maupassant." Careless fecundity and deliberate restraint are sufficiently irreconcilable terms to apply to the same creations. Another critic tells us of Mr. Watson that "it is of 'Collins' lonely vesper-chime' and 'the frugal note of Gray' that we think as we read the choicely worded, well-turned quatrains that succeed each other like the strong unbroken waves of a full tide," and I cannot but wonder how a full tide of strong waves can suggest anything either "frugal" or "well-chosen." It is turbid judgments such as these, and an intellectual slovenliness which is content to accept words and phrases without attaching definite notions to them, that discredit the average English criticism, when set beside the lucid Greek appreciation of Aristotle and Longinus, or of those Frenchmen like Taine or Ste. Beuve who know exactly what they look for and why they look for it. We still require a few Matthew Arnolds to drill us in the first steps in criticism. It seems almost as if we had accepted for literature the ultra-democratic maxim that every man has as much right as every other man to judge a poem—if not a good deal more right.

The appreciation of a poet means the estimation of his rank, the separation of his precious metal from his dross, to the end that we may get the utmost enjoyment out of his beauties, while we feel the intellectual satisfaction which comes of a reasoned opinion at first hand. We appreciate the poet at his true value when we set his particular contribution to the literary joys of life neither too high nor too low. We fully appreciate him when we derive from him the keenest delight which he is capable of affording. And I know of no other process for the attainment of this end than the one which I am about to propound. It is, I think, a method which is analytical without being mechanical, and judicial without being cold.

The excellence of the poems of Tennyson has been placed beyond doubt by a consensus of the best judgment, when there some day swim into our ken first one and then another small volume bearing the name of William Watson or John Davidson. We perhaps read these volumes receptively enough, and form some sort of impression concerning them. But we are not sure of ourselves; we wait to hear what other people have to say. If we hear praise, we feel encouraged to join in it; if we hear disparagement, we grow suspicious of our own more favourable judgment. Perhaps, on the other hand, with that half-resentment which we are always apt to feel at new claims to poetic eminence, and for which a large measure of excuse is to be found in the fact that ambitious but futile rhymesters are a veritable plague of flies to publisher and public—in this spirit of half-resentment we ask, "Who is this Watson?" "Who is this Davidson?" and incontinently proceed to examine them in a cold and carping spirit, with a keen eye to their faults of detail, and with a sort of illogical assumption that if they had been of much account we should somehow have heard of them before.

It is but rarely that an accomplished judge of literature will speak out boldly and unequivocally, without "hedging," so to speak, and not only declare that such-and-such a work reveals a rising genius, but give his reasons why he declares it, distinguishing the poetical elements in which the genius is shown. The critic should frankly analyse; but mostly he does not. He tells us, for instance, that Walt Whitman is the "Adam of a new poetical era," or else that he is "a dunce of inconceivable incoherence and incompetence"; but usually he does not show us the precise data upon which either conclusion is based. Cannot profundity of thought, ardour of emotion, power and charm of expression, be actually demonstrated as present or absent in a poet, when the critic is addressing himself to his natural readers, to wit, persons in whom are pre-supposed a certain amount of brains and heart, and cultivation of both? If they cannot, has criticism any real existence?

To begin with, each reader is bound to recognise how far he is himself at any time capable of appreciating particular kinds of poetry. Out of epic, lyric, dramatic, and descriptive poetry there is usually some one kind with which we have no natural sympathy. It follows not that, because a man is fond of peaches, pears, and grapes, he is also fond of passionfruit or tomatoes. Of these latter he may be no judge whatever. *Non omnia possumus omnes* in the criticism of poetry, any more than in other departments of activity.

There are, for instance, some who have no patience with poetry of the mystic, half-dreamy kind, but must have their conceptions one and all definitely realized for them. They cannot away with emotional arabesques; they must have recognizable and rememberable outlines. There are others who cannot bring themselves to care for the poetry which broods upon inanimate nature; their interest centres wholly on the problems of man; just as there are limited souls who find no delight in landscapes, and think figure-painting the only field of art. These are no critics, perhaps never could be critics, of more than the verbal expression in those uncongenial regions of poesy. To be a true appreciator of all poetry a man must possess a harmoniously-developed nature, as full and large and liberal as poetry itself. Let us, therefore, begin by admitting and allowing for our limitations where we feel them to exist.

In the first place, we must set about our reading only when we are in the proper mood of receptivity. Poetry is not science, any more than painting is photography, or architecture is building in squares and cubes and circles. To approach the great poetry of "high seriousness" when we are in a cynical or flippant mood; to snatch glances at a great drama or epic when we are in a hurry; to begin from the very first line by examining with a cold-blooded criticism a passionate elegy or fiery lyric, is to act as if one sat at a concert of unfamiliar music only to criticise the gestures of the performers or to watch for an occasional weakness of the second violin. It is almost always open to adult human beings not to be reading poetry if they are not feeling disposed for it. I say "almost always" because the "indolent reviewer" is apt to be an exception. Yet even the indolent reviewer might with advantage often remind himself that poetry is written for people who want to read it, and when they want to read it, and that no art pretends to force men into enjoying it at all times and seasons. Granting, then, that we know our own personal limitations, and what particular sense our organisation lacks; granting also that we are reading our poet spontaneously, simply because the pleasure of poetry is the pleasure we happen to be seeking; granting, further, that we are sufficiently cultivated and experienced in literature to possess ready apprehension of a thought, a fair taste in expression, and an ear for cadence and melody, there is, I believe, but one certain way of telling whether a verse-writer is a poet at all, and then whether as poet he is greater or less.

He must be read a first time without effort at criticism of any kind. The words and rhythms, the thoughts and feelings contained in a particular poem will thus leave a certain general effect, an unanalysed impression. It will be as it is with the true judge of art when he stands before a picture, a statue, or a building. In its presence he either feels the spontaneous delight which comes of a general satisfyingness, or he feels the annoyance of a general unsatisfyingness, or he feels neither one nor the other. So with a poem. We shall either feel that the sounds and melodies have bathed us in delight, or we shall think them harsh, or we shall think nothing about them at all. We shall feel a high intellectual stimulation or a strong emotional excitement, or we shall think the passage rather futile, or we shall be aware of no pronounced feeling one way or the other. If we are constrained to say to ourselves, "What a noble passage!" "What splendid verse!" "What a sweet song!" or to use any of those unstudied exclamations which spring to the lips before we have had time or inclination to realize our impressions more definitely—then, I maintain, we are justified in calling the writer at once and definitively a poet. Whether he is a

greater poet or a minor poet remains still to be estimated, but poet he is, be he Burns or Swinburne, Tennyson or Watson or Davidson. Here, for instance, is a passage from Watson's elegy upon Tennyson, which he has called *Lachrymæ Musarum*. I do not choose it because it is his best, but because it is typical:—

He hath returned to regions whence he came;
Him doth the spirit divine
Of universal loveliness reclaim,
All nature is his shrine.
Seek him henceforward in the wind and sea,
In earth's and air's emotion or repose,
In every star's august serenity,
And in the rapture of the flaming rose.
There seek him if ye would not seek in vain,
There, in the rhythm and music of the whole,
Yea, and for ever in the human soul
Made stronger and more beauteous by his strain.

For lo! Creation's self is one great choir,
And what is Nature's order but the rhyme
Whereto the world keeps time,
And all things move with all things from their prime?
Who shall expound the mystery of the lyre?
In far retreats of elemental mind
Obscurely comes and goes
The imperative breath of song, that as the wind
Is trackless, and oblivious whence it blows.

Demand of lilies wherefore they are white,
Extort her crimson secret from the rose,
But ask not of the Muse that she disclose
The meaning of the riddle of her might.
Somewhat of all things sealed and recondite,
Save the enigma of herself, she knows.
The master could not tell, with all his lore,
Wherefore he sang, or whence the mandate sped;
E'en as the linnet sings, so I, he said—
Ah! rather as the imperial nightingale
That held in trance the ancient Attic shore,
And charms the ages with the notes that o'er
All woodland chants immortally prevail!
And now from our vain plaudits, greatly fled,
He with diviner silence dwells instead,
And on no earthly sea, with transient roar,
Unto no earthly airs, he trims his sail,
But, far beyond our vision and our hail,
Is heard for ever and is seen no more.

Now it matters not what flaws the austere critic might find with a microscope in those lines. I feel certain that there is no one who would not at this first reading experience that inevitable glow of satisfaction which, in the cultured mind, is the unfailing criterion that the art is good. Whether Mr. Watson is further an original poet, a signal poetic force; whether he is a poet for the mind as much as for the ear, is a further question to be decided by a detailed analysis; but that he is a poet is, I beg leave to think, wholly undeniable. At first sight, has there been anything better in this vein since *Lycidas*?

Here, again, is a brief part of a song from Davidson's *Fleet Street Eclogue* of May Day. I quote these lines in particular, because, unlike most very short passages of this poet, they admit of being disentangled from their setting. They are typical of only one side of a many-sided being, the side which exults in the simple sensuous delights of nature. They are two stanzas from the song of the nightingale as interpreted by Basil:—

The lark from the top of heaven raved
  Of the sunshine sweet and old;
And the whispering branches dipped and laved
  In the light; and waste and wold
Took heart and shone; and the buttercups paved
  The emerald meads with gold.

Now it is night, and—

The wind steals down the lawns
  With a whisper of ecstasy,
Of moonlit nights and rosy dawns,
  And a nest in a hawthorn tree;
Of the little mate for whom I wait,

Flying across the sea,
Through storm and night as sure as fate,
Swift-winged with love for me.

And again I ask, has there, at first sight, been anything more like Shelley since Shelley's *Cloud*?

Assuming that the first step in our method has left us quite satisfied that a writer (and here I leave Mr. Watson and Mr. Davidson and revert to the general case) possesses enough share in the divine gift to be called "poet," we may, if we are bent upon truly "appreciating" him, proceed to taste his lines over and over, to dwell in detail upon his expression, upon its charms and splendours and felicities, its vigour and terseness and simplicity. It may be that we shall find our first admiration continually increased, especially when we learn to realise the full music of the verse, the subtle tones of its "flutes and soft recorders," or the swell of the "organ-voice." We may come to taste "all the charms of all the Muses often flowering in one lonely word." It might be, on the other hand, that we should detect a certain over-fulness—what Coleridge has called a too-muchness—of diction; or a certain want of correspondence between the melodious language and any clearly apprehended mental picture. We might find the vigour too often lapsing into sheer bad taste, or the simplicity taking the fatal step into simpledom, as when Tennyson ends the story of Enoch Arden with the banal remark that

the little port
Had seldom seen a costlier funeral.

We might, unhappily, discover these things, or, on the contrary, we might find them so rare that our admiration at the expressive genius of the poet would increase, until we were sure that the thing of beauty was really and truly a superlative joy for ever.

And not only in diction and melody, but in that supreme Shakespearian poetic gift of imagination which can vividly portray, body forth in clear form, what others can only feel in a vague and misty way while lacking the power to express it—in this gift also the great poet is known, not at the first reading, nor at the second, nor at the third. An image, a metaphor, which seems most perfect when first met, may lose much of its apparent completeness and depth when the mind examines it; whereas upon many another, which appeared at first so easy and obvious, there is revealed the very stamp of that godlike genius which creates, as if without effort, the one unsurpassable, soul-satisfying "name." If, the more we return to a poet's work, the more it grows upon us and the more we see in it, then, as Longinus truly declares, it possesses the quality of the sublime. Without that result the poet may be great, but not of the greatest. To employ once more that definition which I still find the best yet constructed, true poetry is the "exquisite expression of an exquisite impression." For a reader to reach the apprehension of such an impression in all its exquisiteness, and to recognize the full exquisiteness of its expression, requires some effort. Under the pellucid diction may lurk amazing depths. We must therefore read a poet, and read him anew. This is the way to attain to a reasoned and discriminating judgment, and to escape those vain and vague impressions which we can neither trust ourselves nor impart to others.

So much for the heads of the sermon. The application is to Tennyson's successors. Of William Watson and John Davidson as men, I know practically nothing. I am fain to confess that I have no desire to know anything. There is too much personal gossip already interfering with our enjoyment of literature. These men's work is presumably their best selves, and except for such hints of their personality as occur in their poems, I know not "whether they be black or white." Incidentally, Mr. Watson lets us learn that he is from the North of England, and I gather that Mr. Davidson is a Scot from the fact that he scans "world" as two syllables, uses "I mind" in the sense of "I remember," and talks unpatriotically enough of his nurture in that easily identifiable region where are to be found—

A chill and watery clime; a thrifty race
Using all means of grace
To save their souls and purses.

Among their many points of difference, the two men have this prime quality in common, that they are ready to rely upon their own poetical resources. Their work contains, indeed, many an echo of their great predecessors, many a suggestion of familiarity with Milton or Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, or Tennyson. It is evident that both have steeped themselves in the literature which is best calculated to make an English poet. But it is equally evident that they have mastered their material, and not allowed their material to master them. Watson, it is true, has attained to a much less firm and spontaneous style than Davidson, but it would be false to say of him that he is, in point of diction, the imitator of any poet in especial, or that he moulds his style upon Tennyson more than on Milton, or upon Milton more than on Wordsworth. And what is true of their form is true of their matter. They think with their own brains and feel with their own natures. They fall back upon no master and no fashion to direct them what to say or leave unsaid. Whatever opinion we may form of their force and range, we cannot but recognise that it is themselves whom they are expressing. And it may be taken as an axiom that nothing so commends the man who speaks to the interest of the man who listens as this—the fact that the speaker is telling his own thought. That, I believe, is the secret of the hold which Browning possesses upon his votaries, and which Goethe will for all time exercise.

We recognise with both our poets that this initial charm is theirs, and if we find in Davidson the richer nature and the more robust, the more infused with Browning's rough, virile strain, we are no less confident that Watson's verse is the natural cream gathered from his daintier and more

purely intellectual moods. But in thus comparing the men I anticipate my evidence.

The poems of John Davidson upon which I have based my judgment are those contained in the *Fleet Street Eclogues* (the first and second series), and in the volume of *Ballads and Songs*. The name of the latter explains itself. In the former are contained some dozen pieces, written in dialogue, in various metres. The interlocutors are London journalists and poets, who meet in Fleet Street on such holidays as Lammas, May Day, Michaelmas, and the New Year, and there hold a kind of discursive symposium on such themes as then and there present themselves. I mildly call the discussion "discursive," though it would be fair in one or two instances to dub the piece frankly a medley. Usually the special holiday suggests a reference to the charms of nature as they are to be seen in the country at that date, and as they are, alas! not to be seen in Fleet Street. This device affords scope for not a few charming word-pictures, as simple in outline and as complete in suggestion as the drawings of flowers and tree sprays made by the Japanese, and as effective in the artistic directness and simplicity of the language as if they had been written by Burns or by a Greek lyrist. I do not think that it would be possible to find anywhere in the English language more pure and fresh delight in the sights and sounds of rural nature expressed with such apparent naïveté. And all the time the mind's eye is kept so closely, so distinctly, on the object that the result is often the sublimity of art as defined by Longinus, the selection and combination of exactly those features which are the most essential and most telling. For instance, no man who did not feel and realize with vividness, no man who lacked a genius for expression, could so select and place just the touches which describe the sudden descent of the lark in the evening sky. The lines occur in the song of "Spring" in *Ballads and Songs*:—

High, O high, from the opal sky,
  Shouting against the dark,
"Why, why, why, must the day go by?"
  Fell a passionate lark.

The words "opal," "shouting," "fell," and "passionate," are exactly the words, and all the words, which could be demanded in an ideal word-picture by those who have been familiar with the scene itself. And to make the ideal twice ideal, the very sound of the bird is brought before one's mind after a score of years, by the whole passage, and particularly in the reiterated "Why, why, why." If there is more consummate simplicity of art anywhere contained in as small a compass of words, I confess I do not know where it is to be found. Shelley does not surpass this.

Throughout Davidson's poems there is this same positive revelling in those delights of the eye and ear and smell which meet the wanderer in the country. They are fresh to him every time; and he realizes and fulfils that function of the poet, the bringing back of new freshness into things common, at which he hints when he makes one of his characters say:—

Dear Menzies, talk of sight and sound,
  And make us *feel* the blossom-time.

In these more sensuous moods he is so filled with the simple Chaucerian gladsomeness of spring that he can sing, or make one of his characters sing—for after all, his characters are but so many sides of himself—

I have been with the nightingale;
  I have learned his song so sweet;
I sang it aloud by wood and dale,
  And under my breath in the street.

And again—

I can hear in that valley of mine,
  Loud-voiced on a leafless spray,
How the robin sings, flushed with his holly-wine,
  Of the moonlit blossoms of May.

In all such passages there is the genuine note of the vernal joy which stirs naturally in the blood of all men who are men. The writer feels as the birds feel, nay, as the burgeoning hedges feel, when—

The blackbirds with their oboe voices make
  The sweetest broken music, all about
The beauty of the day, for beauty's sake,
  And all about the mates whose love they won,
  And all about the sunlight and the sun.

Or when—

A passionate nightingale adown the lane
Shakes with the force and volume of his song
A hawthorn's heaving foliage.

