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EUPHORION: BEING STUDIES OF THE ANTIQUE AND THE MEDIÆVAL IN THE RENAISSANCE

BY

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VOL. II.

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THE PORTRAIT ART

I.

Real and Ideal—these are the handy terms, admiring or disapproving, which criticism claps with random facility on to every imaginable school. This artist or group of artists goes in for the real—the upright, noble, trumpery, filthy real; that other artist or group of artists seeks after the ideal—the ideal which may mean sublimity or platitude. We summon every living artist to state whether he is a realist or an idealist; we classify all dead artists as realists or idealists; we treat the matter as if it were one of almost moral importance. Now the fact of the case is that the question of realism and idealism, which we calmly assume as already settled or easy to settle by our own sense of right and wrong, is one of the tangled questions of art-philosophy; and one, moreover, which no amount of theory, but only historic fact, can ever set right. For, to begin with, we find realism and idealism coming before us in different ways and with different meaning and importance. All art which is not addressing (as decrepit art is forced to do) faculties to which it does not spontaneously and properly appeal—all art is decorative, ornamental, idealistic therefore, since it consciously or unconsciously aims, not merely at reproducing the already existing, but at producing something which shall repay the looking at it, something which shall ornament, if not a place, at least our lives; and such making of the ornamental, of the worth looking at, necessarily implies selection and arrangement—that is to say idealism. At the same

time, while art aims definitely at being in this sense decorative, art may very possibly aim more immediately at merely reproducing, without, selection or arrangement, the actually existing things of the world; and this in order to obtain the mere power of representation. In short, art which is idealistic as a master will yet be realistic as a scholar: it decorates when it achieves, it copies when it studies. But this is only half the question. Certain whole schools may be described as idealistic, others as realistic, in tendency; and this, not in their study, but in their achievement. One school will obviously be contented with forms the most unselected and vulgar; others will go but little out of their way in search of form-superiority; while yet others, and these we must emphatically call idealistic, are squeamish to the last degree in the choice and adaptation of form, anxious, to get the very best, and make the very best of it. Yet, on thinking over it, we shall find that realistic. and idealistic schools are all, in their achievements, equally striving after something which is not the mere reproduction of the already existing as such—striving, in short, after decoration. The pupil of Perugino will, indeed, wait patiently to begin his work until he can find a model fit for a god or goddess; while the fellow-craftsman of Rembrandt will be satisfied with the first dirty old Jew or besotten barmaid that comes to hand. But the realistic Dutchman is not, therefore, any the less smitten with beauty, any the less eager to be ornamental, than the idealistic Italian: his man and woman he takes indeed with off-hand indifference, but he places them in that of which the Italian shall perhaps never have dreamed, in that on which he has expended all his science, his skill, his fancy, in that which he gives as his addition to the beautiful things of art—in atmosphere, in light, which are to the everyday atmosphere and light what the patiently sought for, carefully perfected god or goddess model of Raphael is to the everyday Jew, to the everyday barmaid, of Rembrandt.

The ideal, for the man who is quite coarsely realistic in his figures, exists in the air, light, colour; and in saying this I have, so to speak, turned over the page too quickly, forestalled the expression of what I can prove only later: the disconnection of such comparative realism and idealism as this (the only kind of realism, let us remember, which can exist in great art) with any personal bias of the artist, its intimate dependence upon the constitution and tendency of art, upon its preoccupations about form, or colour, or light, in a given country and at a given moment. And now I should wish to resume the more orderly treatment of the subject, which will lead us in time to the second half of the question respecting realism and idealism. These considerations have come to me in connection with the portrait art of the Renaissance; and this very simply. For portrait is a curious bastard of art, sprung on the one side from a desire which is not artistic, nay, if anything, opposed to the whole nature and function of art: the desire for the mere likeness of an individual. The union with this interloping tendency, so foreign to the whole aristocratic temper of art, has produced portrait; and by the position of this hybrid, or at least far from regularly bred creature; by the amount of the real artistic quality of beauty which it is permitted to retain by the various schools of art, we can, even as by the treatment of similar social interlopers we can estimate the necessities and tendencies of various states of society, judge what are the conditions in which the various schools of art struggle for the object of their lives, which is the beautiful.

I have said that art is realistic in its periods or moments of study; and this is essentially the case even with the school which in many respects was the most unmistakably decorative and idealistic in intention: the school of Giotto. The Giottesques are more than decorative artists, they are decorators in the most literal sense. Painting with them is merely one of the several arts and crafts enslaved by mediaeval architecture and subservient to architectural effects. Their art is the only one which is really and successfully architecturally decorative; and to appreciate this we must contrast their fresco-work with that of the fifteenth century and all subsequent times. Masaccio, Ghirlandajo, Signorelli, turn the wall into a mere badly made frame; a gigantic piece of cardboard would do as well, and better; the colours melt into one another, the figures detach themselves at various degrees of relief; those upon the ceiling and pendentives are frequently upside down; yet these figures, which are so difficult to see, are worth seeing only in themselves, and not in relation to their position. The masonry is no longer covered, but carved, rendered uneven with the cavities and protrusions of perspective. In Mantegna's frescoes the wall becomes a slanting theatre scene, cunningly perspectived like Palladio's Teatro Olimpico; with Correggio, wall, masonry, everything, is dissolved, the side or cupola of a church becomes a rent in the clouds, streaming with light.

Not so with the Giottesque frescoes: the wall, the vault, the triumphant masonry is always present and felt, beneath the straight, flat bands of uniform colour; the symmetrical compartments, the pentacles,triangles, and segments, and borders of histories, whose figures never project, whose colours are separate as those in a mosaic. The Giottesque frescoes, with their tiers and compartments of dark blue, their vague figures dressed in simple ultramarines, greens, dull reds, and purples; their geometrical borders and pearlings and dog-tooths; cover the walls, the ribbed and arched ceilings, the pointed raftering almost like some beautiful brown, blue, and tarnished gold leather-hangings; the figures, outlined in dark paint, have almost the appearance of being stencilled, or even stamped on the wall. Such is Giottesque painting: an art which is not merely essentially decorative, but which is, moreover, what painting and sculpture remained throughout the Gothic period, subservient to the decorative effect of another art; an art in which all is subordinated to architectural effect, in which form, colour, figures, houses, the most dramatic scenes of the most awful of all dramas, everything is turned into a kind of colossal and sublime wall-paper; and such an art as this would lead us to expect but little realism, little deliberate and slavish imitation of the existing. Yet wherever there is life in this Gothic art (which has a horrible tendency, piously unobserved by critics, to stagnate into blundering repetition of the same thing), wherever there is progress, there is, in the details of that grandiose, idealistic

decoration, realism of the crudest kind. Those Giottesque workers, who were not content with a kind of Gothic Byzantinism; those who really handed over something vital to their successors of the fifteenth century, while repeating the old idealistical decorations; were studying with extraordinary crudeness of realism. Everything that was not conventional ornament or type was portrait; and portrait in which the scanty technical means of the artist, every meagre line and thin dab of colour, every timid stroke of brush or of pencil, went towards the merciless delineation not merely of a body but of a soul. And the greater the artist, the more cruel the portrait: cruellest in representation of utter spiritual baseness in the two greatest of these idealistic decorators; Giotto, and his latest disciple, Fra Angelico. Of this I should like to give a couple of examples.

In Giotto's frescoes at Santa Croce—one of the most lovely pieces of mere architectural decoration conceivable—there are around the dying and the dead St. Francis two groups of monks, which are astoundingly realistic. The solemn ending of the ideally beautiful life of sanctity which was so fresh in the memory of Giotto's contemporaries, is nothing beyond a set of portraits of the most absolutely mediocre creatures, moral and intellectual, of creatures the most utterly incapable of religious enthusiasm that ever made religion a livelihood. They gather round the dying and the dead St. Francis, a noble figure, not at all ecstatic or seraphic, but pure, strong, worn out with wise and righteous labour, a man of thought and action, upon whose hands and feet the stigmata of supernatural rapture are a mere absurdity. The monks are presumably his immediate disciples, those fervent and delicate poetic natures of whom we read in the "Fioretti di San Francesco." To represent them Giotto has painted the likeness of the first half-dozen friars he may have met in the streets near Santa Croce: not caricatures, nor ideals, but portraits Giotto has attempted neither to exalt nor to degrade them into any sort of bodily or spiritual interestingness. They are not low nor bestial nor extremely stupid. They are in various degrees dull, sly, routinist, prosaic, pedantic; their most noteworthy characteristic is that they are certainly the men who are not called by God. They are no scandal to the Church, but no honour; they are sloth, stupidity, sensualism, and cunning not yet risen to the dignity of a vice. They look upon the dying and the dead saint with indifference, want of understanding, at most a gape or a bright look of stupid miscomprehension at the stigmata: they do not even perceive that a saint is a different being from themselves. With these frescoes of Giotto I should wish to compare Fra Angelico's great ceremonial crucifixion in the cloister chapel of San Marco of Florence; for it displays to an extraordinary degree that juxtaposition of the most conventionally idealistic, pious decorativeness with the realism straightforward, unreflecting, and heartless to the point of becoming perfectly grotesque. The fresco is divided into two scenes: on the one side the crucifixion, the mystic actors of the drama, on the other the holy men admitted to its contemplation. A sense that holy things ought to be old-fashioned, a respect for Byzantine inanity which invariable haunted the Giottesques in their capacity of idealistic decorators, of men who replaced with frescoes the solemn lifeless splendours of mosaic; this kind of artistico-religious prudery has made Angelico, who was able to foreshorten powerfully the brawny crucified thieves, represent the Saviour dangling from the cross bleached,boneless, and shapeless, a thing that is not dead because it has never been alive. The holy persons around stand rigid, vacant, against their blue nowhere of background, with vague expanses of pink face looking neither one way nor the other; mere modernized copies of the strange, goggle-eyed, vapid beings on the old Italian mosaics. This is not a representation of the actual reality of the crucifixion, like Tintoret's superb picture at S. Rocco, or Dürer's print, or so many others, which show the hill, the people, the hangman, the ladders and ropes and hammers and tweezers: it is a sort of mystic repetition of it; subjective, if I may say so; existing only in the contemplation of the saints on the opposite side, who are spectators only in the sense that a contemplative Christian may be said to be the mystic spectator of the Passion. The thing for the painter to represent is fervent contemplation, ecstatic realization of the past by the force of ardent love and belief; the condition of mind of St. Francis, St. Catherine of Siena, Madame Guyon: it is the revelation of the great tragedy of heaven to the soul of the mystic. Now, how does Fra Angelico represent this? A row of saints, founders of orders, kneel one behind the other, and by their side stand apostles and doctors of the Church; admitting them to the sight of the super-human, with the gesture, the bland, indifferent vacuity of the Cameriere Segreto or Monsignore who introduces a troop of pilgrims to the Pope; they are privileged persons, they respect, they keep up decorum, they raise their eyes and compress their lips with ceremonious reverence; but, Lord! they have gone through it all so often, they are so familiar with it, they don't look at it any longer; they gaze about listlessly, they would yawn if they were not too well bred for that. The others, meanwhile, the sainted pilgrims, the men whose journey over the sharp stones and among the pricking brambles of life's wilderness finds its final reward in this admission into the presence of the Holiest, kneel one by one, with various expressions: one with the stupid delight of a religious sightseer; his vanity is satisfied, he will next draw a rosary from his pocket and get it blessed by Christ Himself; he will recount it all to his friends at home. Another is dull and gaping, a clown who has walked barefoot from Valencia to Rome, and got imbecile by the way; yet another, prim and dapper; the rest indifferent looking restlessly about them, at each other, at their feet and hands, perhaps exchanging mute remarks about the length of time they are kept waiting; those at the end of the kneeling procession, St. Peter Martyr and St. Giovanni Gualberto especially, have the bored, listless, devout look of the priestlets in the train of a bishop. All these figures, the standing ones who introduce and the kneeling ones who are being introduced, are the most perfect types of various states of dull, commonplace, mediocre routinist superstition; so many Camerlenghi on the one hand, so many Passionist or Propagandists on the other: the first aristocratic, bland and bored; the second, dull, listless, mumbling, chewing Latin Prayers which never meant much to their minds, and now mean nothing; both perfectly reverential and proper in behaviour, with no more possibility of

individual fervour of belief than of individual levity of disbelief: the Church, as it exists in well-regulated decrepitude. And thus does the last of the Giottesques, the painter of glorified Madonnas and dancing angels, the saint, represent the saints admitted to behold the supreme tragedy of the Redemption.

Thus much for the Giottesques. The Tuscans of the early Renaissance developed up to the utmost, assisted by the goldsmiths and sculptors, who taught them modelling and anatomy, that realistic element of Giottesque painting. Its ideal decorative part had become impossible. Painting could no longer be a decoration of architecture, and it had not yet the means of being ornamental in itself; it was an art which did not achieve, but merely studied. Among its exercises in anatomy, modelling, perspective, and so forth, always laborious and frequently abortive, its only spontaneous, satisfactory, mature production was its portrait work, Portraits of burghers in black robes and hoods; of square-jawed youths with red caps stuck on to their fuzzy heads, of bald and wrinkled scholars and magnificoes; of thinly bearded artizans; people who stand round the preaching Baptist or crucified Saviour, look on at miracle or martyrdom, stolid, self-complacent, heedless, against their background of towered, walled, and cypressed city—of buttressed square and street; ugly but real, interesting, powerful among the grotesque agglomerations of bag-of-bones nudities, bunched and taped-up draperies and out-of-joint architecture of the early Renaissance frescoes; at best among its picture-book and Noah's-ark prettinesses of toy-box cypresses, vine trellises, inlaid house fronts, rabbits in the grass, and peacocks on the roofs; for the early Renaissance, with the one exception of Masaccio, is in reality a childish time of art, giving us the horrors of school-hour blunders and abortions varied with the delights of nursery wonderland: maturity, the power of achieving, the perception of something worthy of perception, comes only with the later generation, the one immediately preceding the age of Raphael and Michael Angelo; with Ghirlandajo, Signorelli, Filippino, Botticelli, Perugino, and their contemporaries.

But this period is not childish, is not immature in everything. Or, rather, the various arts which exist together at this period are not all in the same stage of development. While painting is in this immature ugliness, and ideal sculpture, in works like Verrocchio's and Donatello's David, only a cleverer, more experienced, but less legitimate kind of painting, painting more successful in the present, but with no possible future; the almost separate art of portrait-sculpture arises again where it was left by Graeco-Roman masters, and, developing to yet greater perfection, gives in marble the equivalent of what painting will be able to produce only much later: realistic art which is decorative; beautiful works made out of ugly materials.

The vicissitudes of Renaissance sculpture are strange: its life, its power, depend upon death; it is an art developed in the burying vault and cloister cemetery. During the Middle Ages sculpture had had its reason, its vital possibility, its something to influence, nay, to keep it alive, in architecture; but with the disappearance of Gothic building disappears also the possibility of the sculpture which covers the portals of Chartres and the belfry of Florence. The pseudo-classic colonnades, entablatures, all the thin bastard Ionic and Corinthian of Aberti and Bramante, did not require sculpture, or had their own little supply of unfleshed ox-skulls, greengrocer's garlands, scallopings and wave-linings, which, with a stray siren and one or two bloated emperors' heads, amply sufficed. On the other hand, mediaeval civilization and Christian dogma did not encourage the production of naked of draped ideal statues like those which Antiquity stuck on countless temple fronts, and erected at every corner of square, street, or garden. The people of the Middle Ages were too grievously ill grown, distorted, hideous, to be otherwise than indecent in nudity; they may have had an instinct of the kind, and, ugly as they knew themselves to be, they must yet have found in forms like those of Verrocchio's David insufficient beauty to give much pleasure. Besides, if the Middle Ages had left no moral room for ideal sculpture once freed from the service of architecture; they had still less provided it with a physical place. Such things could not be set up in churches, and only a very moderate number of statues could be wanted as open-air monuments in the narrow space of a still Gothic city; and, in fact, ideal heroic statues of the early Renaissance are fortunately not only ugly, but comparatively few in number. There remained, therefore, for sculpture, unless contented to dwindle down into brass and gold miniature work, no regular employment save that connected with sepulchral monuments. During the real Middle Ages, and in the still Gothic north, the ornamentation of a tomb belonged to architecture: from the superb miniature minsters, pillared and pinnacled and sculptured, cathedrals within the cathedral, to the humbler foliated arched canopy, protecting a simple sarcophagus at the corner of many a street in Lombardy. The sculptor's work was but the low relief on the church flags, the timidly carved, outlined, cross-legged knight or praying priest, flattened down on his pillow as if ashamed even of that amount of prominence, and in a hurry to be trodden down and obliterated into a few ghostly outlines. But to this humiliated prostrate image, to this flat thing doomed to obliteration, came the sculptor of the Renaissance, and bade the wafer-like simulacrum fill up, expand, raise itself, lift itself on its elbow, arise and take possession of the bed of state, the catafalque raised high above the crowd, draped with brocade, carved with rich devices of leaves and beasts of heraldry, roofed over with a daïs, which is almost a triumphal arch, garlanded with fruits and flowers, upon which the illustrious dead were shown to the people; but made eternal, and of eternal magnificence, by the stone-cutter, and guarded, not for an hour by the liveried pages or chaunting monks, but by winged genii for all eternity. Some people, I know, call this a degradation, and say that it was the result of corrupt pride, this refusal to have the dear or illustrious dead scraped out any longer by the shoe-nails of every ruffian, rubbed out by the knees of every kitchen wench; but to me it seems that it was due merely to the fact that sculpture had lost its former employment, and that a great art cannot (thank Heaven!) be pietistically self-humiliating. Be this as it may, the sculpture of the

Renaissance had found a new and singularly noble line of work, the one in which it was great, unique, unsurpassed, because untutored. It worked here without models, to suit modern requirements, with modern spirit; it was emphatically-modern sculpture; the only modern sculpture which can be talked of as something original, genuine, valuable, by the side of antique sculpture. Greek Antiquity had evaded death, and neglected the dead; a garland of maenads and fauns among ivy leaves, a battle of amazons or centaurs; in the late semi-Christian, platonic days, some Orphic emblem, or genius; at most, as in the exquisite tombs of the Keramikos of Athens, a figure, a youth on a prancing steed, like the Phidian monument of Dexileus; a maiden, draped and bearing an urn; but neither the youth nor the maiden is the inmate of the tomb: they are types, living types, no portraits. Nay, even where Antiquity shows us Death or Hermes, gently leading away the beloved; the spirit, the ghost, the dead one, is unindividual. "Sarkophagen und Urnen bekränzte der Heide mit Leben," said Goethe; but it was the life which was everlasting because it was typical: the life not which had been relinquished by the one buried there, but the life which the world danced on, forgetful, round his ashes. The Romans, on the contrary, graver and more retentive folk than the Greeks, as well as more domestic, less coffee-house *living*, appear to have inherited from the Etruscans a desire to preserve the effigy of the dead, a desire unknown to the Greeks. But the Etrusco-Roman monuments, where husband and wife stare forth togaed and stolaed, half reduced to a conventional crop-headedness, grim and stiff as if sitting unwillingly for their portrait; or reclining on the sarcophagus-lid, neither dead, nor asleep, nor yet alive and awake, but with a hieratic mummy stare, have little of aesthetic or sympathetic value. The early Renaissance, then, first bethought it of representing the real individual in the real death slumber. And I question whether anything more fitting could be placed on a tomb than the effigy of the dead as we saw them just before the coffin-lid closed down; as we would give our all to see them but one little moment longer; as they continue to exist for our fancy within the grave; for to any but morbid feelings the beloved can never suffer decay. Whereas a portrait of the man in life, as the throning popes in St. Peter's, seems heartless and derisive; such monuments striking us as conceived and ordered by their inmates while alive, like Michael Angelo's Pope Julius, and Browning's Bishop, who was so preoccupied about his tomb in St. Praxed's Church. The Renaissance, the late Middle Ages, felt better than this: on the extreme pinnacle, high on the roof, they might indeed place against the russet brick or the blue sky, amid the hum of life and the movement of the air, the living man, like the Scaligers, the mailed knight on his charger, lance in rest: but in the church below, under the funereal pall, they could place only the body such as it may have lain on the bier.

And that figure on the bier was the great work of Renaissance sculpture. Inanimate and vulgar when in heroic figures they tried to emulate the ancients, the sculptors of the fifteenth century have found their own line. The modesty, the simplicity, the awful and beautiful repose of the dead; the individual character cleared of all its conflicting meannesses by death, simplified, idealized as it is in the memory of the survivors—all these are things which belong to the Renaissance. As the Greeks gave the strong, smooth life-current circulating through their heroes; so did these men of the fifteenth century give the gentle and harmonious ebbing after-life of death in their sepulchral monuments. Things difficult to describe, and which must be seen and remembered. There is the monument, now in the museum at Ravenna, by a sculptor whose name, were it known, would surely be among the greatest, of the condottiere, Braccioforte: the body prone in its heavy case of armour, not yet laid out in state, but such as he may have been found in the evening, when the battle was over, under a tree where they had carried him to die while they themselves went back to fight; the head has fallen back, side-ways, weighed down by the helmet, which has not even been unbuckled, only the face, the clear-cut, austere features, visible beneath the withdrawn vizor; the eyes have not been closed; and there are few things more exquisite and solemn at once in all sculpture, than the indication of those no longer seeing eyes, of that broken glance, beneath the half-closed lids. There is Rossellino's Cardinal of Portugal at S. Miniato a Monte: the slight body, draped in episcopal robes, lying with delicate folded hands, in gracious decorum of youthful sanctity; the strong delicate head, of clear feature and gentle furrow of suffering and thought, a face of infinite purity of strength, strength still ungnarled by action: a young priest, who in his virginal dignity is almost a noble woman. And there is the Ilaria Guinigi of Jacopo della Quercia (the man who had most natural affinity with the antique of all these sculptors, as one may see from the shattered remains of the Fonte Gaia of Siena), the lady stretched out on the rose-garlanded bed of state in a corner of Lucca Cathedral, her feet upon her sleeping dog, her sweet, girlish head, with wavy plaits of hair encircled by a rose-wreathed, turban-like diadem, lying low on round cushions; the bed gently giving way beneath the beautiful, ample-bosomed body, round which the soft robe is chastely gathered, and across which the long-sleeved arms are demurely folded; the most beautiful lady (whose majestic tread through the palace rooms we can well imagine) that the art of the fifteenth century has recorded. There is, above all, the Carlo Marsuppini of Desiderio da Settignano, the humanist Secretary of the Commonwealth, lying on the sarcophagus, superb with shell fretwork and curling acanthus, in Santa Croce of Florence. For the youthful beauty of the Cardinal of Portugal and of the Lady Ilaria are commonplace compared with the refinement of this worn old face, with scant wavy hair and thin, gently furrowed, but by no means ploughed-up features. The slight figure looks as if in life it must have seemed almost transparent; and the hands are very pathetic: noble, firm hands, subtle of vein and wrist, crossed simply, neither in prayer nor in agony, but in gentle weariness, over the book on his breast. That book is certainly no prayer-book; rather a volume of Plato or Cicero: in his last moments the noble old man has longed for a glance over the familiar pages; they have placed the book on his breast, but it has been too late; the drowsiness of death has overtaken him, and with his last sigh he has gently folded his hands over the volume, with the faint, last clinging to the things beloved in this world.

Such is that portrait sculpture of the early Renaissance, its only sculpture, if we except the exquisite work in babies and angels just out of the nursery of the Robbias, which is a real achievement. But how achieved? This art is great just by the things which Antiquity did not. And what are those things? Shall we say that it is sentiment? But all fine art has tact, antique art most certainly; and as to pathos, why, any quiet figure of a dead man or woman, however rudely carved, has pathos; nay, there is pathos in the poor puling^ hysterical art which makes angels draw the curtains of fine ladies' bedchambers, and fine ladies, in hoop or limp Grecian dress, faint (the smelling bottle, Betty!) over their lord's coffin; there is pathos, to a decently constituted human being, wherever (despite all absurdities) we can imagine that there lies some one whom it was bitter to see departing, to whom it was bitter to depart. Pathos, therefore, is not the question; and, if you choose to call it sentiment, it is in reality a sentiment for line and curve, for stone and light. The great question is, How did these men of the Renaissance make their dead people look beautiful? For they were not all beautiful in life, and ugly folk do not grow beautiful merely because they are dead. The Cardinal of Portugal, the beautiful Ilaria herself, were you to sketch their profile and place it by the side of no matter what ordinary antique, would greatly fall short of what we call sculpturesque beauty; and many of the others, old humanists and priests and lawyers, are emphatically ugly: snub or absurdly hooked noses, retreating or deformedly overhanging foreheads, fleshy noses, and flabby cheeks, blear eyes and sunk-in mouths; and a perfect network of wrinkles and creases, which, hard as it is to say, have been scooped out not merely by age, but by low mind, fretting and triumphant animalism. Now, by what means did the sculptor—the sculptor, too unacquainted with sculptural beauty (witness his ugly ideal statues), to be able, like the man who turned the successors of Alexander into a race of leonine though crazy demi-gods—to insidiously idealize these ugly and insignificant features; by what means did he turn these dead men into things beautiful to see? I have said that he took up art where Graeco-Roman Antiquity had left it. Remark that I say Graeco-Roman, and I ought to add much more Roman than Greek. For Greek sculpture, nurtured in the habit of perfect form, art to whom beauty was a cheap necessity, invariably idealized portrait, idealized it into beauty or inanity. But when Greek art had run its course; when beauty of form had well-nigh been exhausted or begun to pall; certain artists, presumably Greeks, but working for Romans, began to produce portrait work of quite a new and wonderful sort: the beautiful portraits of ugly old men, of snub little boys, work which was clearly before its right time, and was swamped by idealized portraits, insipid, nay, inane, from the elegant revivalist busts of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius down to the bonnet blocks of the lower empire. Of this Roman portrait art, of certain heads of half-idiotic little Caesar brats, of sly and wrinkled old men, things which ought to be so ugly and yet are so beautiful, we say, at least, perhaps unformulated, we think, "How Renaissance!" And the secret of the beauty of these few Graeco-Roman busts, which is also that of Renaissance portrait sculpture, is that the beauty is quite different in kind from the beauty of Greek ideal sculpture, and obtained by quite different means.

It is, essentially, that kind of beauty which I began by saying belonged to realistic art, to the art which is not squeamish about the object which it represents, but is squeamish about the manner and medium in which that indifferent object is represented; it is a kind of beauty, therefore, more akin to that of Rembrandt and Velasquez than to that of Michael Angelo or Raphael. It is the beauty, not of large lines and harmonies, beauty residing in the real model's forms, beauty real, wholesale, which would be the same if the man were not marble but flesh, not in a given position but moving; but it is a beauty of combinations of light and surface, a beauty of texture opposed to texture, which would probably be unperceived in the presence of the more regal beauty of line and colour harmonies, and which those who could obtain this latter would employ only as much as they were conducive to such larger beauties. And this beauty of texture opposed to texture and light combined with surface is a very real thing; it is the great reality of Renaissance sculpture: this beauty, resulting from the combination, for instance, in a commonplace face, of the roughness and coarser pore of the close shaven lips and chin with the smoothness of the waxy hanging cheeks; the one catching the light, the other breaking it into a ribbed and forked penumbra. The very perfection of this kind of work is Benedetto da Maiano's bust of Pietro Mellini in the Bargello at Florence. The elderly head is of strongly marked osseous structure, yet fleshed with abundant and flaccid flesh, hanging in folds or creases round the mouth and chin, yet not flobbery and floppy, but solid, though yielding, creased, wrinkled, crevassed rather as a sandy hillside is crevassed by the trickling waters; semi-solid, promising slight resistance, waxy, yielding to the touch. But all the flesh has, as it were, gravitated to the lower part of the face, conglomerated, or rather draped itself, about the mouth, firmer for sunken teeth and shaving; and the skin has remained alone across the head, wrinkled, yet drawn in tight folds across the dome-shaped skull, as if, while the flesh disappeared, the bone also had enlarged. And on the temples the flesh has once been thick, the bone (seemingly) slight; and now the skin is being drawn, recently, and we feel more and more every day, into a radiation of minute creases, as if the bone and flesh were having a last struggle. Now in this head there is little beauty of line (the man has never been good-looking), and there is not much character in the sense of strongly marked mental or moral personality. I do not know, nor care, what manner of man this may have been. The individuality is one, not of the mind^ but of the flesh. What interests, attaches, is not the character or temperament, but the bone and skin, the creases and folds of flesh. And herein also lies the beauty of the work. I do not mean its interest or mere technical skill, I mean distinctly visible and artistic beauty.

Thus does the sculptor of the Renaissance get beauty, visible beauty, not psychologic interest, out of a plain human being; but the beauty (and this is the distinguishing point of what I must call realistic decorative art) does not exist necessarily in the plain human being: he merely affords the

beginning of a pattern which the artist may be able to carry out. A person may have in him the making of a really beautiful bust and yet be ugly; just as the same person may afford a subject for a splendid painting and for an execrable piece of sculpture. The wrinkles and creases in a face like that of Benedetto da Maiano's Mellini would probably be ugly and perhaps disgusting in the real reddish, flaccid, discoloured flesh; while they are admirable in the solid and supple-looking marble, in its warm and delicate bistre and yellow. Material has an extraordinary effect upon form; colour, though not a positive element in sculpture, has immense negative power in accentuating or obliterating the mere line. All form becomes vague and soft in the dairy flaccidness of modern ivory; and clear and powerful in the dark terra cotta, which can ennoble even the fattest and flattest faces with its wonderful faculty for making mere surface markings, mere crowsfeet, interesting. Thus also with bronze: the polished, worked bronze, of fine chocolate burnish and reddish reflections, mars all beauty of line; how different the unchased, merely rough cast, greenish, with infinite delicate greys and browns, making, for instance, the head of an old woman like an exquisite withered, shrivelled, veined autumnal leaf. It is moreover, as I have said, a question of combination of surface and light, this art which makes beautiful busts of ugly men. The ideal statue of the Greeks intended for the open air; fit to be looked at under any light, high or low, brilliant or veiled, had indeed to be prepared to look well under any light; but to look well under any light means not to use any one particular relation of light as an ally; the surface was kept modestly subordinated to the features, the features which must needs look well at all moments and from all points of view. But the Renaissance sculptor knew where his work would be placed; he could calculate the effect of the light falling invariably through this or that window; he could make a fellow-workman of that light, present for it to draw or to obliterate what features he liked, bid it sweep away such or such surfaces with a broad stream, cut them with a deep shadow, caress their smooth chiselling or their rough grainings, mark as with a nail the few large strokes of the point which gave the firmness to the strained muscle or stretched skin. Out of this model of his, this plain old burgess, he and his docile friend the light, could make quite a new thing; a new pattern of bosses and cavities, of smooth sweeps and tracked lines, of creases and folds of flesh, of pliable linen and rough brocade of dress: something new, something which, without a single feature being straightened or shortened, yet changed completely the value of the whole assemblage of features; something undreamed of by nature in moulding that ugly old merchant or humanist. With this art which produced works like Desiderio da Settignano's Carlo Marsuppini and Benedetto da Maiano's Pietro Mellini, is intimately connected the art of the great medallists of the Renaissance—Pasti, Guacialotti, Niccolò Fiorentino, and, greatest of all, Pisanello. Its excellence depends precisely upon its independence of the ideal work of Antiquity; nay, even upon the fact that, while the ancients, striking their coins in chased metal dies, obtained an astonishing minuteness and clearness of every separate little stroke and dint, and were therefore forced into an almost more than sculptural perfection of mere line, of mere profile and throat and elaborately composed hair, a sort of sublime abstraction of the possible beauty of a human face, as in the coins of Syracuse and also of Alexander; the men of the fifteenth century employed the process of casting the bronze in a concave mould obtained by the melting away of a medallion in wax; in wax, which taking the living impress of the artist's finger, and recalling in its firm and yet soft texture the real substance of the human face, insensibly led the medallist to seek, not sharp and abstract lines, but simple, strongly moulded bosses; not ideal beauty, but the real appearance of life. It is, moreover, a significant fact that while the men who, half a century or so later, made fine, characterless die-stamped medals in imitation of the antique, Caradossi and Benvenuto for instance, were gold-smiths and sculptors, workers with the chisel, artists seeking essentially for abstract elegance of line; the two greatest medallists of the early Renaissance, Vittore Pisano and Matteo di Pasti, were both of them painters; and painters of the Northern Italian school, to whom colour and texture were all important, and linear form a matter of indifference. And indeed, if we look at the best work of what I may call the wax mould medallists of the fifteenth century, even at the magnificent marble medallions of the laurel-wreathed head of Sigismund Malatesta on the pillars of his church at Rimini, modelled by Pasti, we shall see that these men were preoccupied almost exclusively with the almost pictorial effect of the flesh in its various degrees of boss and of reaction of the light; and that the character, the beauty even, which they attained, is essentially due to a skilful manipulation of texture, and surface, and light—one might almost say of colour. We all know Pisanello's famous heads of the Malatesti of Rimini: the saturnine Sigismund, the delicate dapper Novello, the powerful yet beautiful Isotta; but there are other Renaissance medals which illustrate my meaning even better, and connect my feelings on the subject of this branch of art more clearly with my feelings towards such work as Benedetto's Pietro Mellini. Foremost among these is the perhaps somewhat imperfect and decidedly grotesque, but astonishingly powerful, naïf and characteristic Lorenzo dei Medici by Niccolò real grandeur of whose conception of this coarse yet imaginative head may be profitably contrasted with the classicizing efforts after the demi-god or successor of Alexander in Pollaiolo's famous medal of the Pazzi conspiracy. Next to this I would place a medal by Guacialotti of Bishop Niccolò Palmieri, with the motto, "Nudus egressus sic redibo"—singularly appropriate to the shameless fleshliness of the personage, with his naked fat chest and shoulders, his fat, pig-like cheeks and greasy-looking bald head; a hideous beast, yet magnificent in his bestiality like some huge fattened porker. These medals give us, as does the bust of Pietro Mellini, beauty of the portrait despite ugliness of the original. But there are two other medals, this time by Pisanello, and, as it seems to me, perhaps his masterpieces, which show the quite peculiar way in which this homely charm of portraiture amalgamates, so as to form a homogeneous and most seemingly simple whole, with the homely charm of certain kinds of pure and simple youthful types. One of these (the reverse of which fantastically represents the four elements, the wooded earth, the starry sky, the rippled sea, the sun, all in one sphere) is the portrait of Don Inigo d'Avalos; the other that of Cecilia Gonzaga. This slender

beardless boy in the Spanish shovel hat and wisp of scarf twisted round the throat; and this tall, long-necked girl, with sloping shoulders and still half-developed bosom; are, so to speak, brother and sister in art, in Pisanello's wonderful genius. The relief of the two medals is extremely low, so that in certain lights the effigies vanish almost completely, sink into the pale green surface of the bronze; the portraits are a mere film, a sort of haze which has arisen on the bronze and gathered into human likeness; but in this film, this scarce perceptible relief, we are made to perceive the slender osseous structure, the smooth, sleek, childish blond flesh and hair, the delicate, undecided pallor of extreme youth and purity, even as we might in some elaborate portrait by Velasquez, but with a springlike healthiness which Velasquez, painting his lymphatic Hapsburgs, rarely has.

Such is this Renaissance art of medals, this side branch of the great realistic portraiture in stone of the Benedettos, Desiderios, and Rossellinos; a perfect thing in itself; and one which, if we muse over it in connection with the more important works of fifteenth century sculpture, will perhaps lead us to think that, as the sculpture of Antiquity, in its superb idealism, its devotion to the perfect line and curve of beauty, achieved the highest that mere colourless art can achieve—thanks to the very purity, sternness, and narrowness of its sculpturesque feeling—so also, perhaps, modern sculpture, should it ever re-arise, must be a continuation of the tendencies of the Renaissance, must be the humbler sister of painting, must seek for the realistic portrait and begin, perhaps, with the realistic medal.

II.

This kind of realism, where only the model is ugly, while the portrait is beautiful; which seeks decorative value by other means than the intrinsic excellence of form in the object represented, this kind of realism is quite different in sort from the realisms of immature art, which, aiming at nothing beyond a faithful copy, is content with producing an ugly picture of an ugly thing. Now this latter kind of realism endured in painting some time after decorative realism such as I have described had reached perfection in sculpture. Nor was it till later, and when the crude scholastic realism had completely come to an end, that there became even partially possible in painting decorative realism analogous to what we have noticed in sculpture; while it was not till after the close of the Italian Renaissance period that the painters arose in Spain and the Netherlands who were able to treat their subjects with the uncompromising decorative realism of Desiderio or Rosellino or Benedetto da Maiano. For the purely imitative realism of the painters of the early Renaissance was succeeded in Italy by idealism, which matured in the great art of intrinsically beautiful linear form of Michael Angelo and Raphael, and the great art of intrinsically beautiful colour form of Giorgione and Titian. These two schools were bound to be, each in its degree, idealistic. Complete power of mere representation in tint and colour having been obtained through the realistic drudgery of the early Renaissance, selection in the objects thus to be represented had naturally arisen; and the study of the antique had further hastened and directed this movement of art no longer to study but to achieve, to be decorative once more, decorative no longer in subservience to architecture, but as the separate and self-sufficing art of painting. Selection, therefore, which is the only practical kind of idealism, had begun as soon as painting was possessed of the power of representing objects in their relations of line and colour, with that amount of light and shadow requisite to the just appreciation of the relations of form and the just relations of colour. Now art which stops short at this point of representation must inevitably be, if decorative at all, idealistically decorative; it must be squeamish respecting the objects represented, respecting their real structure, colour, position, and grouping. For, of the visible impressions received from an object, some are far more intrinsic than others. Suppose we see a woman, beautiful in the structure of her body, and beautiful in the colour of her person and her draperies, standing under a light which is such as we should call beautiful and interesting: of these three qualities one will be intrinsic in the woman, the second very considerably so, the third not at all. For, let us call that woman away and replace her immediately by another woman chosen at random. We shall immediately perceive that we have lost one pleasurable impression, that of beautiful bodily structure: the woman has taken away her well-shapen body. Next we shall perceive a notable diminution in the second pleasurable impression: the woman has taken with her, not indeed her well-tinted garments, which we may have bestowed on her successor, but her beautifully coloured skin and hair, so that of the pleasing colour-impression will remain only as much as was due to, and may have been retained with, the original woman's clothes. But if we look for our third pleasurable impression, our beautiful light, we shall find that unchanged, whether it fall upon a magnificently arrayed goddess or upon a sordid slut And, conversely, the beautiful woman, when withdrawn from that light and placed in any other, will be equally lovely in form, even if we cast her in plaster, and lose the colour of her skin and hair; or if we leave her not only the beautiful tints of her flesh and hair, but her own splendidly coloured garments, we shall still have, in whatsoever light, a magnificent piece of colour. But if we recall the poor ugly creature who has succeeded her from out of that fine effect of light, we shall have nothing but a hideous form invested in hideous colour.

This rough diagram will be sufficient to explain my thought respecting the relative degree to which the art dealing with linear form, that dealing with colour and that dealing with light, with the medium in which form and colour are perceived; is each respectively bound to be idealistically or realistically decorative. Now painting was aesthetically mature, possessed the means to achieve great beauty, at a time when of the three modes of representation there had as yet developed only those of linear form and colour; and the very possibility and necessity of immediately achieving all that could be achieved by these means delayed for a long time the

development of the third mode of representation: the representation of objects as they appear with reference to the light through which they are seen. A beginning had indeed been made. Certain of Correggio's effects of light, even more an occasional manner of treating the flesh and hair, reducing both form and colour to a kind of vague boss and vague sheen, such as they really present in given effects of light, a something which we define roughly as eminently modern in the painting of his clustered cherubs; all this is certainly a beginning of the school of Velasquez. Still more so is it the case with Andrea del Sarto, the man of genius whom critics love to despatch as a mediocrity, because his art, which is art altogether for the eyes, and in which he innovated more than any of his contemporaries, does not afford any excuse for the irrelevancies of ornamental criticism; with him the appearance of form and colour, acted upon by light, the relative values of which flesh and draperies consist with reference to the surrounding medium, all this becomes so evident a preoccupation and a basis for decorative effects, as to give certain of his works an almost startling air of being modern. But this tendency comes to nothing: the men of the sixteenth century appear scarcely to have perceived wherein lay the true excellence of this "Andrea senza errori," deeming him essentially the artist of linear perfection; while the innovations of Correggio in the way of showing the relations of flesh tones and light ended in the mere coarse gala illuminations in which his successors made their seraphs plunge and sprawl. There was too much to be done, good and bad, in the way of mere linear form and mere colour; and as art of mere linear form and colour, indifferent of all else, did the art of the Italian Renaissance run to seed.

I said at the beginning of this paper that the degree to which any art is strictly idealistic, can be measured by the terms which it will make with portrait. For as portrait is due to the desire to represent a person quite apart from that person affording material for decoration, it is evident that only the art which can call in the assistance of decorative materials, independent of the represented individual, can possibly make a beautiful picture out of an ugly man; while the art which deals only with such visible peculiarities as are inherent in the individual, has no kind of outlet, is cornered, and can make of a repulsive original only a repulsive picture. The analogy to this we have already noticed in sculpture: antique sculpture, considering only the linear bosses which existed equally in the living man and in the statue, could not afford to represent plain people; while Renaissance sculpture, extracting a large amount of beauty out of combinations of surface and light, was able, as long as it could arrange such an artificial combination, to dispense with great perfection in the model. Nay, if we except Renaissance statuary as a kind of separate art, we may say that this independence of the object portrayed is a kind of analytic test, enabling us to judge at a glance, and by the degree of independence from the model, the degree to which any art is removed from the mere line and boss of antique sculpture. In the statue standing free in any light that may chance to come, every form must be beautiful from every point; but in proportion as the new elements of painting enter, in proportion as the actual linear form and boss is marked and helped out by grouping, colour, and light and shade, does the actual perfection of the model become less important; until, under the reign of light as the chief factor, it becomes altogether indifferent. In this fact lies the only rational foundation for the notion, made popular by Hegel, that painting is an art in which beauty is of much less account than in sculpture; failing to understand that the sum total of beauty remained the same, whether dependent upon the concentration of a single element or obtained by the co-operation of several consequently less singly important elements.

But to return to the question of portrait art. From what we have seen, it is clear that art which requires perfection of form will be reduced to ugliness if cramped in the obtaining of such perfection, whereas art which can obtain beauty by other means will still have a chance when reduced to imitate ugly object? Hence it is that while the realistically decorative art of the seventeenth century can make actually beautiful things of the portraits of ugly people, the idealistically decorative art of the Renaissance produces portraits which are cruelly ugly in proportion as the art is purely idealistic. Yet even in idealism there are degrees: the more the art is confined to mere linear form, to the exclusion of colour, the uglier will be the portraits. With Michael Angelo the difficulty was simplified to impossibility: he could not paint portrait at all; and in his sculptured portraits of the two Medicean dukes at S. Lorenzo he evaded all attempt at likeness, making those two men into scarcely more than two architectural monsters, half-human cousins of the fantastic creatures who keep watch on the belfries and gurgoyles of a Gothic cathedral. It is almost impossible to think of Michael Angelo attempting portrait: the man's genius cannot be constrained to it, and what ought to be mere ugliness would come out idealized into grandiose monstrosity. Men like Titian and Tintoret are at the other end of the scale of ideal decoration: they are bordering upon the domain of realism. Hence they can raise into interest, by the mere power of colour, many an insignificant type; yet even they are incapable of dealing with absolute ugliness, with absence of fine colour, or, if they do deal with it, there is an immediate improvement upon the model, and the appearance of truthfulness goes. Between the absolute incapacity for dealing with ugliness of Michael Angelo, and the power of compromising with it of Titian and Tintoret, Raphael stands half-way: he can call in the assistance of colour just sufficiently to create a setting of carefully harmonized draperies and accessories, beautiful enough to allow of his filling it up with the most cruelly ugly likeness which any painter ever painted. Far too much has been written about Raphael in general, but not half enough about Raphael as a portrait-painter; for by the side of the eclectic idealist, who combined and balanced beauty almost into insipidity, is the most terribly, inflexibly veracious portrait-painter that ever was. Compared with those sternly straightforward portraits of his Florentine and Roman time, where ugliness and baseness are never attenuated by one tittle, and alloyed nobility or amiability, as with his finer models, like the two Donis, husband and wife, and Bibbiena, is never purified of

its troubling element; compared with them the Venetian portraits are mere insincere, enormously idealized pieces of colour-harmony; nay, the portraits of Velasquez are mere hints—given rapidly by a sickened painter striving to make those scrofulous Hapsburgs no longer mere men, but keynotes of harmonies of light—of what the people really are. For Velasquez seems to show us the temperament, the potentiality of his people, and to leave us, with a kind of dignified and melancholy silence as to all further, to find out what life, what feelings and actions, such a temperament implies. But Raphael shows us all: the temperament and the character, the real active creature, with all the marks of his present temper and habits, with all the indications of his immediate actions upon him: completely without humour or bitterness, without the smallest tendency to twist the reality into caricature or monstrosity, nay, perhaps without much psychologic analysis to tell him the exact meaning of what he is painting, going straight to the point, and utterly ruthless from sheer absence of all alternative of doing otherwise than he does. There is nothing more cruelly realistic in the world, cruel not only to the base originals but to the feelings of the spectator, than the harmony of villainies, of various combinations of black and hog-like bestiality, and fox and wolf-like cunning and ferocity with wicked human thought and self-command, which Raphael has enshrined in that splendid harmony of scarlet silk and crimson satin, and purple velvet and dull white brocade, as the portraits of Leo X. and his cardinals Rossi and Dei Medici.

The idealistic painter, accustomed to rely upon the intrinsic beauty which he has hitherto been able to select or create; accustomed also to think of form as something quite independent of the medium through which it is seen, scarcely conscious of the existence of light and air in his habit of concentrating all attention upon a figure placed, as it were, in a sort of vacuum of indifference; —this idealistic artist is left without any resources when bid to paint an ugly man or woman. With the realistic artist, to whom the man or woman is utterly indifferent, to whom the medium in which they are seen is everything, the case Is just reversed: let him arrange his light, his atmospheric effect, and he will work into their pattern no matter what plain or repulsive wretch. To Velasquez the flaccid yellowish fair flesh, with its grey downy shadows, the limp pale drab hair, which is grey in the light and scarcely perceptibly blond in the shade, all this unhealthy, bloodless, feebly living, effete mass of humanity called Philip IV. of Spain, shivering in moral anaemia like some dog thorough bred into nothingness, becomes merely the foundation for a splendid harmony of pale tints. Again, the poor little baby princess, with scarce visible features, seemingly kneaded (but not sufficiently pinched and modelled) out of the wet ashes of an *auto da fè*, in her black-and-white frock (how different from the dresses painted by Raphael and Titian!), dingy and gloomy enough for an abbess or a cameriera major, this childish personification of courtly dreariness, certainly born on an Ash Wednesday, becomes the principal strands for a marvellous tissue of silvery and ashy light, tinged yellowish in the hair, bluish in the eyes and downy cheeks, pale red in the lips and the rose in the hair; something to match which in beauty you must think of some rarely seen veined and jaspered rainy twilight, or opal-tinted hazy winter morning. Ugliness, nay, repulsiveness, vanish, subdued into beauty, even as noxious gases may be subdued into health-giving substances by some cunning chemist. The difference between such portraits as these and the portraits by Raphael does not however consist merely in the beauty: there is also the fact that if you take one of Velasquez's portraits out of their frame, reconstitute the living individual, and bid him walk forth in whatsoever light may fall upon him, you will have something infinitely different from the portrait, and of which your only distinct feeling will be that a fine portrait might be made of the creature; whereas it is a matter of complete indifference whether you see Raphael's Leo X. in the flesh or in his gilded frame.

Whatever may fairly be said respecting the relative value of idealistic and realistic decorative art is really also connected with this latter point. Considering that realistic art is merely obtaining beauty by attention to other factors than those which preoccupy idealistic art, that the one fulfils what the other neglects—taking the matter from this point of view, it would seem as if the two kinds of arts were, so to speak, morally equal; and that any vague sense of mysterious superior dignity clinging to idealistic art was a mere shred of long discarded pedantry. But it is not so. For realistic art does more than merely bring into play powers unknown to idealistic art: it becomes, by the possession of these powers, utterly indifferent to the intrinsic value of the forms represented: it is so certain of making everything lovely by its harmonies of light and atmosphere that it almost prefers to choose inferior things for this purpose. I am thinking at present of a picture by I forget what Dutchman in our National Gallery, representing in separate compartments five besotten-looking creatures, symbolical of the five senses: they are ugly, brutish, with I know not what suggestion of detestable temperament in their bloodshot flesh and vermilion lips, as if the whole man were saturated^with his appetite. Yet the Dutchman has found the means of making these degraded types into something which we care to look at, and to look at on account of its beauty; even as, in lesser degree, Rubens has always managed to make us feel towards his flaccid, veal-complexioned, fish-eyed women, something of what we feel towards the goddesses of the Parthenon; towards the white-robed, long-gloved ladies, with meditative face beneath their crimped auburn hair, of Titian.

Viewed in one way, there is a kind of nobility in the very fact that such realistic art can make us pardon, can redeem, nay almost sanctify, so much. But is it right thus to pardon, redeem, and sanctify; thus to bring the inferior on to the level of the superior? Nay, is it not rather wrong to teach us to endure so much meanness and ugliness in creatures, on account of the nobility with which they are represented? Is this not vitiating our feelings, blunting our desire for the better, our repugnance for the worse?

A great and charitable art, this realistic art of the seventeenth century, and to be respected for

its very tenderness towards the scorned and castaway things of reality; but accustoming us, perhaps too much, like all charitable and reclaiming impulses, to certain unworthy contacts: in strange contrast herein with that narrow but ascetic and aristocratic art of idealism, which, isolated and impoverished though it may be, has always the dignity of its immaculate purity, of its unswerving judgment, of its obstinate determination to deal only with the best. A hard task to judge between them. But be this as it may, it is one of the singular richnesses of the Italian Renaissance that it knew of both tendencies; that while in painting it gave the equivalent of that rigid idealism of the Greeks which can make no compromise with ugliness; in sculpture it possessed the equivalent of the realism of Velasquez, which can make beauty out of ugly things, even as the chemist can make sugar out of vitriol.

THE SCHOOL OF BOIARDO.

"Le donne, i cavalieri, 1' armi, gli amori."

I.

Throughout the tales of Charlemagne and his warriors, overtopping by far the crowd of paladins and knights, move two colossal mailed and vizored figures—Roland, whom the Italians call Orlando and the Spaniards Roldan, the son of Milon d'Angers and of Charlemagne's sister; and Renaud or Rinaldo, the lord of Montauban, and eldest of the famous four sons of Aymon. These are the two representative heroes, equal but opposed, the Achilles and Odysseus, the Siegfried and Dietrich, of the Carolingian epic; and in each is personified, by the unconscious genius of the early Middle Ages, one of the great political movements, of the heroic struggles, of feudalism. For there existed in feudalism two forces, a centripetal and a centrifugal—a force which made for the supremacy of the kingly overlordship, and a force which made for the independence of the great vassals. Hence, in the poetry which is the poetry of feudalism, two distinct currents of feeling, two distinct epics—-the epic of the devoted loyalty of all the heroes of France to their wise and mighty emperor Charlemagne, triumphant even in misfortune; and the epic of the hopeless resistance against a craven and capricious despot Charles of the most righteous and whole-hearted among his feudatories: the epic of Roland, and the epic of Renaud. Of the first there remains to us, in its inflexible and iron solemnity, an original rhymed narrative, "The Chanson de Roland," which we may read perhaps almost in the selfsame words in which it was sung by the Normans of William in their night watch before the great battle. The centripetal force of feudalism gained the upper hand, and the song of the great empire, of the great deeds of loyal prowess, was consecrated in the feudal monarchy. The case was different with the tale of resistance and rebellion. The story of Renaud soon became a dangerous lesson for the great barons; it fell from the hands of the nobles to those of humbler folk; and it is preserved to us no longer in mediaeval verse, but in a prose version, doubtless of the fifteenth century, under the name, familiar on the stalls of village fairs, of "The Quatre Fils Aymon." But, as Renaud is the equal of Roland, so is this humble prose tale nevertheless the equal of the great song of Roncevaux; and even now, it would be a difficult task to decide which were the grander, the tale of loyalty or the tale of resistance.

In each of these tales,"The Chanson de Roland" and "The Quatre Fils Aymon," there is contained a picture of its respective hero, which sums up, as it were, the whole noble character of the book; and which, the picture of the dying Roland and the picture of the dying Renaud, I would fain bring before you before speaking of the other Roland and the other Renaud, the Orlando of Ariosto and the Rinaldo of Boiardo. The traitor Ganelon has enabled King Marsile to overtake with all his heathenness the rear-guard of Charlemagne between the granite walls of Roncevaux; the Franks have been massacred, but the Saracens have been routed; Roland has at last ceded to the prayers of Oliver and of Archbishop Turpin; three times has he put to his mouth his oliphant and blown a blast to call back Charlemagne to vengeance, till the blood has foamed round his lips and his temple has burst. Oliver is dead, the archbishop is dying, Roland himself is slowly bleeding to death. He goes down into the defile, heaped with corpses, and seeks for the bodies of the principal paladins, Ivon and Ivaire, the Gascon Engelier, Gérier and Gérin, Bérenger and Otho, Anseis and Salamon, and the old Gerard of Rousillon; and one by one drags them to where the archbishop lies dying. And then, when to these knights Roland has at last added his own beloved comrade Oliver, he bids the archbishop bless all the dead, before he die himself. Then, when he has reverently crossed Turpin's beautiful priestly hands over his breast, he goes forth to shatter his sword Durendal against the rocks; but the good sword has cut the rock without shivering; and the coldness of death steals, over Roland. He stretches himself upon a hillock looking towards Spain, and prays for the forgiveness of his sins; then, with Durendal and his ivory horn by his side, he stretches out the glove of his right hand to God. "He has stretched forth to God the glove of his right hand; St. Gabriel has received it... Then his head has sunk on his arm; he has gone, with clasped hands, to his end. God sends him one of his cherubim and St. Michael of Peril. St. Gabriel has come with them. They carry the soul of the Count: up to paradise."

More solitary, and solemn and sad even, is the end of the other hero, of the great rebel Renaud of Montauban. At length, after a lifetime wasted in fruitless, attempts to resist the iniquity of the emperor, to baffle his power, to shame him by magnanimity into, justice, the four sons of Aymon,

who have given up their youth, their manhood, the dearest things to their heart, respect to their father and loyalty to their sovereign, rather than countenance the injustice of Charlemagne to their kinsman, have at last obtained to be pardoned; to be pardoned, they, heroes, by this, dastardly tyrant, and to quietly sink, broken-hearted into nothingness. The eldest, Renaud, returning from his exile and the Holy Land, finds that his wife Clarisse has pined for him and died; and then, putting away his armour from him, and dressing in a pilgrim's frock made of the purple serge of the dead lady's robe, he goes forth to wander through the world; not very old in years, but broken-spirited; at peace, but in solitude of heart. And one evening he arrives at Cologne. We can imagine the old knight, only half aware of the sunshine of the evening, the noise of the streets, the looks of the crowd, the great minster rising half-finished in the midst of the town by the Rhine, the cries and noise and chipping of the masons; unconscious of all this, half away: with his brothers hiding in the Ardennes, living on roots and berries, at bay before Charlemagne; or wandering ragged and famishing through France; with King Yon brilliant at Toulouse, seeing perhaps for the first time his bride Clarisse, or the towers of Montauban rising under the workmen's hands; thinking perhaps of the frightful siege, when all, all had been eaten in the fortress, and his children Aymonnet and Yonnet, all thin and white, knelt down and begged him to slaughter his horse Bayard that they might eat; perhaps of that journey, when he and his brothers, all in red-furred robes with roses in their hands, rode prisoners of King Charles across the plain of Vaucouleurs; perhaps of when he galloped up to the gallows at Montfaucon, and cut loose his brother Richard; or of that daring ride to Paris, where he and his horse won the race, snatched the prize from before Charlemagne and sped off crying out that the winner was Renaud of Montauban; or, perhaps, seeing once more the sad, sweet face of the Lady Clarisse, when she had burned all her precious stuffs and tires in the castle-yard, and lay dead without him to kiss her cold mouth; of seeing once more his good horse Bayard, when he kissed him in his stall before giving him to be killed by Charlemagne. Thinking of all that past, seeing it all within his mind, and seeing but little of the present; as, in the low yellow light, he helped, for his bread, the workmen to heave the great beams, to carry the great stones of the cathedral, to split the huge marble masses while they stared in astonished envy; as he sat, unconscious of their mutterings, eating his dry bread and porridge in the building docks by the river. And then, when wearied, he had sunk to sleep in the hay-loft, dreaming perchance that all this evil life was but a dream and the awakening therefrom to happiness and strength; the jealous workmen came and killed him with their base tools, and cast him into the Rhine. They say that the huge body floated on the water, surrounded by a great halo; and that when the men of the banks, seeing this, reverently fished it out, they found that the noble corpse was untouched by decay, and still surrounded by a light of glory. And thus, it seems to me, this Renaud, this rebel baron of whose reality we know nothing, has floated surrounded by a halo of poetry down the black flood of the Middle Ages (in which so much has sunk); and when we look upon his face, and see its beauty and strength and solemness, we feel, like the people of the Rhine bank, inclined to weep, and to say of this mysterious corpse, "Surely this is some great saint."

Of each of these heroes thus shown us by the Middle Ages, the Italian Renaissance also, by the hand of two of her greatest poets, has given us a picture. And first, of Roland. Of him, of Count Orlando, we are told by Messer Lodovico Ariosto, that in consequence of his having discovered, in a certain pleasant grotto among the ferns and maidenhair, words graven on the rock (interrupted, doubtless, by the lover's kisses) which revealed that the Princess Angelica of Cathay had disdained him for Medoro, the fair-haired page of the King of the Moors; Count Orlando went straightway out of his mind, and hanging up his armour and stripping off his clothes, galloped about on his bare-backed horse, slaughtering cows and sheep instead of Saracens; until it pleased God, moved by the danger of Christendom and the prayers of Charlemagne, to permit Astolfo to ride on the hippogriffs back up to the moon, and bring back thence the wits of the great paladin contained in a small phial. We all know that merry tale. What the Renaissance has to say of Renaud of Montauban is even stranger and more fantastic. One day, says Matteo Boiardo, in the fifteenth canto of the second part of his "Orlando Innamorato," as Rinaldo of Montalbano, the contemner of love, was riding in the Ardennes, he came to a clearing in the forest, where, close to the fountain of Merlin, a wonderful sight met his eyes. On a flowery meadow were dancing three naked damsels, and singing with them danced also a naked youth, dark of eyes and fair of hair, the first down on his lips, so that some might have said it was and others that it was not there. On Rinaldo's approach they broke through their singing and dancing, and rushed upon him, pelting him with roses and hyacinths and violets from their baskets, and beating him with great sheaves of lilies, which burnt like flames through the plates of his armour to the very marrow of his bones. Then when they had dragged him, tied with garlands, by the feet round and round the meadow; wings, eyed not with the eyes of a peacock but with the eyes of lovely damsels, suddenly sprouted out of their shoulders, and they flew off, leaving the poor baron, bruised on the grass, to meditate upon the vanity of all future resistance to love.

Such are the things which the Middle Ages and the Renaissance found to tell us of the two great heroes of Carolingian poetry. And the explanation of how it came to pass, that for the Roland of the song of Roncevaux was substituted the Orlando of Ariosto, and for the Renaud of "The Quatre Fils Aymon" the Rinaldo of Matteo Boiardo—means simply that which I desire here to study: the metamorphoses of mediaeval romance stuffs, and, more especially, the vicissitudes of the cycle of Charlemagne.

II.

We are apt to think of the Middle Ages as if they were the companion-piece to Antiquity; but no

such ideal correspondence exists between the two periods. Antiquity is all of a piece, and the Middle Ages, on the contrary, are heterogeneous and chaotic. For Antiquity is the steady and uniform development of civilization in one direction and with one meaning; there are great differences between its various epochs, but they are as the differences between the budding, the blossoming, and the fading stages of one plant: life varies, but is one. The Middle Ages, on the other hand, are a series of false starts, of interruptions and of new departures; a perpetual confusion. For, if we think over them, we shall see that these centuries called mediaeval are occupied by the effort of one people, or one generation, to put to rights and settle down among as much as it can save of the civilization of Antiquity. And the sudden overwhelming of this people or this generation by another, which puts all the elaborate arrangements into disarray, adds to the ruins of Antiquity the ruins of more recent times; and then this destroying generation tries to put things straight, to settle down, and is in its turn interrupted by the advent of some new comer who begins the game afresh.

As it is with peoples, so also is it with ideas; scarcely has a scheme of life or of philosophy or of art taken shape and consistence before, from out of the inexhaustible chaos of mediaeval thought and feeling, there issue new necessities, new aspirations, which put into confusion all previous ones. The Middle Ages were like some financial crisis: a little time, a little credit, money will fructify, wealth will reappear, the difficult moment will be tided over; and so with civilization. But unfortunately the wealth of ideas began to accumulate in the storehouse only just long enough to bring down a rout of creditors, people who rifled the bank, and went home to consume or invest their money in order to be succeeded by others. Hence, in the matter of civilization, the Middle Ages ended in an extraordinary slow ruin, a bankruptcy like that which overtook France before '89, and from which, as France was restored by the bold seizure and breaking up of property of the revolution, the world was restored by the bold breaking of feudal and spiritual mortmain, the restoring of wasted energies to utility, of that great double revolution, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Be this as it may, mankind throughout the Middle Ages appears to have been in a chronic condition of packing up and unpacking, and packing up again; one after another a nation, a race, a philosophy, a political system came to the front and was pushed back again into limbo: Germans and Kelts and Latins, French civilization of the day of Abélard, Provençal civilization of the days of the Raymonds, brilliant and evanescent Hohenstauffen supremacy, papacy at Canossa and at Avignon, Templars triumphant and Templars persecuted; scholasticism, mysticism, feudalism, democracy, communism: influences all these perpetually rising up and being trodden down, till they all rotted away in the great stagnation of the fifteenth century; and only in one part of the world, where the conflict was more speedily ended, where one set of tendencies early triumphed, where stability was temporarily obtained, in Italy alone did civilization continue to be nurtured and developed for the benefit of all mankind. In such a state of affairs only such things could flourish and mature as were safe from what I have called, for want of a better expression, the perpetual unpacking and repacking, the perpetual being on the move, of the Middle Ages; and among such things foremost was art, the essential art of the times, architecture, which, belonging to the small towns, to the infinite minority of the democracy, who worked and made money and let the great changes pass over their heads, thrived almost as something too insignificant for notice. But it was different with literature. Cathedrals once built cannot so easily be changed; new peoples, new ideas, must accept them. But poetry—the thing which every nation insists upon having to suit its own taste, the thing which every nation and every generation carries about with it hither and thither, the thing which can be altered to suit every passing whim—poetry was, of all the fluctuating things of the Middle *Ages*, perhaps the most fluctuating. And fluctuating also because, as none of these various nations, tendencies, aspirations, dominated sufficiently long to produce any highly organized art, there remained no standard works, nothing recognizedly perfect, which would be kept for its perfection and gather round it imitations, so as to form the nucleus of any homogeneous tradition. The Middle Ages, so full of fashions in literary matters, possessed no classics; the minnesingers knew nothing of the stern old Teutonic war songs; the meistersängers had forgotten the minnesingers; the trouvères and troubadours knew nothing of "The Chanson de Roland," and Villon knew nothing of them; only in Italy, where the Middle Ages came to an end and the Renaissance began with the Lombard league, was there established a tradition of excellence, with men like Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, handed down from generation to generation; even as, while in the north there came about the strange modification which substituted the French of Rabelais for the French of Chrestien de Troyes, the German of Luther for the German of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Italian language, from Ciullo d'Alcamo almost to Boiardo and Lorenzo dei Medici, remained virtually identical. The result of this, which I may call the heterogeneousness and instability of the Middle Ages was that not merely literary forms were for ever arising and being superseded, but literary subject matter was continually undergoing a process of transformation. While in Antiquity the great epic and tragic stuffs remained well-nigh unaltered, and the stories of Valerius Flaccus and Apollonius Rhodius were merely the stories which had been current since the days of Homer, during the course of the Middle Ages every epic cycle, and every tale belonging thereunto, was gradually adulterated, mingled with, swamped by, some other cycle or tale; nay, rather, every other, cycle and every other tale, the older ones trying to save their popularity by admixture with the more recent, till at last all mythical significance, all historical meaning, all national character, all psychological reality, were lost in the chaotic result. And meanwhile, in the absence of any stable language, of any durable literary fashion, the Middle Ages were unable to give to these epic stuffs, at any one period of their life of metamorphose, a form sufficiently artistically valuable to secure anything beyond momentary vogue, to secure for them the immortality of the great Greek tales of adventure and warfare and love. Thus it came about that the epic cycle of Charlemagne, after supplanting in men's minds the grand sagas of the pagan North, was itself supplanted by the

Arthurian cycle; that the Frankish stories absorbed the wholly discrepant elements of their more fortunate Keltic rivals; that both cycles, having lost all character through fusion and through obliteration by time, became more meaningless generation by generation and year by year, until when the Middle Ages had come to an end, and the great poets of the Renaissance were ready to give this old mediaeval epic stuff a definitive and durable artistic shape, there came to the hands of Boiardo and Ariosto, of Tasso and Spenser, only a strange, trumpery material, muddled by jongleurs and romance writers, and reduced to mere fairy stuff, taken seriously only by Don Quixote, and by the authors of the volumes of insane twaddle called after Amadis of Gaul and all his kinsmen.