But this sensuous rapture, which reminds us of Keats, though of a Keats whose expression is more like that of Shelley, is by no means all that Davidson can feel in nature. Through the eyes and other senses the influence of nature penetrates to his soul and spirit. He touches Wordsworth in such lines as these:—

All my emotion and imagining
Were of the finest tissue that is woven,
From sense and thought....
I seemed to be created every morn.
A golden trumpet pealed along the sky:
The sun arose: the whole earth rushed upon me.
Sometimes the tree that stroked my windowpane
Was more than I could grasp; sometimes my thought
Absorbed the universe.

It is true that these words are put in the mouth of that one of his dramatis personæ who is of the most melancholy and brooding disposition; but he who can make another say—

I am haunted by the heavens and the earth;
... I am besieged by things that I have seen:
Followed and watched by rivers; snared and held
In labyrinthine woods and tangled meads;
Hemmed in by mountains; waylaid by the sun;
Environed and beset by moon and stars;
Whispered by winds and summoned by the sea.

—he who can put this thought in another's mouth has necessarily first experienced some measure of it himself.

But it is not merely about external nature that our Fleet Street journalists talk. They speak of such questions of man and life and destiny as are wont to engage any gathering of thoughtful men, and particularly those who are poetically disposed. The contrasts between the beauty of rural nature and the squalor of life, especially the life of the town, these and other matters receive such suggestive treatment as can be given to them by a poet who has no desire to become a preacher, and no desire to pose as an exhaustive philosopher. Upon such questions the many-sided poet, whose sympathies are wide, and whose moods are varied, will touch with a certain suggestiveness; he will flash a ray of cheerfulness into the haunts of pessimism, or throw a new pathos into common situations. And Mr. Davidson possesses a large measure of this many-sidedness, this versatility of sympathy. He appears a very human man, a man unfettered by cant or creed, observing men and things from various sides, and entering into their circumstance. Is he without a creed? From his verses on the *Making of a Poet* it would appear so—

No creed for me! I am a man apart:
A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world;

A martyr for all mundane moods to tear;
The slave of every passion, and the slave
Of heat and cold, of darkness and of light;
A trembling lyre for every wind to sound.
I am a man set to overhear
The inner harmony, the very tune
Of nature's heart; to be a thoroughfare
For all the pageantry of Time: to catch
The mutterings of the Spirit of the Hour
And make them known.

Nevertheless he, or one of his avatars, can also say of the celebration of Christmas with its "sweet thoughts and deeds"—

A fearless, ruthless, wanton band,
  Deep in our hearts we guard from scathe
Of last year's log a smouldering brand,
  To light at Yule the fire of faith.

He makes no vulgar boast about escaping from the fetters of religion. He spares us any flouts of intellectual superiority. He is apparently an evolutionist, but withal finds little saving grace in that doctrine, and is not uninclined to envy the old days

When Heaven and Hell were nigh.

It is true that behind his Basil and Herbert and Brian and Sandy and Menzies and Ninian, who converse there in Fleet Street, we find it hard to discover any definite synthetic philosophy of Davidson himself. On the other hand, we have no particular wish to discover one. He is a poet, not a Herbert Spencer. We may reasonably be content to catch the side-lights which a poet throws from a large and liberal nature; to be led by him to different points of view. If the result is that we find the man himself to evade us, we can only admit that the same result occurs with Shakespeare. Indeed, there is a hint that a synthetic philosophy is exactly what Davidson never seeks to attain. Says Ninian:—

Sometimes, when I forget myself, I talk
As though I were persuaded of the truth
Of some received or unreceived belief;
But always afterwards I am ashamed

At such lewd lapses into bigotry.

And though another immediately ejaculates

Intolerantly tolerant!

we have a feeling that the poet has betrayed an attitude of mind not wholly unlike his own.

His outlook is both bright and dark. The modern dragons, it has been said, are dooming "religion and poetry." The answer comes—

They may doom till the moon forsakes
Her dark, star-daisied lawn;
They may doom till Doomsday breaks
With angels to trumpet the dawn;
While love enchants the young
And the old have sorrow and care,
No song shall be unsung,
Unprayed no prayer.

Nature is full of joy, man may find abounding delight of life in the midst of it; but what of his destiny?

For the fate of the elves is nearly the same
As the terrible fate of men;
To love, to rue, to be, and pursue
A flickering wisp of the fen.
We must play the game with a careless smile,
Though there's nothing in the hand;
We must toil as if it were worth our while
Spinning our ropes of sand;
And laugh, and cry, and live, and die
At the waft of an unseen hand.

And again—

I am not thinking solely of myself,
But of the groaning cataract of life,
The ruddy stream that leaps importunate
Out of the night, and in a moment vaults
The immediate treacherous precipice of time,
Splashing the stars, downward into the night.

And apart from destiny, which is beyond human control, society is much at fault. Not only is Davidson plainly democratic, he expresses the complaints and aspirations of the higher type of those who might be socialists, if socialism were allowed to be a development, and not tyrannously imposed as a system. He talks of—

... Slaves in Pagan Rome—
In Christian England—who begin to test
The purpose of their state, to strike for rest
And time to feel alive in.

And—

Hoarsely they beg of Fate to give
A little lightening of their woe,
A little time to love, to live,
A little time to think and know.

There are other wrong elements in society besides poverty, and the poet finds occasion to express one in particular. But what Mrs. Grand requires three volumes to discuss is treated with infinitely more effect by him in a dozen lines. The purport may be gathered from these three:—

... My heart!
Who wore it out with sensual drudgery
Before it came to me? What warped its valves?
It has been used; my heart is secondhand.

This is not the time to exhaust the Davidsonian philosophy, if there be such. We are treating the writer as a poet, and the examples which I have quoted of his joy in nature and his fellow-feeling with mankind, should, I think, demonstrate that he has the gifts of vivid seeing, of vivid feeling, and of vivid expression. If genuine poetry consists of two essentials, substance and form, we cannot deny the substance in Mr. Davidson. He has the gift of "high seriousness," which Arnold declares to be a requisite of all that is classic. He is not always deep; he is not faultless. The same writer who can condense a thought thus—

On Eden's daisies couched, they felt
They carried Eden in their heart,

is also capable of writing, as poetry, these lines:—

For no man ever understood a woman,
No woman ever understood a man,
And no man ever understood a man:
No woman ever understood a woman,
And no man ever understood himself;
No woman ever understood herself.

We can only surmise that Mr. Davidson had just been reading Whitman, and was under the temporary hallucination that this poor stuff was profound thinking. But all poets, nay, all prose-writers, even the greatest, have their lapses into bathos. Yes, even—and I say it with trembling—even Shakespeare.

Let us look, now, for a few moments, more closely, in order to appreciate the particular elements of his genius, as manifested in the form which is his style.

And first, his language. To be perfect, expression must be luminous yet terse, vigorous, yet in taste and keeping. It must be without mannerisms, without inadequacy, without flatness, without obscurity. "Clear, but with distinction," is the brief definition of Aristotle. Davidson has learned his lesson well from Shelley and Wordsworth and Arnold. He cultivates all the virtues, and not without success. He has not been tempted to leave the true path and court singularity, whether in the shape of Browning's verbal puzzles or of Swinburne's luscious and alliterative turgidness. His diction is of the simplest. Says one of his personæ—

I love not brilliance; give me words
Of meadow-growth and garden plot,
Of larks and black-caps; gaudy birds,
Gay flowers and jewels like me not.

It is astonishing how expressive the simple word can become in the hands of a master. Dante's verb and noun are now proverbial. As for Mr. Davidson, Gray's clear-cut lines in the *Elegy* can supply no more instances of perfect aptness than those which I quoted some time ago of the lark. Notice the exactness of choice in—

The patchwork sunshine *nets* the lea,
The flitting shadows *halt and pass*
Forlorn, the mossy humble-bee
Lounges along the flowerless grass,

and in "I heard the *husky* whisper of the corn." Yet I am disposed to think that, like many another finished artist, he has passed through stages of various practice, and has exercised much self-restraint before attaining to that naturalness which, as Goethe reiterates, is the last crown of art-discipline. From sundry indications I conclude that passages of his *Fleet-street Eclogues* were written independently at different dates, and have been fitted later into the dialogue form. However that may be, it is possible to detect instances in which he falls below his own maturer ideal of natural language. The diction, that is to say the choice of mere vocables, is eminently natural, except for the odd words "muted," "writhen," "watchet-hued," "dup," "swound," which I have collected with a rather laborious captiousness. But diction is only part of expression, and, as I have just hinted, it would seem as if, before his lesson in pure style was fully learned, he had passed under the fascination of the mannerists, and particularly of Pope. Otherwise it is hard to account for such entirely eighteenth century lines as—

And brimming echoes spill the pleasant din,

or—

The sloping shores that fringe the velvet tides;

and (speaking of steamers)—

Or, fiery-hearted, cleave with iron limbs
And brows precipitous the pliant sea.

How different are these mechanical constructions from that expression of the birds

hid in the white warm cloud
Mantling the thorn.

Whether I am right or wrong as to the process of his development, the fact remains that he can be, if he chooses, a master in language of poetic simplicity. Even a fire of garden rubbish can be expressed without becoming altogether unpoetical when one speaks of

the spicy smoke
Of withered weeds that burn where gardens be.

Perhaps there do exist some things which cannot be made poetical in any diction whatsoever. Tennyson could only express "tea" by "and on the board the fluttering urn," and if Mr. Davidson has to speak of whisky and calls it

amber spirit that enshrines the heart
Of an old Lothian summer,

we have to recognise that he has come very well out of a difficulty. If at another time he refers to

it as

> things which journalists require,

we must remember that the context implies a certain humour.

"Clear, but not flat," is an easy maxim to utter, but, as Wordsworth too often shows, the danger of falling from studied simplicity into bald prose is always present; and for that reason do smaller artists rather choose to trick their thoughts in verbal jewellery. We cannot say that Davidson, who undertakes to run the risk, never makes the fatal step. In the address to the daisy—

> Oh, little brave adventurer!
> We human beings love you *so*,

the last word, and indeed the whole line, verges on the infantile. So it is a shock when, after a passage of some pretensions, we come upon the lines—

> My way of life led me to London town,
> And difficulties, which I overcame;

or—

> But yet my waking intuition,
> That longed to execute its mission.

It is extremely difficult to realise that the same man wrote these sorry lines who, in another place, adopts this for his style—

> ... Here spring appears
> Caught in a leafless brake, her garland torn,
> Breathless with wonder, and the tears half dried
> Upon her rosy cheek.

For our comfort and his let us remember that it was the same Wordsworth who wrote both the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* and also the lines—

> I've measured it from side to side:
> It's three feet long and two feet wide!

Nevertheless flaws of this kind are few, and it is almost unfair for me to be the means perhaps of conveying even thus much impression of faultiness about verses which sustain so high a general level of excellence of language.

In point of melody and harmony and flow of verse there can be no doubt that our poet is, for instance, an excellent writer of songs, in which a vigorous simplicity is the prime requisite. They lilt along with great vivacity and ease. But elsewhere I could wish that here and there he would amend his rhymes. "Reviewer" and "literature," "pierced" and "athirst," "noise" and "voice," "inquisition" and "division," "trees" and "palaces," "shade is" and "ladies," "giftless" and "swiftness," are far from pleasing; and though I am almost ashamed to play the detective in work which is mostly full of charm, I find myself distressed by such cacophonies as—

> Hid in its hoard of haws,

and—

> Pierces a rushlight's ray's length into it.

John Davidson, then, is a genuine son of his age; free in his thought, wide in his sympathies, eager for the amelioration of man's estate, divided between the hopes of science and the regret for a lost religion, compelled to fall back on the everlasting consolations of love and nature, an ardent lover of the country and its sights and sounds, constrained to draw word-pictures of the things which thus delight him, and drawing them with the consummate skill of the man who keeps his eye on the essentials of the thing he draws. His charm lies in his frank sincerity, and in the clear healthy sweetness of his utterance. That he is a poet none can doubt; if he is comparatively young, as I surmise he is, and if he pursues his true development, he may, I believe, easily take his place in the first rank, not only as a successor, but as the successor, of Tennyson.

On William Watson I shall dwell less long. To begin with, he is already better known. Moreover, his special virtues as a poet are more easy to apprehend, for they lie somewhat prominently upon the surface. Better still, he apparently apprehends them himself, and is in that unusually happy position for an artist, of knowing exactly where his own strength lies. And undoubtedly in those departments his strength is great. We need not hold the mention of them in reserve. I have already quoted a passage of admirable rhetorical and musical skill and taste from the *Lachrymæ Musarum*. That was sufficient to illustrate one of this poet's great gifts—the gift of writing splendid verse, as harmonious as Milton's and as choice in expression as Tennyson's. His other chief endowment is that of literary critic. On Burns, Shelley, and Wordsworth he has said almost the final saying, and assuredly in almost the final language. We may pick faults now and again in his expression, and we may suspect a mannerism here and there, especially when we read large quantities of his verse at one time; nevertheless, each individual piece which fairly represents him is very nearly perfect in its way.

The works of his with which I am acquainted are the volumes entitled *Wordsworth's Grave and Other Poems*, *The Father of the Forest and Other Poems*, *Lachrymæ Musarum*, and the series of sonnets upon Armenia, called *The Purple East*. There is in Watson nothing of the dramatist or of the epic writer. He is a lyrist and a sonneteer. He is also a critic, and might very conceivably be a satirist. But, whatever he is in writing, he is mainly and before all things an intellectual rather than an emotional poet; he is an artist rather than a seer. His poems are constructions of taste and intellectual judgment. Let me take, as an example, his poem upon the *Father of the Forest*. A yew tree, which may be fifteen centuries old, is addressed by him; and, musing on the historical scenes it must have lived through, he gives us a series of verses which touch musically upon salient epochs and characteristic figures in the history of England. To this the yew practically replies that the so-called historical events amount to nothing, and that "wars and tears" will repeat themselves, until men are some day civilized into pursuing but one object, which shall be Beauty. The piece itself reveals nothing profound, awakes no particular emotion. Given the first idea of the plot, so to speak—an idea which is not far to seek for any reflective man—the rest of the material follows as a matter of course. But where is the man besides Mr. Watson who will give us such lines as—

> The South shall bless, the East shall blight,
> The red rose of the Dawn shall blow;
> The million-lilied stream of night,
> Wide in ethereal meadows flow.

I do not say that the poet is without his measure of feeling; but it is rather the pensive feeling of a Jaques, the dainty interest of a Matthew Arnold, than any surge of emotion. The poet seems to me to encourage his brain to feel—to give it that passing luxury with a certain amount of deliberation.

The *Hymn to the Sea* is the only real poem written in the English language in hexameters and pentameters. There have been many attempts at these metres, but they have been failures, one and all. And nothing shows Mr. Watson's skill, nay genius, more than the fact that his attempt is a great and conspicuous success. The sea, confined within its shores, never resting, yet never able to pass its bounds, at war with the winds, and serving the moon with its tides, is compared to man, with his unrest, his limitations, his aspirations. As before, when the clue is once given, the thread is easily followed to the end. The result is simply an intellectual operation done into verbal music. Yet who but William Watson, having to speak of the moon as mistress of the sea, could express his fancy in words like these:—

> When, as yonder, thy mistress, at height of her mutable glories,
> Wise from the magical East, comes like a sorceress pale.
> Ah, she comes, she arises—impassive, emotionless, bloodless,
> Wasted and ashen of cheek, zoning her ruins with pearl.
> Once she was warm, she was joyous, desire in her pulses abounding:
> Surely thou lovedst her well, then, in her conquering youth!
> Surely not all unimpassioned, at sound of thy rough serenading,
> She from the balconied night unto her melodist leaned,—
> Leaned unto thee, her bondsman, who keepest to-day her commandments,
> All for the sake of old love, dead at thy heart though it lie.

Surely such verse would have a claim to endurance, even if the thought were less of a thought than it is.

Autumn, again, is a short piece upon the suggestions of that season. What would those suggestions naturally be? Obviously, the passing and perishing of all things that are. True; but to express those suggestions, obvious as they are, as Watson expresses them, requires a rhetorical power and a taste in melodious words such as would make their possessor eminent in the judgment of men who care anything for beauty. There may be no particular depth in the work; it may be less passionate, less full of thought, than the *Ode to the West Wind*, but we could ill afford to spare such combinations of sound as—

> Elusive notes in wandering wafture borne
> From undiscoverable lips, that blow
> An immaterial horn.

In *Liberty Rejected* we meet once more with the similitude of the moon and the tide. Mr. Watson's range of purely intellectual imagination is, like that of his emotion, limited. But we do not mind meeting the comparison again, when the lover who refuses to be free expresses himself thus—

> The ocean would as soon
> Entreat the moon
> Unsay the magic verse
> That seals him hers
> From silver noon to noon.

When he touches upon nature, we feel again that Watson is not "letting himself go." When he escapes from town it is not to revel and to make us revel in the sheer delight of rural sights and sounds. He feels as before, with the eye and the understanding, not with the buoyant blood of the full heart. No matter, he feels enough to give us this quatrain—

In stainless daylight saw the pure seas roll;
Saw mountains pillaring the perfect sky:
Then journeyed home to carry in his soul
The torment of the difference till he die.