Such a condition of perpetual change as explains, in my belief, why the mediaeval epic subjects were wanted, can be made clear only by examples. I shall therefore try to show the transformations which were undergone by one or two principal mediaeval epic subjects as a result of a mixture with other epic cycles; of a gradual adaptation to a new state of civilization; and finally of their gradual separation from all kind of reality and real interests.

First of all, let us look at the epic cycle, which, although known to us only in poems no older than those of the trouvères and minnesingers who sang of Charlemagne and Arthur, is in reality far more ancient, and on account of its antiquity and its consequent disconnection with mediaeval religious and political interests, was thrown aside even by the nations to which it belonged, by the Scandinavians who took to writing sagas about the wars of Charlemagne against Saracens, and by the Germans who preferred to hear the adventures of Welsh and Briton, Launcelots and Tristrams. I am alluding to the stories connected with the family and life of the hero called Sigurd by the Scandinavians, and Siegfried by the Germans. Of these we possess a Norse version called the Volsunga Saga, magnificently done into English by Mr. William Morris; which, although written down at the end of the twelfth century, in the very time therefore of Chrestien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Gottfried von Strassburg, and subsequently to the presumed writing of "The Chanson de Roland" and the Nibelungenlied, shows us in reality the product of a people, the distant Scandinavians of Iceland, who were five or six hundred years behind the French, Germans, and English of the twelfth century. In the Volsunga Saga, neither Christianity nor feudalism is yet dreamed of; and it is for this reason that I wish to compare it with the Nibelungenlied, in order to show how enormously the old epic stuff was altered by the new civilization. The whole social and moral condition of the two versions is different. In the old Scandinavian civilization, where the Viking is surrounded and served by clansmen, the feeling of blood relationship is the strongest in people's hearts; strangely and fearfully shown in the introductory tale of Signy, who, in order to avenge her father Volsung, killed by her husband, murders her children by the latter, and then, altered in face by magic arts, goes forth to the woods to her brother Sigmund, that, un-wittingly, he may beget with her the only man fit to avenge the Volsungs. And then she sends the boy Sinfjotli to the man he has hitherto considered merely as his uncle, bidding the latter kill him if he prove unworthy of his incestuous birth, or train him to vengeance. The three together murder the husband and legitimate children of Signy, and set the palace on fire; which, being done, the queen, having accomplished her duty to her kin, accomplishes that towards her husband, and calmly returns to die in the burning hall. Here (and apparently again in the case of the children of Sigurd and Brynhilt) incest becomes a family virtue. This being the frightful preponderance of the feeling of blood relationship, it is quite natural that the Scandinavian Chriemhilt (called in the Volsunga Saga, Gudrun) should not resent the murder of her husband Siegfried or Sigurd by her brothers at the instigation of the jealous Brynhilt (who has in a manner been Sigurd's wife before he made her over to Chriemhilt's eldest brother); and that, so far from seeking any revenge against them,she should, when her second husband Atli sends for her brothers in order to rob and murder them, first vainly warn them of the plot, and then, when they have been massacred, kill Atli and her children by him in order to avenge her brothers. The slackening of the tribal feeling, the idea of fidelity in love and sanctity of marriage belonging to Christianity and feudalism, rendered such a story unintelligible to the Germans of the Othos and Henrys. In the Nibelungenlied, the whole story of the massacre of the brothers is changed. Chriemhilt never forgives the murder of Siegfried, and it is not Etzel—Atli for the sake of plunder, but she herself for the sake of revenge, who decoys her brothers and murders them; it is she who with her own hand cuts off the head of Gunther to expiate his murder of Siegfried. To our feelings, more akin to those of the feudal Christians of Franconia than to those of the tribal Scandinavians of the Edda, the second version is far more intelligible and interesting—the story of this once gentle and loving Chriemhilt, turned by the murder of her beloved into a fury, and plotting to avenge his death by the death of all his kinsfolk, must be much grander and more pathetic than the story of this strange Gudrun, who sits down patiently beneath the injury done to her by her brothers, but savagely avenges them on her new husband, and her own and his innocent children; to us this persistence of tribal feeling, destroying all indignation and love, is merely unnatural, confusing, and repulsive. But this alteration for the better in one of the incidents of the tale is a mere fluke; and the whole main plot of the originally central figures are completely obliterated by the new state of civilization, and rendered merely trivial and grotesque. In the Volsunga Saga Sigurd, overcome by enchantments, has forgotten his wife (or mistress, a vague mythical relationship); and, with all sense of the past obliterated, has made her over to the brother of his new wife Gudrun; and Brynhilt kills her faithless love to dissolve the second marriage and be reunited with him in death. In the Nibelungenlied Siegfried, although the flower of knighthood, conquers by foul play the Amazon Brunhilt to reward Gunther for the hand of his sister; nay, in a comic and loathsome scene he forces her into the embraces of the craven Gunther; and then he gets killed by Brunhilt's machinations; when, after most unqueenly bickerings, the proud Amazon is brutally told by Siegfried's wife of the dirty trick

which has given her to Gunther. After this, it is impossible to realize, when Siegfried is murdered and all our sympathies called on to his side, the utterly out-of-character, blackguardly behaviour which has brought the hero to his death. Similarly the conception of the character and position of Brynhilt is entirely disfigured and rendered inane in the Nibelungenlied: of that superb demi-goddess of the Scandinavians, burnt on the pyre with her falcons and dogs and horses and slaves, by the side of the demi-god Sigurd, whom she has loved and killed, lest the door of Valhalla, swinging after him, should shut her out from his presence; of her there remains in the German mediaeval poem only a virago (more like the giantesses of the Amadis romances) enraged at having been defeated and grotesquely and grossly pummelled into wedlock by a man not her husband, and then slanged like a fishwife by her envious sister-in-law.

The old, consistent, grandly tragic tale of the mysterious incests and revenges of a race of demi-gods has lost its sense, its point in the attempt to arrange it to suit Christian and feudal ideas. The really fine portions of the Nibelungenlied are exactly those which have no real connection with the original story, gratuitous additions by mediaeval poets. The delicately indicated falling in love of Siegfried and Chriemhilt, the struggles of Markgraf Rüdger between obedience to his feudal superior and fidelity towards his friends and guests; and, above all, the canto of the death of Siegfried. This last is different, intensely different, from the rugged and dreary monotony of the rest; this most poetical, almost Spenserian or Ariostesque realization of the scene; this beautiful picture (though worked with the needle of the arras-worker rather than with pencil or brush) of the wood, the hunt", the solitary fountain in the Odenwald, where, with his spear leaned against the lime-tree, Siegfried was struck down into the clover and flowers, and writhed with Hagen's steel through his back. This canto is certainly interpolated by some first-rate poet, at least a Gottfried or a Walther, to whom that passage of the savage old droning song of death had suggested a piece of new art; it is like the fragments of exquisitely chiselled leafage and figures which you sometimes find encrusted—by whom? wherefore?—quite isolated in the midst of the rough and lichen-stained stones of some rude Lombard church. All the rest of the Nibelungenlied gives an impression of effeteness; there is no definiteness of idea such as that of the Volsunga Saga; the battles are mere vague slaughter, no action, no realized movement, or (excepting Rudger) no realized motive of conduct. Shape and colour would seem to have been obliterated by repetition and alteration. Yet even these alterations could not make the tale of Siegfried survive among the Germans of the Middle Ages; nay, the more the alterations the less the interest; the want of consistency and colour due to rearrangement merely accelerated the throwing aside of a subject which, dating from pagan and tribal times, had become repugnant to the new generations. All the mutilations in the world could not make the old Scandinavian tales of betrayed trust, of revenge and triumphant bloodshed, at all sympathetic to men whose religious and social ideals were those of forgiveness and fidelity; even stripped of its incestuous mysteries and of its fearful tribal love, the tale of Sigurd and Brynhilt, reduced to the tale of Chriemhilt's revenge, was unpalatable: no more attempts were made at re-writing it, and the poems of Walther, of Gottfried, of Wolfram, of Ulrich, and of Tannhäuser, full as they are of references to stories of the Carolingian and Arthurian cycles, nay, to Antique and Oriental tales, contain no allusion to the personages of the Nibelungenlied. The old epic of the Gothic races had been pushed aside by the triumphant epic of the obscure and conquered Kelts.

There are few phenomena in the history of ideas and forms more singular than that of the sudden conquest of the poetry of dominant or distant nations by the poetic subjects of a comparatively small race, sheared of all political importance, restricted to a trifling territory, and well-nigh deprived of their language; and of this there can be found no more striking example than the sudden ousting of the Carolingian epic by the cycle of Arthur.

The Kelts of Britain and Ireland possessed an epic cycle of their own, which came to notice only when they were dispossessed of their last strongholds by Saxons and Normans, and which immediately spread with astounding rapidity all over Europe. The vanquished race became fashionable; themselves, their art and their poetry, began to be sought for as a precious and war-enhanced loot. The heroic tales of the Kelts were transcribed in Welsh, and translated into Latin, by order of the Norman and Angevine kings, glad, it would seem, to oppose the Old Briton to the Saxon element. The Keltic songs were carried all over France by Breton bards, to whose music and rhymes, with only a general idea of the subjects, the neo-Latin-speaking Franks listened with the sort of stolid satisfaction with which English or Germans of a hundred years ago listened to Italians singing Metastasio's verses. But soon the songs and tales were translated; and French poets imitated in their language, northern and southern, the graceful metres of the Keltic lays, and altered and arranged their subjects. So that, in a very short time, France, and through it Germany, was inundated with Keltic stories. This triumph of the vanquished race was not without reason. The Kelts, early civilized by Rome and Christianity, had a set of stories and a set of heroes extremely in accordance with mediaeval ideas, and requiring but very little alteration. The considerable age of their civilization had long obliterated all traces of pagan and tribal feeling in their tales. Their heroes, originally, like those of all other people, divinities intimately connected with natural phenomena, had long lost all cosmic characteristics, long ceased to be gods, and, manipulated by the fancy of a race whose greatness was quite a thing of the past, had become a sort of golden age ideals—the men of a distant period of glory, which was adorned with every kind of perfection, till it became as unreal as fairyland. Fairyland, in good sooth, was this country of the Keltic tales; and there is a sort of symbolical significance in the fact of its lawgiver Merlin, and its emperor Arthur, being both of them not dead, like Sigurd, like Dietrich, like Charlemagne and Roland, but lying in enchanted sleep. Long inaction and the day-dreaming of idleness had refined and idealized the heroes of this Keltic race—a race of brilliant fancy and almost southern mobility, and softened for a long time by contact with Roman colonists and Christian priests.

They were not the brutal combatants of an active fighting age, like the heroes of the Edda and of the Carolingian cycles; nor had they any particular military work to do, belonging as they did to a people huddled away into inactivity. Their sole occupation was to extend abroad that ideal happiness which reigned in the ideal court of Arthur; to go forth on the loose and see what ill-conditioned folk there might yet be who required being subdued or taught manners in the happy kingdom, which the poor insignificant Kelts connected with some princelet of theirs who centuries before may have momentarily repelled the pagan Saxons. Hence in the Keltic stories, such as they exist in the versions previous to the conquest by the Norman kings, and previous also to any communications with other peoples, the distinct beginning of what was later to be called knight-errantry; of heroes, creations of an inactive nation, having no special military duties, going forth to do what good they may at random, unforced by any necessity, and following a mere aesthetico-romantic plan of perfecting themselves by deeds of valour to become more worthy of their God, their King, and their Lady: religion, loyalty, and love, all three of them mere aesthetic abstractions, becoming the goal of an essentially aesthetic, unpractical system of self-improvement, such as was utterly incompatible with any real and serious business in life. Idle poetic fancies of an inert people, the Knights of the Round Table have no mission save that of being poetically perfect. Such was the spirit of Keltic poetry; and, as it happened, this spirit satisfied the imaginative wants of mediaeval society just at the moment when political events diffused in other countries the knowledge of the Arthurian legends. The old Teutonic tales of Sigurd, Gudrun, and Dietrich, had long ceased to appeal, in their mutilated and obliterated condition, to a society to whom tribal feeling and pagan heroism were odious, and whose religion distinctly reproved revenge. These semi-mythological tales had been replaced by another cycle: the purely realistic epic, which had arisen during the struggles between the Christian west against the pagan north-east and the Mohammedan south, and which, originating in the short battle-songs narrating the exploits of the predecessors and help-mates of Charlemagne, had constituted itself into large narratives of which the "Song of Roland" represents artistic culmination. These narratives of mere military exploits, of the battles of a strong feudal aristocracy animated by feudal loyalty and half-religious, half-patriotic fury against invading heathenness, had perfectly satisfied the men of the earliest Middle Ages, of the times when feudalism was being established and the church being reformed; when the strong military princelets of the North were embarking with their barons to conquer new kingdoms in England and in Italy and Greece; when the whole of feudal Europe hurled itself against Asia in the first Crusades. But the condition of things soon altered: the feudal hierarchy was broken up into a number of semi-independent little kingdoms or principalities, struggling, with the assistance of industrial and mercantile classes, to become absolute monarchies; princes who had been mere generals became stay-at-home diplomatists, studious of taxation and intrigue, surrounded no longer by armed vassals, but by an essentially urban court, in constant communication with the money-making burghers. Religion, also, instead of being a matter of fighting with infidel invaders, turned to fantastic sectarianism and emotional mysticism. With the sense of futility, of disappointment, attendant on the later Crusades, came also a habit of roaming in strange countries, of isolated adventure in search of wealth or information, a love of the distant, the half-understood, the equivocal; perhaps even a hankering after a mysterious compromise between the religion of Europe and the religions of the East, such as appears to have existed among the Templars and other Franks settled in Asia.

There was, throughout feudal society, a sort of enervated languor, a morbid longing for something new, now that the old had ceased to be possible or had proved futile; after the great excitement of the Crusades it was impossible to be either sedately idle or quietly active, even as it is with all of us during the days of weariness and restlessness after some long journey. To such a society the strongly realistic Carolingian epic had ceased to appeal: the tales of the Welsh and Breton bards, repeated by trouvère and jongleur, troubadour and minnesinger, came as a revelation. The fatigued, disappointed, morbid, imaginative society of the later Crusades recognized in this fairyland epic of a long refined, long idle, nay, effete race, the realization of their own ideal: of activity unhampered by aim or organization, of sentiment and emotion and action quite useless and unnecessary, purely subservient to imaginative gratification. These Arthurs, Launcelots, Tristrams, Kays, and Gawains, fantastic phantoms, were also far more artistically malleable than the iron Rolands, Olivers, and Renauds of earlier days; that unknown kingdom of Britain could much more easily be made the impossible ideal, in longing for which squeamish and lazy minds might refuse all coarser reality. Moreover, those who listened to the tales of chivalry were different from those who had listened to the Carolingian stories; and, therefore, required something different. They were courtiers, and one half of them were women. Now the Carolingian tales, originally battle-songs, sung in camps and castles to mere soldiers, had at first possessed no female characters at all; and when gradually they were introduced, it was in the coarsest barrack or tap-room style. The Keltic tales, on the contrary, whether from national tradition, or rather from longer familiarity with Christian culture and greater idleness of life, naturally made women and women's love the goal of a great many adventures which an effete nation could no longer ascribe to patriotic movements. But this was not all. The religious feeling of the day was extremely inclined to mysticism, in which aesthetic, erotic, and all kinds of morbid and ill-defined tendencies were united, which was more than anything else tinged with a semi-Asiatic quietism, a longing for the passive ecstasy of Nirvâna. This religious side of mediaeval life was also gratified by the Arthurian romances. Oddly enough, there existed an old Welsh or Breton tale about the boy Peredur, who from a complete simpleton became the prince of chivalry, and his many adventures connected with a certain mysterious blood-dripping lance, and a still more mysterious basin or *grail* (an allusion to which is said by M. de la Villemarqué to be contained in the originally Keltic name of Percival), which possessed magic properties akin to

those of the purse of Fortunatus, or the pipkin in the story of "Little pot, boil!" The story, whose original mythical meaning had been lost in the several centuries of Christianity, was very decayed and obscure; and the fact of the blood on the lance being that of a murdered kinsman of Peredur, and of the basin containing the head of the same person cut off by Gloucester witches, was evidently insufficient to account for all the mystery with which these objects were surrounded. The French poets of the Middle Ages, strongly imbued with Oriental legends brought back by the Crusaders, saw at a glance the meaning of the whole story: the lance was the lance with which Longinus had pierced the Saviour's side; the Grail was the cup which had received His blood, nay, it was the cup of the Last Supper. A tale about the preservation of these precious relics by Joseph of Arimathaea, was immediately connected therewith; a theory was set up (doubtless with the aid of quite unchristian, Oriental legends) of a kind of kingdom of the keepers of the Grail, of a vague half-material, half-spiritual state of bliss connected with the service of the Grail, which fed its knights (and here the Templars and their semi-oriental mysteries, for which they were later so frightfully misused, certainly come into play) with food which is at once of the body and of the soul. Thus the Keltic Peredur, bent upon massacring the Gloucester witches to avenge his uncle, was turned into a saintly knight, seeking throughout a more and more perfect life for the kingdom of the Grail: the Perceval of Chrestien de Troyes, the Parzifal of Wolfram von Eschenbach, whom later romance writers (wishing to connect everything more closely with Arthur's court) replaced by the Sir Galahad of the "Morte d'Arthur," while the guest of the Grail became a sort of general mission of several knights, a sort of spiritual crusade to whose successful champions Percival, Bors, and Galahad, the Middle Ages did not hesitate to add the arch-adulterer Launcelot.

Thus did the Arthurian tales answer the requirements of the languid, dreamy, courtly, lady-serving and religiously mystic sons and grandsons of those earlier Crusaders whose aspirations had been expressed by the rough and solemn heroes of Carolingian tales. The Carolingian tales were thrown aside, or were kept by the noble mediaeval poets only on condition of their original meaning being completely defaced by wholesale admixture of the manners and adventures belonging to the Arthurian cycles. The paladins were forced to disport themselves in the same fairyland as the Knights of the Round Table; and many mediaeval poems the heroes of which, like Ogier of Denmark and Huon of Bordeaux, already existed in the Carolingian tales, are in reality, with their romantic loves, their useless adventures, their Morgana's castles and Oberon's horns, offshoots of the Keltic stories, which were as rich in every kind of supernatural (being, in fact, pagan myths turned into fairy tales) as the genuine Carolingian subjects, whose origin was entirely historical, were completely devoid of such things. Arthur and his ladies and knights: Guenevere, Elaine, Enid, Yseult, Launcelot, Geraint, Kay, Gawain, Tristram, and Percival-Galahad, were the real heroes and heroines of the courtly nobles and the courtly poets of this second phase of mediaeval life. The Teuton Charlemagne, Roland and Oliver were as completely forgotten of the poets who met in that memorable combat of the Wartburg, as were the Teuton Sigurd and Dietrich. And if the Carolingian cycle survived, however much altered, I think it must have been thanks to the burghers and artizans of the Netherlands and of Provence, to whom the bluff, matter-of-fact heroism, the simple, gross, but not illegitimate amours of Carolingian heroes, were more satisfactory than any mystic quest of the Grail, any refined adultery of Guenevere or Yseult.

But the inevitable fate of all mediaeval epics awaited this triumphant Arthurian cycle: the fate of being obliterated by passing from one nation and civilization to another, long before the existence of any poetic art adequate to its treatment. Of this I will take as an example one of the mediaeval poems which has the greatest reputation the masterpiece (according to most critics, with whom I find it difficult, in the presence of a poet like Gottfried von Strassburg, to agree) of probably the most really poetical and earnest school of poetry which the pre-Dantesque Middle Ages possessed—the "Parzifal" of Wolfram von Eschenbach.

The paramount impression (I cannot say the strongest, for strong impressions are incompatible with such work as this) left by the masterpiece of Wolfram von Eschenbach, is that of the most astonishing vagueness, fluidity, haziness, vaporousness. In reading it one looks back to that rudely hewn and extremely obliterated Nibelungenlied, as to something ?quite astonishingly clear, detailed and strongly marked as to something distinctly artistic. Indeed by the side of "Parzifal" everything seems artistic; Hartmann von Aue reads like Chaucer, "Aucassin et Nicolette" is as living as "Cymbeline," "Chevy Chase" seems as good as the battles of Homer. It is not a narrative, but a vague mooning; a knight illiterate, not merely like his fellow minnesingers, in the way of reading and writing, but in the sense of complete absence of all habit of literary form; extremely noble and pure of mind, chaste, gentle, with a funny, puzzled sense of humour, reminding one distantly of Jean Paul in his drowsy moments; a hanger-on of courts, but perfectly simple-hearted and childlike; very poor and easily pleased: such is, for good and for bad, Herr Wolfram von Eschenbach, the only real personality in his poem. And he narrates, in a mooning, digressive, good-natured, drowsy tone, with only a rare awaking of interest, a story which he has heard from some one else, and that some one else from a series of other some one elses (Chrestien de Troyes, a legendary Provençal Chiot or Guyot, perhaps even the original Welsh bard); all muddled, monotonous, and droning; events and persons ill-defined, without any sense of the relative importance of anything, without clear perception of what it is all about, or at least without the power of keeping the matter straight before the reader. A story, in point of fact, which is no story at all, but a mere series of rambling adventures (adventures which are scarcely adventures, having no point or plot) of various people with not much connection and no individuality—Gachmuret, Parzifal, Gawain, Loherangrein,Anfortas, Feirefis—pale ghosts of beings, moving in a country of Kennaqwhere, Aquitaine, Anjou, Brittany, Wales, Spain, and

heaven knows what wondrous Oriental places; a misty country with woods and towns and castles which are infinitely far apart and yet quite near each other; which seem to sail about like cloud castles round the only solid place in the book, Plimizöl, where Arthur's court, with round table constantly spread, Is for ever established. A no place, nowhere; yet full of details; minute inventories of the splendid furniture of castles (castles where? how reached?); infinitely inferior in this matter even to the Nibelungenlied, where you are made to feel so vividly (one of the few modern and therefore clear things therein) the long, dreary road from Worms to Bechlarn, and thence to Etzelburg, though of none of them is there anything beyond a name. For the Nibelungen story had been localized in what to narrator and audience was a reality, the country in which themselves lived, where themselves might seek out the abbey in which Siegfried was buried, the well in the Odenwald near which he was stabbed; where they knew from merchant and pilgrim the road taken by the Nibelungs from Santen to Worms, by the Burgundians from Worms to Hungary. But here in "Parzifal" we are in a mere vague world of anywhere, the world of Keltic and Oriental romance become mere cloudland to the Thuringian knight. And similarly have the heroes of other nations, the Arthurs, Gawains, Gachmurets, of Wales and Anjou, become mere vague names; they have become liquified, lost all shape and local habitation. They are mere names, these ladies and knights of Herr Wolfram, names with fair pink and white faces, names magnificently draped in bejewelled Oriental stuffs and embossed armour; they have no home, no work, nothing to do. This is the most remarkable characteristic of "Parzifal," and what makes it so typical of the process of growing inane through overmuch alteration, which prevented the mediaeval epics ever turning into an Iliad or an Odyssey; this that it is essentially idle and all about nothing. The feudal relations strongly marked in the German Nibelungenlied have melted away like the distinctions of race: every knight is independent, not a vassal nor a captain, a Volker or Hagen, or Roland or Renaud followed by his men; but an isolated individual, without even a squire, wandering about alone through this hazy land of nowhere. Knight-errantry, in the time of the great Guelph and Ghibelline struggles, every bit as ideal as that of Spenser or Cervantes; and with the difference that Sir Calidore and Sir Artegal have an appointed task, some Blatant Beast or other nuisance to overcome; and that Don Quixote has the general rescuing of all the oppressed Princesse Micomiconas, and the destruction of all windmills, and the capturing of all helmets of Mambrino, and the establishing all over the world of the worship of Dulcinea. But these knights of Wolfram von Eschenbach have no more this mission than they have the politico-military missions, missions of a Rüdger or a Roland. They are all riding about at random, without any particular pagans, necromancers, or dragons to pursue. The very service of the Holy Grail, which is the main interest of the poem, consists in nothing apparently except living virtuously at the Castle of Montselväsche, and virtuously eating and drinking the victuals provided miraculously. To be admitted to this service, no initiation, no mission, nothing preliminary seems required. Parzifal himself merely wanders about vaguely, without doing any specified thing. The fact is that in this poem all has become purely ideal; ideal to the point of utter vacuity: there is no connection with any human business. Of all the heroes and heroines we hear that they are perfectly chaste, truthful, upright; and they are never put into any situation to test these qualities: they are never placed in the way of temptation, never made to fight with evil, or to decide between it and good. The very religion of the Holy Grail consists in doing nothing: not a word about relieving the poor or oppressed, of tending the sick, of delivering the Holy Sepulchre, of defending that great injured One, Christ. To be Grail Knight or even Grail King means to be exactly the same as before. Where in this vague dreamland of passive purity and heroism, of untempted chastity and untried honour, where are the earthly trials of Tristram, of Guenevere, of Rüdger, of Renaud? Where the moral struggles of the Middle Ages? Where is Godfrey, or Francis, or Dominick? Nowhere. All has disappeared, melted away; Christianity and Paganism themselves have melted away or into each other, as in the easy meeting of the Pagan Feirefis and the Christian Parzifal, and in the double marriage of Gachmuret with the Indian Belakane and the Welsh Herzeloid; there remains only a kind of Buddhistic Nirvâna of vague passive perfection, but without any renunciation; and in a world devoid of evil and full of excellent brocade and armour and eatables, and lovely maidens who dress and undress you, and chastely kiss you on the mouth; a world without desire, aspiration, or combat, vacantly happy and virtuous. A world purely ideal, divorced from all reality, unsubstantial like the kingdom of Gloriana, but, unlike Spenser's, quite unshadowed by any puritan sadness, by any sense of evil, untroubled by allegorical vices; cheerful, serene, filled with flowers and song of birds, but as unreal as the illuminated arabesques of a missal. In truth, perhaps more to be compared with an eighteenth century pastoral, an ideal created almost in opposition to reality; a dream of passiveness and liberty (as of light leaves blown about) as the ideal of the fiercely troubled, struggling, tightly fettered feudal world. The ideal, perhaps, of only one moment, scarcely of a whole civilization; or rather (how express my feeling?) an accidental combination of an instant, as of spectre vapour arisen from the mixture of Kelt and Teuton, of Frank and Moslem. Is it Christian, Pagan, Mohammedan? None of all these.... A simple-looking vaporous chaos of incongruous, but not conflicting, elements: a poem of virtue without object, of knighthood without work, of religion without belief; in this like its central interest, the Grail: a mystery, a cup, a stone; a thing which heals, feeds, speaks; animate or inanimate? Stone of the Caaba or chalice of the Sacrament? Merely a mysterious holy of holies and good of goods, which does everything and nothings means nothing and requires nothing—is nothing.

III.

Thus was obliterated, in all its national and traditional meaning, the heroic cycle of Arthur; and by the same process of slow adaptation to new intellectual requirements which had completely wiped out of men's memory the heroic tales of Siegfried, which had entirely altered the originally realistic character of the epic of Charlemagne. But unreal and ideal as had become the tales of the Round Table, and disconnected with any national tradition, the time came when even these were not sufficiently independent of reality to satisfy the capricious imagination of the later Middle Ages. At the end of the fourteenth century was written, most probably in Portuguese by Vasco de Lobeira, the tale of "Amadis de Gaula," which was followed by some forty or fifty similar books telling the adventures of all the brothers, nephews, sons, grandsons sons, and great-grandsons, an infinite succession, of the original Amadis; which, translated into all languages and presently multiplied by the press, seem to have usurped the place of the Arthurian stories in feudal countries until well-nigh the middle of the sixteenth century; and which were succeeded by no more stories of heroes, but by the realistic comic novels of the type of "Lazarillo de Tormes," and the buffoon philosophic extravaganzas of "Gargantua." Further indeed it was impossible to go than did mediaeval idealism in the Amadises. Compared with them the most fairy-tale-like Arthurian stories are perfect historical documents. There remains no longer any ? connection whatsoever with reality, historical or geographical: the whole world seems to have been expeditiously emptied of all its contents, to make room for kingdoms of Gaul, of Rome, of the Firm Island, of Sobradisa, etc., which are less like the Land West of the Moon and East of the Sun than they are like Sancho Panza's island. All real mankind, past, present, and future, has similarly been swept away and replaced by a miraculous race of Amadises, Lisvarts, Galaors, Gradasilias, Orianas, Pintiquinestras, Fradalons, and so forth, who flit across our vision, in company with the indispensable necromancers, fairies, dwarfs, giants, and duennas, like some huge ballet: things without character, passions, pathos; knights who are never wounded or killed, princesses who always end with marrying the right man, enchanters whose heads are always chopped off, foundlings who are always reinstated in their kingdom, inane paper puppets bespangled with impossible sentiment, tinsel and rags which are driven about like chaff by the wind-puffs of romance. The advent of the Amadises is the coming of the Kingdom of Nonsense, the sign that the last days of chivalric romance have come; a little more, and the Licentiate Alonzo Perez will take his seat in Don Quixote's library, and Nicholas the Barber light his faggots in the yard.

But, as if in compensation of the usurpation of which they had been the victims, the Carolingian tales, pushed out of the way by the Arthurian cycle, were not destined to perish. Thrown aside with contempt by the upper classes, engrossed with the Round Table and the Holy Grail, the tales of Charlemagne and his paladins, largely adulterated with Arthurian elements, were apparently cherished by a lower class of society: burgesses, artizans, and such-like, for whom that Arthurian world was far too etherial and too delicately immoral; and to this circumstance is due the fact that the humiliated Carolingian tales eventually received an artistic embodiment which was not given to the Arthurian stories. While troubadours and minnesingers were busy with the court of Arthur, and grave Latinists like Rusticiano of Pisa wrote of Launcelot and Guenevere; the Carolingian epics seem to have been mainly sung about by illiterate jongleurs, and to have busied the pens of prose hackwriters for the benefit of townsfolk. The free towns of the Netherlands and of Germany appear to have been full of this unfashionable literature: the Carolingian cycle had become democratic. And, inasmuch as it was literature no longer for knights and courtiers, but for artizans and shopkeepers, it went, of course, to the pre-eminently democratic country of the Middle Ages—Italy. This was at a time when Italian was not yet a recognized language, and when the men and women who talked in Tuscan, Lombard, or Venetian dialects, wrote in Latin and in French; and while Francesca and Paolo read the story of Launcelot most probably in good mediaeval *langue d'oil*, as befitted people of high birth; the jongleurs, who collected crowds so large as to bar the streets and require the interference of the Bolognese magistrates, sang of Roland and Oliver in a sort of *lingua Franca* of French Lombard. French jongleurs singing in impossible French-Italian; Italian jongleurs singing in impossible French; Paduan penny-a-liners writing Carolingian cyclical novels in French, not of Paris, assuredly, but of Padua—a comical and most hideous jabber of hybrid languages—this was how the Carolingian stories became popular in Italy. Meanwhile, the day came when the romantic Arthurian tales had to dislodge in Italy before the invasion of the classic epic. Troy, Rome, and Thebes had replaced Tintagil and Caerleon in the interest of the cultured classes long before the beginning of the fifteenth century; when Poggio, in the very midst of the classic revival, still told of the comically engrossed audience which surrounded the vagabonds singing of Orlando and Rinaldo. The effete Arthurian cycle, superseded in Spain and France by the Amadis romances, was speedily forgotten in Italy; but the Carolingian stories remained; and when Italian poetry arose once more after the long interregnum between Petrarch and Lorenzo dei Medici, and looked about for subjects, it laid its hand upon them. But when, in the second half of the fifteenth century, those old tales of Charlemagne received, after so many centuries of alterations and ephemeral embodiments, that artistic form which the Middle Ages had been unable to give them, the stories themselves, and the way in which they were regarded, were totally different from what they had been in the time of Theroulde, or of the anonymous author of "The Quatre Fils Aymon;" the Renaissance, with its keen artistic sense, made out of the Carolingian tales real works of art, but works of art which were playthings. To begin with, the Carolingian stories had been saturated with Arthurian colour: they had been furnished with all the knight-rrantry, all the gallantry, all the enchantments, the fairies, giants, and necromancers of the Keltic legends; and, moreover, they had lost, by infinite repetition, all the political realism and meaning so striking in "The Chanson de Roland" and "The Quatre Fils Aymon;" a confusion and unreality further increased by the fact that the Italians had no original connection with those tales, that to them real men and plans were no better than

imaginary ones, and that the minstrels who sang in the market-place, and the laborious prose-writers who compiled such collections as that called of the "Reali di Francia," were equally free in their alterations and adaptations, creating unknown relationships, inventing new adventures, suppressing essential historical points, with no object save amusing their audience or readers with new stories about familiar heroes. Such was the condition of the stories themselves. The attitude of the public towards them was, by the middle of the fifteenth century, one of complete incredulity and frivolous amusement; the paladins were as unreal as the heroes of any granny's fairy tale. The people wanted to hear of wonderful battles and adventures, of enchantments and love-makings; but they wanted also to laugh; and, sceptical, practical, democratic, the artizans and shopkeepers of Florence—to whom, paying, as they did, expensive mercenaries who stole poultry and never got wounded on any account, all chivalry or real military honour was the veriest nursery rubbish—such people as crowded round the *cantastoria* of *mercato vecchio*, must indeed have found much to amuse them in these tales of so different an age.

And into such crowds there penetrated to listen and watch (even as the Magnificent Lorenzo had elbowed among the carnival ragamuffins of Florence, and had slid in among the holiday-making peasants of Poggio a Caiano) a learned man, a poet, an intimate of the Medicis, of Politian, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, Messer Luigi Pulci, the same who had written the semi-allegorical, semi-realistic poem about Lorenzo dei Medici's gala tournament. There was a taste in the house of the Medici, together with those for platonic philosophy, classical erudition, religious hymns, and Hebrew kabbala, for a certain kind of realism, for the language and mode of thinking of the lower classes, as a reaction from Petrarchesque conventionality. As the Magnificent Lorenzo had had the fancy to string together in more artistic shape the quaint and graceful love poems, hyperbolical, realistic, tender, and abusive, of the Tuscan peasantry; so also Messer Luigi Pulci appears to have been smitten with the notion of trying his hand at a chivalric poem like those to which he and his friends had listened among the butchers and pork-shops, the fishmongers and frying booths of the market, and giving an impression, in its ideas and language, of the people to whom such strains were sung. But Luigi Pulci was vastly less gifted as a poet than Lorenzo dei Medici; Florentine prentices are less aesthetically pleasing than Tuscan peasants, and the "Morgante Maggiore" is a piece of work of a sort utterly inferior to the "Nencia da Barberino." Still the "Morgante Maggiore" remains, and will remain, as a very remarkable production of grotesque art. Just as Lorenzo dei Medici was certainly not without a deliberate purpose of selecting the quaintness and gracefulness of peasant life; even so, and perhaps more, Luigi Pulci must have had a deliberate intention of producing a ludicrous effect; in both cases the deliberate attempt is very little perceptible, in the "Nencia da Barberino" from the genius of Lorenzo, in the "Morgante Maggiore" from the stolidity of Pulci. The "Morgante," of which parts were probably written as a mere sample to amuse a supper party, became interesting to Pulci, in the mere matter of inventing and stringing together new incidents; and despite its ludicrous passages, it must have been more seriously written by him, and more seriously listened to by his friends, than would a similar production now-a-days. For the men of the Renaissance, no matter how philosophized and cultured, retained the pleasure in mere incident, which we moderns seem to have given over to children and savages; and Lorenzo, Ficino, and Politian probably listened to the adventures of Luigi Pulci's paladins and giants with much the same interest, and only a little more conscious sense of grotesqueness, with which the crowd in the market listened to Cristofano dell' Altissimo and similar story-tellers. The "Morgante Maggiore," therefore, is neither really comic nor really serious. It is not a piece of realistic grotesqueness like "Gargantua" or "Pantagruel," any more than it is a serious ideal work like "Amadis de Gaula:" the proportion of deliberately sought effects is small; the great bulk, serious or comic, seems to have come quite at random. It is not a caricatured reproduction of the poems of chivalry sung in the market, for they were probably serious, stately, and bald, with at most an occasional joke; it is the reproduction of the joint impression received from the absurd, harum-scarum, unpractical world of chivalry of the poet, and the real world of prose, of good-humoured buffoonish coarseness with which the itinerant poet was surrounded. The paladins are no Don Quixotes, the princesses no Dulcineas, the battles are real battles; but the language is that of Florentine wool-workers, housewives, cheese-sellers, and ragamuffins, crammed with the slang of the market-place,its heavy jokes and perpetual sententious aphorism. Moreover the prominence given to food and eating is unrivalled except by Rabelais: the poet must have lounged with delight through the narrow mediaeval lanes, crowded with booths and barrows, sniffing with rapture the mingled scents of cheese, pork, fish, spices, and a hundred strange concomitant market smells. And the market, that classic *mercato vecchio* (alas, finally condemned and destroyed by modern sanitary prudishness, and which only those who have seen can conceive in its full barbarous, nay, barbaric Pantagruelian splendour of food, blood, and stenches) of Florence, is what we think of throughout the poem. And, when Messer Luigi comes to narrate, with real gravity and after the due invocation of the Virgin, the Trinity, and the saints, the tremendous disaster of Roncevaux, he uses such words and such similes, that above the neighing of horses and the clash of hurtling armour and the yells of the combatants we suddenly hear the nasal sing-song of Florentine tripe-vendors and pumpkin-pod-sellers, the chaffer and oaths and laughter of the gluttonous crowd pouring through the lanes of Calimala and Pellicceria; nay (horrible and grotesque miracle), there seems to rise out of the confused darkness of the battle-filled valley, there seems to disengage itself (as out of a mist) from the chaos of heaped bodies, and the flash of steel among the whirlwinds of dust, a vision, more and more distinct and familiar, of the crowded square with its black rough-hewn, smoke-stained houses, ornamented with Robbia-ware angels and lilies or painted madonnas; of its black butchers dens, outside which hang the ghastly disembowelled sheep with blood-stained fleeces, the huge red-veined hearts and livers; of the piles of cabbage and cauliflowers, the rows of tin ware and copper saucepans, the heaps of maccaroni and pastes,

of spices and drugs; the garlands of onions and red peppers and piles of apples; the fetid sliminess of the fish tressels; the rough pavement oozy and black, slippery with cabbage-stalks, puddled with bullock's blood, strewn with plucked feathers—all under the bright blue sky, with Giotto's dove-coloured belfry soaring high above; a vision, finally, of one of those deep dens, with walls, all covered with majolica plates and dishes and flashing brass-embossed trenchers, in the dark depths of which crackles perennially a ruddy fire, while a huge spit revolves, offering to the flames now one now the other side of scores of legs of mutton, rounds of beef, and larded chickens, trickling with the butter unceasingly ladled by the white-dressed cooks. Roncisvalle, Charlemagne, the paladins, paganism, Christendom—what of them? "I believe in capon, roast or boiled, and sometimes done in butter; in mead and in must; and I believe in the pasty and the pastykins, mother and children; but above all things I believe in good wine "—as Margutte snuffles out in his catechism; and as to Saracens and paladins, past, present, and future, a fig for them!

But meanwhile, for all that Florentine burgesses, artizans, and humorists may think, there is in this Italy of the Renaissance something besides Florence; there is a school of poetry, disconnected with the realisms of Lorenzo and Pulci, with the Ovidian Petrarchisms of Politian. There is Ferrara. Lying, as they do, between the Northern Apennine slopes of Modena and the Euganean hills, the dominions of the House of Este appear at first sight merely as part and parcel of Lombardy, and we should expect from them nothing very different from that which we expect from Milan or Bologna or Padua. But the truth is different; all round Ferrara, indeed, stretches the fertile flatness of Lombard cornfields, and they produce, as infallibly as they produce their sacks of grain and tuns of wine and heaps of silk cocoon, the intellectual and social equivalents of such things in Renaissance Italy: industry, wealth, comfort, scepticism, art. But on either side, into the defiles of the Euganean hills to the north, into the widening torrent valleys of the Modenese Apennines to the south, the Marquisate of Este stretches up into feudalism, into chivalry, into the imaginative kingdom of the Middle Ages. Mediaevalism, feudalism, chivalry, indeed, of a very modified sort; and as different from that of France and Germany as differ from the poverty-stricken plains and forests and and moors of the north these Italian mountain slopes, along which the vines crawl in long trellises, and the chestnuts rise in endlessly superposed tiers of terraces, cultivated by a peasant who is not the serf, but the equal sharer in profits with the master of the soil. And on one of those fertile hill-sides, looking down upon a narrow valley all a green-blue shimmer with corn and vine-bearing elms, was born, in the year 1434, Matteo Maria Boiardo, in the village which gave him the title, one of the highest in the Estensian dominions, of Count of Scandiano. Here, in the Apennines, Scandiano is a fortified village, also a castle, doubtless half turned into a Renaissance villa, but mediaeval and feudal nevertheless; but the name of Scandiano belongs also, I know not for what reason, to a certain little red-brick palace on the outskirts of Ferrara, beautifully painted with half-allegorical, half-realistic pageant frescoes by Cosimo Tura, and enclosing a sweet tangled orchard-garden; to all of which, being the place to which Duke Borso and Duke Ercole were wont to retire for amusement, the Ferrarese have given the further name of Schifanoia, which means, "fly from cares." This little coincidence of Scandiano the feudal castle in the Apennines, and Scandiano the little pleasure palace at Ferrara, seems to give, by accidental allegory, a fair idea of the double nature of Matteo Boiardo, of the Ferrarese court to which he belonged, and of the school of poetry (including the more notable but less original work of Ariosto) which the genius of the man and the character of the court succeeded together in producing.

To understand Boiardo we must compare him with Ariosto; and to understand Ariosto we must compare him with Boiardo; both belong to the same school, and are men of very similar genius, and where the one leaves off the other begins. But first, in order to understand the character of this poetry which, in the main, is identical in Boiardo and in his more successful but less fascinating pupil Ariosto, let us understand Ferrara. It was, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a chivalric town of Ariostesque chivalry: feudalism turned courtly and elegant, and moreover, very liberal and comfortable by preponderance of democratic and industrial habits; a military court, of brave mercenary captains full of dash and adventure, not mere brigands and marauders having studied strategy, like the little Umbrian chieftains; a court orderly, elegant, and brilliant: a prince not risen from behind a counter like Medicis and Petruccis, nor out of blood like Baglionis and Sforzas, but of a noble old house whose beginnings are lost in the mist of real chivalry and real paladinism; a duke with a pretence of feudal honour and decorum, at whose court men were all brave and ladies all chaste—with the little licenses of baseness and gallantry admitted by Renaissance chivalry. A bright, brilliant court at the close of the fifteenth century; and more stable than the only one which might have rivalled it, the Feltrian court of Urbino, too small and lost among the Umbrian bandits. A bright, brilliant town, also, this Ferrara: not mercantile like Florence, not mere barracks like Perugia; a capital, essentially, in its rich green plain by the widened Po, with its broad handsome streets (so different from the mediaeval exchanges of Bologna, and the feudal alleys of Perugia), its well-built houses, so safe and modern, needing neither *bravi* nor iron window bars, protected (except against some stray murder by one of the Estensi themselves), by the duke's well-organized police; houses with well-trimmed gardens, like so many Paris hôtels; and with the grand russet brick castle, military with its moat and towers, urban with its belvederes and balconies, in the middle, well placed to sweep away with its guns (the wonderful guns of the duke's own making) any riot, tidily, cleanly, without a nasty heap of bodies and slop of blood as in the narrow streets of other towns Imagine this bright capital, placed, moreover, in the richest centre of Lombardy, with glitter of chivalry from the Euganean hills and Apennines (castellated with Este, Monselice,Canossa, and Boiardo's own Scandiano); with gorgeous rarities of commerce from Venice and Milan—a central, unique

spot. It is the natural home of the chivalrous poets of the Renaissance, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso; as Florence is of the Politians and Pulcis (Hellenism and back-shopery); and Venice of the literature of lust, jests, cynicism, and adventure, Aretine, Beolco, Calmo, and Poliphilo-Colonna. In that garden, where the white butterflies crowd among the fruit trees bowed down to the tall grass of the palace of Schifanoia—a garden neither grand nor classic, but elegiac and charming—we can imagine Boiardo or Ariosto reading their poems to just such a goodly company as Giraldi Cinthio (a Ferrarese, and fond of romance, too) describes in the prologue of his "Ecatomiti:" gentle and sprightful ladies, with the splendid brocaded robes, and the gold-filleted golden hair of Dosso Dossi's wonderful Alcina Circe; graceful youths like the princely St. John of Benvenuto Garofalo; jesters like Dosso's at Modena; brilliant captains like his St. George and St. Michael; and a little crowd of pages with doublets and sleeves laced with gold tags, of sedate magistrates in fur robes and scarlet caps, of white-dressed maids with instruments of music and embroidery frames and hand looms, like those which Cosimo Tura painted for Duke Borso on the walls of this same Schifanoia palace Such is the audience; now for the poems.

The stuff of Boiardo and Ariosto is the same: that old mediaeval stuff of the Carolingian poems, coloured, scented with Arthurian chivalry and wonder. The knight-errantry of the Keltic tales is cleverly blended with the pseudo-historical military organization of the Carolingian cycle. Paladins and Saracens are ingeniously manoeuvred about, now scattered in little groups of twos and threes, to encounter adventures in the style of Sir Launcelot or Amadis; now gathered into a compact army to crash upon each other as at Roncevaux; or else wildly flung up by the poet to alight in fairyland, to find themselves in the caverns of Jamschid, in the isles where Oberon's mother kept Caesar, and Morgana kept Ogier, in the boats, entering subterranean channels, of Sindbad and Huon of Bordeaux; a constant alternation of individual adventure and wholesale organized campaigns, conceived and carried out with admirable ingenuity. So much for the deeds of arms. The deeds of love are also compounded of Carolingian and Arthurian, but flavoured with special Renaissance feeling. There is a great deal of rapid love-making between too gallant knights and too impressionable ladies; licentious amours which we moderns lay at the door of Boiardo and Ariosto, not knowing that the licentiousness of the Olivers and Ogiers and Guerins and Huons of mediaeval poetry, of the sentimental Amadises, Galaors, and Lisvarts of the fourteenth century, whom the Renaissance has toned down in Rogers and Rinaldos and Ricciardettos, is by many degrees worse. A moral improvement also (for all the immorality of the Renaissance) in the eschewing of the never-failing adultery of the Arthurian romances, and the appropriation to legitimately faithful love of the poetical devotion which Tristram and Launcelot bear to other men's wives. To this are added, and more by Ariosto than by Boiardo, two essentially Italian elements: something of the nobility of passion of the Platonic sonneteers; and a good dose of the ironical, scurrilous, moralizing immoral anecdote gossiping of Boccaccio and Sacchetti. Such is the stuff. The conception, though rarely comic, and sometimes *bonâ fide* serious, is never earnest. All this is a purely artistic world, a world of decorative arabesque incident, intended to please, scarcely ever to move, or to move, at most, like some Decameronian tale of Isabella and the Basil Plant, or Constance and Martuccio. On the other hand, there is none of the grotesque irreverence of Pulci. Boiardo and Ariosto are not in earnest; they are well aware that their heroes and heroines are mere modern men and women tricked out in pretty chivalric trappings, driven wildly about from Paris to Cathay, and from Spain to the Orkneys—on Tony Lumpkin's principle of driving his mother round and round the garden plot till she thought herself on a heath six miles off—without ever really changing place. But they do not, like Pulci, make fun of their characters. They write chivalry romances not for Florentine pork-butchers and wool-carders, but for gallant ladies and gentlemen, to whom, with duels, tournaments, serenades, and fine speeches, chivalry is an admired name, though no longer a respected reality.

The heroes of Boiardo and of Ariosto are always bold and gallant and glittering, the spirit of romance is in them; a giant Sancho Panza like Morgante, redolent of sausage and cheese, would never be admitted into the society of a Ferrarese Orlando. The art of Boiardo and of Ariosto is eminently pageant art, in which sentiment and heroism are but as one element among many; there is no pretence at reality (although there is a good deal of incidental realism), and no thought of the interest in subject and persons which goes with reality. It is a masquerade, and one whose men and women must, I think, be imagined in a kind of artistic fancy costume: a mixture of the Renaissance dress and of the antique, as we see it in the prints of contemporary pageants, and in Venetian and Ferrarese pictures; that Circe of Dosso's, in the Borghese gallery of Rome, seated in her stately wine-lees and gold half-heraldically and half-cabalistically patterned brocade, before the rose-bushes of the little mysterious wood, is the very ideal of the Falerinas and Alcinas, of the enchantresses of Boiardo and Ariosto. Pageant people, these of the Ferrarese poets; they only play at being in forests and deserts, as children play at being on volcanoes or in Green-land by the nursery fire. It is a kind of dressing up, a masquerading of the fancy; not disguising in order to deceive, but rather laying hold of any pretty or brilliant impressive garb that comes to hand, and putting that on in conjunction with many odds and ends, as an artist's guests might do with the silks and velvets and Oriental properties of a studio. These knights and ladies, for ever tearing about from Scotland to India, never, in point of fact, get any further than the Apennine slopes where Boiardo was born, where Ariosto governed the Garfagnana. They ride for ever (while supposed to be in the Ardennes or in Egypt) across the velvet moss turf, all patterned with minute starry clovers and the fallen white ropy chestnut blossom, amidst the bracken beneath the slender chestnut trees, the pale blue sky looking in between their spreading branches; at most they lose their way in the intricacies of some seaside pineta, where the feet slip on the fallen needles, and the sun slants along the vistas of serried, red, scaly trunks, among the juniper and gorse and dry grass and flowers growing in the sea

sand. Into the vast mediaeval forests of Germany and France, Boiardo and Ariosto's fancy never penetrated.

Such is the school: a school represented in its typical character only by Boiardo and Ariosto, but to which belong, nevertheless, with whatever differences, Tasso, Spenser, Camoens, all the poets of Renaissance romance. Now of the two leaders thereof. Here I feel that I can speak only personally; tell only of my own personal impressions and preferences. Comparing together Boiardo and Ariosto, I am, of course, aware of the infinite advantages of the latter. Ariosto is a man of far more varied genius; he is an artist, while Boiardo is an amateur; he is learned in arranging and ornamenting; he knows how to alternate various styles, how to begin and how to end. Moreover, he is a scholarly person of a more scholarly time: he is familiar with the classics, and, what is more important, he is familiar with the language in which he is writing. He writes exquisitely harmonious, supple, and brilliant Tuscan verse, with an infinite richness of diction; while poor Boiardo jogs along in a language which is not the Lombard dialect in which he speaks, and which is very uncouth and awkward, as is every pure language for a provincial; indeed, so much so, that the pedantic Tuscans require Berni to make Tuscan, elegant, to *ingentilire*, with infinite loss to quaintness and charm, the "Orlando Innamorato" of poor Ferrarese Boiardo. Moreover, Ariosto has many qualities unknown to Boiardo; wit, malice, stateliness, decided eloquence and power of simile and apostrophe; he is a symphony for full orchestra, and Boiardo a mere melody played on a single fiddle, which good authorities (and no one dare contest with Italians when they condemn anything not Tuscan as jargon) pronounce to be no Cremona. All these advantages Ariosto certainly has; and I do not quarrel with those who prefer him for them. But many of them distinctly take away from my pleasure. I confess that I am bored by the beautifully written moral and allegorical preludes of Ariosto's cantos; I would willingly give all his aphorism and all his mythology to get quickly to the story. Also, I resent his admirable rhetorical flourishes about his patrons, his Ercoles, Ippolitos, and Isabellas they ring false, dreadfully false and studied; and Boiardo's quickly despatched friendly greeting of his friends, his courteous knights and gentle ladies, pleases me much better. Moreover, the all-pervading consciousness of the existence of Homer, Virgil, nay, Statius and Lucan, every trumpery antique epic-monger, annoys me, giving an uncomfortable doubt as to whether Ariosto did not try to make all this nonsense serious, and this romance into an epic; all this occasional Virgilian stateliness, alternated with a kind of polished Decameronian gossipy cynicism, diverts my attention, turns paladins and princesses too much into tutor-educated gentlemen, into Bandello and Cinthio-reading ladies of the sixteenth century. The picture painted by Ariosto is finer, but you see too much of the painter; he and his patrons take up nearly the whole foreground, and they have affected, idealized faces and would-be dignified and senatorial poses. For these and many other reasons, I personally prefer Boiardo; and perhaps the best reason for my preference is the irrational one that he gives me more pleasure. My preferences, my impressions, I have said, are in this matter, much less critical than personal. Hence I can speak of Boiardo only as he affects me.

When first I read Boiardo, I was conscious of a curious phenomenon in myself. I must confess to reading books usually in a very ardent or rather weary manner, either way in a hurry to finish them. As it happened, when I borrowed Boiardo, I had a great many other things on hand which required my time and attention; yet I could not make up my mind to return the book until I had finished it, though my intention had been merely to satisfy my curiosity by a dip into it. I went on, without that eager desire to know what follows which one has in a novel; drowsily with absolute reluctance to leave off, like the reluctance to rise from the grass beneath the trees with only butterflies and shadows to watch, or the reluctance to put aside some fairy book of Walter Crane's. It was like strolling in some quaint, ill-trimmed, old garden, finding fresh flowers, fresh bits of lichened walls, fresh fragments of broken earthenware ornaments; or, rather, more like a morning in the Cathedral Library at Siena, the place where the gorgeous choir books are kept, itself illuminated like missal pages by Pinturicchio: amused, delighted, not moved nor fascinated; finding every moment something new, some charming piece of gilding, some sweet plumed head, some quaint little tree or town; making a journey of lazy discovery in a sort of world of Prince Charmings, the real realm of the "Faëry Queen," quite different in enchantment from the country of Spenser's Gloriana, with its pale allegoric ladies and knights, half-human, half-metaphysical, and its make-believe allegorical ogres and giants. This is the real Fairyland, this of Boiardo: no mere outskirts of Ferrara, with real, playfully cynical Ferrarese men and women tricked out as paladins and Amazons, and making fun of their disguise, as in Ariosto; no wonderland of Tasso, with enchanted gardens copied out of Bolognese pictures and miraculous forests learned from theatre mechanicians, wonders imitated by a great poet from the cardboard and firework wonders of Bianca Cappello's wedding feasts. This is the real fairyland, the wonderland of mediaeval romance and of Persian and Arabian tales, no longer solemn or awful, but brilliant, sunny, only half believed in; the fairyland of the Renaissance, superficially artistic, with its lightest, brightest fancies, and its charming realities; its cloistered and painted courts with plashing fountains, its tapestried and inlaid rooms, its towered and belvedered villas, its quaint clipped gardens full of strange Oriental plants and beasts; and all this transported into a country of wonders, where are the gardens of the Hesperides, the fountain of Merlin, the tomb of Narcissus, the castle of Morgan-le-Fay; every quaint and beautiful fancy, antique and mediaeval, mixed up together, as in some Renaissance picture of Botticelli or Rosselli or Filippino, where knights in armour descend from Pegasus before Roman temples, where swarthy white-turbaned Turks, with oddly bunched-up trousers and jewelled caftans, and half-naked, oak-crowned youths, like genii descended, pensive and wondering, from some antique sarcophagus, and dapper princelets and stalwart knights, and citizens and monks, all crowd round the altar of some

wonder-working Macone or Apolline or Trevigante; some comic, dreadful, apish figure, mummed up in half-antique, half-oriental garb. Or else we are led into some dainty, pale-tinted panel of Botticelli, where the maidens dance in white clinging clothes, strewing flowers on to the flower-freaked turf; or into some of Poliphilo's vignettes, where the gentle ladies, seated with lute and viol under vine-trellises, welcome the young gallant, or poet, or knight.

Such is the world of Boiardo. Spenser has once or twice peeped in, painted it, and given us exquisite little pictures, as that of Malecasta's castle, all hung with mythological tapestries, that of the enchanted chamber of Britomart, and those of Sir Calidore meeting the Graces and of Hellenore dancing with the Satyrs; but Spenser has done it rarely, trembling to return to his dreary allegories. Equal to these single pictures by Spenser, Boiardo has only one or two, but he keeps us permanently in the world where such pictures are painted. Boiardo is not a great artist like Spenser: but he is a wizard, which is better. He leads us, unceasingly, through the little dreamy laurelwoods, where we meet crisp-haired damsels tied to pine-trees, or terrible dragons, or enchanted wells, through whose translucent green waters we see brocaded rooms full of fair ladies; he ferries us ever and anon across shallow streams, to the castles where *gentil donzelle* wave their kerchiefs from the pillared belvedere; he slips us unseen into the camps and council-rooms of the splendidly trapped Saracens, like so many figures out of Filippino's frescoes; he conducts us across the bridges where giants stand warders, to the mysterious carved tombs whence issue green and crested snakes, who, kissed by a paladin, turn into lovely enchantresses; he takes us beneath the beds of rivers and through the bowels of the earth where kings and knights turned into statues of gold, sit round tables covered with jewels, illumined by carbuncles more wonderful than that of Jamschid; or through the mazes of fairy gardens, where every ear of corn, cut off, turns into a wild beast, and every fallen leaf into a bird, where hydras watch in the waters and lamias rear themselves in the grass, where Orlando must fill his helmet with roses lest he hear the voice of the sirens; where all the wonders of Antiquity—the snake-women, the Circes, the sirens, the hydras and fauns live, strangely changed into something infinitely quaint and graceful, still half-antique, yet already half-Arabian or Keltic, in the midst of the fairyland of Merlin and of Oberon—live, move, transform themselves afresh; where the golden-haired damsels and the stripling knights, delicate like Pinturicchio's Prince Charmings, gallop for ever on their enchanted coursers, within enchanted armour, invincible, invulnerable, under a sky always blue, and through an unceasing spring, ever onwards to new adventures. Adventures which the noble, gentle Castellan of Scandiano, poet and knight and humorist, philanthropical philosopher almost from sheer goodness of heart, yet a little crazy, and capable of setting all the church bells ringing in honour of the invention of the name of Rodomonte relates not to some dully ungrateful Alfonso or Ippolito, but to his own guests, his own brilliant knights and ladies, with ever and anon an effort to make them feel, through his verse, some of those joyous spring-tide feelings which bubble up in himself; as when he remembers how, "Once did I wander on a May morning in a fair flower-adorned field on a hillside overlooking the sea, which was all tremulous with light; and there, among the roses of a green thorn-brake, a damsel was singing of love; singing so sweetly that the sweetness still touches my heart; touches my heart, and makes me think of the greatdelight it was to listen;" and how he would fain repeat that song, and indeed an echo of its sweetness runs through his verse. Meanwhile, stanza pours out after stanza, adventure grows out of adventure, each more wonderful, more gorgeous than its predecessor. To which listen the ladies, with their white, girdled dresses and crimped golden locks; the youths, with their soft beardless faces framed in combed-out hair, with their daggers on their hips and their plumed hats between their fingers; and the serious bearded men, in silken robes; drawing nearer the poet, letting go lute or violin or music-book as they listen on the villa terrace or in some darkened room, where the sunset sky turns green-blue behind the pillared window, and the roses hang over the trellise of the cloister. And as they did four hundred years ago, so do we now, rejoice. The great stalwart naked forms of Greece no longer leap and wrestle or carry their well-poised baskets of washed linen before us; the mailed and vizored knights of the Nibelungen no longer clash their armour to the sound of Volker's red fiddle-bow; the glorified souls of Dante no longer move in mystic mazes of light before the eyes of our fancy. All that is gone. But here is the fairyland of the Renaissance. And thus Matteo Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, goes on, adding adventure to adventure, stanza to stanza, in his castle villa, or his palace at Ferrara. But suddenly he stops and his bright fiddle and lute music jars and ends: "While I am singing, O Redeeming God, I see all Italy set on fire by these Gauls, coming to ravage I know not what fresh place."

And thus, with the earlier and more hopeful Renaissance of the fifteenth century, Matteo Boiardo broke off with his "Orlando Innamorato." The perfect light-heartedness, the delight in play of a gentle, serious, eminently kindly nature, which gives half the charm to Boiardo's work, seems to have become impossible after the ruin of Italian liberty and prosperity the frightful showing up of Italy's moral and social and political insignificance at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Lombardy especially became a permanent battle-field, and its towns mere garrison places of French, German, Spanish, and Swiss barbarians, whose presence meant slaughter and pillage and every foulest outrage; and then, between the horrors of the unresisted invasions and the unresisted exactions, came plague and famine, and industry and commerce gradually died out. A few princes, subsidised and guarded by French or Imperialists, kept up an appearance of cheerfulness, but the courts even grew more gloomy as the people grew more miserable. There is more joking, more resonant laughter in Ariosto than in Boiardo, but there is very much less serenity and cheerfulness; ever and anon a sort of bitterness, a dreary moralizing tendency, a still more dreary fit of prophesying future good in which he has no belief, comes over Ariosto. Berni, who rewrote the "Orlando Innamorato" in choice Tuscan, and who underlined every faintly marked jest of Boiardo's, with evident preoccupation of the ludicrous effects of the "Morgante

Maggiore"—Berni even could not keep up his spirits; into the middle of Boiardo's serene fairyland adventures he inserted a description of the sack of Rome which is simply harrowing. All real cheerfulness departed from the people, to be replaced only by pleasure in the debaucheries of the buffoonish obscenity of Aretino, Bandello, and so forth, to which the men of the dying Italy of the Renaissance listened as the roysterers of the plague of Florence, with the mortal sickness almost upon them, may have listened to the filthy songs which they trolled out in their drunkenness. Or at best, the poor starved, bruised, battered, humiliated nation may have tried to be cheerful on the principle of its harlequin playwright Beolco, who, more honest than the Ariostos and Bibbienas, and Aretines, came forward on his stage of planks at Padua, and after describing the ruin and wretchedness of the country, the sense of dreariness and desolation, which made young folk careless of marriage, and the very nightingales (he thought) careless of song, recommended his audience, since they could not even cry thoroughly and to feel any the better for it, to laugh, if they still were able. Boiardo was forgotten; his spirit was unsuited to the depression, gloomy brutality, gloomy sentimentality, which grew every day as Italy settled down after its Renaissance-Shrovetide in the cinders and fasting of the long Lent of Spanish and Jesuit rule.