Why should I go on to quote such lines as—

That thousand-memoried unimpulsive sea,

or,

Curls the labyrinthine sea
Duteous to the lunar will.

Enough that, thanks to a study of Spenser, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and therefore a delicate taste in word and phrase, and thanks also to an innate genius for verbal music, restrained from Swinburnian riot by a true artistic instinct, Mr. Watson is a poet most delightful to the physical and the mental ear. That he has taken pains with his study is avowed by himself. Beginning with Shelley and passing through Keats to Wordsworth, he says—

In my young days of fervid poesy
He drew me to him with his strange far light,—
He held me in a world all clouds and gleams,
And vasty phantoms, where ev'n Man himself
Moved like a phantom 'mid the clouds and gleams.
Anon the Earth recalled me; and a voice
Murmuring of dethroned divinities
And dead times, deathless upon sculptured urn—
And Philomela's long-descended pain
Flooding the night—and maidens of romance
To whom asleep St. Agnes' love-dreams come—
Awhile constrained me to a sweet duresse
And thraldom, lapping me in high content,
Soft as the bondage of white amorous arms.
And then a third voice, long unheeded—held
Claustral and cold, and dissonant and tame—Found
me at last with ears to hear. It sang
Of lowly sorrows and familiar joys,
Of simple manhood, artless womanhood,
And childhood fragrant as the limpid morn;
And from the homely matter nigh at hand,
Ascending and dilating, it disclosed
Spaces and avenues, calm heights and breadths
Of vision, whence I saw each blade of grass
With roots that groped about eternity,
And in each drop of dew upon each blade
The mirror of the inseparable All.

It is also clear from such reminiscences as—

The laurel glorious from that wintry hair,

which is practically Tennyson, or

The maker of this verse, which shall endure
By splendour of its theme, that cannot die,

which, if I mistake not, is echoed Spenser, or—

And ghostly as remembered mirth,

which is largely Tennyson again.

I do not call these plagiarisms, I call them reflections of wide and retentive reading.

William Watson has thus formed a style which is almost perfect. I say "almost," not quite. There are some few mannerisms which we might wish away. He speaks of "greatly inert," "greatly lost in thee," "greatly slain," "doomed splendidly to die," "loudly weak," "immutably prevail," and "vainly great," till we are forced to recognize what looks very much like a trick. He has occasional moments of tautology, which may possibly be deliberate, but is none the better for that, as when he says:—

Not mine the rich and showering hand, that strews
The facile largess of a stintless muse.

And

The retrospect in Time's reverted eyes.

And worst of all—

"Fair clouds of gulls that *wheel* and *swerve*

In unanimity divine,
With *undulation serpentine*,
And wondrous consentaneous *curve*."

He sometimes falls into lines which ring of the mint of Pope—

No guile may capture and no force surprise.

Or—

Defames the sunlight and deflowers the morn.

Or—

Towers to a lily, reddens to a rose.

In one passage only do I find him falling, falling, falling into the flattest style of the *Excursion*:—

"I overheard a kind-eyed girl relate
To her companions how a favouring chance
By some few shillings weekly had increased
The earnings of her household."

But as I read this, I murmur to myself those lines from Wordsworth—

"And I have travelled far as Hull to see
What clothes he might have left, or other property,"

and wonder how it is that such aberrations can befal even the very man who seems most determined to avoid them.

Watson's second endowment is still one of taste and intellect. It is the gift of literary criticism. The special charm of the great poets is so subtly apprehended by him, and so exquisitely expressed, that it will be a source of much surprise if many of his concise verdicts do not become the household words of students of literature. Let me quote a passage from his poem on *Wordsworth's Grave*:—

You who have loved, like me, his simple themes,
Loved his sincere large accent nobly plain,
And loved the land whose mountains and whose streams
Are lovelier for his strain.

It may be that his manly chant, beside
More dainty numbers, seems a rustic tune;
It may be, thought has broadened, since he died,
Upon the century's noon;
It may be that we can no longer share
The faith which from his fathers he received;
It may be that our doom is to despair
Where he with joy believed;—

Enough that there is none since risen who sings
A song so gotten of the immediate soul,
So instant from the vital fount of things
Which is our source and goal;

And though at touch of later hands there float
More artful tones than from his lyre he drew,
Ages may pass e'er trills another note
So sweet, so great, so true.

Take again—

Not Milton's keen, translunar music thine;
Not Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless, human view;
Not Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine;
Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.

And these:—

Shelley, the hectic flamelight rose of verse,
All colour and all odour and all bloom.

And on Burns—

But as, when thunder crashes nigh,
All darkness opes one flaming eye,
And the world leaps against the sky,
So fiery clear
Did the old truths that we pass by
To him appear.

These, then, are the prominent poetical virtues of William Watson, virtues which none can avoid observing—his magnificent power of expression and his literary acumen. He is an intellectual poet, and therefore not devoid of substance. Yet his substance alone would never make him a *vates*. I can imagine that in prose criticisms and in satire he would make a distinguished figure. Here is his answer to Mr. Alfred Austin when the laureate advised him to be patient with the Armenian question:—

"The poet laureate assured me—first, that whosoever in any circumstances arraigns this country for anything that she may do or leave undone thereby covers himself with shame; secondly, that although the continued torture, rape, and massacre of a Christian people, under the eyes of a Christian continent, may be a lamentable thing, it is best to be patient, seeing that the patience of God Himself can never be exhausted; and, thirdly, that if I were but with him in his pretty country house, were but comfortably seated 'by the yule log's blaze,' and joining with him in seasonable conviviality, the enigmas of Providence and the whole mystery of things would presently become transparent to me, and more especially after 'drinking to England' I should be enabled to understand that 'she bides her hour behind the bastioned brine.'"

It would be hard to better that.

But though I call him intellectual, and more artistic than inspired, I have no wish to underrate the intrinsic poetry in such lines as these, on the *Great Misgiving*:—

Ah, but the apparition—the dumb sign—
  The beckoning finger bidding me forego
The fellowship, the converse, and the wine,
  The songs, the festal glow!
And, ah, to know not, while with friends I sit,
  And while the purple joy is passed about,
Whether 'tis ampler day divinelier lit
  Or homeless night without.

Nor the graceful fancy in these, from *Beauty's Metempsychosis*:—

From wave and star and flower,
    Some effluence rare
Was lent thee; a divine but transient dower;
Thou yield'st it back from eyes and lips and hair
    To wave and star and flower.
Should'st thou to-morrow die,
    Thou still shalt be
Found in the rose, and met in all the sky;
And from the ocean's heart shalt sing to me,
    Should'st thou to-morrow die.

I have also said that Mr. Watson knows his own strength and his limitations. Let me conclude by quoting a passage from his *Apologia*, the very style of which will be in itself the justification of the man whom it argues to justify:—

... Because I have full oft
In singers' selves found me a theme of song,
Holding these also to be very part
Of Nature's greatness....

And though I be to these but as a knoll
About the feet of the high mountains, scarce
Remarked at all, save when a valley cloud
Holds the high mountains hidden, and the knoll
Against the clouds shows briefly eminent;
Yet, ev'n as they, I, too, with constant heart,
And with no light or careless ministry,
Have served what seemed the voice; and unprofane
Have dedicated to melodious ends
All of myself that least ignoble was.
For though of faulty and of erring walk,
I have not suffered aught in me of frail
To blur my song; I have not paid the world
The evil and the insolent courtesy
Of offering it my baseness for a gift.
And unto such as think all Art is cold,
All music unimpassioned, if it breathe
An ardour not of Eros' lips, and glow
With fire not caught from Aphrodite's breast,
Be it enough to say, that in Man's life
Is room for great emotions unbegot
Of dalliance and embracement, unbegot
Even of the purer nuptials of the soul;
And one not pale of blood, to human touch

Not tardily responsive, yet may know
A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality,
When, rapt from all relation with his kind,
All temporal and immediate circumstance,
In silence, in the visionary mood
That, flashing light on the dark deep, perceives
Order beyond this coil and errancy;
Isled from the fretful hour he stands alone,
And hears the eternal movement, and beholds
Above him and around and at his feet,
In million-billowed consentaneousness,
The flowing, flowing, flowing of the world.

The Making of a Shakespeare

There is nothing both wholly new and wholly true to be said concerning Shakespeare. Eckermann, who played Boswell to Goethe's Johnson, was once disposed to discuss Shakespeare with that great master. Alone of modern poets Goethe has revealed a capacity in some degree comparable with that of the myriad-minded Englishman. Yet Goethe replied to Eckermann, "We cannot talk about Shakespeare; everything is inadequate." If the German intellectual colossus, whose conversation bestrode the narrow world from comparative anatomy and scientific optics to the principles of art, could not talk of Shakespeare; if a poet whose writings, next to those of our own unrivalled bard, are most thickly studded with great stars of thought, could not talk of Shakespeare, what is to be said by us punier men who are compelled to peep about for matter of discourse? "Everything is inadequate." That perhaps is the reason why talk about Shakespeare, even from the sanest of men, is apt to convert itself into perfervid rhapsody. Meanwhile, from those whose sanity is less assured, it runs to the delirium of some harebrained cipher of Shakespeare-Geheimnis, and an amused world is asked to listen while some female Dogberry asserts that the truth, too long concealed, has been proved, and it will soon go near to be thought, that *Romeo and Juliet* was written by none other than Anne Hathaway.

I do not come before you to-night with either a rhapsody or a mare's-nest. Nor do I come with criticism of that marvellous creator, who, to use the bold expression of the Frenchman, *après Dieu créa le plus*. When, with the progress of the years, a supreme writer is read more and more over all the world; when his plays are translated from English into Hebrew and Japanese, and performed in Roumanian and Hindustani, criticism should become simply a humble endeavour to realize the various powers and beauties which constitute such triumphant greatness.

That is my attitude to-night. To me Shakespeare—though not flawless, because human—is the crown and consummation of literature. Ardently and reverently as I admire Homer, Æschylus, Dante and Goethe, my mind places even these on somewhat lower seats than the creator of *Hamlet* and *Othello*. My object is to review—however imperfectly—what went to his making, what elements of gift and character, circumstance, training and experience were so mixed in him that nature could stand up and say: "This is a man." This is not the same idle performance as to descant rapturously upon his purely inborn genius. It is no purpose of mine to attempt a definition or dissection of genius. It is only in our youth or ignorance that we possess the confidence to define such abstractions as beauty, goodness, genius, and art. Still less do I propound a recipe for its manufacture. If I knew the secret of its attainment I should first try it upon myself.

Shakespeare was made by the right native genius, by the right environment, and by the right training. We will take these factors in that order.

Genius, like every other good gift and every perfect gift, "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights." We feel its presence when we are fortunate enough to meet with it. In our hearts we know that it is some strange and incommunicable faculty for performing with a divine ease those achievements which are the despair of other men, or to which they can only make some approach by "infinite pains."

Brains have been classified as brains of one, two and three storeys. As you cannot, by thinking, add a cubit to your stature, so can you not, by thinking, add a storey to your brain. You may furnish and brighten the one storey or the two storeys with which your mental house was built before your birth. You may open the windows and let in the sun and air. By the best education and habit you may fill that house with art and beauty and light and comfort, or, by the worst, you may render it ugly, foul, bleak and dark; but you can never add a new floor. Shakespeare's brain was not only built by mother Nature in three storeys, but those storeys were lofty and roomy in an astonishing degree. They were also full of windows.

His natural gifts were vast. No writer ever possessed such a manifoldness, or rather, totality of them. In a different branch of art, one cannot but think of Michael Angelo, who could carve the Moses, paint the Sistine ceiling, or build St. Peter's, with equal grasp and mastery over conceptions each too sublime for ordinary men.

If we analyse and enumerate the endowments lavished by Nature on her "darling" of the Avon, we shall find, as in the case of Angelo, that he not only displays each separate gift, but that he displays each in its highest form and fullest measure. His own modesty may be permitted to envy this man's art or that man's scope, but never was envy more misplaced.

This is no rhapsody. Longinus tells us that an unassailable verdict upon the sublime must be the consensus of different ages, pursuits, tastes and walks in life. Concerning Shakespeare's gifts there is no discord among the competent—the Hazlitts, Coleridges, Emersons, Carlyles. Some of those gifts can be cultivated in considerable measure, some in a less; some lie beyond all training and all art. But no art or cultivation whatever can bring any one of them to the Shakespearean height and fulness, if Nature herself has been less kind than she was to the child of John Shakespeare, that unsuspecting burgess of Stratford town.

If, before we attempt to realise the supremacy of Shakespeare in any particular attribute, we have recognised how miserably we ourselves have managed, at some time or other, to fail in every one of them; if, before we approach an appreciation of Shakespeare, we have applied to other great creators the same analysis which we are about to apply to him; if we have learned from the most instructive examples what is meant by creation, by imagination, by insight, by wisdom, by wit, by humour, by eloquence, and by verbal music; then we cannot fail to acknowledge that here is the all-round, the all-comprehensive genius, superlatively dowered with each and all of them; that here is the entire mind, where others are partial; that here, as I believe some one has put it, is the man who, when others have said, or depicted, or argued, or pleaded, seems to come along and say, "let me show you how this should be done," and so does it once and for ever.

It is but few, one may believe, who are fully conscious of the reasons why Shakespeare could fill the Elizabethan pit with the rough London apprentices and the Elizabethan boxes with superfine gallants and courtiers; why he has been a delight equally to the worldling, to whom always "the play's the thing," and to the sedate scholar, who has perchance never set foot in a theatre, and to whom a play is a dramatic poem printed in a book. Yet the reason is simple. It is because Shakespeare's gifts are numerous and varied enough to appeal to populace and gallant, to worldling and student; they meet to the full each and every demand that can be made upon a work of dramatic art.

To begin with, he possesses the true constructive power, the first secret of the playwright's craft. He can visualise an extensive or complicated passage of human life, with its cross streams of action, its moving world of persons, its intricate motives and passions—whether it surround Julius Cæsar in ancient Rome or Othello in Cyprus or one of his kings of English history—whether he find it recorded in Holinshed, or in Plutarch, or in some novel of Italy—and, with the swift intuition of the master craftsman, he grasps the essentials, arranges and links them, and renders them organic and compact. With sure judgment of effect he adds to his original or subtracts from it, and he rounds off the whole into an absorbing and unflagging story to be told in action during but "two hours traffic of the stage." No one can fully realise this immense selective and constructive power until he has analysed the action of *Macbeth*, and observed the marvellous skill which has compressed into those five short acts a whole world of great and little things done and said and thought.

But greater and rarer still than this architectural gift is the creative power which lies in imagination. And by imagination I do not mean merely the play of fancy in Mercutio's famous speech, nor simply the conjuring up of pictures as in Clarence's dream, nor the invention of those perfect similitudes which meet us everywhere. In these, it is true, Shakespeare is consummate. But I mean that deeper and more pervasive power, which beholds beings of the imagination as if they were flesh and blood realities, and presents men and women of the past or of nowhere as if they were breathing in the living present before our eyes; the shaping power which—to make a quotation that never stales—

> gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name—

so that to us Elsinore for ever means Hamlet, Verona means Juliet, and we think of Shylock and Jessica as historical beings who veritably once trod the Piazza and the Merceria of Venice. The great novelist who wrote *Vanity Fair* possessed a rare measure of this power; but in him it was limited by the limitations of his sympathies and by his less amiable view of men. So was it with Carlyle. In Shakespeare it is boundless. To him all ages, all sorts and conditions of men and women, are understandable and worthy of interest. Intuitively he knows them, walks with them, talks with them, feels with them. They may be heroes, sages, fools, villains: they may be witty or stupid, refined or gross. Their characters may be direct and plain as those of Lear and Kent, or they may be as subtly shaded as that of Hamlet or of the melancholy soliloquist of Arden. He can in imagination traverse the whole gamut of feeling. He can be what or whom he will. This is the imagination in which Shakespeare is unsurpassable. This more than all powers, unless it be that of humour, is the one which Nature must bestow, and which nothing but Nature can bestow. And this is the power which alone can make drama convincing and immortal. Compare with the living and breathing reality of the characters in even the poorest of the Shakespearean plays, the wordy automata of Swinburne's *Faliero* or the frigid figures who talk through Tennyson's *Cup*. There are those who compare Scott with Shakespeare in the gift of visualising and vitalising the past. We Englishmen may leave it to the Scotchman Carlyle to settle with that comparison. For my own part, as a student of antiquity, I would maintain that, despite all petty anachronism, Shakespeare

in his Roman plays comes nearer to the essential truth than any merely professional student can ever come. What he gives us is not archæology, not the exact Forum nor the precise etiquette of the toga, but the man, the Cæsar, the Coriolanus, the greasy populace, their heart and mind—these he sees with the penetrating eye of an imagination which never fails.