Still the style of Boiardo was not yet exhausted; the peculiar kind of fairy epic, the peculiar combination of chivalric and classic elements of which the "Orlando Innamorato" and the "Orlando Furioso," had been the great examples, still fascinated poets and public. The Renaissance, or what remained of it, was now no longer confined to Italy; it had spread, paler, more diluted, shallower, over the rest of Europe. To follow the filiation of schools, to understand the intellectual relationships of individuals, of the latter half of the sixteenth century, it becomes necessary to move from one country to another. And thus the two brother poets of the family of Boiardo, its two last and much saddened representatives, came to write in very different languages and under very different circumstances. These two are Tasso and our own Spenser. They are both poets of the school of the "Orlando Innamorato," both poets of a reaction, of a kind of purified Renaissance: the one of the late Italian Renaissance emasculated by the Council of Trent and by Spain; the other of the English Renaissance, in its youth truly, but, in the individual case of Spenser, timidly drawn aside from the excesses of buoyant life around. In the days of the semi-atheist dramatists, all flesh and blood and democracy, Spenser steeps himself in Christianity and chivalry, even as Tasso does, following on the fleshly levity and scepticism of Boiardo, Berni, and Ariosto. There is in both poets a paleness, a certain diaphanous weakness, an absence of strong tint or fibre or perfume; in Tasso the pallor of autumn, in Spenser the paleness of spring: autumn left sad and leafless by the too voluptuous heat and fruitfulness of summer; spring still pale and pinched by winter, with timid nipped grass and unripe stiff buds and catkins, which never suggest the tangle of bush, grasses, and magnificent flowers and fruits, sweet, splendid, or poisonous, which the sun will make out of them. The Renaissance, in the past for Tasso, in the proximate and very visible future for Spenser, has frightened both; the cynicism and bestiality of men like Machiavelli and Aretino; the godless, muscular lustiness of Marlowe, Greene, and Peele, seen in a glimpse by Tasso and Spenser, have given a shock to their sensitive nature, have made them turn away and hide themselves from a second sight of it. They both take refuge in a land of fiction, of romance, from the realities into which they dread to splash; a world unsubstantial, diaphanous, faint-hued, almost passionless, which they make out of beauty and heroism and purity, which they alembicize and refine, but into which there never enters any vital element, anything to give it flesh and bone and pulsing life: it is a mere soap bubble. And beautiful as is this world of their own making, it is too negative even for them; they move in it only in imagination, calm, serene, vacant, almost sad. There is in it, and in themselves, a something wanting; and the remembrance of that unholy life of reality which jostled and splashed their delicate souls, comes back and haunts them with its evil thought. There is no laugh—what is worse, no smile —in these men. Incipient puritanism, not yet the terrible brawny reality of Bunyan, but a vague, grey spectre, haunts Spenser; and the puritanism of Don Quixote, the vague, melancholy, fantastic reverting from the evil world of to-day to an impossible world of chivalry, is troubling the sight of Tasso. He cannot go crazy like Don Quixote, and instead he grows melancholy; he cannot believe in his own ideals; he cannot give them life, any more than can Spenser give life to his allegoric knights and ladies, because the life would have to be fetched by Tasso out of the flesh of Ariosto, and by Spenser out of the blood of Marlowe; and both Tasso and Spenser shrink at the thought of what might with it be inoculated or transfused; and they rest satisfied with phantoms. The phantoms of Spenser are more shadowy much more utterly devoid of human character; they are almost metaphysical abstractions, and they do not therefore sadden us: they are too unlike living things to seem very lifeless. But the phantoms of Tasso, he would fain make realities; he works at every detail of character, history, or geography, which may make his people real; they are not, as with Spenser, elves and wizards flitting about in a nameless fairyland, characterless and passionless; they are historical creatures, captains and soldiers in a country mapped out by the geographer; but they are phantoms all the more melancholy, these beautiful and heroic Clorindas and Erminias and Tancreds and Godfreys—why? because the real world around Tasso is peopled with Brachianos and Corombonas, and Annabellas and Giovannis, creatures for Webster and Ford; and because this world of chivalry is, in his Italy, as false as the world of Amadis and Esplandian in Toboso and Barcelona for poor Don Quixote. Melancholy therefore, and dreamy, both Tasso and Spenser, with nothing they can fully love in reality, because they see it tainted with reality and evil; without the cheerful falling back upon everyday life of Ariosto and Shakespeare, and with a strange fancy for fairyland, for the distant, for the Happy Islands, the St. Brandan's Isles, the country of the fountain of youth, the country of which vague reports have come back with the ships of Raleigh and Ponce de Leon. Tasso and Spenser are happiest, in their calm, melancholy way, when they can let themselves go

in day-dreams, and talk of things in which they do not believe, of diamond shields which stun monsters, of ointments which cure all ills of body and of soul of enchanted groves whose trees sound with voices, and lutes, of boats in which, steered by fairies, we can glide across the scarcely rippled summer sea, and watching the ruins of the past, time and reality left behind, set sail for some strange land of bliss. And there is in the very sensuousness and love of beauty-of these men a vagueness and melancholy, a constant: sense of the fleeting and of the eternal, as in that passage, translated from the languidly sweet Italian perfection of Tasso into the timid, almost scentless, English of Spenser—"Cosi trapassa al trapassar d'un giorno."

So passeth, in the passing of a day,
Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre

No more doth florish after first decay,
That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
Of many a lady, and many a Paramowre.
Gather therefore the Rose whilest yet is prime,
For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre;
Gather the Rose of love whitest yet is time,
Whitest loving thou mayest loved be withe equall crime.

A sense of evanescence, of dreamlikeness, quite different from the thoughtless enjoyment of Boiardo, from the bold and manly facing of the future, the solemn, strong sense of life and death as of waking realities, of the Elizabethan dramatists, even of weaklings like Massinger and Beaumont. In Tasso and in Spenser there is no such joyousness, no such solemnity; only a dreamy watching, a regret which is scarcely a regret, at the evanescence of pale beauty and pale life, of joys feebly felt and evils meekly borne.

With Tasso and Spenser comes to a close the school of Boiardo, the small number of real artists who finally gave an enduring and beautiful shape to that strangely mixed and altered material of romantic epic left behind by the Middle Ages; comes to an end at least till our own day of appreciative and deliberate imitation and selection and rearrangement of the artistic forms of the past. Until the revival (after much study and criticism) by our own poets of Arthur and Gudrun and the Fortunate Isles, the world had had enough of mediaeval romance. Chivalry had avowedly ended in chamberlainry; the devotion to women in the official routine of the *cicisbeo*; the last romance to which the late Renaissance had clung, which made it sympathize with Huon, Ogier, Orlando, and Rinaldo, which had made it take delight still in the fairyland of Oberon, of Fallerina, of Alcina, of Armida, of Acrasia, the romance of the new world, had also turned into prose, prose of blood-stained filth. The humanistic and rationalistic men of the Renaissance had doubtless early begun to turn up their noses in dainty dilettantism or scientific contempt, at what were later to be called by Montaigne, "Ces Lancelots du Lac, ces Amadis, ces Huons et tels fatras di livres à quoy l'enfance s'amuse;" and by Ben Jonson:

Public nothings,
Abortives of the fabulous dark cloister,
Sent out to poison courts, and infect manners—

the public at large was more constant, and still retained a love for mediaeval romance. But more than humanities, more than scientific scepticism and religious puritanism, did the slow dispelling of the illusion of Eldorado and the Fortunate Isles. Mankind set sail for America in brilliant and knightly gear, believing in fountains of youth and St. Brandan's Isles, with Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser still in its pockets. It returns from America either as the tattered fever-stricken ruffian, or as the vulgar, fat upstart of Spanish comedy, returns without honour or shame, holding money (and next to money, negroes) of greater account than any insignia of paladinship or the Round Table; it is brutal, vulgar, cynical; at best very sad, and it gets written for its delectation the comic-tragic novels of rapscallions, panders, prostitutes, and card-sharpers, which from "Lazarillo de Tormes" to "Gil Blas," and from "Gil Blas" to "Tom Jones," finall replace the romances of the Launcelots, Galahads, Rinaldos, and Orlandos.

Thus did the mediaeval romantic-epic stuffs suffer alteration, adulteration, and loss of character, throughout the long period of the Middle Ages, without ever receiving an artistic shape, such as should make all men preserve and cherish them for the only thing which makes men preserve and cherish such things—that never to be wasted quality, beauty. The Middle Ages were powerless to endow therewith their own subjects; so the subjects had to wait, altering more and more with every passing day, till the coming of the Renaissance. And by that time these subjects had ceased to have any serious meaning whatever; the Roland of the song of Roncevaux had become the crazy Orlando of Ariosto; the Renaud of "The Quatre Fils Aymon," had become the Rinaldo, thrashed with sheaves of lilies by Cupid, of Matteo Boiardo. The Renaissance took up the old epic-romantic materials and made out of them works of art; but works of art which, as I said before, were playthings gets written for its delectation the comic-tragic novels of rapscallions, panders, prostitutes, and card-sharpers, which, from "Lazarillo de Tormes" to "Gil Bias," and from "Gil Bias" to "Tom Jones," finally replace the romances of the Launcelots, Galahads, Rinaldos, and Orlandos.

MEDIEVAL LOVE.

On laying down the "Vita Nuova" our soul is at first filled and resounding with the love of Beatrice. Whatever habits or capacities of noble loving may lurk within ourselves, have been awakened by the solemn music of this book, and have sung in unison with Dante's love till we have ceased to hear the voice of his passion and have heard only the voice of our own. When the excitement has diminished, when we have grown able to separate from our own feelings the feelings of the man dead these five centuries and a half, and to realize the strangeness, the obsoleteness of this love which for a moment had seemed our love; then a new phase of impressions has set in, and the "Vita Nuova" inspires us with mere passionate awe: awe before this passion which we feel to be no longer our own, but far above and distant from us, as in some rarer stratum of atmosphere; awe before this woman who creates it, or rather who is its creation. Even as Dante fancied that the people of Florence did when the bodily presence of this lady came across their path, so do we cast down our glance as the image of Beatrice passes across our mind. Nay, the glory of her, felt so really while reading the few, meagre words in the book, is stored away in our heart, and clothes with a faint aureole the lady—if ever in our life we chance to meet her—in whom, though Dante tells us nothing of stature, features, eyes or hair, we seem to recognize a likeness to her on whose passage "ogni lingua divien tremando muta, e gli occhi non ardiscon di guardare." Passion like this, to paraphrase a line of Rossetti's, is genius; and it arouses in such as look upon it the peculiar sense of wonder and love, of awe-stricken raising up of him who contemplates, which accompanies the contemplation of genius.

But it may be that one day we feel, instead of this, wonder indeed, but wonder mingled with doubt. This ideal love, which craves for no union with its object; which seeks merely to see, nay, which is satisfied with mere thinking on the beloved one, will strike us with the cold and barren glitter of the miraculous. This Beatrice, as we gaze on her, will prove to be no reality of flesh and blood like ourselves; she is a form modelled in the semblance of that real, living woman who died six centuries ago, but the substance of which is the white fire of Dante's love. And the thought will arise that this purely intellectual love of a scarce-noticed youth for a scarce-known woman is a thing which does not belong to life, neither sweetening nor ennobling any of its real relations; that it is, in its dazzling purity and whiteness, in fact a mere strange and sterile death light, such as could not and should not, in this world of ours, exist twice over. And, lest we should ever be tempted to think of this ideal love for Beatrice as of a wonderful and beautiful, but scarcely natural or useful phenomenon, I would wish to study the story of its origin and its influence. I would wish to show that had it not burned thus strangely concentrated and pure, the poets of succeeding ages could not have taken from that white flame of love which Dante set alight upon the grave of Beatrice, the spark of ideal passion which has, in the noblest of our literature, made the desire of man for woman and of woman for man burn clear towards heaven, leaving behind the noisome ashes and soul-enervating vapours of earthly lust

I.

The centuries have made us; forcing us into new practices, teaching us new habits, creating for us new capacities and wants; adding, ever and anon, to the soul organism of mankind features which at first were but accidental peculiarities, which became little by little qualities deliberately sought for and at lengths inborn and hereditary characteristics. And thus, in, what we call the Middle Ages, there was invented by the stress of circumstances, elaborated by half-consciuos effort and bequeathed as an unalienable habit, a new manner of loving.

The women of classical Antiquity appear to us in poetry and imaginative literature as one of two things: the wife or the mistress. The wife, Penelope, Andromache, Alkestis, nay, even the charming young bride in Xenophon's "Oeconomics," is, while excluded from many concerns, distinctly reverenced and loved in her own household capacity; but the reverence is of the sort which the man feels for his parents and his household gods, and the affection is calm and gently rebuking like that for his children. The mistress, on the other hand, is the object of passion which is often very vehement, but which is always either simply fleshly or merely fancifully aesthetic or both, and which entirely precludes any save a degrading influence upon the sensual and suspicious lover. Even Tibullus, in love matters one of the most modern among the ancients, and capable of painting many charming and delicate little domestic idyls even in connection with a mere bought mistress, is perpetually accusing his Delia of selling herself to a higher bidder, and sighing at the high probability of her abandoning him for the Illyrian praetor or some other rich amateur of pretty women. The barbarous North—whose songs have come down to us either, like the Volsunga Saga translated by Mr. Morris, in an original pagan version, or else, as the Nibelungenlied, recast during the early Middle Ages—the North tells us nothing of the venal paramour, but knows nothing also beyond the wedded wife; more independent and mighty perhaps than her counterpart of classical Antiquity, but although often bought, like Brynhilt or Gudrun, at the expense of tremendous adventures, cherished scarcely more passionately than the wives of Odysseus and Hector. Thus, before the Middle Ages, there existed as a rule only a holy, but indifferent and utterly unlyrical, love for the women, the equals of their husbands, wooed usually of the family and solemnly given in marriage without much consultation of their wishes; and a highly passionate and singing, but completely profligate and debasing, desire for mercenary though cultivated creatures like the Delias and Cynthlas of Tibullus and Propertius, or highborn women, descended, like Catullus' Lesbia, in brazen dishonour to their level, women towards whom there could not possibly exist on the part of their lovers any sense of equality, much less of inferiority. To these two kinds of love, chaste but cold, and passionate but unchaste, the Middle Ages added, or rather opposed, a new manner of loving, which, although a mere passing phenomenon, has left the clearest traces throughout our whole mode of feeling and

writing.

To describe mediaeval love is a difficult matter, and to describe it except in negations is next to impossibility. I conceive it to consist in a certain sentimental, romantic, idealistic attitude towards women, not by any means incompatible however with the grossest animalism; an attitude presupposing a complete moral, aesthetical, and social superiority on the part of the whole sex, inspiring the very highest respect and admiration independently of the individual's qualities; and reaching the point of actual worship, varying from the adoration of a queen by a courtier to the adoration of a shrine by a pilgrim, in the case of the one particular lady who happens to be the beloved; an attitude in the relations of the sexes which results in love becoming an indispensable part of a noble life, and the devoted attachment to one individual woman, a necessary requisite of a gentlemanly training.

Mediaeval love is not merely a passion, a desire, an affection, a habit; it is a perfect occupation. It absorbs, or is supposed to absorb, the Individual; it permeates his life like a religion. It is not one of the interests of life, or, rather, one of life's phases; it is the whole of life, all other interests and actions either sinking into an unsingable region below it, or merely embroidering a variegated pattern upon its golden background. Mediaeval love, therefore, never obtains its object, however much it may obtain the woman; for the object of mediaeval love, as of mediaeval religious mysticism, is not one particular act or series of acts, but is its own exercise, of which the various incidents of the drama between man and woman are merely so many results. It has not its definite stages, like the love of the men of classical Antiquity or the heroic time of the North: its stages of seeking, obtaining, cherishing, guarding; it is always at the same point, always in the same condition of half-religious, half-courtier-like adoration, whether it be triumphantly successful or sighingly despairing. The man and the woman—or rather, I should say, the knight and the lady, for mediaeval love is an aristocratic privilege, and the love of lower folk is not a theme for song—the knight and the lady, therefore, seem always, however knit together by habit, nay, by inextricable meshes of guilt, somehow at the same distance from one another. Once they have seen and loved each other, their passion burns on always evenly, burns on (at least theoretically) to all eternity. It seems almost as if the woman were a mere shrine, a mysterious receptacle of the ineffable, a grail cup, a consecrated wafer, but not the ineffable itself. For there is always in mediaeval love, however fleshly the incidents which it produces, a certain Platonic element; that is to say, a craving for, a pursuit of, something which is an abstraction; an abstraction impossible to define in its constant shifting and shimmering, and which seems at one moment a social standard, a religious ideal, or both, and which merges for ever in the dazzling, vague sheen of the Eternal Feminine. Hence, one of the most distinctive features of mediaeval love, an extraordinary sameness of intonation, making it difficult to distinguish between the *bonâ fide* passion for which a man risks life and honour, and the mere conventional gallantry of the knight who sticks a lady's glove on his helmet as a compliment to her rank; nay, between the impure adoration of an adulterous lamia like Yseult, and the mystical adoration of a glorified Mother of God; for both are women, both are ladies, and therefore the greatest poet of the early Middle Ages, Gottfried von Strassburg, sings them both with the same religious respect, and the same hysterical rapture. This mediaeval love is furthermore a deliberately expected, sought-for, and received necessity in a man's life; it is not an accident, much less an incidental occurrence to be lightly taken or possibly avoided: it is absolutely indispensable to man's social training, to his moral and aesthetical self-improvement; it is part and parcel of manhood and knighthood. Hence, where it does not arise of itself (and where a man is full of the notion of such love, it is rare that it does not come) but too soon it has to be sought for. Ulrich von Liechtenstein, in his curious autobiography written late in the twelfth century, relates how ever since his childhood he had been aware of the necessity of the loyal love service of a lady for the accomplishment of knightly duties; and how, as soon as he was old enough to love, he looked around him for a lady whom he might serve; a proceeding renewed in more prosaic days and with a curious pedantic smack, by Lorenzo dei Medici; and then again, perhaps for the last time, by the Knight of La Mancha, in that memorable discussion which ended in the enthronement as his heart's queen of the unrivalled Dulcinea of Toboso. *Frowendienst,* "lady's service," is the name given by Ulrich von Liechtenstein, a mediaeval Quixote, outshining by far the mad Provençals Rudel and Vidal, to the memoirs very delightfully done into modern German by Ludwig Tieck; and "lady's service" is the highest occupation of knightly leisure, the subject of the immense bulk of mediaeval poetry. "Lady's service" in deeds of arms and song, in constant praise and defence of the beloved, in heroic enterprise and madcap mummery, in submission and terror to the wondrous creature whom the humble servant, the lover, never calls by her sacred name, speaking of her in words unknown to Antiquity, *dompna, dame, frowe, madonna*—words of which the original sense has almost been forgotten, although there cleave to them even now ideas higher than those associated with the *puella* of the ancients, the *wib* of the heroic days—lady, mistress—the titles of the Mother of God, who is, after all, only the mystical Soul's Paramour of the mediaeval world. "Lady's service"—the almost technical word, expressing the position, half-serf-like, half-religious, the bonds of complete humility and never-ending faithfulness, the hopes of reward, the patience under displeasure, the pride in the livery of servitude, the utter absorption of the life of one individual in the life of another; which constitute in Provence, in France, in Germany, in England, in Italy, in the fabulous kingdoms of Arthur and Charlemagne, the strange new thing which I have named Mediaeval Love.

Has such a thing really existed? Are not these mediaeval poets leagued together in a huge conspiracy to deceive us? Is it possible that strong men have wept and fainted at a mere woman's name, like the Count of Nevers in "Flamenca," or that their mind has swooned away in months of reverie like that of Parzifal in Eschenbach's poem; that worldly wise and witty men have shipped

off and died on sea for love of an unseen woman like Jaufre Rudel; or dressed in wolf's hide and lurked and fled before the huntsmen like Peire Vidal; or mangled their face and cut off their finger, and, clothing themselves in rags more frightful than Nessus' robe, mixed in the untouchable band of lepers like Ulrich von Liechtenstein? Is it possible to believe that the insane enterprises of the Amadises, Lisvarts and Felixmartes of late mediaeval romance, that the behaviour of Don Quixote in the Sierra Morena, ever had any serious models in reality? Nay, more difficult still to believe—because the whole madness of individuals is more credible than the half-madness of the whole world—is it possible to believe that, as the poems of innumerable trouvères and troubadours, minnesingers and Italian poets, as the legion of mediaeval romances of the cycles of Charlemagne, Arthur, and Amadis would have it, that during so long a period of time society could have been enthralled by this hysterical, visionary, artificial, incredible religion of mediaeval love? It is at once too grotesque and too beautiful, too high and too low, to be credible; and our first impulse, on closing the catechisms and breviaries, the legendaries and hymn-books of this strange new creed, is to protest that the love poems must be allegories, the love romances solar myths, the Courts of Love historical bungles; that all this mediaeval world of love is a figment, a misinterpretation, a falsehood.

But if we seek more than a mere casual impression; if, instead of feeling sceptical over one or two fragments of evidence, we attempt to collect the largest possible number of facts together; if we read not one mediaeval love story, but twenty—not half a dozen mediaeval love poems, but several scores; if we really investigate into the origin of the apparent myth, the case speedily alters. Little by little this which had been inconceivable becomes not merely intelligible, but inevitable; the myth becomes an historical phenomenon of the most obvious and necessary sort. Mediaeval love, which had seemed to us a poetic fiction, is turned into a reality; and a reality, alas, which is prosaic. Let us look at it.

Mediaeval love is first revealed in the sudden and almost simultaneous burst of song which, like the twitter and trill so dear to trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers, fills the woods that yesterday were silent and dead, and greeted the earliest sunshine, the earliest faint green after the long winter numbness of the dark ages, after the boisterous gales of the earliest Crusade. The French and Provençals sang first, the Germans later, the Sicilians last; but although we may say after deliberate analysis, such or such a form, or such or such a story, was known in this country before it appeared in that one, such imitation or suggestion was so rapid that with regard to the French, the Provençals, and the Germans at least, the impression is simultaneous; only the Sicilians beginning distinctly later, forerunners of the new love lyric, wholly different from that of trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers, of the Italians of the latter thirteenth century. And this simultaneous revelation of mediaeval love takes place in the last quarter of the twelfth century, when Northern France had already consolidated into a powerful monarchy, and Paris, after the teachings of Abélard, was recognized as the intellectual metropolis of Europe; when south of the Loire the brilliant Angevine kings held the overlordship of the cultured Raymonds of Toulouse and of the reviving Latin municipalities of Provence \ when Germany was welded as a compact feudal mass by the most powerful of the Stauffens; and the papacy had been built up by Gregory and Alexander into a political wall against which Frederick and Henry vainly battered; when the Italian commonwealths grew slowly but surely, as yet still far from guessing that the day would come when their democracy should produce a new civilization to supersede this triumphant mediaeval civilization of the early Capetiens, the Angevines, and the Hohenstauffens. Europe was setting forth once more for the East; but no longer as the ignorant and enthusiastic hordes of Peter the Hermit: Asia was the great field for adventure, the great teacher of new luxuries, at once the Eldorado and the grand tour of all the brilliant and inquisitive and unscrupulous chivalry of the day. And, while into the West were insidiously entering habits and modes of thought of the East; throughout Germany and Provence, and throughout the still obscure free burghs of Italy, was spreading the first indication of that emotional mysticism which, twenty or thirty years later, was to burst out in the frenzy of spiritual love of St. Francis and his followers. The moment is one of the most remarkable in all history: the premature promise in the twelfth century of that intellectual revival which was delayed throughout Northern Europe until the sixteenth. It is the moment when society settled down, after the anarchy of eight hundred years, on its feudal basis; a basis fallaciously solid, and in whose presence no one might guess that the true and definitive Renaissance would arise out of the democratic civilization of Italy.

Such is the moment when we first hear the almost universal song of mediaeval love. This song comes from the triumphantly reorganized portion of society, not from the part which is slowly working its way to reorganization; not from the timidly encroaching burghers, but from the nobles. The reign of town poetry, of fabliaux and meistersang, comes later; the poets of the early Middle Ages, trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers are, with barely one or two exceptions, all knights. And their song comes from the castle. Now, in order to understand mediaeval love, we must reflect for a moment upon this feudal castle, and upon the kind of life which the love poets of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century—whether lords like Bertram de Born, and Guillaume de Poitiers, among the troubadours; the Vidame de Chartres, Meurisses de Craon, and the Duke of Brabant among the trouvères of Northern France; like Ulrich von Liechtenstein among the minnesingers; or retainers and hangers-on like Bernard de Ventadour and Armand de Mareulh, like Chrestiens de Troyes, Gaisses Brulez, or Quienes de Béthune, like Walther, Wolfram, and Tannhäuser—great or small, good or bad, saw before them and mixed with in that castle. The castle of a great feudatory of the early Middle Ages, whether north or south of the Loire, in Austria or in Franconia, is like a miniature copy of some garrison town in barbarous countries: there is an enormous numerical preponderance of men over women; for only the chiefs

in command, the overlord, and perhaps one or two of his principal kinsmen or adjutants, are permitted the luxury of a wife; the rest of the gentlemen are subalterns, younger sons without means, youths sent to learn their military duty and the ways of the world: a whole pack of men without wives, without homes, and usually without fortune. High above all this deferential male crowd, moves the lady of the castle: highborn, proud, having brought her husband a dower of fiefs often equal to his own, and of vassals devoted to her race. About her she has no equals; her daughters, scarcely out of the nurse's hands, are given away in marriage; and her companions, if companions they may be called, are the waiting ladies, poor gentlewomen situated between the maid of honour and the ladies' maid, like that Brangwaine whom Yseult sacrifices to her intrigue with Tristram, or those damsels whom Flamenca gives over to the squires of her lover Guillems; at best, the wife of one of her husband's subalterns, or some sister or aunt or widow kept by charity. Round this lady—the stately, proud lady perpetually described by mediaeval poets—flutters the swarm of young men, all day long, in her path: serving her at meals, guarding her apartments, nay, as pages, admitted even into her most secret chamber; meeting her for ever in the narrowness of that castle life, where every unnecessary woman is a burden usurping the place of a soldier, and, if possible, replaced by a man. Servants, lacqueys, and enjoying the privileges of ubiquity of lacqueys, yet, at the same time, men of good birth and high breeding, good at the sword and at the lute; bound to amuse this highborn woman, fading away in the monotony of feudal life, with few books to read or unable to read them, and far above all the household concerns which devolve on the butler, the cellarer, the steward, the gentleman, honourably employed as a servant. To them, to these young men, with few or no young women of their own age to associate, and absolutely no unmarried girls who could be a desirable match, the lady of the castle speedily becomes a goddess, the impersonation at once of that feudal superiority before which they bow, of that social perfection which they are commanded to seek, and of that womankind of which the castle affords so few examples. To please her, this lazy, bored, highbred woman, with all the squeamishness and caprice of high birth and laziness about her, becomes their ideal; to be favourably noticed, their highest glory; to be loved, these wretched mortals, by this divinity—that thought must often pass through their brain and terrify them with its delicious audacity; oh no, such a thing is not possible. But it is. The lady at first, perhaps most often, singles out as a pastime some young knight, some squire, some page; and, in a half-queenly, half-motherly way, corrects, rebukes his deficiencies, undertakes to teach him his duty as a servant. The romance of the "Petit Jehan de Saintré," written in the fifteenth century, but telling, with a delicacy of cynicism worthy of Balzac, what must have been the old, old story of the whole feudal Middle Ages, shows the manner in which, while feeling that he is being trained to knightly courtesy and honour, the young man in the service of a great feudal lady is gradually taught dissimulation, lying, intrigue; is initiated by the woman who looms above him like a saint into all the foulness of adultery. Adultery; a very ugly word, which must strike almost like a handful of mud in the face whosoever has approached this subject of mediaeval love in admiration of its strange delicacy and enthusiasm. Yet it is a word which must be spoken, for in it is the explanation of the whole origin and character of this passion which burst into song in the early Middle Ages. This almost religious love, this love which conceives no higher honour than the service of the beloved, no higher virtue than eternal fidelity—this love is the love for another man's wife. Between unmarried young men and young women, kept carefully apart by the system which gives away a girl without her consent and only to a rich suitor, there is no possibility of love in these early feudal courts; the amours, however licentious, between kings' daughters and brave knights, of the Carolingian tales, belong to a different rank of society, to the prose romances made up in the fourteenth century for the burgesses of cities; the intrigues, ending in marriage, of the princes and princesses of the cycle of Amadis, belong to a different period, to the fifteenth century, and to courts where feudal society scarcely exists; the squires, the young knights who hang about a great baronial establishment of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have still to make their fortune, and do not dream of marriage. The husband, on the other hand, the great lord or successful knightly adventurer, married late in life, and married from the necessity, for ever pressing upon the feudal proprietor, of adding on new fiefs and new immunities, of increasing his importance and independence in proportion to the hourly increasing strength and claims of the overlord, the king, who casts covetous eyes upon him—the husband has not married for love; he has had his love affairs with the wives of other men in his day, or may still have them; this lady is a mere feudal necessity, she is required to give him a dower and give him an heir, that is all. If the husband does not love, how much less can the wife; married, as she is, scarce knowing what marriage is, to a man much older than herself, whom most probably she has never seen, to whom she is a mere investment. Nay, there is not even the after-marriage love of the ancients: this wife is not the housekeeper, the woman who works that the man's house may be rich and decorous; not even the nurse of his children, for the children are speedily given over to the squires and duennas; she is the woman of another family who has come into his, the stranger who must be respected (as that most typical mediaeval wife, Eleanor of Guienne, was respected by her husbands) on account of her fiefs, her vassals, her kinsfolk; but who cannot be loved. Can there be love between man and wife? There cannot be love between man and wife. This is no answer of mine, fantastically deduced from mediaeval poetry. It is the answer solemnly made to the solemnly asked question by the Court of Love held by the Countess of Champagne in 1174, and registered by Master Andrew the King of France's chaplain: "Dicimus enim et stabilito tenore firmamus amorem non posse inter duos jugales suas extendere vires." And the reason alleged for this judgment brings us back to the whole conception of mediaeval love as a respectful service humbly waiting for a reward: "For," pursues the decision published by André le Chapelain, "whereas lovers grant to each other favours freely and from no legal necessity, married people have the duty of obeying each other's wishes and of refusing nothing to one another." "No love is possible between man and wife," repeat the Courts of Love which,

consisting of all the highborn ladies of the province and presided by some mighty queen or princess, represent the social opinions of the day. "But this lady," says a knight (Miles) before the love tribunal of Queen Eleanor, "promised to me that if ever she should lose the love of her lover, she would take me in his place. She has wedded the man who was her lover, and I have come to claim fulfilment of her promise." The court discusses for awhile. "We cannot," answers Queen Eleanor, "go against the Countess of Champagne's decision that love cannot exist between man and wife. We therefore desire this lady to fulfil her promise and give you her love." Again, there come to the Court of Love of the Viscountess of Narbonne a knight and a lady, who desire to know whether, having been once married, but since divorced, a love engagement between them would be honourable. The viscountess decides that "Love between those who have been married together, but who have since been divorced from one another, is not to be deemed reprehensible; nay, that it is to be considered as honourable." And these Courts of Love, be it remarked, were frequently held on occasion of the marriage of great personages; as, for instance, of that between Louis VII. and Eleanor of Poitiers in 1137. The poetry of the early Middle Ages follows implicitly the decisions of these tribunals, which reveal a state of society to which the nearest modern approach is that of Italy in the eighteenth century, when, as Goldoni and Parini show us, as Stendhal (whose "De l'Amour" may be taken as the modern "Breviari d'Amor") expounds, there was no impropriety possible as long as a lady was beloved by any one except her own husband. No love, therefore, between unmarried people (the cyclical romances, as before stated, and the Amadises, belong to another time of social condition, and the only real exception to my rule of which I can think is the lovely French tale of "Aucassin et Nicolette"); and no love between man and wife. But love there must be; and love there consequently is; love for the married woman from the man who is not her husband. The feudal lady, married without being consulted and without having had a chance of knowing what love is, yet lives to know love; lives to be taught it by one of these many bachelors bound to flutter about her in military service or social duty; lives to teach it herself. And she is too powerful in her fiefs and kinsmen, too powerful in the public opinion which approves and supports her, to be hampered by her husband. The husband, indeed, has grown up in the same habits, has known, before marrying, the customs sanctioned by the Courts of Love; he has been the knight of some other man's wife in his day, what right has he to object? As in the days of Italian *cecisbei*, the early mediaeval lover might say with Goldoni's Don Alfonso or Don Roberto, "I *serve* your wife—such or such another serves mine, what harm can there be in it?" ("Io servo vostra moglie, Don Eugenio favorisce la mia; che male c' è?" I am quoting from memory.) And as a fact, we hear little of jealousy; the amusement of En Barral when Peire Vidal came in and kissed his sleeping wife; and the indignation of all Provence for the murder of Guillems de Cabestanh (buried in the same tomb with the lady who had been made to eat of his heart)—showing from opposite sides how the society accustomed to Courts of Love looked upon the duties of husbands.

Such was the social life in those feudal courts whence first arises the song of mediaeval love, and that this is the case is proved by the whole huge body of early mediaeval poetry. We must not judge, as I have said, either by poems of much earlier date, like the Nibelungen and the Carolingian *chansons de geste*, which merely received a new form in the early Middle Ages; still less from the prose romances of Mélusine, Milles et Amys, Palemon and Arcite, and a host of others which were elaborated only later and under the influence of the quite unfeudal habits of the great cities; and least of all from that strange late southern cycle of the Amadises, from which, odd as it seems, many of our notions of chivalric love have, through our ancestors, through the satirists or burlesque poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, been inherited. We must look at the tales which, as we are constantly being told by trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers, were the fashionable reading of the feudal classes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the tales best known to us in the colourless respectability of the collection made in the reign of Edward IV. by Sir Thomas Malory, and called by him the "Morte d'Arthur"—of the ladies and knights of Arthur's court; of the quest of the Grail by spotless knights who were bastards and fathers of bastards; of the intrigues of Tristram of Lyoness and Queen Yseult; of Launcelot and Guenevere; the tales which Francesca and Paolo read together. We must look, above all, at the lyric poetry of France, Provence, Germany, and Sicily in the early Middle Ages.

> Vos qui très bien ameis i petit mentendeis
> Por l'amor de Ihesu les pucelles ameis.
> Nos trouvons en escris de sainte auctoriteis
> Ke pucelle est la fleur de loyaulment ameir.

This strange entreaty to love the maidens for the sake of Christ's love, this protest of a nameless northern French poet (Wackernagel, Altfranzösische Lieder and Leiche IX.) against the adulterous passion of his contemporaries, comes to us, pathetically enough, solitary, faint, unnoticed in the vast chorus, boundless like the spring song of birds or the sound of the waves, of poets singing the love of other men's wives. But, it may be objected—how can we tell that these love songs, so carefully avoiding all mention of names, are not addressed to the desired bride, to the legitimate wife of the poet? For several reasons; and mainly, for the crushing evidence of an undefinable something which tells us that they are not. The other reasons are easily stated. We know that feudal habits would never have allowed to unmarried women (and women were married when scarcely out of their childhood) the opportunities for the relations which obviously exist between the poet and his lady; and that, if by some accident a young knight might fall in love with a girl, he would address not her but her parents, since the Middle Ages, who were indifferent to adultery, were, like the southern nations among whom the married woman is not expected to be virtuous, extreme sticklers for the purity of their unmarried womankind. Further,

we have no instance of an unmarried woman being ever addressed during the early Middle Ages, in those terms of social respect—*madame, domna, frowe, madonna*—which essentially belong to the mistress of a household; nor do these stately names fit in with any theory which would make us believe that the lady addressed by the poet is the jealously guarded daughter of the house with whom he is plotting a secret marriage, or an elopement to end off in marriage. This is not the way that Romeo speaks to Juliet, nor even that the princesses in the cyclical romances and in the Amadises are wooed by their bridegrooms. This is not the language of a lover who is broaching his love, and who hopes, however timidly, to consummate it before all the world by marriage. It is obviously the language of a man either towards a woman who is taking a pleasure in keeping him dangling without favours which she has implicitly or explicitly promised; or towards a woman who is momentarily withholding favours which her lover has habitually enjoyed. And in a large proportion of cases the poems of trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers are the expression of fortunate love, the fond recollection or eager expectation of meetings with the beloved. All this can evidently not be connected with the wooing, however stealthy, however Romeo-and-Juliet-like of a bride; still less can it be explained in reference to love within wedlock. A man does not, however loving, worship his wife as his social superior; he does not address her in titles of stiff respect; he does not sigh and weep and supplicate for love which is his due, and remind his wife that she owes it him in return for loyal, humble, discreet service. Above all, a man (except in some absurd comedy perhaps, where the husband, in an age of *cicisbeos*, is in love with his own wife and dares not admit it before the society which holds "that there can be no love between married folk ")—a husband, I repeat, does not beg for, arrange, look forward to, and recall with triumph or sadness, secret meetings with his own wife. Now the secret meeting is, in nearly every aristocratic poet of the early poetry, the inevitable result of the humble praises and humble requests for kindness; it is, most obviously, *the* reward for which the poet is always importuning. Mediaeval love poetry, compared with the love poetry of Antiquity and the love poetry of the revival of letters, is, in its lyric form, decidedly chaste; but it is perfectly explicit; and, for all its metaphysical tendencies and its absence of clearly painted pictures, the furthest possible removed from being Platonic. One of the most important, characteristic, and artistically charming categories of mediaeval love lyrics is that comprising the Provençal *serena* and *alba,* with their counterparts in the *langue d'oil*, and the so-called *Wachtlieder* of the minnesingers; and this category of love poetry may be defined as the drama, in four acts, of illicit love. The faithful lover has received from his lady an answer to his love, the place and hour are appointed; all the day of which the evening is to bring him this honour, he goes heavy hearted and sighing: "Day, much do you grow for my grief, and the evening, the evening and the long hope kills me." Thus far the *serena*, the evening song, of Guiraut Riquier. A lovely anonymous *alba,* whose refrain, "Oi deus, oi deus; de l' alba, tan tost ve!" is familiar to every smatterer of Provençal, shows us the lady and her knight in an orchard beneath the hawthorn, giving and taking the last kisses while the birds sing and the sky whitens with dawn. "The lady is gracious and pleasant, and many look upon her for her beauty, and her heart Is all in loving loyally; alas, alas, the dawn! how soon it: comes!—" "Oi deus, oi deus; de l'alba, tan tost ve!" The real *alba* is the same as the German *Wachtlieder,* the song of the squire or friend posted at the garden gate or outside the castle wall, warning the lovers to separate. "Fair comrade (Bel Companho), I call to you singing. 'Sleep no more, for I hear the birds announcing the day in the trees, and I fear that the jealous one may find you;' and in a moment it will, be day, 'Bel Companho, come to the window and look at the signs in the sky! you will know me a faithful messenger; if you do it not, it will be to your harm" and in a moment it will be dawn (et ades sera 1' alba)... Bel Companho, since I left you I have not slept nor raised myself from my knees; for I have prayed to God the Son of Saint Mary, that he should send me: back my faithful comrade, and in a moment it will be dawn In this *alba* of Guiraut de Borneulh, the lover comes at last to the window, and cries to his. watching comrade that he is too happy to care either for the dawn or for the jealous one. The German *Wachtlieder* are even more explicit. "He must away at once and without delay," sings the watchman in a poem of Wolfram, the austere singer of Parzifal and the Grail Quest; "let him go, sweet lady; let him away from thy love so that he keep his honour and life. He trusted himself to me that I should bring him safely hence; it is day ..." "Sing what thou wilt, watchman," answers the lady, "but leave him here." In a far superior, but also far less chaste poem of Heinrich von Morungen, the lady, alone and melancholy, wakes up remembering the sad white light of morning, the sad cry of the watchman, which separated her from her knight. Still more frankly, and in a poem which is one of the few real masterpieces of Minnesang, the lady in Walther von der Vogelweide's "Under der linden an der Heide" narrates a meeting in the wood. "What passed between us shall never be known by any! never by any, save him and me—yes, and by the little nightingale that sang *Tandaradei*! The little bird will surely be discreet."

The songs of light love for another's wife of troubadour, trouvère, and minnesinger, seem to have been squeezed together, so that all their sweet and acrid perfume is, so to speak, sublimated, in the recently discovered early Provençal narrative poem called "Flamenca." Like the "Tristram" of Gottfried von Strassburg, like all these light mediaeval love *lyrics,* of which I have been speaking, the rhymed story of "Flamenca," a pale and simple, but perfect petalled daisy, has come up in a sort of moral and intellectual dell in the winter of the Middle Ages—a dell such as you meet in hollows of even the most wind-swept southern hills, where, while all round the earth is frozen and the short grass nibbled away by the frost, may be found even at Christmas a bright sheen of budding wheat beneath the olives on the slope, a yellow haze of sun upon the grass in which the little aromatic shoots of fennel and mint and marigold pattern with greenness the sere brown, the frost-burnt; where the very leafless fruit trees have a spring-like rosy tinge against the blue sky, and the tufted little osiers flame a joyous orange against the greenness of the hill.

Such spots there are—and many—in the winter of the Middle Ages; though it is not in them, but where the rain beats, and the snow and the wind tugs, that grow, struggling with bitterness, the great things of the day: the philosophy of Abélard, the love of man of St. Francis, the patriotism of the Lombard communes; nor that lie dormant, fertilized in the cold earth, the great things of art and thought, the great things to come. But in them arise the delicate winter flowers which we prize: tender, pale things, without much life, things either come too soon or stayed too late, among which is "Flamenca;" one of those roses, nipped and wrinkled, but stained a brighter red by the frost, which we pluck in December or in March; beautiful, bright, scentless roses, which, scarce in bud, already fall to pieces in our hand. "Flamenca" is simply the narrative of the loves of the beautiful wife of the bearish and jealous Count Archambautz, and of Guillems de Nevers, a brilliant young knight who hears of the lady's sore captivity, is enamoured before he sees her, dresses up as the priest's clerk, and speaks one word with her while presenting the mass book to be kissed, every holiday; and finally deceives the vigilance of the husband by means of a subterranean corridor, which he gets built between his inn and the bath-room of the lady at the famous waters of Bourbon—les—Bains. In this world of "Flamenca," which is in truth the same world as that of the "Romaunt of the Rose," the "Morte d'Arthur," and of the love poets of early France and Germany, conjugal morality and responsibility simply do not exist. It seems an unreal pleasure-garden, with a shadowy guardian—impalpable to us gross moderns—called Honour, but where, as it seems, Love only reigns. Love, not the mystic and melancholy god of the "Vita Nuova," but a foppish young deity, sentimental at once and sensual, of fashionable feudal life: the god of people with no apparent duties towards others, unconscious of any restraints save those of this vague thing called honour; whose highest mission for the knight, as put in our English "Romaunt of the Rose" is to—

> Set thy might and alle thy witte
> Wymmen and ladies for to plese,
> And to do thyng that may hem ese;

while, for the lady, it is expressed with perfect simplicity of shamelessness by Flamenca herself to her damsels, teaching them that the woman must yield to the pleasure of her lover. Now love, when young, when, so to speak, but just born and able to feed (as a newborn child on milk, without hungering for more solid food) on looks and words and sighs; love thus young, is a fair-seeming godhead, and the devotion to him a pretty and delicate piece of aestheticism. And such it is here in "Flamenca," where there certainly exists neither God nor Christ, both complete absentees, whose priest becomes a courteous lover's valet, whose church the place for amorous rendezvous, whose sacrifice of mass and prayer becomes a means of amorous correspondence: Cupid, in the shape of his slave Guillems de Nevers—become *patarin*(zealot) for love—peeping with shaven golden head from behind the missal, touching the lady's hand and whispering with the words of spiritual peace the declaration of love, the appointment for meeting. God and Christ, I repeat, are absentees. Where they are I know not; perhaps over the Rhine with the Lollards in their weavers' dens, or over the Alps in the cell of St. Francis; not here, certainly, or if here, themselves become the mere slaves of love. But this King Love, as long as a mere infant, is a sweet and gracious divinity, surrounded by somewhat of the freshness and hawthorn sweetness of spring which seem to accompany his favourite Guillems. Guillems de Nevers, "who could still grow," this brilliant knight and troubadour, in his white silken and crimson and purple garments and soundless shoes embroidered with flowers, this prince of tournaments and *tensos*, who hearing the sorrows of the beautiful Flamenca, loves her unseen, sits sighing in sight of her prison bower, and faints like a hero of the Arabian Nights at her name, and has visions of her as St. Francis has of Christ; this younger and brighter Sir Launcelot, is an ideal little figure, whom you might mistake for Love himself as described in the "Romaunt of the Rose;" Love's avatar or incarnation, on whose appearance the year blooms into spring, the fruit trees blossom, the birds sing, the girls dance at eve round the maypoles; behind whom, while reading this poem, we seem to see the corn shine green beneath the olives, the white-blossomed branches slant across the blue sky. For is he not the very incarnation of chivalry, of beauty, and of love? So much for this King Love while but quite young. Unfortunately he is speedily weaned of his baby food of mere blushing glances and sighed-out names; and then his aspect, his kingdom's aspect, the aspect of his votaries, undergoes a change. The profane but charming game of the loving clerk and the missal is exchanged for the more coarse hide-and-seek of hidden causeways and tightened bolts, with jealous husbands guarding the useless door; Guillems becomes but an ordinary Don Juan or Lovelace, Flamenca but a sorry, sneaking adulteress, and the gracious damsels mere common sluts, curtseying at the loan (during the interview of nobler folk) of the gallant's squires. For the scent of May, of fresh leaves and fallen blossoms, we get the nauseous vapours of the bath-room; and, alas, King Love has lost his aureole and his wings and turned keeper of the hot springs, sought out by the gouty and lepers, of Bourbon-les-Bains; and in closing this book, so delightfully begun, we sicken at the whiff of hot and fetid moral air as we should sicken in passing over the outlet of the polluted hot water.

"But where is the use of telling us all this?" the reader will ask; "every one knows that illicit passion existed and exists, and has its chroniclers, its singers in prose and in verse. But what has all this poetry of common adultery to do with a book like the 'Vita Nuova,' with that strange new thing, that lifelong worship of a woman, which you call mediaeval love?" This much: that out of this illicit love, and out of it, gross as it looks, alone arises the possibility of the "Vita Nuova;" arises the possibility of the romantic and semi-religious love of the Middle Ages. Or, rather, let us say that this mere loose love of the *albas* and *Wachtlieder* and "Flamenca," is the substratum, nay, is the very flesh and blood, of the spiritual passion to which, in later days, we owe the book of Beatrice.

It is a harsh thing to say, but one which all sociology teaches us, that as there exists no sensual relation which cannot produce for its ennoblement a certain amount of passion, so also does there exist no passion (and Phaedrus is there to prove it) so vile and loathsome as to be unable to weave about itself a glamour of ideal sentiment. The poets of the Middle Ages strove after the criminal possession of another man's wife. This, however veiled with fine and delicate poetic expressions, is the thing for which they wait and sigh and implore; this is the reward, the supremely honouring and almost sanctifying reward which the lady cannot refuse to the knight who has faithfully and humbly served her. The whole bulk of the love lyrics of the early Middle Ages are there to prove it; and if the allusions in them are not sufficiently clear, those who would be enlightened may study the discussions of the allegorical persons even in the English (and later) version of Guillaume de Lorris' "Roman de la Rose;" and turn to what, were it in *langue d'oc*, we should call a *tenso* of Guillaume li Viniers among Mätzner's "Altfranzösische Liederdichter." The catastrophe of Ulrich von Liechtenstein's "Frowendienst," where the lady, the "virtuous," the "pure," as he is pleased to call her, after making him cut off his finger, dress in leper's clothes, chop off part of his upper lip, and go through the most marvellous Quixotic antics dressed in satin and pearls and false hair as Queen Venus, and jousting in this costume with every knight between Venice and Styria, all for her honour and glory; pulls the gallant in a basket up to her window, and then lets him drop down into the moat which is no better than a sewer; this grotesque and tragically resented end of Ulrich's first *love service* speaks volumes on the point. The stones in Nostradamus' "Lives of the Troubadours," the incidents in Gottfried's "Tristan und Isolde," nay, the adventures even in our expunged English "Morte d'Arthur," relating to the birth of Sir Galahad, are as explicit as anything in Brantôme or the Queen of Navarre; the most delicate love songs of Provence and Germany are cobwebs spun round Decameronian situations. And all this is permitted, admitted, sanctioned by feudal society even as the *cecisbeos* of the noble Italian ladies were sanctioned by the society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the mediaeval castle, where, as we have seen, the lady, separated from her own sex, is surrounded by a swarm of young men without a chance of marriage, and bound to make themselves agreeable to the wife of a military superior; the woman soon ceases to be the exclusive property of her husband, and the husband speedily discovers that the majority, hence public ridicule, are against any attempt at monopolizing her. Thus adultery becomes, as we have seen, accepted as an institution under the name of *service*; and, like all other social institutions, developes a morality of its own—a morality within immorality, of faithfulness within infidelity. The lady must be true to her knight, and the knight must be true to his lady: the Courts of Love solemnly banish from society any woman who is known to have more than one lover. Faithfulness is the first and most essential virtue of mediaeval love; a virtue unknown to the erotic poets of Antiquity, and which modern times have inherited from the Middle Ages as a requisite, even (as the reproaches of poets of the Alfred de Musset school teach us) in the most completely illicit love. Tristram and Launcelot, the two paragons of knighthood, are inviolably constant to their mistress: the husband may and must be deceived, but not the wife who helps to deceive him. Yseult of Brittany and Elaine, the mother of Galahad, do not succeed in breaking the vows made to Yseult the Fair and to Queen Guenevere. The beautiful lady in the hawthorn *alba* "a son cor en amar lejalmens." But this loyal loving is for the knight who is warned to depart, certainly not for the husband, the *gilos*, in whose despite ("Bels dous amios, baizem nos eu e vos—Aval els pratzon chantols auzellos—*Tot O fassam en despeit del gilos*") they are meeting. The ladies of the minnesingers are "pure," "good," "faithful" (and each and all are pure, good, and faithful, as long as they do not resist) from the point of view of the lover, not of the husband, if indeed a husband be permitted to have any point of view at all. And as fidelity is the essential virtue in these adulterous connections, so infidelity is the greatest crime that a woman (and even a man) can commit, the greatest misfortune which fate can send to an unhappy knight. That he leaves a faithful mistress behind him is the one hope of the knight who, taking the cross, departs to meet the scimitars of Saladin's followers, the fevers, the plagues, the many miserable deaths of the unknown East. "If any lady be unfaithful," says Quienes de Béthune, "she will have to be unfaithful with some base wretch."

> Et les dames ki castement vivront
> Se loiauté font a ceus qui iront;
> Et seles font par mal conseil folaje,
> A lasques gens et mauvais le feront,
> Car tout li bon iront en cest voiage.

"I have taken the cross on account of my sins," sings Albrecht von Johansdorf, one of the most earnest of the minnesingers; "now let God help, till my return, the woman who has great sorrow on my account, in order that I may find her possessed of her honour; let Him grant me this prayer. But if she change her life (*i.e.*, take to bad courses), then may God forbid my ever returning." The lady is bound (the Courts of Love decide this point of honour) to reward her faithful lover. "A knight," says a lady, in an anonymous German song published by Bartsch, "has served me according to my will. Before too much time elapse, I must reward him; nay, if all the world were to object, he must have his way with me" ("und waerez al der Werlte leit, so muoz sîn wille an mir ergän"). But, on the other hand, the favoured knight is bound to protect his lady's good fame.

> Se jai mamie en tel point mis,
> Que tout motroit (m'octroit) sans esformer,
> Tant doi je miex sonnor gaiter—

thus one of the interlocutors in a French *jeu-parti*, published by Mätzner; a rule which, if we may

judge from the behaviour of Tristram and Launcelot, and from the last remnants of mediaeval love lore in modern French novels, means simply that the more completely a man has induced a woman to deceive her husband, the more stoutly is he bound to deny, with lies, rows, and blows, that she has ever done anything of the sort. Here, then, we find established, as a very fundamental necessity of this socially recognized adultery, a reciprocity of fidelity between lover and mistress which Antiquity never dreamed of even between husband and wife (Agamemnon has a perfect right to Briseis or Chryseis, but Clytaemnestra has no right to Aegisthus); and which indeed could scarcely arise as a moral obligation except where the woman was not bound to love the man (which the wife is) and where her behaviour towards him depended wholly upon her pleasure, that is to say, upon her satisfaction with his behaviour towards her. This, which seems to us so obvious, and of which every day furnishes us an example in the relations of the modern suitor and his hoped-for wife, could not, at a time when women were married by family arrangement, arise except as a result of illegitimate love. Horrible as it seems, the more we examine into this subject of mediaeval love, the more shall we see that our whole code of Grandisonian chivalry between lovers who intend marriage is derived from the practice of the Launcelots and Gueneveres, not from that of the married people (we may remember the manner in which Gunther woos his wife Brunhilt in the Nibelungenlied) of former ages; nay, the more we shall have to recognize that the very feeling which constitutes the virtuous love of modern poets is derived from the illegitimate loves of the Middle Ages.

Let us examine what are the habits of feeling and thinking which grow out of this reciprocal fidelity due to the absence of all one-sided legal pressure in this illegitimate, but socially legitimated, love of the early Middle Ages; which are added on to it by the very necessities of illicit connection. The lover, having no right to the favours of his mistress, is obliged, in order to win and to keep them, to please her by humility, fidelity, and such knightly qualities as are the ideal plumage of a man: he must bring home to her, by showing the world her colours victorious in serious warfare, in the scarcely less dangerous play of tournaments, and by making her beauty and virtues more illustrious in his song than are those of other women in the songs of their lovers —he must bring home to her that she has a more worthy servant than her rivals; he must determine her to select him and to adhere to her selection. Now mediaeval husbands select their wives, instead of being selected; and once the woman and the dowry are in their hands, trouble themselves but little whether they are approved of or not. On the other hand, the mistress appears to her lover invested with imaginative, ideal advantages such as cannot surround her in the eyes of her husband: she is, in nearly every case, his superior in station and the desired of many beholders; she is bound to him by no tie which may grow prosaic and wearisome; she appears to him in no domestic capacity, can never descend to be the female drudge; her possession is prevented from growing stale, her personality from becoming commonplace, by the difficulty, rareness, mystery, adventure, danger, which even in the days of Courts of Love attach to illicit amours; above all, being for this man neither the housewife nor the mother, she remains essentially and continually the mistress, the beloved. Similarly the relations between the knight and the lady, untroubled by domestic worries, pecuniary difficulties, and squabbles about children, remain, exist merely as love relations, relations of people whose highest and sole desire is to please one another. Moreover, and this is an important consideration, the lady, who is a mere inexperienced, immature girl when she first meets her husband, is a mature woman, with character and passions developed by the independence of conjugal and social life. When she meets her lover, whatever power or dignity of character she may possess is ripe; whatever intensity of aspiration and passion may be latent is ready to come forth; for the first time there is equality in love. Equality? Ah, no. This woman who is the wife of his feudal superior, this woman surrounded by all the state of feudal sovereignty, this woman who, however young, has already known so much of life, this woman whose love is a free, gift of grace to the obscure, trembling vassal who has a right not even to be noticed; this lady of mediaeval love must always remain immeasurably above her lover. And, in the long day-dreams while watching her, as he thinks unseen, while singing of her, as he thinks unheard, there cluster round her figure, mistily seen in his fancy, those vague and-mystic splendours which surround the new sovereign of the Middle Ages, the Queen of Heaven; there mingles in the half-terrified raptures of the first kind glance, the first encouraging word, the ineffable passion stored up in the Christian's heart for the immortal beings who, in the days of Bernard and Francis, descend cloud-like on earth and fill the cells of the saints with unendurable glory.

And thus, out of the baseness of habitual adultery, arises incense-like, in the early mediaeval poetry, a new kind of love—subtler, more imaginative, more passionate, a love of the fancy and the heart, a love stimulating to the perfection of the individual as is any religion; nay, a religion, and one appealing more completely to the complete man, flesh and soul, than even the mystical beliefs of the Middle Ages. And as, in the fantastic song of Ritter Tannhäuser, whose liege lady, so legend tells, was Dame Venus herself, the lady bids the knight go forth and fetch her green water which has washed the setting sun, salamanders snatched from the flame, the stars out of heaven; so would it seem as if this new power in the world, this poetically worshipped woman, had sent forth mankind to seek wonderful new virtues, never before seen on earth. Nay, rather, as the snowflakes became green leaves, the frost blossoms red and blue flowers, the winter wind a spring-scented breeze, when Bernard de Ventadorn was greeted by his mistress; so also does it seem as if, at the first greeting of the world by this new love, the mediaeval winter had turned to summer, and there had budded forth and flowered a new ideal of manly virtue, a new ideal of womanly grace.

But evil is evil, and evil is its fruit. Out of circumstances hitherto unknown, circumstances come about for the first time owing to the necessities of illegitimate passion, have arisen certain new

and nobler characters of sexual love, certain new and beautiful conceptions of manly and womanly nature. The circumstances to which these are owed are pure in themselves, they are circumstances which in more modern times have characterized the perfectly legitimate passion of lovers held asunder by no social law, but by mere accidental barriers—from Romeo and Juliet to the Master of Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton; and pure so far have been the spiritual results. But these circumstances were due, In the early Middle Ages, to the fact of adultery; and to the new ideal of love has clung, even in its purity, in its superior nobility, an element of corruption as unknown to gross and corrupt Antiquity as was the delicacy and nobility of mediaeval love. The most poetical and pathetic of all mediaeval love stories, the very incarnation of all that is most lyric at once and most tragic in the new kind of passion, is the story, told and retold by a score of poets and prose writers, of the loves of Yseult of Ireland and of Sir Tristram who, as the knight was bringing the princess to his uncle and her affianced, King Mark of Cornwall drank together by a fatal mistake a philter which made all such as partook of it in common inseparable lovers even unto death. Every one knows the result r: how Yseult came to her husband already the paramour of Tristram; how Brangwaine, her damsel, feeling that this unhallowed passion was due to her having left-within reach the potion intended for the King and Queen of Cornwall, devoted herself, at the price of her maidenhood, to connive in the amours of the lovers whom she had made; how King Mark was deceived, and doubted, and was deceived again; how Tristram fled to Brittany, but how, despite his seeming marriage with another and equally lovely Yseult, he remained faithful to the Queen of Cornwall. One version tells that Mark slew his nephew while he sat harping to Queen Yseult; another that Tristram died of grief because his scorned though wedded wife told him that the white-sailed ship, bearing his mistress to meet him, bore the black sail which meant that she was not on board; but all versions, I think, agree in ending with the fact, that the briar-rose growing on the tomb of the one, slowly trailed its flowers and thorns along till it had reached also the grave of the other, and knit together, as love had knit together with its sweet blossoms and sharp spines, the two fated lovers. The Middle Ages were enthralled by this tale; but they were also, occasionally, a little shocked by it. Poets and prose writers tampered every now and then with incidents and characters, seeking to make it appear that, owing to the substitution of the waiting-maid, and the neglect of the wedded princess of Brittany, Yseult had never belonged to any man save Tristram, nor Tristram to any woman save Yseult; or that King Mark had sent his nephew to woo the Irish queen's daughter merely in hopes of his perishing in the attempt, and that his whole subsequent conduct was due to a mere unnatural hatred of a better knight than himself; touching up here and there with a view to justifying and excusing to some degree the long series of deceits which constituted the whole story. Thus the more timid and less gifted. But when, in the very first years (1210) of the thirteenth century, the greatest mediaeval poet that preceded Dante, the greatest German poet that preceded Goethe, Meister Gottfried von Strassburg, took in hand the old threadbare story of "Tristan und Isolde," he despised all alterations of this sort, and accepted the original tale in its complete crudeness.

For, consciously or unconsciously, Gottfried had conceived this story as a thing wholly unknown in his time, and no longer subject to any of those necessities of constant re-arrangement which tormented mediaeval poets: he had conceived it not as a tale, but as a novel. Gottfried himself was probably but little aware of what he was doing; the poem that he was writing probably fell for him into the very same category as the poems of other men; but to us, with our experience of so many different forms of narrative, it must be evident that "Tristan und Isolde" is a new departure, inasmuch as it is not the story of deeds and the people who did them, like the true epic from Homer to the Nibelungen; nor the story of people and the adventures which happened to them, like all romance poetry from "Palemon and Arcite," to the "Orlando Furioso;" but, on the contrary, the story of the psychological relations, the gradual metamorphosis of soul by soul, between two persons. The long introductory story of Tristram's youth must not mislead us, nor all the minute narrations of the killing of dragons and the drinking of love philters: Gottfried, we must remember, was certainly no deliberate innovator, and these thing's are the mere inevitable externalities of mediaeval poetry, preserved with dull slavish care by the re-writer of a well-known tale, but enclosing in reality something essentially and startlingly modern: the history of a passion and of the spiritual changes which it brings about in those who are its victims.

To meet again this purely psychological interest we must skip the whole rest of the Middle Ages, nay, skip even the great period of dramatic literature, not stopping till we come to the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, to the "Princesse de Clèves," to "Clarissa Harlowe," nay, really, to "The Nouvelle Heloise." For even in Shakespeare there is always interest and importance in the action and reaction of subsidiary characters, in the event, in the accidental; there is intrigue, chance, misunderstanding, fate—active agencies of which Othello and Hamlet, King Lear and Romeo, are helpless victims; there is, even in this psychological English drama of the Elizabethans, fate in the shape of Iago, in the shape of the Ghost, in the shape of the brothers of Webster's duchess; fate in the shape of a ring, a letter, a drug, but fate always. And in this "Tristan und Isolde" of Gottfried von Strassburg is there not fate also in the love potion intended for King Mark, and given by the mistake of Brangwaine to Mark's bride and his nephew? To this objection, which will naturally occur to any reader who is not acquainted with the poem of Gottfried, I simply answer, there is not. The love potion there is, but it does not play the same part as do, for instance, the drugs of Friar Laurence and his intercepted letter. Suppose the friar's narcotic to have been less enduring in its action, or his message to have reached in safety, why then Juliet would have been awake instead of asleep, or Romeo would not have supposed her to be dead, and instead of the suicide of the two lovers, we should have had the successful carying off of Juliet by Romeo. Not so with Gottfried. The philter is there, and a great deal is talked about it; but it is merely one of the old, threadbare trappings of the original

story, which he has been too lazy to suppress; it is merely, for the reader, the allegorical signal for an outburst of passion which all our subsequent knowledge of Tristram and Yseult shows us to be absolutely inevitable. In Gottfried's poem, the drinking of the potion signifies merely that all the rambling, mediaeval prelude, not to be distinguished from the stories of "Morte d'Arthur," and of half the romances of the Middle Ages, has come to a close and may be forgotten; and that the real work of the great poet, the real, matchless tragedy of the four actors—Tristram, Yseult, Mark, and Brangwaine—has begun.

Yet if we seek again to account to ourselves for this astonishing impression of modernness which we receive from Gottfried's poem, we recognize that it is due to something far more important than the mere precocious psychological interest; nay, rather, that this psychological interest is itself dependent upon the fact which makes "Tristan und Isolde," so modern to our feelings. This fact is simply that the poem of Gottfried is the earliest, and yet perhaps almost the completest, example of a literary anomaly which Antiquity, for all its abominations, did not know: the glorification of fidelity in adultery, the glorification of excellence within the compass of guilt. Older times —more distant from our own in spirit, though not necessarily in years—have presented us with many themes of guilt: the guilt which exists according to our own moral standard, but not according to that of the narrator, as the magnificently tragic Icelandic incest story of Sigmund and Signy; the guilt which has come about no one well knows how, an unfortunate circumstance leaving the sinner virtually stainless, in his or her own eyes and the eyes of others, like the Homeric Helen; the heroic guilt, where the very heroism seems due to the self-sacrifice of the sinner's innocence, of Judith; the struggling, remorseful guilt, hopelessly overcome by fate and nature, of Phaedra; the dull and dogged guilt, making the sinner scarce more than a mere physical stumbling-block for others, of the murderer Hagen in the Nibelungenlied; and, finally, the perverse guilt, delighting in the consciousness of itself, of demons like Richard and Iago, of libidinous furies like the heroines of Tourneur and Marston. The guilt theme of "Tristan und Isolde" falls into none of these special categories. This theme, unguessed even by Shakespeare, is that of the virtuous behaviour towards one another of two individuals united in sinning against every one else. Gottfried von Strassburg narrates with the greatest detail how Tristram leads to the unsuspecting king the unblushing, unremorseful woman polluted by his own embraces; how Yseult substitutes on the wedding night her spotless damsel Brangwaine for her own sullied self; then, terrified lest the poor victim of her dishonour should ever reveal it, attempts to have her barbarously murdered, and, finally, seeing that nothing can shake the heroic creature's faith, admits her once more to be the remorseful go-between in her amours. He narrates how Tristram dresses as a pilgrim and carries the queen from a ship to the shore, in order that Yseult may call on Christ to bear witness by a miracle that she is innocent of adultery, never having been touched save by that pilgrim and her own husband; and how, when the followers of King Mark have surrounded the grotto in the wood, Tristram places the drawn sword between himself and the sleeping queen, as a symbol of their chastity which the king is too honest to suspect. He draws, with a psychological power truly extraordinary in the beginning of the thirteenth century, the two other figures in this love drama: King Mark, cheated, dishonoured, oscillating between horrible doubt, ignominious suspicion and more ignominious credulity, his love for his wife, his trust in his nephew, his incapacity for conceiving ill-faith and fraud, the very gentleness and generosity of his nature, made the pander of guilt in which he cannot believe; and, on the other side, Brangwaine, the melancholy, mute victim of her fidelity to Yseult, the weak, heroic soul, rewarded only with cruel ingratitude, and condemned to screen and help the sin which she loathes and for which she assumes the awful responsibility. All this does Gottfried do, yet without ever seeming to perceive the baseness and wickedness of this tissue of lies, equivocations, and perjuries in which his lovers hide their passion; without ever seeming to guess at the pathos and nobility of the man and the woman who are the mere trumpery obstacles or trumpery aids to their amours. He heaps upon Tristram and Yseult the most extravagant praises: he is the flower of all knighthood, and she, the kindest, gentlest, purest, and noblest of women; he insists upon the wickedness of the world which is for ever waging war upon their passion, and holds up to execration all those who seek to spy out their secret. Gottfried is most genuinely overcome by the ideal beauty of this inextinguishable devotion, by the sublimity of this love which holds the whole world as dross; the crimes of the lovers are for him the mere culminating point of their moral grandeur, which has ceased to know any guilt save absence of love, any virtue save loving. And so serene is the old minnesinger's persuasion, that it obscures the judgment and troubles the heart even of his reader; and we are tempted to ask ourselves, on laying down the book, whether indeed this could have been sinful, this love of Tristram and Yseult which triumphed over everything in the world, and could be quenched only by death. That circle of hell where all those who had sinfully loved were whirled incessantly in the perse, dark, stormy air, appeared in the eyes even of Dante as a place less of punishment than of glory; and, especially since the Middle Ages, all mankind looks upon that particular hell-pit with admiration rather than with loathing. And herein consists, more even than in any deceptions practised upon King Mark or any ingratitude manifested towards Brangwaine, the sinfulness of Tristram and Yseult: sinfulness which is not finite like the individual lives which it offends, but infinite and immortal as the heart and the judgment which it perverts. For such a tale, and so told, as the tale of Gottfried von Strassburg, makes us sympathize with this fidelity and devotion of a man and woman who care for nothing in the world save for each other, who are dragged and glued together by the desire and habit of mutual pleasure; it makes us admire their readiness to die rather than be parted, when their whole life is concentrated in their reciprocal sin, when their miserable natures enjoy, care for, know, only this miserable love. It makes us wink with leniency at the dishonour, the baseness, the cruelty, to which all this easy virtue is due. And such sympathy, such admiration, such leniency, for howsoever short a time they may remain

in our soul, leave it, if they ever leave it completely and utterly less strong, less clean than it was before. We have all of us a lazy tendency to approve of the virtue which costs no trouble; to contemplate in ourselves or others, with a spurious moral satisfaction, the development of this or that virtuous quality in souls which are deteriorating in undoubted criminal self-indulgence. We have all of us, at the bottom of our hearts, a fellow feeling for all human affection; and the sinfulness of sinners like Tristram and Yseult lies largely in the fact that they pervert this legitimate and holy sympathy into a dangerous leniency for any strong and consistent love, into a morbid admiration for any irresistible mutual passion, making us forget that love has in itself no moral value, and that while self-indulgence may often be innocent, only self-abnegation can ever be holy.