Of imagination, in this sense, wit and humour are a vital part. Without them you may imagine an Othello or a Lear, but you cannot imagine a Falstaff, a Touchstone, a Mercutio, or a Bottom. In this domain Shakespeare is sometimes thought to be rivalled by Aristophanes and Molière. Yet one who read all three will find that these are his rivals rather in broad strokes of humour and flashes of wit than in the subtler virtues of his humour. His humour is all-pervading, it is colour woven into the whole tissue of thinking, speaking, and action. Nay, true humour is like the colour of a flower or leaf. It belongs to the nature of the plant, and is carried in the sap of its life. To talk like Falstaff, you must in imagination become Falstaff, feel as he would do, think as he would think. You cannot lay on the Falstaffian humour by a reasoning process from the outside. The result may be clever, but it will lack just that subtle and evasive quality which the modern cant seeks to describe by the word "inevitable." A merely brilliant man—a Sheridan, for instance—might make the endeavour, and gain some considerable applause. But Shakespeare for the moment lived the part, the humour came to him with the part, whether the humour of clowns and gravediggers, of Jaques, or of the moody prince of Denmark.

Essential also to such humour is the broad and tolerant temper which can not only suffer fools gladly, as being a large and representative class of God's creatures, but can actually rejoice in their folly as a thing delectable to a healthy contemplation.

But when the piece has been thus constructed with a master hand, and when the characters have been informed by imagination with all the convincingness of infinitely varied life, with humour, with sound and healthy and impartial understanding, much is still left. There is still to be considered the language or expression in which all is clothed. And in this respect the writer who has written best in any tongue, falls, when compared with Shakespeare, a step into the rear. Not Milton, for all his organ flood of noble phrase; not Shelley, for all his burning and rapturous utterance, can vie with the actor-playwright of the Globe in his gift of eloquence. It is entirely marvellous and beyond all explanation. No mere study or scholarship could attain to that inexhaustible fund, not merely of words, but of the right words. Orators and writers there are a many who never fail to find a word, and a good word, for the rounding of their sentences. But Shakespeare's words are not merely good words; they are the best words. Even the bare vocabulary of Burke or Macaulay would seem second-rate beside the vocabulary of Shakespeare. It is a commonplace to dilate upon the fact that Shakespeare has used 15,000 words, while Milton, our poet of widest reading and erudition, has but 8,000. I do not attach so much importance to that enumeration. The subjects, the sides of life, the classes of persons of whom Shakespeare treats, are so comprehensive of high and low, serious and jocose, while Milton's are confined to a range of such seriousness and dignity, that the comparison is but fallacious. Nevertheless this vast repertoire of words is in itself an amazing phenomenon. Still more amazing is the consummate tact with which he makes use of them, in sentences so terse and clear that they increasingly pass into the proverbs of everyday. And most amazing is that, with all his characters, and all their speeches, he never repeats himself. No better proof could be given that the speaker is for the moment not Shakespeare, but the character in which he has sunk himself. We need not pretend that he does not sometimes run riot in his power; yet, how seldom, in the day of his maturity, is that "sometimes," when we rightly understand his meanings.

Let critics, observing always who speaks and in what spirit he speaks, try to improve a word in a typical passage of Shakespeare. They speedily realise the error of their ways.

Take at random the very simplest line, say: "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank"; substitute some other word for "sweet" or "sleeps," and examine the result. The very sound of the line possesses the tone of the moonlight and the hour, the mood of Lorenzo and Jessica. Try an easy-looking similitude:—

> How like a younker or a prodigal
> The scarfed bark puts from her native bay,
> Hugg'd and embraced by the strumpet wind!
> How like a prodigal doth she return,
> With over-weather'd ribs and ragged sails,
> Lean, rent, and beggared by the strumpet wind!

And, if the man who writes this nervous Saxon, writes elsewhere—

> No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

that also is a lesson to those who have any notion of what is meant by the right word in the right place.

To me Shakespeare is the most stupendously eloquent man who ever set pen to paper. Shakespeare, says Goethe, offers us golden apples in silver dishes. But Goethe was a foreigner, he perhaps hardly realised that the dishes of English expression are, to the English reader who responds to the niceties of his own tongue, not less golden than the apples.

To these perfections let us add another, his superb sense of rhythm. Properly speaking, this is but an integral part of perfect eloquence. It is the concern of the poet, not only to make the words

express the meaning, but to make the cadence express the tone and mood; to make it, in fact, answer to those rhythmic vibrations of the brain which go with all states of mental exaltation. It is Emerson who observes that "Shakespeare's sonnets are like the tone of voice of some incomparable person." He was doubtless thinking of their general effect upon our mood and spirit, but his remark is true of the mere movement of Shakespeare's lyric lines:—

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

Or—

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead, and lovely knights,

and so on.

Here, as in the dramas, are no mechanical tricks, no obvious compassing of sickly sweetnesses. The accent falls where it should, unstrained. The disguised alliteration comes, as almost always in Milton also, not from set and conscious purpose, but from the promptings of a mind vibrating with harmonious suggestion.

This catalogue of virtues has been long, but it has required some self-command to prevent it from being longer. It justifies the exclamation with which Mr. Sidney Lee closes his life of Shakespeare, an exclamation which he deftly borrows from Hamlet: "How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in apprehension how like a God!"

So much for Nature's making. With such lavish powers, or at least potentialities, was Shakespeare born. It is appalling to reflect that their fruit might all have been lost to the world if John Shakespeare, the father, had been but a little poorer than he actually was; if William, the son, had been sent to the plough-tail without the rudiments of education, and so had been banished for ever from contact with bright spirits and all the brilliant motley of London life. His fate would have been that of Gray's rural "mute inglorious Milton" and the headstone with "Here lies William Shakespeare" would have meant nothing outside the parish, and very little inside it. It is an alarming thought also that, had he been born half a century later, though with every educational advantage, his manhood would have fallen under the grim Puritan tyranny, and he would never have written a play. It is a peculiarly happy combination of circumstances which we must thank for the making of Shakespeare as he is.

Nature produced the wonderful plant, but, for its perfect development, a plant requires a congenial soil and atmosphere; it needs light and water; it needs protection from early destruction, or stunting, or starvation. It may seem heterodox, but I would maintain stubbornly, against all the phalanx of Baconians and Bedlamites, that, for the cultivation of Shakespeare's peculiar genius, circumstances were almost wholly propitious. His very poverty was his stimulus. Even that school education of his, which is made by misunderstanding to appear so scant and pitiful, was, I doubt not, better adapted to his career than if he had been filled with all the learning of Verulam or Ben Jonson. But of that anon.

The first happy circumstance was the epoch at which he saw the light. In modern times two forms of poetry contend for the supremacy. The third kind, the epic, is dead. No Homer or Virgil can ever more arise, unless as a novelist in prose. Of the two perennial kinds, one is the lyric—the consummate blending of language and music which utters the cry of individual passion from the individual heart. The other is the drama, the presentation of human life in visible form, realised in all its complexity of motives, characters and moods. Both of these flourished mightily in Shakespeare's generation. Lyric poets were innumerable. The whole country rang with songs. The Elizabethan Miscellanies and Rhapsodies and Dainty Devices are testimony stronger even than the great names of Spenser and the sonneteers. No less did drama appeal to high and low, the Puritan always excepted. But the day of the Puritan had not yet dawned. The taste of society of every grade was for the theatre, but a theatre without scenery, in which it was required of the drama that it should be rich in high poetry. Poetry was just then both a fashion and a passion of the nation, as it never was before and never has been since. To a man born, like Shakespeare, with both the lyric and the dramatic gift, the age was full of example and stimulus, and, better still, full of challenge and exacting poetic standards. There is an immense difference between writing an artistic sonnet for a wide public which desires to read artistic sonnets, or composing a poetic drama for a wide public which desires to see poetic dramas, and doing these things for a narrow public which, after all, rather tolerates your efforts than demands them.

We are not concerned with the question what Shakespeare might have been if he had lived in his prime to-day. He might perhaps have become a superlative novel-writer, since that is the field in which creation appears to be playing its chief part. But our concern is to perceive what causes helped to fashion him to that which he in fact became.

Let us first glance for a few moments at those spacious times of great Elizabeth. Why so wondrously prolific in song and play? Why so provocative of genius?

First, we may lay down the proposition that it is not times of national misery and poverty, not

times of insecurity and fear, not times of weak convictions and cynicism, that produce a wealth of either great poets or great art. There is not one distinguished literary or artistic period of any country at which the national spirit was not full of the animation, enterprise, and confidence of a general well-being, or at which it was not possessed by high ideas and strong aims or strong convictions. I am speaking in broad summary. Whatever qualifications may be made for unique phenomena, this statement in the main is true. At such periods the mental vitality of a community is high; the air is charged with intellectual and artistic electricity, and great talents everywhere become the receivers and gathering-points of those electric currents. Hence poets, artists, and other creators appear simultaneously in clusters; production is abundant both in matter and in kind. At such times there is nothing withdrawn or particularly refined about the creations which pour forth. There is no room for the dilettante or *petit maître*, and not much for the professional critic; it is the age of strong men; writing, painting, sculpture are full of vigour, inspiration, earnestness.

It was so at Athens in that glorious age of Pericles and the succeeding generation, the age of the great tragedians, of Thucydides, of Aristophanes and of Phidias. It was so—though with men of less original genius—in the Augustan Rome of Virgil, Horace and Livy. It was so in the rich and ardent cities of Renaissance Italy, where Da Vinci, Raphael, Michel Angelo, and Titian flourished in the same space of thirty years. It was so in the France of Louis Quatorze, when Corneille, Racine, Molière, Pascal, and numbers of others of hardly smaller note, were writing side by side. And it was so in the times of great Elizabeth. According to Emerson there is a mental zymosis or contagion prevailing in society at such epochs. Some one has said that "No member of either house of the British Parliament will be ranked among the orators whom Lord North did not see or who did not see Lord North." If so, the cause will be found to lie in the encouragement which noble oratory then received, whereas at a later day it has "fallen into abatement and low price."

The age of Elizabeth was one of material prosperity and comfort. It was, in the main, well with men's bodies and well with their minds. They possessed not only the leisure, not only the means, but also the disposition to enjoy. It is not for the artist in any field to scorn the material prosperity of the community in which he works. After all, as history will show, it is that prosperity which makes him possible. "Plain living and high thinking" is good for himself; it is good for a nation; but plain living does not mean poverty, squalor or starvation, while high thinking cannot be done without leisure and resource. You cannot build glorious Gothic cathedrals or order sublime Madonnas out of nothing.

Elizabethan England lived in comfort. It lived also in the security of at least internal peace. The Civil Wars, which had unsettled men of all ranks and distracted their thoughts and energies, were over. Those thoughts and energies now sought another outlet. On the whole it was also an age of tolerance. England had not entered upon its phase of Puritan bigotry, nor on its licentious Anti-Puritan vengeance. Religion was in less degree a battle-ground. There were, of course, hostilities of Protestants, Catholics, and Brownists, but the two hundred and odd sects of the twentieth century were still far off, and men's time and intellectual energies—of which there is but a limited amount—were not wasted in futile discussion of sectarian minutiæ.

At ease in mind, body and estate, it was natural that the age should be one of frank enjoyment—enjoyment of all that gladdens mind or eye or ear, enjoyment of rich clothes, fine houses, shows, pageantries, music, song, stories, and plays. In the revels which Scott in his *Kenilworth* makes Leicester prepare for the reception of Elizabeth, he is drawing upon his study of the times. Above all entertainments the play was the thing, and whether performed before the mixed auditory of the new theatres of Shoreditch or on the Southwark side, or before the Benchers of the Inns of Court, or before the Queen's Majesty herself, the drama received a welcome compared with which its appreciation in our midst is as cold as it is stinted.

And yet all this might have produced in literature and art nothing but pomp and show, or amusement more or less vulgar. In the theatre it might have ended in farce or melodrama. But happily, along with prosperity and the feeling for enjoyment, conditions were at work which made for the keenest activity of mind and every form of intellectual expansion. It would be to enlarge upon a trite theme indeed, if one dwelt upon the enterprise and discovery of bold spirits like Francis Drake, and upon the eager curiosity, the ready imagination, the universal open-mindedness, which ran through the nation, as new worlds were opened or looked for in the western or southern seas.

More important, all-important in truth, was the avid mastery of new knowledge which had followed the Renaissance and the invention of printing. The ancient writers of Greece and Rome were all recovered, and were being greedily absorbed. Old thoughts, ideas, fancies, knowledge—long buried and shamefully forgotten—had become new again. The curiosity which followed the voyages of Drake or Raleigh to America, followed also the explorations of the scholar in the ever-opening seas of ancient literature. The age became one of wide and plenteous reading. Moreover men read then, as they ought to read, for the matter. They tore the heart out of books, from Homer to Seneca; they were greedy for the substance, the thoughts, the imaginations, the fancies. If they could not read the originals, they insisted on the translations. Nor did they stay at the classics. They devoured books in Italian and French. Never has England been so cosmopolitan, at least so European, in its absorption of ideas and knowledge. It is only since the icebound Puritan days that England has become insular, self-contained, in part hugely conceited, and in part absurdly diffident, concerning itself. The best work of Byron and Shelley aimed at breaking down this attitude, and if we are again growing out of our insularity—which is open to much doubt—it is in no small measure due to writers of their kind.

I do not offer all these commonplaces as information. I offer them simply as reminders, and as a necessary introduction to the remark which I have next to make—that the enlightenment, the education, above all the spirit, derived from this wealth of reading were precisely that sort of enlightenment and education and spirit which make for splendid poetry. The learning of the day was in no wise scientific in the narrower modern sense. It was not of the material and utilitarian, still less of the sordid, kind. The age was the least Philistine of all epochs of English history. We were not yet a nation of shopkeepers. It is inevitable that nowadays an immense proportion of our study and reading should run to social and economic questions, to applied sciences, to the investigation of germs and gases, political problems, electric forces, and manures. There is, I have often maintained, no necessary antagonism whatever between these intellectual pursuits and the pursuit of art and literature. One should be but the complement of the other. Goethe and Shelley could combine the love of both science and poetry. If the physicist and the artistic creator quarrel, then each is blind in one mental eye.

Be that as it may, the fact for us just now is that the reading and learning of those spacious Elizabethan days were such that, with the brightening of the intellect, there was no dimming of the imagination. On the contrary, the effect of the recovery and the spread of all the rich, warm, many-coloured creations of the world's best minds, was to steep the English nation in enthusiasm for great lyrics, great dramas, any great production which carried with it the warmth and brightness and exhilarating breath of noble poetry.

There was no weakening of character in this, no loss of practical efficiency. A Sidney or a Raleigh could fight as well as turn a verse; a Shakespeare could prove as sound a man of business as he was a poet. Elizabethan men were all-round men, like the best men in Periclean Athens.

Moreover, the recovered classics imparted not only enthusiasm, but standards. An ambitious writer of the Elizabethan age must do his best to live up to Homer and Plato, to Virgil and Catullus, just as he must live up to Petrarch.

And one thing more. When Spenser or Shakespeare or their contemporaries took up their pens, there was ready to their use the magnificent Elizabethan English tongue—a store inexhaustibly rich, and all the richer for being free from huge piles of needless rubbish, called vocabulary, which modern times have heaped into the long-suffering dictionary. The speech of the English Bible, which rightly seems to us so inimitably noble in its simplicity, was but the contemporary speech of educated England. Fine expressive words had not yet been soiled with all ignoble use. They had not been debauched by slang or vulgarized by affectation. The Elizabethan language possessed the noble solid grandeur of a statue of Phidias or Angelo. At its best now it is apt to pose like the enervated Apollo Belvedere or an over-refined production of Canova. Says that vigorous writer, Lowell: "In reading Hakluyt's Voyages, we are almost startled now and then to find that even common sailors could not tell the story of their wanderings without rising to an almost Odyssean strain, and habitually used a diction that we should be glad to buy back from desuetude at any cost."

Here, then, is an epoch of history, prosperous, high-spirited, tolerant, enterprising, joyous, alert for knowledge, enamoured of high fancies and imagination. Here also is a language of ample scope and noble powers. And into the midst of a London like this there comes up from Stratford, we know not how, a man marvellously dowered with all those supreme gifts which I have endeavoured to describe.

Towards the making of Shakespeare, Nature has contributed her utmost. For the full encouragement of his genius the environment is most apt. It remains briefly to see what experience did for him, or what he did for himself. What was his preparation?

His origin was lowly, and, as with Robert Burns, we may be glad of it. He thus saw intimately certain sides of life and conditions of men which otherwise he might never have touched so closely. He learned to know all their strange and naïve humours, their ignorance and muddlement. From them he realised those strong and elemental passions which finer folk attenuate or disguise. He acquired a stock of sinewy and home-coming Saxon phrase, which often stood him in good stead, and which forms no small factor in his vast eloquence. He is manifestly a man who forgot nothing. In after days he mingled with wits and players, with poets and peers, but, while ever acquiring diction of wider range and choicer degree, he kept always ready to hand the language of peasant and clown. No man ever enjoyed more full instruction in the speech, the thoughts, or the manners, of all degrees of men.

Of women toward the social summits he perhaps never knew so much, but he had not studied their humbler sisters in vain, and beneath all the width of ruff and opulence of silk, he knew well enough what primal feelings lurked, what affections, what jealousies, what caprices of the eternal feminine. As for the mere externals of their behaviour, he had abundant opportunities of noting them.

When modern readers censure Shakespeare for dubious things which he makes his gentlewomen say and do, they are apt to forget how surprising were the canons of behaviour and decorum for gentlewomen under good Queen Bess. For my part I am prepared in all such cases to give their keen-eyed and marvellous contemporary the benefit of the doubt. He would not represent ladies as any coarser than they were.

Of his education, in the narrower sense, we can really make sure of little; but, like that of Burns, it was indisputably far more liberal than the devotees of miracle are wishful to suppose. To-day

no competent inquirer doubts that, with the grammar-school at Stratford opening its doors free to the son of John Shakespeare, burgess and alderman, the opportunity was grasped by that struggling but ambitious person. Nor is it doubted that there, under some Holofernes or Sir Hugh Evans, the boy learned his Lyly's grammar, and read his share of Latin authors—his Terence, Ovid, and Seneca, together with Baptista "the old Mantuan." In French he assuredly did more than dabble, if his *Henry V* be taken as any proof. The other day Mr. Churton Collins essayed to prove, by an array of quotations, that he was tolerably read in Greek. For my own part I confess that I find, in the passages of Æschylus cited with passages of Shakespeare, no more than happy coincidences in the thinking of two kindred original minds. Yet some Greek at least he had. Our witness is Ben Jonson. Rare Ben was himself a monument of learning, and to him the ordinary mortal's modicum was but a trifle. When he observes "and though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek," we should do well to take him as meaning precisely what he says. If he had meant "no Latin and no Greek," he would have written it so; the line would have scanned as easily, and the desired point would have been made still more effective. Add to these studies of Shakespeare his early study in the Bible; early familiarity with that book, apart from all questions of character and religion, will always shoot a rich woof of word and thought through all the warp of writing.

Remember that Shakespeare at school was not distracted by hours of mathematics and other agreeable but alien pursuits. Remember also—what is so strangely forgotten—that he was a genius, whose capacious mind would grasp and retain with unique facility. Remember that at school there are boys and boys, and that, while some of them waste time in laboriously endeavouring to assimilate the shells of knowledge along with the oysters, others instinctively use their powers of secretion to better purpose. Remember also that in Elizabethan times school-boy study was a far more strenuous matter than it is in these degenerate days, and that it was not chiefly directed towards examinations.

Be assured that Shakespeare's school education was as good as your own; or, if you are not convinced of that, be at least assured that an illiterate man never did, and never will, write even tolerable poetry.

It may seem as if I were acting the traitor to my own profession when I rejoice that Shakespeare was never turned into what is technically called a learned man. He was something better, he was an educated man. You do not need erudition to be a creator of great works of imagination, whether it be erudition concerning Latin syntax or concerning the Origin of the Concept or concerning the life-history of the worm. What you chiefly require to know is the human heart; and the best books for that knowledge are human beings. Learning is after all but the milch-cow of education. If Shakespeare had been as learned as Ben Jonson, or the so-called University Wits, he might perchance have come to view mankind too much through the medium of books, as Jonson himself did, instead of through his own keen natural orbs of vision.

> His soul proud science never taught to stray
> Far as the Solar walk or Milky Way.

No! but he had soared otherwise to the Solar walk and the Galaxy, he had gladdened at the sight of the sun flattering all Nature with his sovereign eye, and he had felt the full sense of the nocturnal heavens, thick inlaid with patines of bright gold. A learned man, says Bagehot, may study butterflies till he forgets that they are beautiful. On the other hand, it is only fair to say that he need forget nothing of the kind. So a man may study Aristotle till he forgets that Aristotle derived his psychology from men and not men from Aristotle.

The real scandalum to Greene and the scholar playwrights was not that Shakespeare was illiterate, but that, not having studied by Cam or Isis, he had no business to be literate. He was an "upstart crow," and what right had he to be "as well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you?" The attitude was perhaps natural to jealous rivals, but it should never have been used to show that Shakespeare was destitute of a decent school education. Perhaps the most regrettable outcome of this notion is that Milton should have written the amazing line which tells how Shakespeare

> Warbled his native woodnotes wild.

Like the famous description of the crab as the little red fish which walks backwards, it contains only three demonstrable errors. Shakespeare does not warble, his notes are not woodnotes, and they are not wild.

He was, moreover, a man of the sort whose education—even book education—never ceases. At a later date in London he manifestly absorbed numerous translations. He knew his way about his Golding's Ovid and North's Plutarch. Before he attempted those splendid poetical exercises the *Venus and Adonis*, the *Lucrece*, and the early sonnets, he had studied, like every one else, the models for sonneteers and lyrists which came from Italy and France, from Petrarch or Du Bellay. It is clear that he was familiar with the Essays of Montaigne. Earlier English literature was no sealed book to him. He also read his own contemporaries. Hence his *Lucrece* is part Ovid, part Chaucer, part Daniel or Watson; his *Venus and Adonis* is part Ovid, part Lodge.

Better still than reading is conversation, the rubbing of wits and furbishing of knowledge amid well-informed and bright-minded company. Tradition tells us that Shakespeare was a member of that brilliant coterie of the Mermaid Tavern, where rare Ben presided, as glorious John presided at a later day in his favoured Coffee-house. Fuller describes the wit-combats between Shakespeare and his learned confrère, and there is no reason to doubt that the nimble man-of-

war and the heavy galleon fought many a bout. Of that coterie Beaumont writes to Jonson:—

> What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! Heard words that have been
> So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest.

The classical quotation, the apt allusion, would fly freely in that society. The matter of books new and old would be talked of and discussed. For the purpose of Shakespeare, here was learning to be picked up of the most telling sort. For, let us repeat, reading was then pursued on high levels, and intellectual curiosity was eager. And let us remember always that Shakespeare must have possessed an astonishing instinct for seizing the essentials, which he shaped for himself "in the quick forge and working-house of thought."

Also among the actors into whose company he was perpetually thrown there were men who had, as we should call it, toured through England and Scotland, and sometimes abroad to France, Germany, or Denmark. Scores of his acquaintances must have travelled in Italy, even if they did not return *diavoli incarnati*. Each man brought back description, information, story, which the vivid imagination of Shakespeare, as he listened, turned into abiding picture; and this, after he had chosen his theme from Cinthio or Bandello or elsewhere, he would employ for the background in his Verona or his Venice. How powerfully this can be done by the imagination of genius is well exemplified in *Wilhelm Tell*, which, from its opening verses of *Es lächelt der See*, carries in it the whole sense of Swiss landscape and Swiss air, although Schiller had never set foot in Switzerland.

Over and above all this, a man whose heart and whose interests are alike engaged in a particular profession, be he physician, or inventor, or artist, and who is ambitious to excel and prosper in that profession, will be for ever alert to every hint or lesson which will make for success. Shakespeare was from his heart a playwright; he was at the same time a shrewd business man as partner in a theatre. Not only did he love his work with all the passion of a creator, he was also concerned to outvie his professional rivals. The plays of the Globe must be better than the plays of the Fortune. He therefore studied existing dramas, in order to surpass them, if possible, at every point. He began by recasting or improving the plays of feebler writers, and so learned to distinguish what was effective from what was not. He then went on in the effort—an easy effort it proved to him—to transcend the plays of writers of strength; to transcend them in construction, in characterisation, in intellectual matter, in humour, and in diction; and this means that his aim was, by compulsion, high.

The standard already set was a lofty one. Marlowe's mighty line was not easy to surpass. There is nothing which provokes the best efforts of genius so powerfully as formidable predecessors and rivals. It is as with the forest trees; if some grow tall, the rest will struggle to grow taller, so that they may escape from the shade into the sun. The University Wits and scholar poets, who had "climbed to the height of Seneca his style," deserve no little thanks for the making of our Shakespeare. If his pieces were to be performed before the Queen's Majesty, or the King's Majesty, and all that cultivated court, or if they were to receive the applause of the learned Benchers of Gray's Inn, they must attain a distinguished level both of living interest and of admirable poetry. Shakespeare's precursors had rendered this high perfection indispensable.

Let me insist also on another consideration, too often overlooked. The Elizabethan stage was without scenery. The bare boards, a curtain at the back, a table and inkstand to represent a court of justice, two or three ragged foils to disgrace the name of Agincourt, and the imagination of the audience did the rest. All the gorgeousness of the modern *mise-en-scène*; all the painting, mechanical contrivances, and elaborate furnishing, were wanting. There was none of that modern realism, which consists in driving a real train across a painted country or eating real sandwiches under a property tree. To a great extent all this elaborate staging has been the death of dramatic art. Among the Elizabethans, the interest depended solely on the action and the acting, on the piece and its language. All these must be excellent. They were not yet considered inferior to those of optical effect. The Elizabethans listened with their minds, not solely with their eyes.

Thus, from his teaching at school, from his wide reading, from bright and varied conversation, from assiduous exercise, Shakespeare derived perpetual education. If, as Bacon declares, "reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man," then Shakespeare was trebly well equipped.

But there was another element in his training, which, for the dramatist, was worth all the rest. This was his habit of observation, an observation shrewd but sympathetic, of all sorts and conditions of men. The experience lying between his youthful escapades at Stratford and his sober retirement thither was doubtless a wonderful polychrome. He had plodded his way among many peculiar folk as he passed from Warwickshire to London by way of Banbury or Oxford. He had stopped at inns in strange company of fools and knaves, pedlars, roisterers and swashbucklers. He had hobnobbed with dull-pated village constables. He had consorted with

> Stephen Sly and old John Naps of Greece,
> And Peter Turf and Henry Pimpernel.

In London he had foregathered with Mrs. Quickly and haply with Doll Tearsheet. All the

whimsical miscellany of the Bohemians must have been known to him. We need not doubt that he had sowed wild oats. Doubtless, if he lived the same life now, he would be looked upon askance by good people who knew nothing of his temptations. But he was no neurotic; no genius of the first rank ever is or was. He never lost control of himself, and so did not, like some of his brilliant contemporaries, tread the primrose path which leads down to futility and death. He was always pre-eminently sane. While composing his transcendent *Lear* and *Othello*, he was suing Philip Rogers for £1 15s. 10d. While his fancy roamed in the fairyland of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, his investments were in the highest degree judicious.

Elizabethan life, whether in town or country, whether among earls or tapsters, was infinitely more frank, varied, and picturesque than it can ever be again. Men and women displayed more freely their natural idiosyncrasies. Nor did the traveller rush at fifty miles an hour through all this variegated world. He saw it lingeringly and intimately, as Chaucer saw his Pilgrims, or Goldsmith his Village, or Scott his Border peasants.

Bagehot says truly that, to have experiences, one must have the experiencing nature. To make observations, one must have an observing nature, and that nature Shakespeare possessed as no other man has possessed it. He noted everything. So might another, but the superlative merit of Shakespeare's observation is that he noted all and always with humorous and universal sympathy, with an eye absolutely free from the jaundice of Carlyle, as it was free from the bookish astigmatism of Ben Jonson. His mental retina formed a perfect mirror to hold up to nature. Whether it be true or not that he had seen a veritable Dogberry at Grendon, Bucks, it is certain that he had seen the type somewhere. Best of all, he had not seen it in irritation or contempt. If we are told that Shakespeare presents "no entire and perfect hero, no entire and perfect villain," it is simply because he had—like ourselves—never set eyes on either of those monsters. He also never made the mistake of reading himself into other men, any more than he made the artistic mistake of unlocking his heart and taking a hundred and fifty sonnets to do it. His clear objective picture is never vitiated by the desire to preach. He has no system of ethics, politics, or anything else to teach. Doubtless Shakespeare had his own views on all important matters of life and death; but in the drama the artist's business is to present us with the kaleidoscope of life, not to insist upon our interpreting it to certain ends, of which he is to be the arbiter. You cannot, perhaps, read *Lear* without being a better man, or *Hamlet* without being a wiser; but you are permitted to be better and wiser in your own way, and not in some way ready mapped out for you. Do not let us talk of the ethical purpose of Shakespeare's plays. Let us only speak of their ethical effect. What that effect is has been expressed by Shelley thus: "The gentleness and elevation of mind connected with sacred emotions render men more amiable, more generous and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self."

Last element in the making of our Shakespeare was one which I dare hardly name, in fear of the deluge of contempt which the minor prophets of artistry will pour upon my head. Well, I take my Philistine courage in my hands, and say that he was thus great because he never wrote for any special class of the illuminati; he never troubled his soul with any other theory of art than that it should present interesting and universal truth, truth so manifestly true that it should appeal to all the world of men and women. When Angelo was asked by a sculptor in what light a certain statue should be viewed, his answer was, "in the light of the public square." A statue which will not bear the criticism of that place is assuredly untrue. Shakespeare wrote for the public square, not for exhibition in the gallery of some ephemeral school of taste, nor for the private collection of some self-elected critic, who holds a pouncet-box while he applies his little artificial canons of correctness.

Doubtless a man who writes in this large massive spirit, overlooks some trifling blemishes. "Nice customs curtesy to great kings." "Great men," says Landor, "often have greater faults than smaller men can find room for." Shakespeare has his, but, of all wise things that Ruskin has said of art, this—which describes our Shakespeare—is perhaps the truest: "There are two characters in which all greatness of art consists—first, the earnest and intense seizing of natural facts; then the ordering those facts by strength of human intellect, so as to make them, for all who look upon them, to the utmost serviceable, memorable and beautiful."

Literature and Life

The Literature Society of Melbourne meets monthly in order to assimilate true literature and to study its principles. If its President is entitled to speak its corporate mind, it approaches this task in a grateful and docile spirit.

There is, I believe, no necessity to defend the existence and aims of a Literature Society. It would be enough if we simply confessed that we meet for the enjoyment of a rational and not unelevating pleasure. It would be enough if we said that literature, like pictorial art and music, is one of the recognized resources for the gladdening of life, and that we meet in order to get as much of that high refreshment as possible in each other's company. And this, indeed, we do so far frankly acknowledge and confess.

But we also claim that there is a more serious aspect of our association. We believe that great literature and its zealous study produce most powerful effects, both upon our inner selves and upon the value and happiness of our lives; that they supply us with a rich equipment, both for our

private thinking and feeling and also for social action and social intercourse; that from great literature we derive indefeasible resources, which form glorious company in the midst of solitude, abundant wealth in the midst of poverty, and an unfailing refuge from the too frequent harshness of circumstance.

Our objects are not those of mere dilettanti, although for my part I should blame no association which boldly inscribed "dilettanti" on its breezy flag. Our "literature" is not mere elegant trifling —although men who do choose to spend an occasional evening in trifling with elegance are men whom we can still afford to respect and perhaps to envy. But literature, as we understand it, is no trifling, however elegant. By literature we mean what Milton has called the "seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books"; and the seasoned life of man is no trifle. We mean something of which the influence—or the effluence—may profoundly determine the quality of our lives, both as they affect others and as they affect ourselves.

We do not mean simply printed books. The vaster proportion of what is printed is not literature. It may be statements of fact and items of information; it may be sound science and unimpeachable record; it may be truism; it may be platitude; it is often sheer bathos or doggerel. We do not count these things as literature. A good deal of singing, piano-beating and tin-whistling is not music. It is only in virtue of a certain fine quality that books are literature. According to Emerson, literature is "a record of the best thoughts." According to Matthew Arnold it is "the best that has been thought and said in the world." If literature is a collection of great books, then we may recall Milton's description of a great book, as "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." And so literature becomes a store of inexhaustible vials, filled with the most generous elixir decanted from the world's master-spirits. Listen again to Vauvenargues: "Good literature is the essence of the best minds, the abstract of their knowledge, the fruit of their long vigils." Or let us drop metaphor, and accept, as entirely satisfying and luminous, the account given by Mr. John Morley, that "literature consists of all books ... where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form."

Such is the sense in which we interpret the term "literature."

The range and variety of such true literature are as wide and varied as human genius. It includes, for instance, the novel, whenever the novel, as in Balzac, Thackeray, and Fielding, shows this fine, large, sane, attractive touch; it includes verse, when, and only when, moral truth and human passion are touched finely or nobly in this way. Its forms are manifold, and its themes include—

> All thoughts, all passions, all delights
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame.

In its shape and form literature may be a hard-headed essay of Bacon or an impassioned lyric of Shelley; its sound may be the majestic organ-peal of Milton or the sumptuous flute music of Keats; its mood may be the scathing fervour of Carlyle or the genial humour of Lamb; its manner may be the rugged strength of Browning or the fastidious grace of Arnold; but, whatever it be, it everywhere contains this high distinction; it touches some vital truth or human passion with "a certain largeness and sanity and attraction of form." What is not sane and large and expressive is not the literature which we meet to study and absorb.

Literature, then, is no mere "elegant trifling." It is no mere *belles lettres*. We do not, indeed, pretend, and none but a human machine will pretend, to despise the graces and charms of *belles lettres*. That would be as ridiculous and inhuman as to despise the delights of music or architecture. But literature is more than *belles lettres*; it is something of far superior intellectual weight and dignity, of far superior moral force and energy. In its contents it is a body of the wisest, most suggestive, most impressive utterance of the world's best minds, at their best moments, from the Psalmist to Wordsworth, from the *Iliad* to *The Ring and the Book*. Meanwhile its outward vesture is full of art and beauty.