The great mediaeval German poem of Tristram and Yseult remained for centuries a unique phenomenon; only John Ford perhaps, that grander and darker twin spirit of Gottfried von Strassburg, reviving, even among the morbidly psychological and crime-fascinated followers of Shakespeare, that new theme of evil—the heroism of unlawful love. But Gottfried had merely manipulated with precocious analytical power a mode of feeling and thinking which was universal in the feudal Middle Ages; the great epic of adultery was forgotten, but the sympathetic and admiring interest in illegitimate passion remained; and was transmitted, wherever the Renaissance or the Reformation did not break through such transmission of mediaeval habits, as an almost inborn instinct from father to son, from mother to daughter. And we may doubt whether the important class of men and women who write and read the novels of illicit love, could ever have existed, had not the psychological artists of modern times, from Rousseau to George Sand, and from Stendhal to Octave Feuillet, found ready prepared for them in the countries not re-tempered by Protestantism, an assoiation of romance, heroism, and ideality with mere adulterous passion, which was unknown to the corruption of Antiquity and to the lawlessness of the Dark Ages, and which remained as a fatal alloy to that legacy of mere spiritual love which was left to the world by the love poets of early feudalism.

II.

The love of the troubadours and minnesingers, of the Arthurian tales, which show that love in narrative form, was, as we have seen, polluted by the selfishness, the deceitfulness, the many unclean necessities of adulterous passion. Elevated and exquisite though it was, it could not really purify the relations of man and woman, since it was impure. Nay, we see that through its influence the grave and simple married love of the earlier tales of chivalry, the love of Siegfried for Chriemhilt, of Roland for his bride Belle Aude, of Renaud for his wife Clarisse, is gradually replaced in later fiction by the irregular love-makings of Huon of Bordeaux, Ogier the Dane, and Artus of Brittany; until we come at last to the extraordinary series of the Amadis romances, where every hero without exception is the bastard of virtuous parents, who subsequently marry and discover their foundling: a state of things which, even in the corrupt Renaissance, Boiardo and Ariosto found it necessary to reform in their romantic poems. With idealizing refinement, the chivalric love of the French, Provençal, and German poets brings also a kind of demoralization which, from one point of view, makes the spotless songs of Bernard de Ventadour and Armaud de Mareulh, of Ulrich von Liechtenstein and Frauenlob, less pure than the licentious poems addressed by the Greeks and Romans to women who, at least, were not the wives of other men.

Shall all this idealizing refinement, this almost religious fervour, this new poetic element of chivalric love remain useless; or serve only to subtly pollute while pretending to purify the great singing passion? Not so. But to prevent such waste of what in itself is pure and precious, is the mission of another country, of another civilization; of a wholly different cycle of poets who, receiving the new element of mediaeval love after it has passed through and been sifted by a number of hands, shall cleanse and recreate it in the fire of intellectual and almost abstract passion, producing that wonderful essence of love which, as the juices squeezed by alchemists out of jewels purified the body from all its ills, shall purify away all the diseases of the human soul.

While the troubadours and minnesingers had been singing at the courts of Angevine kings and Hohenstauffen emperors, of counts of Toulouse and dukes of Austria; a new civilization, a new political and social system, had gradually been developing in the free burghs of Italy; a new life entirely the reverse of the life of feudal countries. The Italian cities were communities of manufacturers and merchants, into which only gradually, and at the sacrifice of every aristocratic privilege and habit, a certain number of originally foreign feudatories were gradually absorbed. Each community consisted of a number of mercantile families, equal before the law, and illustrious or obscure according to their talents or riches, whose members, instead of being scattered over a wide area like the members of the feudal nobility, were most often gathered together under one roof—sons, brothers, nephews, daughters, sisters and daughters-in-law, forming a hierarchy attending to the business of factory or counting-house under the orders of the father of the family, and to the economy of the house-under the superintendence of the mother; a manner of living at once business-like and patriarchal, expounded pounded by the interlocutors in Alberti's "Governo della Famiglia," and which lasted until the dissolution of the commonwealths and almost to our own times. Such habits imply a social organization, an intercourse between men and women, and a code of domestic morality the exact opposite to those of feudal countries. Here, in the Italian cities, there are no young men bound to loiter, far from their homes, round the wife of a military superior, to whom her rank and her isolation from all neighbours give idleness and solitude. The young men are all of them in business, usually with

their own kinsfolk; not in their employer's house, but in his office; they have no opportunity of seeing a woman from dawn till sunset. The women, on their side, are mainly employed at home: the whole domestic arrangement depends upon them, and keeps their hands constantly full; working, and working in the company of their female relatives and friends. Men and women are free comparatively little, and then they are free all together in the same places; hence no opportunities for *tête-à-tête*. Early Italian poetry is fond of showing us the young poet reading his verses or explaining his passion to those gentle, compassionate women learned in love, of whom we meet a troop, beautiful, vague, half-arch, half-melancholy faces, consoling Dante in the "Vita Nuova," and reminding Guido Cavalcanti of his lady far off at Toulouse. But such women almost invariably form a group; they cannot be approached singly. Such a state of society inevitably produces a high and strict morality. In these early Italian cities a case of in' fidelity is punished ruthlessly; the lover banished or killed; the wife for ever lost to the world, perhaps condemned to solitude and a lingering death in the fever tracts, like Pia dei Tolomei. A complacent deceived husband is even more ridiculous (the deceived husband is notoriously the chief laughing stock of all mediaeval free towns) than is a jealous husband among the authorized and recognized *cicisbeos* of a feudal court. Indeed the respect for marriage vows inevitable in this busy democratic mediaeval life is so strong, that long after the commonwealths have turned into despotisms, and every social tie has been dissolved in the Renaissance, the wives and daughters of men stained with every libidinous vice, nay, of the very despots themselves—Tiberiuses and Neros on a smaller scale—remain spotless in the midst of evil; and authorized adultery begins in Italy only under the Spanish rule in the late sixteenth century.

Such were the manners and morals of the Italian commonwealths when, about the middle of the thirteenth century, the men of Tuscany, now free and prosperous, suddenly awoke to the consciousness that they had a soul which desired song, and a language which was spontaneously singing. It was the moment when painting was beginning to claim for the figures of real men and women the walls and vaulted spaces whence had hitherto glowered, with vacant faces and huge ghostlike eyes, mosaic figures, from their shimmering golden ground; the moment when the Pisan artists had sculptured solemnly draped madonnas and kings not quite unworthy of the carved sarcophagi which stood around them; the moment when, merging together old Byzantine traditions and Northern examples, the architects of Florence, Siena, and Orvieto conceived a style which made cathedrals into marvellous and huge reliquaries of marble, jasper, alabaster, and mosaics. The mediaeval flowering time had come late, very late, in Italy; but the atmosphere was only the warmer, the soil the richer, and Italy put forth a succession of exquisite and superb immortal flowers of art when the artistic sap of other countries had begun to be exhausted. But the Italians, the Tuscans, audacious in the other arts, were diffident of themselves with regard to poetry. Architecture, painting, sculpture, had been the undisputed field for plebeian craftsmen, belonging exclusively to the free burghs and disdained by the feudal castles; but poetry was essentially the aristocratic, the feudal art, cultivated by knights and cultivated for kings and barons. It was probably an unspoken sense of this fact which caused the early Tuscan poets to misgive their own powers and to turn wistfully and shyly towards the poets of Provence and of Sicily. There, beyond the seas, under the last lords of Toulouse and the brilliant mongrel Hohenstauffen princes, were courts, knights, and ladies; there was the tradition of this courtly art of poetry; and there only could the sons of Florentine or Sienese merchants, clodhoppers in gallantry and song, hope to learn the correct style of thing. Hence the history of the Italian lyric before Dante is the history of a series of transformations which connect a style of poetry absolutely feudal and feudally immoral, with the hitherto unheard-of platonic love subtleties of the "Vita Nuova." And it is curious, in looking over the collections of early Italian lyrists, to note the alteration in tone as Sicily and the feudal courts are left further and further behind. Ciullo d' Alcamo, flourishing about 1190, is the only Italian-writing poet absolutely contemporaneous with the earlier and better trouvères, troubadours, and minnesingers; and he is also the only one who resembles them very closely. His famous *tenso,* beginning "Rosa fresca aulentissima" (a tolerably faithful translation heads the beautiful collection of the late Mr. D.G. Rossetti), is indeed more explicitly gross and immoral than the majority of Provençal and German love-songs: loose as are many of the *albas, serenas, wachtlieder*, and even many of the less special forms of German and Provençal poetry, I am acquainted with none of them which comes up to this singular dialogue, in which a man, refusing to marry a woman, little by little wins her over to his wishes and makes her brazenly invite him to her dishonour. Between Ciullo d' Alcamo and his successors there is some gap of time, and a corresponding want of gradation. Yet the Sicilian poets of the courts of Hohenstauffen and Anjou, recognizable by their name or the name of their town, Inghilfredi, Manfredi, Ranieri and Ruggierone da Palermo, Tommaso and Matteo da Messina, Guglielmotto d' Otranto, Rinaldo d'Aquino, Peir delle Vigne, either maintain altogether unchanged the tone of the troubadours, or only gradually, as in the remarkable case of the Notary of Lentino, approximate to the platonic poets of Tuscany. The songs of the archetype of Sicilian singers, the Emperor Frederick II., are completely Provençal in feeling as in form, though infinitely inferior in execution. With him it is always the pleasure which he hopes from his lady, or the pleasure which he has had—"Quando ambidue stavamo in allegranza alla dolce fera;" "Pregovi donna mia—Per vostra cortesia—E pregovi che sia—Quello che lo core disia." Again: "Sospiro e sto in rancura—Ch' io son si disioso—E pauroso—Mi fate penare—Ma tanto m' assicura—Lo suo viso amoroso—E lo gioioso—Riso e lo sguardare—E lo parlare—Di questa criatura—Che per paura—Mi fate penare—E di morare—Tant' è fina e pura—Tanto è saggia e cortese—Non credo che pensasse—Nè distornasse—Di ciò he m' impromise." It is, this earliest Italian poetry, like the more refined poetry of troubadours and minnesingers, eminently an importuning of highborn but loosely living women. From Sicily and Apulia poetry goes first, as might be expected (and as probably sculpture went) to the seaport Pisa, thence to the neighbouring Lucca, considerably before

reaching Florence. And as it becomes more Italian and urban, it becomes also, under the strict vigilance of burgher husbands, considerably more platonic. In Bologna, the city of jurists, it acquires (the remark is not mine merely, but belongs also to Carducci) the very strong flavour of legal quibbling which distinguishes the otherwise charming Guido Guinicelli; and once in Florence, among the most subtle of all subtle Tuscans, it becomes at once what it remained even for Dante, saturated with metaphysics: the woman is no longer paramount, she is subordinated to Love himself; to that personified abstraction Amor, the serious and melancholy son of pagan philosophy and Christian mysticism. The Tuscans had imported from Provence and Sicily the new element of mediaeval love, of life devotion, soul absorption in loving; if they would sing, they must sing of this; any other kind of love, at a time when Italy still read and relished her would-be Provençals, Lanfranc Cicala and Sordel of Mantua, would have been unfashionable and unendurable. But in these Italian commonwealths, as we have seen, poets are forced, nilly-willy, to be platonic; an importuning poem found in her work-basket may send a Tuscan lady into a convent, or, like Pia, into the Maremma; an *alba* or a *serena* interrupted by a wool-weaver of Calimara or a silk spinner of Lucca, may mean that the imprudent poet be found weltering in blood under some archway the next morning. The chivalric sentimentality of feudalism must be restrained; and little by little, under the pressure of such very different social habits, it grows into a veritable platonic passion. Poets must sing, and in order that they sing, they must adore; so men actually begin to seek out, and adore and make themselves happy and wretched about women from whom they can hope only social distinctions; and this purely aesthetic passion goes on by the side nay, rather on the top, of their humdrum, conjugal life or loosest libertinage. Petrarch's bastards were born during the reign of Madonna Laura; and that they should have been, was no more a slight or infidelity to her than to the other Madonna, the one in heaven. Laura had a right to only ideal sentiments ideal relations; the poet was at liberty to carry more material preferences elsewhere.

But could such love as this exist, could it be genuine? To my mind, indubitably. For there is, in all our perceptions and desires of physical and moral beauty, an element of passion which is akin to love; and there is, in all love that is not mere lust, a perception of, a craving for, beauty, real or imaginary which is identical with our merely aesthetic perceptions and cravings; hence the possibility, once the wish for such a passion present, of a kind of love which is mainly aesthetic, which views the beloved as gratifying merely to the wish for physical or spiritual loveliness, and concentrates upon one exquisite reality all dreams of ideal perfection. Moreover there comes, to all nobler natures, a love dawning: a brightening and delicate flushing of the soul before the actual appearance of the beloved one above the horizon, which is as beautiful and fascinating in its very clearness, pallor, and coldness, as the unearthly purity of the pale amber and green and ashy rose which streaks the heavens before sunrise. The love of the early Tuscan poets (for we must count Guinicelli, in virtue of his language, as a Tuscan) had been restrained, by social necessities first, then by habit and deliberate aesthetic choice, within the limits of this dawning state; and in this state, it had fed itself off mere spiritual food, and acquired the strange intensity of mere intellectual passions. We give excessive weight, in our days, to spontaneity in all things, apt to think that only the accidental, the unsought, can be vital; but it is true in many things, and truest in all matters of the imagination and the heart, that the desire to experience any sentiment will powerfully conduce to its production, and even give it a strength due to the long incubation of the wish. Thus the ideal love of the Tuscan poets was probably none the weaker, but rather the stronger, for the desire which they felt to sing such passion; nay, rather to hear it singing in themselves. The love of man and wife, of bride and bridegroom, was still of the domain of prose; adulterous love forbidden; and the tradition of, the fervent wish for, the romantic passion of the troubadours consumed them as a strong artistic craving. Platonic love was possible, doubly possible in souls tense with poetic wants; it became a reality through the strength of the wish for it.

Nor was this all. In all imaginative passions, intellectual motives are so much fuel; and in this case the necessity of logically explaining the bodiless passion for a platonic lady, of understanding why they felt in a manner so hitherto unknown to gross mankind, tended greatly to increase the love of these Tuscans, and to bring it in its chastity to the pitch of fervour of more fleshly passions, by mingling with the aesthetic emotions already in their souls the mystical theorizings of transcendental metaphysics, and the half-human, half-supernatural ecstasy of mediaeval religion. For we must remember that Italy was a country not merely of manufacturers and bankers, but of philosophers also and of saints.

Among the Italians of the thirteenth century the revival of antique literature was already in full swing; while in France, Germany, and Provence there had been, in lyric poetry at least, no trace of classic lore. Whereas the trouvères and troubadours had possessed but the light intellectual luggage of a military aristocracy; and the minnesingers had, for the most part, been absolutely ignorant of reading and writing (Wolfram says so of himself, and Ulrich von Liechtenstein relates how he carried about his lady's letter for days unread until the return of his secretary); the poets of Italy, from Brunetto Latini to Petrarch, were eminently scholars; men to whom, however much they might be politicians and ringleaders, like Cavalcanti, Donati, and Dante, whatever existed of antique learning was thoroughly well known. Such men were familiar with whatever yet survived of the transcendental theories of Plato and Plotinus; and they seized at once upon the mythic metaphysics of an antenatal condition, of typical ideas, of the divine essence of beauty, on all the mystic discussions on love and on the soul, as a philosophical explanation of their seemingly inexplicable passion for an unapproachable woman. The lady upon whom the poetic fervour, the mediaeval love, inherited from Provence and France, was now expended, and whom social reasons placed quite beyond the reach of anything save the poet's soul and words, was evidently

beloved for the sake of that much of the divine essence contained in her nature; she was loved for purely spiritual reasons, loved as a visible and living embodiment of virtue and beauty, as a human piece of the godhead. So far, therefore, from such an attachment being absurd, as absurd it would have seemed to troubadours and minnesingers, who never served a lady save for what they called a reward; it became, in the eyes of these platonizing Italians, the triumph of the well-bred soul; and as such, soon after, a necessary complement to dignities, talents, and wealth, the very highest occupation of a liberal mind. Thus did their smattering of platonic and neo-platonic philosophy supply the Tuscan poets with a logical reality for this otherwise unreal passion.

But there was something more. In this democratic and philosophizing Italy, there was not the gulf which separated the chivalric poets, men of the sword and not of books, from the great world of religious mysticism; for, though the minnesingers especially were extremely devout and sang many a strange love-song to the Virgin; they knew, they could know, nothing of the contemplative religion of Eckhardt and his disciples—humble and transcendental spirits, whose words were treasured by the sedentary, dreamy townsfolk of the Rhine, but would have conveyed no meaning even to the poet of the Grail epic, with its battles and feasts, its booted and spurred slapdash morality, Wolfram von Eschenbach. In the great manufacturing cities of Italy, such religious mysticism spread as it could never spread in feudal courts; it became familiar, both in the mere passionate sermons and songs of the wandering friars, and in the subtle dialectics of the divines; above all, it became familiar to the poets. Now the essence of this contemplative theology of the Middle Ages, which triumphantly held its own against the cut-and-dry argumentation of scholastic rationalism, was love. Love which assuredly meant different things to different minds; a passionate benevolence towards man and beast to godlike simpletons like Francis of Assisi; a mere creative and impassive activity of the divinity to deep-seeing (so deep as to see only their own strange passionate eyes and lips reflected in the dark well of knowledge) and almost pantheistic thinkers like Master Eckhardt; but love nevertheless, love. "Amor, amore, ardo d' amore," St. Francis had sung in a wild rhapsody, a sort of mystic dance, a kind of furious *malagueña* of divine love; and that he who would wish to know God, let him love—"Qui vult habere notitiam Dei, amet," had been written by Hugo of St. Victor, one of the subtlest of all the mystics. "Amor oculus est," said Master Eckhardt; love, love—was not love then the highest of all human faculties, and must not the act of loving, of perceiving God's essence in some creature which had virtue, the soul's beauty, and beauty, the body's virtue, be the noblest business of a noble life? Thus argued the poets; and their argument, half-passionate, half-scholastic, mixing Phaedrus and Bonaventura, the Schools of Alexandria and the Courts of Love of Provence, resulted in adding all the fervid reality of philosophical and religious aspiration to their clear and cold phantom of disembodied love of woman.

Little by little therefore, together with the carnal desires of Provençals and Sicilians, the Tuscan poets put behind them those little coquetries of style and manner, complications of metre and rhythm learned and fantastic as a woman's plaited and braided hair; those metaphors and similes, like bright flowers or shining golden ribbons dropped from the lady's bosom and head and eagerly snatched by the lover, which we still find, curiously transformed and scented with the rosemary and thyme of country lanes, in the peasant poetry of modern Tuscany. Little by little does the love poetry of the Italians reject such ornaments; and cloth itself in that pale garment, pale and stately in heavy folds like a nun's or friar's weeds, but pure and radiant and solemn as the garment of some painted angel, which we have all learned to know from the "Vita Nuova."

To describe this poetry of the immediate precursors and contemporaries of Dante is to the last degree difficult: it can be described only by symbols, and symbols can but mislead us. Dante Rossetti himself, after translating with exquisite beauty the finest poems of this school, showed how he had read into them his own spirit, when he drew the beautiful design for the frontispiece of his collection. These two lovers—the youth kneeling in his cloth of silver robe, lifting his long throbbing neck towards the beloved; the lady stooping down towards him, raising him up and kissing him; the mingled cloud of waving hair, the four tight-clasped hands, the four tightly glued lips, the profile hidden by the profile, the passion and the pathos, the eager, wistful faces, nay, the very splendour of brocade robes and jewels, the very sweetness of blooming rose spaliers; all this is suitable to illustrate this group of sonnets or that of the "House of Life;" but it is false, false in efflorescence and luxuriance of passion, splendour and colour of accessory, to the poetry of these early Tuscans. Imaginative their poetry certainly is, and passionate; indeed the very concentration of imaginative passion; but imagination and passion unlike those of all other poets; perhaps because more rigorously reduced to their elements: imagination purely of the heart, passion purely of the intellect, neither of the senses: love in its most essential condition, but, just because an essence, purged of earthly alloys, rarefied, sublimated into a cultus or a philosophy.

These poems might nearly all have been written by one man, were it possible for one man to vary from absolute platitude to something like genius, so homogeneous is their tone: everywhere do we meet the same simplicity of diction struggling with the same complication and subtlety of thought, the same abstract speculation strangely mingled with most individual and personal pathos. The mode of thinking and feeling, the conception of all the large characteristics of love, and of all its small incidents are, in this *cycle* of poets, constantly the same; and they are the same in the "Vita Nuova;" Dante having, it would seem, invented and felt nothing unknown to his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, but merely concentrated their thoughts and feelings by the greater intenseness of his genius. This platonic love of Dante's days is, as I have said, a passion sublimated into a philosophy and a cultus. The philosophy of love engages much of these poets' attention; all have treated of it, but Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's elder brother in poetry, is love's chief theologian. He explains, as Eckhardt or Bonaventura might explain the

mysteries of God's being and will, the nature and operation of love. "Love, which enamours us of excellence, arises out of pure virtue of the soul, and equals us to God," he tells us; and subtly developes his theme. This being the case, nothing can be more mistaken than to suppose, as do those of little sense, that Love is blind, and goes blindly about ("Da sentir poco, e da credenza vana—Si move il dir di cotal grossa gente—Ch' amor fa cieco andar per lo suo regno"). Love is omniscient, since love is born of the knowledge and recognition of excellence. Such love as this is the only true source of happiness, since it alone raises man to the level of the divinity. Cavalcanti has in him not merely the subtlety but the scornfulness of a great divine. His wrath against all those who worship or defend a different god of Love knows no bounds. "I know not what to say of him who adores the goddess born of Saturn and sea-foam. His love is fire: it seems sweet, but its result is bitter and evil. He may indeed call himself happy; but in such delights he mingles himself with much baseness." Such is this god of Love, who, when he descended into Dante's heart, caused the spirit of life to tremble terribly in his secret chamber, and trembling to cry, "Lo, here is a god stronger than myself, who coming will rule over me. Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi!"

The god, this chaste and formidable archangel Amor, is the true subject of these poets' adoration; the woman into whom he descends by a mystic miracle of beauty and of virtue becomes henceforward invested with somewhat of his awful radiance. She is a gentle, gracious lady; a lovable and loving woman, in describing whose grey-green eyes and colour as of snow tinted with pomegranate, the older Tuscans would fain linger, comparing her to the new-budded rose, to the morning star, to the golden summer air, to the purity of snowflakes falling silently in a serene sky; but the sense of the divinity residing within her becomes too strong. From her eyes dart spirits who strike awe into the heart; from her lips come words which make men sigh; on her passage the poet casts down his eyes; notions, all these, with which we are familiar from the "Vita Nuova;" but which belong to Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, nay, even to Guinicelli, quite as much as to Dante. The poet bids his verse go forth to her, but softly; and stand before her with bended head, as before the Mother of God. She is a miracle herself, a thing sent from heaven, a spirit, as Dante says in that most beautiful of all his sonnets, the summing up of all that the poets of his circle had said of their lady—"Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare."

"She passes along the street so beautiful and gracious," says Guinicelli, "that she humbles pride in all whom she greets, and makes him of our faith if he does not yet believe. And no base man can come into her presence. And I will tell you another virtue of her: no man can think ought of evil as long as he looks upon her." "The noble mind which I feel, on account of this youthful lady who has appeared, makes me despise baseness and vileness," says Lapo Gianni. The women who surround her are glorified in her glory, glorified in their womanhood and companionship with her. "The ladies around you," says Cavalcanti, "are dear to me for the sake of your love; and I pray them as they are courteous, that they should do you all honour." She is, indeed, scarcely a woman, and something more than a saint: an avatar, an incarnation of that Amor who is born of virtue and beauty, and raises men's minds to heaven; and when Cavalcanti speaks of his lady's portrait behind the blazing tapers of Orsanmichele, it seems but natural that she should be on an altar, in the Madonna's place. The idea of a mysterious incarnation of love in the lady, or of a mystic relationship between her and love, returns to these poets. Lapo Gianni tells us first that she is Amor's sister, then speaks of her as Amor's bride; nay, in this love theology of the thirteenth century, arises the same kind of confusion as in the mystic disputes of the nature of the Godhead. A Sienese poet, Ugo da Massa, goes so far as to say, "Amor and I are all one thing; and we have one will and one heart; and if I were not, Amor were not; mind you, do not think I am saying these things from subtlety ('e non pensate ch' io '1 dica per arte'); for certainly it is true that I am love, and he who should slay me would slay love."

Together with the knowledge of public life and of scholastic theories, together with the love of occult and cabalistic science, and the craft of Provençal poetry, Dante received from his Florence of the thirteenth century the knowledge of this new, this exotic and esoteric intellectual love. And, as it is the mission of genius to gather into an undying whole, to model into a perfect form, the thoughts and feelings and perceptions of the less highly endowed men who surround it, so Dante moulded out of the love passion and love philosophy of his day the "Vita Nuova." Whether the story narrated in this book is fact; whether a real woman whom he called Beatrice ever existed; some of those praiseworthy persons, who prowl in the charnel-house of the past, and put its poor fleshless bones into the acids and sublimates of their laboratory, have gravely doubted. But such doubts cannot affect us. For if the story of the "Vita Nuova" be a romance, and if Beatrice be a mere romance heroine, the real meaning and value of the book does not change in our eyes; since, to concoct such a tale, Dante must have had a number of real experiences which are fully the tale's equivalent; and to conceive and create such a figure as Beatrice, and such a passion as she inspires her poet, he must have felt as a poignant reality the desire for such a lady, the capacity for such a love. A tale merely of the soul, and of the soul's movements and actions, this "Vita Nuova;" so why should it matter if that which could never exist save in the spirit, should have been but the spirit's creation? It is, in its very intensity, a vision of love; what if it be a vision merely conceived and never realized? Hence the futility of all those who wish to destroy our faith and pleasure by saying "all this never took place." Fools, can you tell what did or did not take place in a poet's mind? Be this as it may, the "Vita Nuova," thank heaven, exists; and, thank heaven, exists as a reality to our feelings. The longed-for ideal, the perfection whose love, said Cavalcanti, raises us up to God, has seemed to gather itself into a human shape; and a real being has been surrounded by the halo of perfection emanated from the poet's own soul. The vague visions of glory have suddenly taken body in this woman, seen rarely, at a distance; the woman whom, as a child, the poet, himself a child, had already looked at with the strange, ideal

fascination which we sometimes experience in our childhood. People are apt to smile at this opening of the "Vita Nuova;" to put aside this narrative of childish love together with the pathetic little pedantries of learned poetry and Kabbala, of the long gloses to each poem, and the elaborate calculations of the recurrence and combination of the number nine (and that curious little bit of encyclopaedic display about the Syrian month *Tismin*) as so much pretty local colouring or obsolete silliness. But there is nothing at which to laugh in such childish fascinations; the wonderful, the perfect, is more open to us as children than it is afterwards: a word, a picture, a snatch of music will have for us an ineffable, mysterious meaning; and how much more so some human being, often some other, more brilliant child from whose immediate contact we are severed by some circumstance, perhaps by our own consciousness of inferiority, which makes that other appear strangely distant, above us, moving in a world of glory which we scarcely hope to approach; a child sometimes, or sometimes some grown person, beautiful, brilliant, who sings or talks or looks at us, the child, with ways which we do not understand, like some fairy or goddess. No indeed, there is nothing to laugh at in this, in this first blossoming of that love for higher and more beautiful things, which in most of us is trodden down, left to wither, by our maturer selves; nothing to make us laugh; nay, rather to make us sigh that later on we see too well, see others too much on their real level, scrutinize too much; too much, alas, for what at best is but an imperfect creature. And in this state of fascination does the child Dante see the child Beatrice, as a strange, glorious little vision from a childish sphere quite above him; treasuring up that vision, till with his growth it expands and grows more beautiful and noble, but none the less fascinating and full of awfulness. When, therefore, the grave young poet, full of the yearning for Paradise (but Paradise vaguer, sweeter, less metaphysic and theological than the Paradise of his manhood); as yet but a gracious, learned youth, his terrible moral muscle still undeveloped by struggle, the noble and delicate dreamer of Giotto's fresco, with the long, thin, almost womanish face, marked only by dreamy eyes and lips, wandering through this young Florence of the Middle Ages—when, I say, he meets after long years, the noble and gentle woman, serious and cheerful and candid; and is told that she is that same child who was the queen and goddess of his childish fancies; then the vague glory with which his soul is filled expands and enwraps the beloved figure, so familiar and yet so new. And the blood retreats from his veins, and he trembles; and a vague god within him, half allegory, half reality, cries out to him that a new life for him has begun. Beatrice has become the ideal; Beatrice, the real woman, has ceased to exist; the Beatrice of his imagination only remains, a piece of his own soul embodied in a gracious and beautiful reality, which he follows, seeks, but never tries to approach. Of the real woman he asks nothing; no word throughout the "Vita Nuova" of entreaty or complaint, no shadow of desire, not a syllable of those reproaches of cruelty which Petrarch is for ever showering upon Laura. He desires nothing of Beatrice, and Beatrice cannot act wrongly; she is perfection, and perfection makes him who contemplates humble at once and proud, glorifying his spirit. Once, indeed, he would wish that she might listen to him; he has reason to think that he has fallen in her esteem, has seemed base and uncourteous in her eyes, and he would explain. But he does not wish to address her; it never occurs to him that she can ever feel in any way towards him; it is enough that he feels towards her. Let her go by and smile and graciously salute her friends: the sight of her grave and pure regalness, nay, rather divinity, of womanhood, suffices for his joy; nay, later the consciousness comes upon him that it is sufficient to know of her existence and of his love even without seeing her. And, as must be the case in such ideal passion, where the action is wholly in the mind of the lover, he is at first ashamed, afraid; he feels a terror lest his love, if known to her, should excite her scorn; a horror lest it be misunderstood and befouled by the jests of those around him, even of those same gentle women to whom he afterwards addresses his praise of Beatrice. He is afraid of exposing to the air of reality this ideal flower of passion. But the moment comes when he can hide it no longer; and, behold, the passion flower of his soul opens out more gloriously in the sunlight of the world. He is proud of his passion, of his worship; he feels the dignity and glory of being the priest of such a love. The women all round, the beautiful, courteous women, of whom, only just now, he was so dreadfully afraid, become his friends and confidants; they are quite astonished (half in love, perhaps, with the young poet) at this strange way of loving; they sympathize, admire, are in love with his love for Beatrice. And to them he speaks of her rather than to men, for the womanhood which they share with his lady consecrates them in his eyes; and they, without jealousy towards this ideal woman, though perhaps not without longing for this ideal love, listen as they might listen to some new and unaccountably sweet music, touched and honoured, and feeling towards Dante as towards some beautiful, half-mad thing. He talks of her, sings of her, and is happy; the strangest thing in this intensely real narrative of real love is this complete satisfaction of the passion in its own existence, this complete absence of all desire or hope. But this happiness is interrupted by the sudden, terrible thought that one day all this must cease; the horrible, logical necessity coming straight home to him, that one day she must die— "Di necessità conviene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia." There is nothing truer, more intensely pathetic, in all literature, than this frightful pang of evil, not real, but first imagined; this frightful nightmare vision of the end coming when reality is still happy. Have we not all of us at one time felt the horrible shudder of that sudden perception that happiness must end; that the beloved, the living, must die; that this thing the present, which we clasp tight with our arms, which throbs against our breast, will in but few moments be gone, vanished, leaving us to grasp mere phantom recollections? Compared with this the blow of the actual death of Beatrice is gentle. And then, the truthfulness of his narration how, with yearning, empty heart, hungering after those poor lost realities of happiness, after that occasional glimpse of his lady, that rare catching of her voice, that blessed consciousness of her existence, he little by little lets himself be consoled, cradled to sleep like a child which has sobbed itself out, in the sympathy, the vague love, of another—the Donna della Finestra—with whom he speaks of Beatrice; and the sudden, terrified, starting up

and shaking off of any such base consolation, the wrath at any such mental infidelity to the dead one, the indignant impatience with his own weakness, with his baseness in not understanding that it is enough that Beatrice has lived and that he has loved her, in not feeling that the glory and joy of the ineffaceable past is sufficient for all present and future. A revolution in himself which gradually merges in that grave final resolve, that sudden seeing how Beatrice can be glorified by him, that solemn, quiet, brief determination not to say any more of her as yet; not till he can show her transfigured in Paradise. "After this sonnet there appeared unto me a marvellous vision, in which I beheld things that made me propose unto myself to speak no more of this blessed one, until the time when I might more worthily treat of her. And that this may come to pass, I strive with all my endeavour, even as she truly knows it. Thus, if it should please Him, through whom all things do live, that my life continue for several more years, I hope to say of her such things as have never been said of any lady. And then may it please Him, who is the lord of all courtesy, that my soul shall go forth to see the glory of its lady, that is to say, of that blessed Beatrice, who gloriously looks up into the face of Him, *qui est per omnia saecula benedictus*"

Thus ends the "Vita Nuova;" a book, to find any equivalent for whose reality and completeness of passion, though it is passion for a woman whom the poet scarcely knows and of whom he desires nothing, we must go back to the merest fleshly love of Antiquity, of Sappho or Catullus; for modern times are too hesitating and weak. So at least it seems; but in fact, if we only think over the matter, we shall find that in no earthly love can we find this reality and completeness: it is possible only in love like Dante's. For there can be no unreality in it: it is a reality of the imagination, and leaves, with all its mysticism and idealism, no room for falsehood. Any other kind of love may be set aside, silenced, by the activity of the mind; this love of Dante's constitutes that very activity. And, after reading that last page which I have above transcribed, as those closing Latin words echo through our mind like the benediction from an altar, we feel as if we were rising from our knees in some secret chapel, bright with tapers and dim with incense; among a crowd kneeling like ourselves; yet solitary, conscious of only the glory we have seen and tasted, of that love *qui est per omnia scecula benedictus.*

III.