And without going further we ask, how can one stand in habitual communion with wise, seminal and impressive speech; how can one saturate oneself with its wisdom and energy, without being the better equipped for the demands of both the life within and the life without? "Consider," says Emerson, "what you have in the smallest chosen library. A company of the wisest and wittiest men that could be picked out of all civil countries have set in their best order the results of their wisdom and learning." Well, let us keep company like that, and what is the result? The value of great literature is that it conveys an endless number of eternal truths for the use and enrichment of human life: moreover it conveys them by a medium of language of such peculiar power and beauty that those truths penetrate keenly into the heart and brain, and, at least in some measure, and often in very large measure, they find a fixed and perennial lodgment there. They enter the blood which reddens our whole mental complexion.

This is true of literature in general, but, though the wisdom and the wit and the passion are found in both prose and verse, the crowning form of literature—and that which all literary societies inevitably study most—is great poetry. The supreme mastery and our supreme interest lie with Dante or Shakespeare or Goethe. It is astounding how commonly the function and the brain power of the great poet are misconceived and underrated. The supreme poets are no dainty or fragile sentimentalists; in reality they are the very flower of human penetration. Not because they write in splendid verse. That, indeed, is the appropriate vehicle of their power; the harmonies and melodies of verse represent and reproduce the tone and colour vibrations of their singularly rich natures; but verse is only their vehicle. These great writers are supreme, not for this versification, however magnificent, but because that utterance of theirs is the voice of the seer, the voice of a marvellous insight into vital truths, of a sane and ripe philosophy of life, of a wide and profound sympathy with the myriad thoughts and emotions of mankind. They write in verse simply because, as Hazlitt describes it, poetry is "the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything." They write in verse because Nature herself insists on having—

> High and passionate thoughts
> To their own music chanted.

Their verse alone is a charm and a joy. But their primary value to us is that they are among the rare beings who have possessed "the vision and the faculty divine," who, to quote Ruskin, can "startle our lethargy with the deep and pure agitation of astonishment." There is about them nothing incomprehensibly transcendental, nothing "unpractical," nothing aloof from the life we live—if we live it fully—but wholly the contrary. Those who say otherwise are but exposing their own short sight, their own creeping imagination, their own narrowness of sympathy.

Take Shakespeare. What he possesses is not only the most stupendous eloquence ever owned by man. It is profound knowledge of humanity, gathered by a keen and open-eyed Olympian contemplation of all sorts and conditions of men, from the egregious Bottom, and Dogberry the muddled, up to Hamlet and Imogen; it is the broad myriad-minded understanding which feels with every class, and, withal, suffers even fools gladly. His prime value is that he saw—saw life steadily and saw it whole—saw clearly into and round that thought, that sentiment, that passion, that apparent contradiction, which commoner minds have only perceived as a vague nebula. It is so that Carlyle describes the poet: "An inspired soul, once more vouchsafed to us direct from Nature's own fire heat, to see the truth and speak it." The sovereign poets do this with such godlike ease that we seldom realize their vast achievement.

It is not the greatest masters who surround their expression with a haze, even with a glory haze. It is not the greatest masters who express things vaguely because they see them dimly. They see the thing and speak it.

But the supreme poet not only sees thus with his intellect; he experiences with his feelings. He possesses "the experiencing nature." Emerson declares that "among partial men he stands for the complete man, the representative of man, in virtue of having the largest power to receive and impart." This is, of course, said of the best; it is not to be said of the scribblers and the poetasters in their thousands; it is not to be said of the innumerable warblers whose feeble songs "grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw"; it is not true even of a canorous rhetorician, such as Swinburne, or a dreamy teller of tales like William Morris; but it is beyond question true of a Shakespeare or a Goethe. These were men of three-storied brain and also of thrice capacious soul.

Says Coleridge: "No man was ever yet a great poet without being a profound philosopher." For poetry is the blossom and the fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language; and Carlyle tells us of Goethe, "His resources have been accumulated from nearly all the provinces of human intellect and activity," while his culture was learned "not from art and literature alone, but also by action and passion in the rugged school of experience."

It is, therefore, not for nothing that Lowell declares—

> I believe the poets; it is they
> Who utter wisdom from the central deep.

Nor is it for nothing that Wordsworth declares poetry to be "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." The student of poetry may doubtless be studying æsthetics, but he is not merely dallying with æsthetics. If he is communing thoughtfully with mighty spirits like these—the penetrators to the central deep—is he not gaining, by the most royal road known to humanity, the most liberal education for the fullest life?

But we are not, it is true, always with the greatest poets. We are not always breathing the keen air of the very mountain tops. There is permanent value to be drawn also from writers in a rank below these greatest seers and creators. A Pope or a Dryden has packed into clear, rememberable, and serviceable shape considerable masses of wisdom and good sense—shrewd and enlightening, if not always lofty or original. The terse and pregnant essays of Bacon, the brusque, cant-hating wit and wisdom of Samuel Johnson, the critical sagacities of Hazlitt, the

remorseless searchings of Carlyle, the brilliant expositions of Macaulay—to listen to these, to ponder and assimilate their best, is both to train the mind and to furnish it. Nay, even if a Plato or a Ruskin leave not one single dogma consciously grasped by the student's faith, they have, nevertheless, been in the highest degree invigorating and ennobling company. To associate with a Scott is to associate with high and wholesome character.

Such are the great writers of the first rank and second rank who form great literature; and to them the student has recourse when in quest of "the best that has been thought and said in the world." If what he gathers is not applied by him to life, then the fault is his own. If he does apply it, what then? Is there any such application, practical and living?

This is said to be a "practical" age. If I know anything whatever of history, I maintain that this age is no more "practical" than any other. All sensible ages are practical. The present age, it is true, possesses more ingenious and labour-increasing machinery, and, when it is minded to do what it euphoniously describes as "hustle," it can doubtless "hustle" with a more deplorable rapidity than in times ancient. But it is not one whit more "practical." If we ask for a practical application of literature to life, so did the Greeks and so did the Romans. The object of their literary study was to fit a man to play his part in affairs, to know his world, to know both himself and other men, and to train him for a distinguished social place. They knew that literary study did this; if it had not, they would have called it a pastime, and left it to provide for itself as such. A training for the living of a life—is that object not sufficiently practical for the modern man? Is, after all, the final cause of society to be simply manufacturing and underselling, eating, drinking, and sleeping? None of us really believe that. We cannot glance at our public libraries, our art-galleries and museums, and seriously assert that society even looks like believing it. Any one who maintains that there actually and consciously prevails such a basely materialistic meaning of "practical" is but a poor cynic maligning the world which tolerates him. When the world calls for a "practical" outcome of literary study, we mean what the Greeks meant, and what the Romans meant—some discoverable adaptation of the results of literary study to the various activities of human life—human life in its fulness—life of the helpful citizen, life of the partner in social intercourse, life in the silence of oneself.

Go and fetch in the first respectable-looking man from the street, and prove to him that literary study tends, as Bacon requires, "to civilize the life of man"; prove to him that, as Montesquieu requires, it "increases the excellence of our nature, and makes an understanding being yet more understanding," and the man—type though he may be of the modern practical age—will admit your claim and applaud your effort.

Well, literary study, to be worth anything beyond entertainment, ends in application to life, and to that end it is admirably fitted. I am not intending to compare in detail the value of one study with that of another. I make no pretence at estimating their relative potentialities. That proceeding may be left to the ignorance or the intolerance of the man of one idea. He will settle it for us, and we will duly disregard him. It is, for example, not the cultivated scientist, not the wise scientist, who urges those huge and exorbitant claims which are sometimes advanced for physical science in these days—for electricity and chemistry and *ologies*. The true scientist may perhaps prefer that his kine should be the fat kine—for he is but human—but he does not desire them to be the only kine and to eat up all the rest.

But, though we are not to compare all the possibilities of this and that study, we can appeal to one unquestionable fact. When it comes to the tasks of citizenship, to settling human questions for legislation and the arguments of justice, to intelligent voting and the like, the student of those human documents which we call literature is found more often to the front than the student of anything else whatsoever. It would be worth while, if we had the time, to make a list of the great statesmen and great initiators who have been men of letters or of literary culture. Not physical science, not the region of mathematics, seem to have equipped the mind so fully for this complex, this motive-determined department of life.

Literature deals with man and the mind of man, and, whether it be right or no to hold that "the proper study of mankind is man," we must acknowledge that man, and the workings of his mind and spirit, play the preponderating part in the region of social order and social happiness. It is literature and no other study which embraces the wide, the all-round, the long-practised survey "of man, of nature, and of human life" necessary for a luminous intelligence.

A Huxley will remind us that, in any case, what we are bound to study is "not merely things and their forces, but men and their ways, and the fashioning of the affections and the will." Doubtless we must observe as well as read. But our own observation of life, however shrewd, is insufficient; it is narrow and partial. We see but the minutest fraction of time and the minutest fraction of humanity. It is from literature that we learn most vividly and most efficaciously all that can really be known "of men and their ways, the affections and the will."

There are, of course, self-complacent human beings who cannot realize that past literature has in this domain anything to teach them. They imagine that the world was born when they were born. These persons we must perhaps leave to the error of their ways. In earnest truth, there is no real

literature too foreign or too old—nor, for the matter of that, too near or too young—to enlighten us concerning human feeling, human thought, and human motive. In these things the world did not have to wait for wisdom and insight until the modern scientific epoch. Age cannot wither the essential truth nor stale the potency of great literature in this respect. Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato, Tacitus, Dante, or Shakespeare would have nothing to learn of the human mind and heart from Haeckel or from Herbert Spencer.

Nor, again, has human capacity—thinking capacity—appreciably advanced since great literature first arose. "Telephones," says Mr. Frederic Harrison, "microphones, pantoscopes, steam presses, and ubiquity engines in general may, after all, leave the poor human brain no bigger and no stronger than the brains of men who heard Moses speak and saw Aristotle pondering over a few worn rolls of crabbed manuscript." One assuredly cannot say of the twentieth-century man with more truth than Shakespeare's Hamlet said it of man three centuries ago—certainly not with more truth than it might have been said of Shakespeare himself—"How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In apprehension how like a god!" There was, indeed, none of the modern scientific terminology in Thucydides, or Æschylus, or Aristotle, but, in respect of sheer brain power and sanity, literature is at least as lofty in Æschylus as in Browning, in Aristotle as in Spencer. That is why the classics—classics of all languages, classics of Greece, of Italy, of England—are for ever fresh, and can never die.

Literature, therefore, is a mass of written enlightenment concerning human beings, human hearts, and human thought. Name, if you will, any other study which could better fit a man for grappling with the problems of humanity in that portion of his life which we call public.

But man is something more than a public instrument. We cannot separate the man of citizen life, playing his part in the practical world, from the man of private intercourse, and the man of inward culture and resource. There is a sufficiently "practical" outcome of literary study if it makes the man wiser in himself, if it makes him truer in his judgment, richer and broader in his feelings, makes him put forth antennæ of tact and sympathy, if also it supplies him with such inward resources that he can dispense with unattainable luxuries or with vulgar methods of passing his time. Such results are surely a profoundly useful application of the results of study to life.

Take a human being in the loneliness—the absolute isolation or the intellectual isolation—of the bush; take one who is disabled by illness or disease; take one who is perforce environed all his days by company which is ignoble and dull; take one who can ill afford any of the distractions of the wealthy. How shall he keep alive his higher part, or fill his leisure with contentment and delight, except by constant intercourse with the mightiest minds in the history of the thinking world? Said Rousseau: "Let one destine my pupil to the army, to the church, the bar, or anything else; yet, before his parents have chosen his vocation, nature has called him to the vocation of human life; living is the trade I want to teach him." All the rest is but means to an end. "We live," asserts the poet, "by admiration, hope, and love." And nothing can stimulate these sensations like great literature.

In this connexion I must insist for a few minutes upon the relations of literature to the intellectual idol of to-day—to wit science—science in the popular, if inaccurate, sense. I have to maintain that literature—and particularly poetry—is the indispensable ally and complement of science; that it is, in the end, the means by which the essential truths of science will reach their application to life; that it supplies the force by which the great facts of science are made to operate for good upon our thinking and our feeling. Literature supplies that which science alone cannot supply.

I am aware there are those who fancy that science itself is sufficient guide and equipment for human existence. Huxley, if I remember rightly, asserted in his nonage that science would even afford us a newer and more enlightened morality. But I have never heard any scientist repeat that doctrine; I have never heard any scientist claim that the altruism of the Sermon on the Mount or of Buddha had been superseded by the dry light of scientific conclusions. Physical science and its inventions have not obviously advanced the delicacy of sentiments or of ethical ideas. Chaucer's notion of a "parfit gentil knight," and his "poure parsoun of a toun" could not be bettered for anything discovered in all the five centuries since. It is not easy to see how science can stimulate us to warm-hearted charity, to self-sacrificing love and loyalty, to patriotism, and other manifestations of qualities which we universally recognize as virtues, and as things without which human life would be a dreary and intolerable waste. Without them suicide were almost best. And the cultivation of the emotions belongs to literature, not to objective science.

Will you pardon me if I repeat an illustration which has been used before, though I forget where? There are two ways of regarding tears. They may be the infinitely appealing outward and visible signs of some great inward troubling of the spirit. They may "rise in the heart and gather to the eyes" from "the depths of some divine despair." On the other hand they may be what they were to a certain character in Balzac. The physicist Baltazar retorts in answer to an outburst of tears, "Ah! tears! I have analysed them; they contain a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucin, and water!" I do not happen to know if that is a correct analysis, but I do know that both

these aspects of tears are true aspects. There is nothing contradictory about them. The one is the aspect of objective science; the other—the human and moral aspect—is that of literature. Is there any doubt which aspect ultimately concerns us the more as human beings, livers of human lives?

There is no conflict between science and literature, especially between science and poetry.

The astronomer tells us the immense distances and immense sizes of the stars—great facts, most interesting facts; but the imagination of literature gets hold of all the vastness and wonder and suggestion of such a universe, and by the gift of expression it makes us realize them, makes us feel an awe and admiration, which may at least lend some chastening to minds which sorely need it. I believe that all true men of science recognise this power of literature, and that they are no more satisfied than the veriest poet with the mere facts of nature without the beauty and marvel and moral stimulation. They do not wish that a flower should be rendered less beautiful because they dissect it and classify it under a hard dog-Latin name. "A primrose by the river's brim a dicotyledon was to him, and it was nothing more." That is not their attitude.

There is not much influence on the higher side of life to be got from a study of nothing else but metals, or nothing else but triangles, or nothing else but germs. But literature exerts a most potent influence on this higher side of life; for it not only supplies thoughts and expresses feelings, but it is in itself—thanks to its expression—a force to make them felt and to give them effective life. It not only instructs—it moves. For, remember, great literature was never produced by cynicism nor by affectation: men of weak convictions or feelings have never been supreme writers. As at Athens, at Rome, or in Elizabethan England, great literature belongs to periods full of animation, of enterprise, of high ideals, of strong aims or strong beliefs. In that prevailing spirit the great writers share, and they impart it forever to us who read. There exhales from what they write an inspiring power of earnestness. As Longinus phrases it, we seem to be possessed by a divine effluence from those mighty minds.

It is often complained, in regard to our schools, that moral teaching without religious stimulation is futile. The reason assents, but the will is unmoved. "We want," says Shelley, "the generous impulse to act that which we perceive." Great literature lends this impulse. Let us have plenty of great literature in our schools.

I do not, indeed, claim that literature always and completely conveys the requisite impulsion, but I claim that, in its impressiveness or its charm, by its appeal to the imagination and the sensibilities, it can go far, as Heine thought of Schiller's poetry, to "beget deeds." "Let me," said Fletcher, "make the songs of a people, and let who will make its laws." "Certainly," declares that flower of chivalry, Sir Philip Sidney, "I must confess ... I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet." Bare psychology teaches us; bare history teaches us; but great literature both teaches and inspires; it gives not only light, but warmth. "Reading good books of morality," Bacon sadly confesses, "is a little flat and dead." Great literature puts the breath of life into this deadness. Not merely to peruse, but to assimilate, the *King Lear* of Shakespeare or the *Vita Nuova* of Dante cannot fail to turn the current of our minds strongly towards right feeling—in the one case of duty and compassion, in the other of purest loyalty in love.

The most vivid conception of high conduct—the one which we can least shake off—is hardly to be gathered from the didactic moral treatise; it is hardly ever derived from set sermons, unless the preacher impose it upon us by some magnetism of his personality; it is more often impressed by some literary embodiment which has been made to live and move and have a being—by a Cordelia or a Jeanie Deans, by a Galahad or a Parson Adams. Such embodiments as these are instruments for that which Matthew Arnold holds to be the object of poetry, namely, the powerful and beautiful application of "ideas to life."

But, it may be objected, the influence of a writer may indeed thus stimulate, but what if it stimulates irrationally and amiss? Yet herein, precisely, lies one great superiority of the study of literature. It is the best means known to humanity of encouraging breadth of mind, many-sidedness of comprehension. That is, of course, with the proviso that your literary worship is not a monotheism. The genuine literary student is not a student of one author, much less of one book. It is true that Shakespeare is in himself almost a compendium of humanity, and that to study Shakespeare alone is as profitable as to study a score of less comprehensive mortals. Nevertheless, even Shakespeare has his limitations. He could not wholly escape the limitations of his times, spacious though these were.

Literary study in the proper sense is as wide as time and opportunity can make it. It includes alike the *Divine Comedy* and the human comedy. As far as possible it ignores differences of nationality, of language, of date. It seeks to know the best that has been thought and said in the world, wherever and whenever. It ransacks the Hebrew mind, the Greek mind, the Roman mind, the Italian, French, German and English mind. It gathers opinions, suggestions, points of view, elements of culture from all sources. If Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature as she shows herself in human actions and passions, Wordsworth reflects the manifestations of her spirit as seen in her physical works. If Homer gives us the naïve and simple grandeur of pagan life, Dante gives us the mystic grandeur of the Catholic conception, Milton the severer grandeur of the semi-Puritan. The literary student thus approaches truth from every side. He approaches it variously with Bacon, with Johnson, with Voltaire, with Goethe, with Wordsworth, with Carlyle, with Newman. He feels the various emotions of a hundred lyrists. Led by a score of dramatists and novelists he sees into the complexities of human character, motive and mood. Getting away from the narrow and biassed bickerings, gropings, and caprices of the day, he associates with

hundreds of the best minds of the past, whose interests were altogether outside the temporary prejudices and passions which now surround us. And what preparation for life could surpass that of the student who has thus taken all literature for his province? He is in reality better equipped with practical psychology than many a professed psychologist.

The professional student of history studies history from books in which long series of facts and their possible relations are presented in the light in which they are seen by Mommsen or Gibbon or Macaulay or Froude. Meanwhile the student of literature sees incidentally, but, so far as he goes, more vividly, into the actual life of breathing men through the legend of *Beowulf* or the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, through Chaucer or the *Spectator*, through Ben Jonson's *Humours* or Horace Walpole's Letters, through *Clarissa Harlowe* or *Pride and Prejudice*.

I know, of course, full well one frequent consequence of the broad-mindedness which results. I realize how promptly the unread man, filled to the lips with the frothy spirit of his own infallibility, will condemn him whose knowledge of men and motives makes him pause and suspend his judgment. But what of that? Some one has said that thinking makes you wise but weak, while action makes you narrow but strong. A terse sentence, but one which will not bear inspection. The man of half-lights who acts with a promptitude often disastrous, is indeed narrow, but I deny that he is strong. He is opinionated and audacious. Far stronger, in a more reasonable world, is the man who can withhold his yea or nay, when neither yea nor nay happens to be the one answer of that truth which is great and will prevail.

These, then, are the virtues which we claim for the study of literature.

Literature enlarges our imagination; it expands our judgment; it widens our sympathies; it enriches the world to our eyes and minds, by revealing to us the marvels, delights, tendernesses and suggestions which are all around us in man and nature; it keeps alive our better part in places and circumstances when that better part might perish with disease and atrophy; it continually irrigates with benign influences the mind which might grow arid and barren, and so it enables all the little seeds and buds of our intellectual and moral nature to germinate and produce some fruit.

And, therefore, this Society meets to study literature, and, as I said at the beginning, it meets to study in a spirit which is open-minded, grateful, and docile.

The Future of Poetry

A thoughtful friend of mine—but one who withal affects a philistinism which I know to be only skin-deep—is fond of assuring me that "poetry" can no longer justify its existence, that the world of the future will regard it as a trifling and artificial thing, and that therefore serious men will cease to devote themselves either to producing it or to reading it. In our discussions upon the subject, I have asked him whether he merely means that men will cease to compose verses, or whether he believes that "the poetry" is actually going out of life and literature, and that the imaginative and emotional way of looking at things, which belongs to "poetry," will give place to the rigidly philosophical and practical. He answers, of course, that men will continue to have ardours, aspirations, joys, sorrows, and sympathies, which they will and must express as vividly as they can, to their own relief and to the solace or encouragement of their fellow-men; but he asserts that all this can be done in prose, and will be done in prose, seeing that rhymes and regular numbers of syllables are a sort of primitive barbarian device, mechanical, cramping, and, in a certain way, productive of untruth. When we press this latter point, it is admitted that prose itself is capable of inexhaustible rhythms and magnificent melodies, and that these qualities show signs of being more and more developed, more and more adapted to the mood and sentiment of that which is to be expressed. When we get thus far, it appears that we have been very much in agreement all along. To me—and by this time, I hope, to him—poetry is nothing else but this same impassioned expression of ardour and emotion, sensibility and imagination, no matter whether the form it takes be obviously regulated verse or subtly rhythmic "prose."

But, when we have reached our agreement, there are others who confront us with that too well-known sentence from Macaulay: "In an enlightened age there will be much intelligence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses and even of good ones; but little poetry. Men will judge and compare, but they will not create." It is a fashion nowadays to make little of Macaulay as a thinker, to damn him with faint praise as a brilliant rhetorician. It is not to join unreservedly in that censure, if we remark that Macaulay pronounced his dictum on poetry when he was very young. But, young or not, he utterly misses a sound view of the nature and scope of poetry. He asserts that "men will judge and compare, but they will not create"; and particularly, he meant, create epics and romances. If Macaulay is to be taken literally, poetry is to him mainly the creation of stories; it is summed up in *Iliads*, *Æneids*, *Orlandos*, *Faerie Queenes*. Let us for the moment suppose—what, however, there is no ground in fact or reason for supposing—that creations such as these, at least in verse, will engage enlightened men no more. Is there no room for lyrics and for the poetical expression of great truths? "But little poetry!" What else should this

imply, except that there will be but little feeling or emotion, but little ecstasy, hope, grief, loveliness, awe, or mystery in all the "wide gray lampless deep unpeopled world" of the future? It is these things which are the most copious and most stimulating subject-matter of poetry, and Macaulay surely never meant to say, and never did say, that these would some day fail.

The poets of the last generation are dead—Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Morris, Swinburne. The great "makers" have passed away, and there remain to us but certain highly dexterous word-artificers and melodists, a varied chorus of dainty, musical, scholarly, but mostly uninspired, writers of verse. We have passed the crest of the poetical wave, and are sunk into its trough. It is not unnatural, therefore, that we should, at this particular juncture, feel some misgivings. Finding no immediate successor worthy to fill the place of those great departed, we cry out in our haste that "science" is killing poetry, or that "democracy" is crushing out poetry, or that we are "living too fast" for poetry. Poetry was dead in England for a century and three-quarters between Chaucer and Spenser; in a large sense it was dead for four generations between Milton and Burns. In Italy there was almost no real poetry for the thirteen hundred years between Virgil and Dante. In France nearly two centuries before Victor Hugo may be treated as a blank. Yet the revival came, and came with strength. We forget, or do not know, that the complaint of the decay of poetry is a hackneyed tale, familiar to Addison as to Macaulay. We do not, in fact, look the question frankly in the face. When one assures us of the decline of poetry as a fact and as inevitable, we have a right to ask him two questions. One is: "What signs of weakening and degeneracy in poetic genius, or of failing interest in its creations, do you actually discover in the course of history?" the other: "From what arguments are we to conclude that the future must of necessity prove barren of poetry?" Is there evidence in fact? Is there in theory?

We can imagine some champion of the Muses pointing to the mass and excellence of the poetry which has been created during the last hundred years; to the work of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Coleridge, Scott, Béranger, Victor Hugo, De Musset, Leopardi, Longfellow, Browning, Arnold, Tennyson, Morris; to the immense and varied fertility, to the creative and emotional power, of makers like these, displayed during the most "enlightened"—that is to say, we presume, the most rationalistic and scientific—century the world has yet passed through. We can imagine him asking whether, in all the past history of the human race, so great a zeal for poetry, romantic, lyrical-descriptive, speculative, has ever been manifested at once in such force and width in England, Germany, France, America. And we can fancy him completely satisfied with that single phenomenon. We can also imagine him setting opinion against opinion, outweighing Macaulay with the greater name of Wordsworth and Macaulay's disciples with the name of Matthew Arnold. We can hear him answering the assertion that in "the advance of civilization" poetry must necessarily decline, with the declaration of the most single-hearted poet of our century, that "poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science ... carrying the sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself." And we can suppose our champion willing to abide in that faith, because "the master hath said it."

But it is our present concern to go somewhat more closely to the heart of the question, to consider without bias how much truth there really is in this prediction that poetry must of necessity decline with the advance of science and the "progress" of society.

Of the preliminary question what *is* poetry, we may spare the discussion. If there are those who are misled by words and who will insist that poetry is simply identical with good expression in verse, it will be impossible to say anything helpful to the sect. Nor, indeed, will anything be needed, for they will entertain no apprehensions about the future. Does not even Macaulay tell them that there will be "abundance of verses, even of good ones"? With those, again, who accept Macaulay's unspeakably miserable definition of poetry as "the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination" we shall find no common footing. Nor need we dispute with those who follow the thin dry criticism of Addison or Johnson, and who imagine the poetical elements in poetry to consist of figures of speech, images, and technical devices. It may well be, as Macaulay predicts, that the enlightened world will indeed resent and cease to practise "illusions" on the imagination, or on any other faculty. It may be the case also that the stock poetical diction and mechanism of Addison's time, with the "Delias" and "Phyllises," "nymphs," "swains," "lyres," and other tinsel elegancies in which it delights, will be—nay, are already—the abomination of a discerning world. But if by "poetry" is meant what should be meant —the vivid, impassioned and rhythmical expression of rare emotions and exquisite thoughts, the revelation by genius of the ideal and spiritual side of things, the crystallizing of the floating and fugitive sentiments and aspirations of the contemporary mind into clear aim and purpose by words of luminous beauty; if there is meant a power which seizes and utters subtle truths "of man, of nature, and of human life"; if there is meant the urgent desire and the power to body forth by the imagination in exquisite language the shapes of things unknown, things of beauty, glamour, pathos, or refreshment; if, as Wordsworth once more puts it, "the objects of the poet's thoughts are everywhere"; then, with those who maintain that poetry in this sense must inevitably wither before the blighting touch of science and democracy, we may join issue with a light heart. Assuredly the men of science would be the first to rise in remonstrance at the charge that the beauty, wonder and moral effluence of nature must all be from the earth "with sighing sent" because contempt for them has been bred by the familiarity of scientific knowledge.

And, first, is there any basis whatever in *history* for the notion that poetry flourishes best where enlightenment is least; that it is some sort of noxious weed which cannot bear the intellectual sunshine? Do we find the most consummate poets in a semi-barbarian world? Do we find our Anglo-Saxon fore-fathers in this respect superior to Chaucer, Chaucer superior to Shakespeare? Is Goethe the inferior of Hans Sachs in any poetic quality, or still more the inferior of the nameless author of the *Nibelungen Lied*? Is the verse of Cædmon of imagination more compact than *Paradise Lost*? Or is the *Roman de la Rose* more poetical, in any sense ever attributed to the term, than *La Légende des Siècles*? No one, however bold, will say "yes" to questions put with this undisguised directness.

The poetical pessimists will not dispassionately examine plain facts. They take English literature and point to the now remote date of Shakespeare; they take Italian literature and remind us that Dante has been dead nearly six centuries; they take the literature of Greece and triumphantly observe that its greatest poet, Homer, was its earliest. They ignore the essential fact that transcendent genius is the phenomenon of a thousand years; that we must not demand a recurrence even of second-rate genius in every generation or even in every century. Without the altogether extraordinary genius of Shakespeare, English poetry culminates, not in the age of Elizabeth, but in the nineteenth century. Without the unique marvel of the mind of Dante, the poetry of Italy is at its highest in the sixteenth century of Tasso and Ariosto, not in the fourteenth century of the subtle amorist Petrarch. Remove the one name of Homer, and you bring the crowning glory of Grecian poetry at least three or four centuries later, to the era of Pindar, Æschylus, and Sophocles. We cannot judge the laws of general progress by unique instances of individual genius. These are the comets and meteors of the literary heavens. To judge of a generation's capacity for poetry, we must compare, not a Shakespeare with a Shelley or a Wordsworth, but the *average* spirit, the average power of insight and expression, of Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson, with those of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Keats. And who will maintain, that in force of imagination, in truth of vision, in grasp of the ideal side of things, in beautiful expression of elusive thoughts, in lyric rapture, the Elizabethans are equal to the Georgian and Victorian poets?

Our own day is, we boast, the age of light and reason. The days of Chaucer were times of childlike ignorance, credulity, *naïveté*. Yet who will tell us that Tennyson looks out on nature or on man with a colder, less imaginative, eye than Chaucer? That the advances of science have made him gaze less lovingly, less wonderingly, upon any created thing? That the progress of philosophy has hardened Browning's heart to accesses of passion, or cramped his creative imagination? And yet it should be so, if enlightenment means decay of poetry.

Science, we are told, and philosophy are but an inclement atmosphere for poetry to thrive in. Their spiteful frost nips the young buds and tender shoots of imagination, of fancy, of "sentiment." Well, at what date was modern science born? At what date philosophy? Does philosophy date from Kant, or from Bacon, or from Plato? Does modern science begin with Darwin, with Newton, with Copernicus, or with Aristotle? Let us, for argument's sake, accept the common account that the age *par excellence* of science and philosophy began in England, in France, in Germany, somewhere about the end of the seventeenth century. Since that time we have doubtless discovered and elaborated many a detail. None the less the air of all the eighteenth century was full of scientific inquiry and mechanical invention, full of philosophical discussion, full of religious and moral scepticism. If ever there was an age when it looked to the pessimist as if science and philosophy would change the aspect of nature and the heart of man, it was that eighteenth century. Now note that, if some holder of Macaulay's view had risen up in the year 1770 or thereabouts, he might have addressed his contemporaries to great effect in words like these: "The age of philosophy and science is upon us all, and poetry is dead. See how in Germany not a single worthy note of a poet's singing is heard amid the din of critics, philosophers, jurists, scientists. See how in France we find historians, letter-writers, philosophers, moralists, but not a verse worth hearing since the dry-light prose-versicles of Voltaire. Observe how in England our so-called poetry is but prose sawed into lines of five feet each, and contains not one drop of the sap of nature, unless it be some suggestion in Thomson and a half-ashamed trace in Collins or in Gray. As for the last really great figure, Pope, and all his rhyming brood, they are but arguers, critics, moralists, describers, satirists in verse. They show no inspiration, and could show none, because science and reasoning forbade it to them. The wings of their imaginations are cropped close by the hard facts and knowledge of our time. Let us cry *Ichabod* over poetry, for its glory is departed, and departed for ever."

It would scarcely have been an unnatural thing for an observant lover of poetry at that date to make such a speech, and, without the light of later experience, it would have been impossible to confute him. Yet had that same man lived the length of another human life, seen still more scientists make their steps forward in discovery, seen another crop of even subtler philosophers at their analytic work, witnessed the "Triumph of Reason and Democracy" in the shape of the French Revolution:—had he lived to see all this, he would have beheld meanwhile something which shows how fallible is prophecy. He would have seen, to wit, a most marvellous, rich and widespread outburst of the strenuous natural poetry he thought dead. From amid the critical rationalism of Germany would come the fullest, most fervid voices of poetry with which that land had ever echoed—voices full of vigour and passion, full of imagination and music, singing of romance and story, of nature and man and human life—the voices of Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Heine, Wieland. From France would be heard Béranger's stirring songs and the deepening romantic notes of Lamartine and Victor Hugo. From Scotland would sound the passionate song of Burns and later the romantic lays of Scott; and soon would arise in England the graver tones of

Wordsworth, Nature's high-priest, the deep, half-romantic, half-religious music of the mystic Coleridge, the fiery ecstasies of Shelley, the rebellious melancholies of Byron, the sensuous raptures of Keats,—these and other tones of less compass or less power.

And as our mistaken pessimist listens, what then becomes of his theory that science and philosophy have killed the poet in mankind? Might not some reasoner of the more cheerful school urge in triumph just the contrary? Might he not say that it was precisely the new light shed by the dawning Renaissance which elicited the poetry of Dante's day? That it was precisely the flood of illumination on English thought in the sixteenth century which called forth the Elizabethan outburst? That it was precisely the eminent scientific and critical toiling of the eighteenth century which led up to that pronounced and unanimous romantic movement of recent times in England, Germany and France? We need not at present strongly urge that argument. It is enough to have shown the unsoundness of its contrary.

It may, however, be answered that science hitherto is only a preface to what is to come, that even the last generation of discovery is nothing in comparison with the expansion of our knowledge and the enslavement of natural forces which must be looked for in the years on which we enter. Well, we are not sure of that. It has been a foible of many an era to think itself remarkable as a time when "the world's great age begins anew." But let us grant, if you choose, that we are moving into an incomparable age of scientific light and clearness, and at the same time of unprecedented social change. Is it necessary that this clear light of science should be dry and cold? And is it inevitable that the destined social existence shall be arid and hard, cramping, drab, and dreary? Will analysis destroy all wonder, or classification annihilate all beauty? And will human nature be so transformed by some system of social contract that a man will no longer feel love or grief, or any other of those emotions which have been his, and increasingly his, since the days of Adam?

There is, we have seen, no basis in history for assuming that poetry will cease. Is there any ground in speculation? The assertion goes that imagination will be shrivelled by the chill of scientific practicality, that minds trained and informed by physical and mental science will possess too overpowering a sense of logic, too habitual a consciousness of the matter-of-fact, to indulge in the visions and imaginings which are supposed to be the life of poetry. It is urged that, when every inch of the world has rendered its hard statistics to the blue-books, and when the variety of the nations has disappeared before common appliances and familiar intercourse, there will be nothing to stimulate the romantic fancy, nay, romance in any sort will but come into conflict with man's ever-present realization of actual conditions.

Is this the just account? Is it just to the meaning of "poetry" or just to the nature of mankind?

One might perhaps fall back on what a man of science declared to Mr. Stedman: "The conquest of mystery leads to greater mystery: the more we know, the greater the material for the imagination." Or one might assert by right of intuition that, in face of the new world of science, we shall feel as Shakespeare's Miranda felt in the presence of new realities:—

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
> That hath such people in't!

We too may expect to call it a "brave new world," to exclaim "how beauteous"—and not only how beauteous, but how awesome—"Nature is!" "how many goodly creatures are there here!" And in this goodliness, beauty, and awesomeness poetry will find unfailing material, while it seeks to express the emotions they evoke and to relate them with power to man's inner life. The objects of poetry are everywhere; and Wordsworth, who should know, if any one can know, will have it that "the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist or mineralogist will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed."

One might, then, simply fall back on statements such as these. But we need a closer treatment. We require to see in what manner poetry and science will work side by side as partners and not, as enemies, struggle with each other until poetry is exterminated.

Whatever the future may be like, there are, and will be, two sides to human life. There is the material, commonplace, and in a sense, vulgar existence; there is also life's ideal side. Give a man, who is a man and not a mere biped animal, all the comforts and enjoyments of physical life, good food, good habitation, safety and health, even a clear intellect, and give him nothing else. Would he not scorn and weary of such a life as that, which merely adds empty day to empty day, so many ciphers of existence, which, after all, amount to nothing? There is in man, just in proportion as he rises above the beasts, a demand for something which he holds more vital, for the things of the mind and spirit. We live, not by bread alone, but "we live by admiration, hope and love." Man must have ideals and aspirations and mental ecstasies. And this, in other words, means that he must live the poetical as well as the material half of life.

What is our own state of mind—yours and mine—when we contemplate the threatened unpoetical future? Is it not one of alarm and disgust? Do we not almost rejoice to think that we ourselves shall not live to shiver in its bleakness? When we contemplate such a time, we say with Wordsworth—

> Great God, I'd rather be
> A pagan, suckled in a creed outworn,

So might I, standing on the pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn

than the dull and melancholy prospect which is conjured up before us. Even in this age of science, we entertain such feelings. And if we ourselves feel so, it is simply because humanity is so constituted, and no science, no democracy, no learning, invention or legislation can ever drive out human nature from human beings. It is on grounds like these that Matthew Arnold declares, "More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without Poetry our science will appear incomplete." "Incomplete" is a right word, though a very weak one; "incomplete," not untrue, not pernicious, but terribly inadequate. For there are two manners of looking at the universe and at the life of men, and human nature demands that we should exercise and enjoy them both. "The words poetry, philosophy, art, science," says Renan, "betoken not so much different objects proposed for the intellectual activity of man, as different manners of looking at the same object—which object is existence in all its manifestations," and, "if we understand by poetry the faculty which the soul has of being touched in a certain manner, of giving forth a certain sound of a particular and indefinable nature in the face of the beauty of things, he who is not a poet is not a man." True poetry does not imply fiction, unreality, misrepresentation. The true poet is not a deluded dreamer and a visionary. The scientist tells us certain facts about existing things, the poet draws forth the beauties and suggestions of those facts, brings them into moral and emotional connexion with ourselves, makes them, at his best, effective on our conduct. Human nature can never be satisfied with the bare objective facts. It must "disengage the elements of beauty" and goodness from them.

It is too generally assumed that to know a thing scientifically is to divest it of all touching beauty, of all romantic glamour, of all spiritual suggestion,—to make it, in fact, incapable of yielding poetry. We can, indeed, no longer call the sun a god and construct myths of Phœbus, nor can we seriously picture the moon descending to dally with Endymion. We can no longer see Hamadryads in the oaks or Naiads in the streams. We do not hear Zeus or Thor in the thunderclap, nor recognize in volcanic eruptions the struggles of imprisoned Titans breathing flame. But what of that? Does the essence of poetry lie at all in myths and superstitions? Because we know of what the sun is made, and how many miles distant he is, do we find his risings and settings less moving in their endless splendours? Do we less marvel at the stupendous order of the solar and astral circles? Do we feel less awe before the infinitude of space and the insignificance of our own selves? Do waterfalls "haunt us like a passion" any the less because the water is chemically known as H_2O and because we believe no longer in nymphs and water-sprites? On the contrary, if there is one fact in the history of literature more certain than another, it is the fact that the passion for natural beauty and the emotions it evokes are things of very modern date. In France Rousseau, in England Wordsworth, are practically the first to give to them that loving rapture of expression into which we of this scientific age enter so naturally.

It is true that Keats, in a moment of that petulance which is one of his less happy characteristics, writes like this:—

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine,
Unweave a rainbow.

But assuredly it was in his haste that Keats let slip those lines. To him at least, loving as he did the "principle of beauty in all things," to him, to whom a "thing of beauty is a joy for ever," the rainbow was not given in the dull catalogue of common things. Nor is it to us, though we might render ever so scientifically accurate an account of the origin of rainbows.

Shelley, who had dabbled in chemistry for the love of science, knew, as well as we know, that a cloud is but moisture evaporated from the earth, that there is no Valkyrie in it. But that does not hinder him from making such a cloud a thing of life, and causing it to sing—

I wield the flail of the lashing hail
And whiten the green plains under;
And then again I dissolve it in rain
And laugh as I pass in thunder.
I sift the snow on the mountains below,
And their great pines groan aghast;
And all the night 'tis my pillow white,
While I sleep in the arms of the blast.

Neither his studies in natural science, nor his economic and moral readings in Godwin and Condorcet could repress, or even tended to repress, the flight of Shelley's imagination. Nor did Goethe's original and almost professional scientific work in botany, anatomy, and optics prevent the creation of his *Faust* or the singing of his touching ballads. And when we question the compatibility of historical knowledge with the poetry of epic or romantic creations, do we suppose that Tennyson, while writing the *Idylls of the King*, believed in the stories of Arthur, of

Lancelot, of Galahad, or of the Holy Grail? When Morris composed the *Earthly Paradise*, had his imagination no freedom of flight because stubborn facts of history and geography clipped its pinions?

The truth is that there are two ways of looking at existing things, two ways of handling them; and neither way is false. The scientist's way we all understand. It is the way of the microscope and the crucible. It arrives at definite physical facts. It sets forth the material constitution and physical laws of objects. But to the poet, says Mrs. Browning—

> Every natural flower which grows on earth
> Implies a flower on the spiritual side.

And what is true of flowers is true of suns and stars and living creatures and all that science contemplates. Science is knowledge, while poetry, asserts Wordsworth, is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge"; it is "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science." There is a poetic truth, and there is a scientific truth, compatible one with the other, complementary one to the other. Perhaps the most prosaic mind that ever existed was that of Jeremy Bentham, and "poetry," said that worthy, "is misrepresentation." One may be pardoned for a passing impatience when the poetical side of man is treated as a kind of amiable delusion; when one hears the shallow argument, containing a begged question, that, inasmuch as the poet imagines in things what is really not there at all, he is so far a wanderer from the truth and an enemy of science. The answer is very brief; the poet does not imagine something which is not there. A beauty or a suggestion is a truth, and the poet sees a beauty or a suggestion. He would indeed be false and an enemy to science if he said that a primrose by the river's brim was a buttercup, or that it was red when it is yellow, but it is no fiction when he declares that the primrose tells him this or that of nature or of God. It may not tell the scientist anything of the kind, but that is because the scientist does not look for such a thing in it, does not understand or seek to understand its language. "The eye of the intellect," says Carlyle, "sees in all objects what it brings with it the means of seeing." Say, if you like, that it is really the poet himself who puts the language, the message, into flower or tree or waterfall. That only removes the argument a step further back. How is he prompted to find such language there?

And who knows but that, by his exquisite sensibility and gift of sympathy, the poet may be discovering truths more valuable to us in the end than all the truths of science? The Newtons and Faradays and Lyells perform their several tasks in the region of great literal physical facts and laws; the Shakespeares and Wordsworths and Shelleys perform theirs in the region of things ideal, in the expression of potent suggestions and stimulations. We cannot afford to treat as weak fantastic enthusiasts those to whom

> The meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Nor can we too soon recognize the fact that what the world requires is the combined result of both forms of genius. It requires that the genius of science and the genius of poetry should unite their powers and their discoveries into one grand harmony of happiness in faith and hope and love.

One can do no better than quote from Wordsworth a passage which shows how the moral mood is transformed through the medium of the eye, when the eye gazes with poetic sympathy on nature: —

> O then what soul was his, when on the top
> Of the high mountains he beheld the sun
> Rise up and bathe the world in light! He looked—
> Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth,
> And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay
> In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,
> And in their silent faces did he read
> Unutterable love. Sound needed none
> Nor any voice of joy. His spirit drank
> The spectacle; sensation, soul and form
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live,
> And by them did he live; they were his life.

There are people who find little satisfaction in Wordsworth. His reputation is a puzzle to them. They look for fine passages and too rarely discover them. They judge him by the test of mere brilliance of language, not by the higher and truer poetic gift, the power of seeing "into the life of things," the power and exquisite feeling whereby outward facts are brought to serve as inward forces.

And, quite apart from this function as the receiver of impressions and the communicator of them; quite apart from the function of the poet as moral and spiritual teacher working side by side with that teacher of facts, the man of science, there is room, and will always be room, for the artist-poet who simply refreshes and entertains. For poetry lies also in epics and romances, in "feigned history" and descriptions, when the poet, as Longinus says, "by a kind of enthusiasm or extraordinary emotion of the soul," makes it seem to us that we behold those things which he paints—a feat which he performs through his gift of imagination, whereby he bodies forth the

shapes of things unknown and gives to airy nothings of beauty and delight and pathos a local habitation and a name. The world of the future will find refreshment in such creations no less than the world of the present. We know that romantic novels are unreal, but we read them with keen enjoyment none the less. So those romantic poems the *Idylls of the King* and *The Earthly Paradise*, like *The Tempest*, or the *Faerie Queene*, though they cause us no real illusion as to fact, nevertheless absorb our interest, and charm us with their unliteral beauties. We know in our hearts that there is no magic and no fairyland. But it is a pitiably dull and mollusc mind which finds no delight in peering through those

> Charm'd magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.

There remains, then, this function too of the poet who gives "exquisite expression" to an "exquisite impression"—the function of entertaining us nobly with tender thought and touching story, embodied in words of beauty, and graced with melodious cadences. Of such sort is the writer of the *Earthly Paradise*, who confesses his own modest aims in words like these:—

> Of heaven or hell I have no power to sing;
> I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
> Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
> Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
> Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
> Or hope again for aught that I can say,
> The idle singer of an empty day.
>
> But rather, when aweary of your mirth,
> From full hearts still unsatisfied ye sigh,
> And, feeling kindly unto all the earth,
> Grudge every minute as it passes by,
> Made the more mindful that the sweet days die,
> Remember me a little then, I pray,
> The idle singer of an empty day.
>
> Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
> Beat with light wing against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> To those who in the sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day.

We have dealt with the poet's place in the world of growing scientific light. We might also treat of the poet's place in the world of social progress. But he is a bold man who will prophesy whither society is tending. To some of us, its evolution has no terrors. But, whatever be the course of institutions, whatever the changing shapes of the social organism, there is one conviction we may most firmly hold. It is that, as ecstasies of love and grief, hope and fear, joy and suffering, must still exist, so the poet will ever exist to give them utterance. The drama, the lyric, the elegy, can never be effete so long as men have hearts and feel with them.

But why, it may be asked, should all this exquisite expression of nature and man and life take shape in verse? Why should we not, with Carlyle, declare verse out of date, an artificial thing, which expresses under crippling encumbrances what could be expressed in prose more clearly and more truthfully? To this question we may reply that rhymes and recurrences of equal syllables are indeed no essentials of true poetry. Poetry has existed without them, and will exist without them. But, if not rhymes and equal syllables, yet rhythm and melody, moving concurrences of sounds, must for all time be elements of poetic utterance. The reason should be manifest. There is an indefinable sympathy between the spoken sound and the conceiving mood of the poet. The poet conceives in moments of unusual sensibility, his mental part is vibrating, and that sensibility lends a corresponding movement to his language. When a poet says of himself —

> I do but sing because I must,
> And pipe but as the linnets sing,

he expresses the truth that rhythm and melody lend themselves spontaneously to an inspiring thought. Poetry, like good music, comes of the possession of the movement. The mood in which poetry is conceived is the same mood in which men burst forth without premeditation into song. The thoughts which come to the poet in his exaltation are, therefore, naturally wedded to melody and cadence.

Moreover, not only is a rhythmic music the natural utterance of impassioned thought for him who speaks. It is the necessary instrument for inducing the proper, the receptive, mood in him who hears. We know how it is with music, when all the air is vibrating and chanting with some vast organ-swell. We know how we are stirred to our inmost depths simply by mere harmony and sequence of sounds. We do not know why it is so, why our mood should be attuned to sorrow, gaiety, enthusiasm, heroism, meditation, by the hearing of music in its various kinds. We do not know, either, why the mere shapes of the sublime architecture of some great abbey or cathedral, or the blended colours of its deep-damasked window-stains, should fill our hearts with devout or

poignant aspirations. Yet we know that the fact is so. And it is the same with poetry. The rhythm and melody which come spontaneously from the poet's mood dispose the hearer in the self-same way; they fit him to receive what the other brings. Verse, as we now understand that term, poetry need not be. But though it may look like prose because the lines stretch all across the page and cannot be measured by so many iambics or anapæsts, yet, if it be real poetry, heart-felt and heart-moving, it will be but a delusive prose, a prose of infinitely subtle rhythms and harmonies. It will be as far removed as the Homeric hexameter from the pedestrian motion of cold argument.

Poetry will never fail us until nature fails. We may miss the transcendent voices now, but we have had during this century more than a century's usual share, and with the first widespread rise of some new moral fervour or lofty hope and aim the great poet cannot be wanting to give it shape in thrilling verse.

Poetry will never fail us. The poetry of nature will not fail us. So long as the sun shall each night and morning glorify the heavens with his inexhaustible splendours, or the majestic moon ride in her mysterious silence between the everchanging isles of cloud; so long as innumerable starry worlds shine down their unspeakable peace into human hearts; so long as the flower shall open out its loveliness, dance in the breeze, shed its perfumes, and then close its petals in sleep and drink in the refreshment of the unfailing dew; so long as the tree shall put forth its tender greenery of leaf in the spring, blossom into gold and fire in summer and in the autumn bow down with fruits; so long as water shall leap and foam and thunder in cataracts down the mountain-side, or ripple and smile over the pebble or under the fern—so long shall the heart of man respond to sun and moon and stars, to flower and tree and stream, and there shall be poetry.

And as man's vision, intensified by the lens of science, pierces deeper and deeper into the universe of the ineffably great and the illimitably small, and as his wonder and awe increase with what they feed upon, so will the finer souls of humankind be thrilled and thrilled again with rich new suggestions and exquisite emotions, and they shall express them in poetry.

The poetry of man will not fail us. So long as man has a heart wherewith to love another better than himself, to feel the joy of possession or the pang of loss, to glow with pride at a nation's glories or mourn in its dejection, so long shall the lyric and the elegy, in whatsoever shape, create themselves ever afresh.

Till all our life, its institutions, and its beliefs are perfect: till man has no doubts, no fears, no hopes: till he has analysed all his emotions and despises them: till the heavens above and the earth beneath can be read like a printed scroll: till nature has yielded up her last mystery: till that day poetry will exist among men.

And we may dare to assert that the future of poetry is destined to be greater than its past, that Tennyson's prayer will be fulfilled—

> Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music as before
> But vaster,

And the expression of that music will be poetry.

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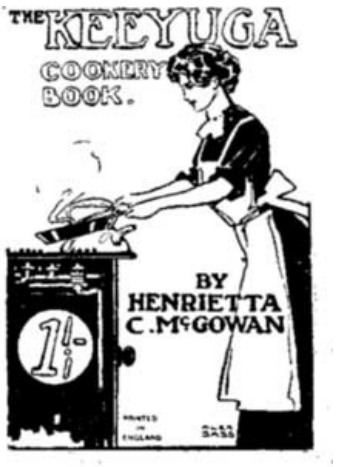

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