But is it right that we should feel thus? Is it right that love, containing within itself the potentialities of so many things so sadly needed in this cold real world, as patience, tenderness, devotion, and loving-kindness —is it right that love should thus be carried away out of ordinary life and enclosed, a sacred thing for contemplation, in the shrine or chapel of an imaginary Beatrice? And, on the other hand, is it right that into the holy places of our soul, the places where we should come face to face with the unattainable ideal of our own conduct that we may strive after something nobler than mere present pleasure and profit—is it right that into such holy places, destined but for an abstract perfection, there should be placed a mere half-unknown, vaguely seen woman? In short, is not this "Vita Nuova" a mere false ideal, one of those works of art which, because they are beautiful, get worshipped as holy?

This question is a grave one, and worthy to make us pause. The world is full of instances of the fatal waste of feelings misapplied: of human affections, human sympathy and compassion, so terribly necessary to man, wasted in various religious systems, upon Christ and God: of religious aspirations, contemplation, worship, and absorption, necessary to the improvement of the soul, wasted in various artistic or poetic crazes upon mere pleasant works, or pleasant fancies, of man; wastefulness of emotions, wastefulness of time, which constitute two-thirds of mankind's history and explain the vast amount of evil in past and present. The present question therefore becomes, is not this "Vita Nuova" merely another instance of this lamentable carrying off of precious feelings in channels where they result no longer in fertilization, but in corruption? The Middle Ages, especially, in its religion, its philosophy, nay, in that very love of which I am writing, are one succession of such acts of wastefulness. This question has come to me many a time, and has left me in much doubt and trouble. But on reflection I am prepared to answer that such doubts as these may safely be cast behind us, and that we may trust that instinct which, whenever we lay down the "Vita Nuova," tells us that to have felt and loved this book is one of those spiritual gains in our life which, come what may, can never be lost entirely.

The "Vita Nuova" represents the most exceptional of exceptional moral and intellectual conditions. Dante's love for Beatrice is, in great measure, to be regarded as an extraordinary and exquisite work of art, produced not by the volition of man, but by the accidental combination of circumstances. It is no more suited to ordinary life than would a golden and ivory goddess of Phidias be suited to be the wife of a mortal man. But it may not therefore be useless; nay, it may be of the highest utility. It may serve that high utilitarian mission of all art, to correct the real by the ideal, to mould the thing as it is in the semblance of the thing as it should be. Herein, let it be remembered, consists the value, the necessity of the abstract and the ideal. In the long history of evolution we have now reached the stage where selection is no longer in the mere hands of unconscious nature, but of conscious or half-conscious man; who makes himself, or is made by mankind, according to not merely physical necessities, but to the intellectual necessity of realizing the ideal, of pursuing the object, of imitating the model, before him. No man will ever find the living counterpart of that chryselephantine goddess of the Greeks; ivory and gold, nay, marble, fashioned by an artist, are one thing; flesh is another, and flesh fashioned by mere blind accident. But the man who should have beheld that Phidian goddess, who should have felt her full perfection, would not have been as easily satisfied as any other with a mere commonplace living

woman; he would have sought—and seeking, would have had more likelihood of finding—the woman of flesh and blood who nearest approached to that ivory and gold perfection. The case is similar with the "Vita Nuova." No earthly affection, no natural love of man for woman, of an entire human being, body and soul, for another entire human being, can ever be the counterpart of this passion for Beatrice, the passion of a mere mind for a mere mental ideal. But if the old lust-fattened evil of the world is to diminish rather than to increase, why then every love of man for woman and of woman for man should tend, to the utmost possibility, to resemble that love of the "Vita Nuova." For mankind has gradually separated from brute kind merely by the development of those possibilities of intellectual and moral passion which the animal has not got; an animal man will never cease to be, but a man he can daily more and more become, until from the obscene goat-legged and goat-faced creature which we commonly see, he has turned into something like certain antique fauns: a beautiful creature, not noticeably a beast, a beast in only the smallest portion of his nature. In order that this may come to pass—and its coming to pass means, let us remember, the enormous increase of happiness and diminution of misery upon earth—it is necessary that day by day and year by year there should enter into man's feelings, emotions, and habits, into his whole life, a greater proportion of that which is his own, and is not shared by the animal; that his actions, preferences, the great bulk of his conscious existence, should be busied with things of the soul, truth, good, and beauty, and not with things of the body. Hence the love of such a gradually improving and humanizing man for a gradually improving and humanizing woman, should become, as much as is possible, a connection of the higher and more human, rather than of the lower and more bestial, portions of their nature; it should tend, in its reciprocal stimulation, to make the man more a man, the woman more a woman, to make both less of the mere male and female animals that they were. In brief, love should increase, instead, like that which oftenest profanes love's name, of diminishing, the power of aspiration, of self-direction, of self-restraint, which may exist within us. Now to tend to this is to tend towards the love of the "Vita Nuova;" to tend towards the love of the "Vita Nuova" is to tend towards this. Say what you will of the irresistible force of original constitution, it remains certain, and all history is there as witness, that mankind—that is to say, the only mankind in whom lies the initiative of good, mankind which can judge and select—possesses the faculty of feeling and acting in accordance with its standard of feeling and action; the faculty in great measure of becoming that which it thinks desirable to become. Now to have perceived the even imaginary existence of such a passion as that of Dante for Beatrice, must be, for all who can perceive it, the first step towards attempting to bring into reality a something of that passion: the real passion conceived while the remembrance of that ideal passion be still in the mind will bear to it a certain resemblance, even as, according to the ancients, the children born of mothers whose rooms contained some image of Apollo or Adonis would have in them a reflex, however faint, of that beauty in whose presence they came into existence. In short, it seems to me, that as the "Vita Nuova" embodies the utmost ideal of absolutely spiritual love, and as to spiritualize love must long remain one of the chief moral necessities of the world, there exists in this book a moral force, a moral value, a power in its unearthly passion and purity, which, as much as anything more deliberately unselfish, more self-consciously ethical, we must acknowledge and honour as holy.

As the love of him who has read and felt the "Vita Nuova" cannot but strive towards a purer nature, so also the love of which poets sang became also nobler as the influence of the strange Tuscan school of platonic lyrists spread throughout literature, bringing to men the knowledge of a kind of love born of that idealizing and worshipping passion of the Middle Ages; but of mediaeval love chastened by the manners of stern democracy and passed through the sieve of Christian mysticism and pagan philosophy. Of this influence of the "Vita Nuova"—for the "Vita Nuova" had concentrated in itself all the intensest characteristics of Dante's immediate predecessors and contemporaries, causing them to become useless and forgotten—of this influence of the "Vita Nuova," there is perhaps no more striking example than that of the poet who, constituted by nature to be the mere continuator of the romantically gallant tradition of the troubadours, became, and hence his importance and glory, the mediator between Dante and the centuries which followed him; the man who gave to mankind, incapable as yet of appreciating or enduring the spiritual essence of the "Vita Nuova," that self-same essence of intellectual love in an immortal dilution. I speak, of course, of Petrarch. His passion is neither ideal nor strong. The man is in love, or has been in love, existing on a borderland of loving and not loving, with the beautiful woman. His elegant, refined, half-knightly, half-scholarly, and altogether courtly mind is delighted with her; with her curly yellow hair, her good red and white beauty (we are never even told that Dante's Beatrice is beautiful, yet how much lovelier is she not than this Laura, descended from all the golden-haired bright-eyed ladies of the troubadours!), with her manner, her amiability, her purity and dignity in this ecclesiastical Babylon called Avignon. He maintains a semi-artificial love; frequenting her house, writing sonnet after sonnet, rhetorical exercises, studies from the antique and the Provençal, for the most part; he, who was born to be a mere troubadour like Ventadour or Folquet, becomes, through the influence of Dante, the type of the poet Abate, of the poetic *cavaliere servente*; a good, weak man with aspirations, who, failing to get the better of Laura's virtue, doubtless consoles himself elsewhere, but returns to an habitual contemplation of it. He is, being constitutionally a troubadour, an Italian priest turned partly Provençal, vexed at her not becoming his mistress; then (having made up his mind, which was but little set upon her), quite pleased at her refusal: it turns her into a kind of Beatrice, and him, poor man, heaven help him! into a kind of Dante—a Dante for the use of the world at large. He goes on visiting Laura, and writing to her a sonnet regularly so many times a week, and the best, carefully selected, we feel distinctly persuaded, at regular intervals. It is a determined cultus, a sort of half-real affectation, something equivalent to lighting a lamp before a very well-painted and very conspicuous shrine. All his humanities, all his Provençal lore go into these poems—

written for whom? For her? Decidedly; for she has no reason not to read the effusions of this amiable, weak priestlet; she feels nothing for him. For her; but doubtless also to be handed round in society; a new sonnet or canzone by that charming and learned man, the Abate Petrarch. There is considerable emptiness in all this: he praises Laura's chastity, then grows impatient, then praises her again; adores her, calls her cruel, his goddess, his joy, his torment; he does not really want her, but in the vacuity of his feeling, thinks he does; calls her alternately the flat, abusive, and eulogistic names which mean nothing. He plays loud and soft with this absence of desire; he fiddle faddles in descriptions of her, not passionate or burning, but delicately undressed: he sees her (but with chaste eyes) in her bath; he envies her veil, &c.; he neither violently intellectually embraces, nor humbly bows down in imagination before her; he trifles gracefully, modestly, half-familiarly, with her finger tips, with the locks of her hair, and so forth. Fancy Dante abusing Beatrice; fancy Dante talking of Beatrice in her bath; the mere idea of his indignation and shame makes one shameful and indignant at the thought. But this perfect Laura is no Beatrice, or only a half-and-half sham one. She is no ideal figure, merely a figure idealized; this is no imaginative passion, merely an unreal one. Compare, for instance, the suggestion of Laura's possible death with the suggestion of the possible death of Beatrice. Petrarch does not love sufficiently to guess what such a loss would be. Then Laura does die. Here Petrarch rises. The severing of the dear old habits, the absence of the sweet reality, the terrible sense that all is over, Death, the great poetizer and giver of love philters, all this makes him love Laura as he never loved her before. The poor weak creature, who cannot, like a troubadour, go seek a new mistress when the old one fails him, feels dreadfully alone, the world dreadfully dreary around him; he sits down and cries, and his crying is genuine, making the tears come also into our eyes. And Laura, as she becomes a more distant ideal, becomes nobler, though noble with only a faint earthly graciousness not comparable to the glory of the living Beatrice. And, as he goes on, growing older and weaker and more desolate, the thought of a glorified Laura (as all are glorified, even in the eyes of the weakest, by death) begins to haunt him as Dante was haunted by the thought of Beatrice alive. Yet, even at this very time, come doubts of the lawfulness of having thus adored (or thought he had adored) a mortal woman; he does not know whether all this may not have been vanity and folly; he tries to turn his thoughts away from Laura and up to God. Perhaps he may be called on to account for having given too much of his life to a mere earthly love. Then, again, Laura reappears beautified in his memory, and is again tremblingly half-conjured away. He is weak, and sad, and helpless, and alone; and his heart is empty; he knows not what to think nor how to feel; he sobs, and we cry with him. Nowhere could there be found a stranger contrast than this nostalgic craving after the dead Laura, vacillating and troubled by fear of sin and doubt of unworthiness of object, with that solemn ending of the "Vita Nuova," where the name of Beatrice is pronounced for the last time before it be glorified in Paradise, where Dante devotes his life to becoming worthy of saying "such words as have never been said of any lady." The ideal woman is one and unchangeable in glory, and unchangeable is the passion of her lover; but of this sweet dead Laura, whose purity and beauty and cruelty he had sung, without a tremor of self-unworthiness all her life, of her the poor weak Petrarch begins to doubt, of her and her worthiness of all this love; and when? when she is dead and himself is dying.

Such a man is Petrarch; and yet, by the irresistible purifying and elevating power of the "Vita Nuova,'" this man came to write not other *albas* and *serenas,* not other love-songs to be added to the love-songs of Provence, but those sonnets and canzoni which for four centuries taught the world, too coarse as yet to receive Dante's passion at first hand, a nobler and more spiritual love. After Petrarch a gradual change takes place in the poetic conception of love: except in learned revivalisms or in loose buffooneries, the mere fleshly love of Antiquity disappears out of literature; and equally so, though by a slower process of gradual transformation, vanishes also the adoring, but undisguisedly adulterous love of the troubadours and minnesingers. Into the love Instincts of mankind have been mingled, however much diluted, some drops of the more spiritual passion of Dante. The *puella* of Antiquity, the noble dame of feudal days, is succeeded in Latin countries, In Italy, and France, and Spain, and Portugal, by the *gloriosa donna* imitated from. Petrarch, and imitated by Petrarch from Dante; a long-line of shadowy figures, veiled in the veil of Madonna Laura, ladies beloved of Lorenzo and Michael Angelo, of Ariosto, and Tasso, and Camoens, and Cervantes, passes through the world; nay, even the sprightly-mistress of Ronsard, half-bred pagan and troubadour has airs of dignity and mystery which make us almost think that in this dainty coquettish French body, of Marie or Helene or Cassandrette, there really may be an immortal soul. But with the Renaissance—that movement half of mediaeval democratic progress, and half of antique revivalism, and to which in reality belongs not merely Petrarch, but Dante, and every one of the Tuscan poets, Guinicelli, Lapo Gianni, Cavalcanti, who broke with the feudal poetry of Provence and Sicily—with the Renaissance, or rather with its long-drawn-out end, comes the close, for the moment, of the really creative activity of the Latin peoples in the domain of poetry. All the things for two centuries which Italy and France and Spain and Portugal (which we must remember for the sake of Camoens) continue to produce, are but developments of parts left untouched; or refinements of extreme detail, as in the case, particularly, of the French poets of the sixteenth century; but poetry receives from these races nothing new or vital, no fresh ideal or fruitful marriage of ideals. And here begins, uniting in itself all the scattered and long-dormant powers of Northern poetry, the great and unexpected action of England. It had slept through the singing period of the Middle Ages, and was awakened, not by Germany or Provence, but by Italy: Boccaccio and Petrarch spoke, and, as through dreams, England in Chaucer's voice, made answer. Again, when the Renaissance had drawn to a close, far on in the sixteenth century, English poetry was reawakened; and again by Italy. This time it was completely wakened, and arose and slept no more. And one of the great and fruitful things achieved by English poetry in this its final awakening was to give to the world the new, the modern, perhaps the definitive, the

final ideal of love. England drank a deep draught—how deep we see from Sidney's and Spenser's sonnets—of Petrarch; and in this pleasant dilution, tasted and felt the burning essence of the "Vita Nuova;" for though Dante remained as the poet, the poet of heaven and hell, this happy half-and-half Petrarch had for full two centuries completely driven into oblivion the young Dante who had loved Beatrice. For England, for this magnificent and marvellous outburst of all the manifold poetic energy stored up and quintupled during that long period of inertness, there could however be no foreign imported ideal of love; there was no possibility of a new series of spectral Lauras, shadows projected by a shadow. Already, long ago, at the first call of Petrarch, Chaucer, by the side of the merely mediaeval love types—of brutish lust and doglike devotion—of the Wife of Bath and of Griseldis, had rough-sketched a kind of modern love, the love which is to become that of Romeo and Hamlet, in his story of Palemon and Arcite. Among the poetic material which existed in England at the close of the sixteenth century was the old, long-neglected, domestic love, quiet, undemonstrative, essentially unsinging, of the early Northern (as indeed also of the Greek and Hindoo) epics; a domestic love which, in a social condition more closely resembling our own than any other, even than that of the Italian democracies, which had preceded it; among a people who permitted a woman to choose her own husband, and forbade a man wooing another man's wife, had already, in ballads and folk poetry, begun a faint-twitter of song. To this love of the man and the woman who hope to marry, strong and tender, but still (as Coleridge remarked of several of the lesser Elizabethan playwrights) most outspokenly carnal, was united by the pure spirit of Spenser, by the unerring genius of Shakespeare, that vivifying drop of burning, spiritual love taken from out of the "Vita Nuova," which had floated, like some sovereign essential oil, on the top of Petrarch's rose-water. Henceforward the world possesses a new kind of love: the love of Romeo, of Hamlet, of Bassanio, of Viola, and of Juliet; the love of the love poems of Shelley, of Tennyson, of Browning and Browning's wife. A love whose blindness, exaggeration of passion, all that might have made it foolish and impracticable, leads no longer to folly and sin, but to an intenser activity of mankind's imagination of the good and beautiful, to a momentary realization in our fancy of all our vague dreams of perfection; a love which, though it may cool down imperceptibly and pale in its intenseness, like the sunrise fires into a serene sky, has left some glory round the head of the wife, some glory in the heart of the husband, has been, however fleeting, a vision of beauty which has made beauty more real. And all this owing to the creation, the storing up, the purification by the Platonic poets of Tuscany, of that strange and seemingly so artificial and unreal thing, mediaeval love; the very forms and themes of whose poetry, the *serena* and the *alba*, which had been indignantly put aside by the early Italian lyrists, being unconsciously revived, and purified and consecrated in the two loveliest love poems of Elizabethan poetry: the *serena*, the evening song of impatient expectation in Spenser's Epithalamium; the *alba*, the dawn song of hurried parting, in the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet."

Let us recapitulate. The feudal Middle Ages gave to mankind a more refined and spiritual love, a love all chivalry, fidelity, and adoration, but a love steeped in the poison of adultery; and to save the pure and noble portions of this mediaeval love became the mission of the Tuscan poets of that strange school of Platonic love which in its very loveliness may sometimes seem so unnatural and sterile. For, by reducing this mediaeval love to a mere intellectual passion, seeking in woman merely a self-made embodiment of cravings after perfection, they cleansed away that deep stain of adultery; they quadrupled the intensity of the ideal element; they distilled the very essential spirit of poetic passion, of which but a few drops, even as diluted by Petrarch, precipitated, when mingled with the earthly passion of future poets, to the bottom, no longer to be seen or tasted, all baser ingredients.

And, while the poems of minnesingers and troubadours have ceased to appeal to us, and remain merely for their charm of verse and of graceful conceit; the poetry written by the Italians of the thirteenth century for women, whose love was but an imaginative fervour, remains concentrated in the "Vita Nuova;" and will remain for all time the sovereign purifier to which the world must have recourse whenever that precipitate of baser instincts, which thickened like slime the love poetry of Antiquity, shall rise again and sully the purity of the love poetry of to-day.

EPILOGUE.

More than a year has elapsed since the moment when, fancying that this series of studies must be well-nigh complete, I attempted to explain in an introductory chapter what the nature of this book of mine is, or would fain be. I had hoped that each of these studies would complete its companions; and that, without need for explicit explanation, my whole idea would have become more plain to others than it was at that time even to myself. But instead, it has become obvious that the more carefully I had sought to reduce each question to unity, the more that question-subdivided and connected itself with other questions; and that, with the solution of each separate problem, had arisen a new set of problems which infinitely complicated the main lessons to be deduced from a study of that many-sided civilization to which, remembering the brilliant and mysterious offspring of Faustus and Helena, I have given the name of Euphorion. Hence, as it seems, the necessity for a few further words of explanation.

In those introductory pages written some fifteen months ago, I tried to bring home to the reader a sense which has haunted me throughout the writing of this volume; namely, that instead of having deliberately made up my mind to study the Renaissance, as one makes up one's mind to

visit Greece or Egypt or the Holy Land; I have, on the contrary, quite accidentally and unconsciously, found myself wandering about in spirit among the monuments of this particular historic region, even as I might wander about in the streets of Siena where I wrote last year, of Florence whence I write at present; wandering about among these things, and little by little feeling a particular interest in one, then in another, according as each happened to catch my fancy or to recall some already known thing. Now these, which for want of a better word I have just called monuments, and just now, less clearly, but also less foolishly, merely *things*—these things were in reality not merely individual and really existing buildings, books, pictures, or statues, individual and really registered men, women, and events; they were the mental conceptions which I had extracted out of these realities; the intellectual types made up (as the mediaeval symbols of justice are made up of the visible paraphernalia, robe, scales and sword, for judging and weighing and punishing) of the impressions left on the mind by all those buildings, or books, or pictures, or statues, or men, women, and events. They were not the iniquities of this particular despot nor the scandalous sayings of that particular humanist, but the general moral chaos of the Italian fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; not the poem of Pulci, of Boiardo, of Ariosto in especial, but a vast imaginary poem made up of them all; not the mediaeval saints of Angelico and the pagan demi-gods of Michael Angelo, but the two tremendous abstractions: the spirit of Mediaevalism in art, and the spirit of Antiquity; the interest in the distressed soul, and the interest in the flourishing body. And, as my thoughts have gone back to Antiquity and onwards to our own times, their starting-point has nevertheless been the Tuscan art of the fifteenth century, their nucleus some notes on busts by Benedetto da Maiano and portraits by Raphael.

My *dramatis persona* have been modes of feeling and forms of art. I have tried to explain the life and character, not of any man or woman, but of the moral scepticism of Italy, of the tragic spirit of our Elizabethan dramatists; I have tried to write the biography of the romance poetry of the Middle Ages, of the realism of the great portrait painters and sculptors of the Renaissance. But these, my *dramatis persona,* are, let me repeat it, abstractions: they exist only in my mind and in the minds of those who think like myself. Hence, like all abstractions, they represent the essence of a question, but not its completeness, its many-sidedness as we may see it in reality. Hence it is that I have frequently passed over exceptions to the rule which I was stating, because the explanation of these exceptions would have involved the formulating of a number of apparently irrelevant propositions; so that any one who please may accuse me of inexactness; and, to give an instance, cover the margins of my essay on Mediaeval Love with a whole list of virtuous love stories of the Middle Ages; or else ferret out of Raynouard and Von der Hagen a dozen pages of mediaeval poems in praise of rustic life. These objections will be perfectly correct, and (so far as my knowledge permitted me) I might have puzzled the reader with them myself; but it remains none the less certain that, in the main, mediaeval love was not virtuous, and mediaeval peasantry not admired by poets; and none the less certain, I think, also, that in describing the characteristics and origin of an abstract thing, such as mediaeval love, or mediaeval feeling towards the country and country folk, it was my business to state the rule and let alone the exceptions.

There is another matter which gives me far greater concern. In creating and dealing with an abstraction, one is frequently forced, if I may use the expression, to cut a subject in two, to bring one of its sides into full light and leave the other in darkness; nay, to speak harshly of one side of an art or of a man without being able to speak admiringly of another side.

This one-sidedness, this apparent injustice of judgment, has in some cases been remedied by the fact that I have treated in one study those things which I was forced to omit in another study; as, in two separate essays, I have pointed out first the extreme inferiority of Renaissance sculpture to the sculpture of Antiquity with regard to absolute beauty of form; and then the immeasurable superiority of Renaissance over antique sculpture in the matter of that beauty and interest dependent upon mere arrangement and handling, wherein lies the beauty-creating power of realistic schools. But most often I have shown one side, not merely of an artist or an art, but of my own feeling, without showing the other; and in one case this inevitable one-sidedness has weighed upon me almost like personal guilt, and has almost made me postpone the publication of this book to the Greek Kalends, in hopes of being able to explain and to atone. I am alluding to Fra Angelico. I spoke of him in a study of the progress of mere beautiful form, the naked human form moreover, in the art of the Renaissance; I looked at his work with my mind full of the unapproachable superiority of antique form; I judged and condemned the artist with reference to that superb movement towards nature and form and bodily beauty which was the universal movement of the fifteenth century; I lost patience with this saint because he would not turn pagan; I pushed aside, because he did not seek for a classic Olympus, his exquisite dreams of a mediaeval Paradise. I had taken part, as its chronicler, with the art which seeks mere plastic perfection, the art to which Angelico said, "Retro me Sathana." It was my intention to close even this volume with a study of the poetical conception of early Renaissance painting, of that strange kind of painting in which a thing but imperfect in itself, a mere symbol of lovely ideas, brings home to our mind, with a rush of associations, a sense of beauty and wonder greater perhaps than any which we receive from the sober reality of perfect form. Again, there are the German masters—the great engravers, Kranach, Altdorfer, Aldegrever, especially; of whom, for their absolute pleasure in ugly women, for their filthy delight in horrors, I have said an immense amount of ill; and of whom, for their wonderful intuition of dramatic situation, their instinct of the poetry of common things, and their magnificently imaginative rendering of landscape, I hope some day to say an equal amount of good.

I have spoken of the lesson which may be derived from studies even as humble as these studies of

mine; since, in my opinion, we cannot treat history as a mere art—though history alone can gives us now-a-days tragedy which has ceased to exist on our stage, and wonder which has ceased to exist in our poetry—we cannot seek in it mere selfish enjoyment of imagination and emotion, without doing our soul the great injury of cheating it of some of those great indignations, some of those great lessons which make it stronger and more supple in the practical affairs of life. Each of these studies of mine brings its own lesson, artistic or ethical, important or unimportant; its lesson of seeking certainty in our moral opinions, beauty in all and whatever our forms of art, spirituality in our love. But besides these I seem to perceive another deduction, an historical fact with a practical application; to see it as the result not merely perhaps of the studies of which this book is the fruit, but of those further studies, of the subtler sides of Mediaeval and Renaissance life and art which at present occupy my mind and may some day add another series of essays to this: a lesson still vague to myself, but which, satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily, I shall nevertheless attempt to explain; if indeed it requires to be brought home to the reader.

Of the few forms of feeling and imagination which I have treated—things so different from one another as the feeling for nature and the chivalric poem, as modern art, with its idealism and realism, and modern love—of these forms, emotional and artistic, which Antiquity did not know, or knew but little, the reader may have observed that I have almost invariably traced the origin deep into that fruitful cosmopolitan chaos, due to the mingling of all that was still unused of the remains of Antiquity with all that was untouched of the intellectual and moral riches of the barbarous nations, to which we give the name of Middle Ages; and that I have, as invariably, followed the development of these precious forms, and their definitive efflorescence and fruit-bearing, into that particular country where certain mediaeval conditions had ceased to exist, namely Italy. In other words, it has seemed to me that the things which I have studied were originally produced during the Middle Ages, and consequently in the mediaeval countries, France, Germany, Provence; but did not attain maturity except in that portion of the Middle Ages which is mediaeval no longer, but already more than half modern, the Renaissance, which began in Italy not with the establishment of despotisms and the coming of Greek humanists, but with the independence of the free towns and with the revival of Roman tradition.

Why so? Because, it appears to me, after watching the lines of my thought converging to this point, because, with a few exceptions, the Middle Ages were rich in great beginnings (indeed a good half of all that makes up our present civilization seems to issue from them): but they were poor in complete achievements; full of the seeds of modern institutions, arts, thoughts, and feelings, they yet show us but rarely the complete growth of any one of them: a fruitful Nile flood, but which must cease to drown and to wash away, which must subside before the germs that it has brought can shoot forth and mature. The sense of this comes home to me most powerfully whenever I think of mediaeval poetry and mediaeval painting.

The songs of the troubadours and minnesingers, what are they to our feelings? They are pleasant, even occasionally beautiful, but they are empty, lamentably empty, charming arrangements of words; poetry which fills our mind or touches our heart comes only with the Tuscan lyrists of the thirteenth century. The same applies to mediaeval narrative-verse: it is, with one or two exceptions or half exceptions, such as "The Chanson de Roland" and Gottfried's "Tristan und Isolde," decidedly wearisome; a thing to study, but scarcely a thing to delight in. I do not mean to say that the old legends of Wales and Scandinavia, subsequently embodied by the French and German poets of the Middle Ages, are without imaginative or emotional interest; nothing can be further from my thoughts. The Nibelung story possesses, both in the Norse and in the Middle High German version, a tragic fascination; and a quaint fairy-tale interest, every now and then rising to the charm of a Decameronian *novella*, is possessed by many of the Keltic tales, whether briefly told in the Mabinogion or lengthily detailed by Chrestien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach. But all this is the interest of the mere story, and you would enjoy it almost as much if that story were related not by a poet but by a peasant; it is the fascination of the mere theme, with the added fascination of our own unconscious filling up and colouring of details. And the poem itself, whence we extract this theme, remains, for the most part, uninteresting. The figures are vague, almost shapeless and colourless; they have no well-understood mental and moral anatomy, so that when they speak and act the writer seems to have no clear conception of the motives or tempers which make them do so; even as in a child's pictures, the horses gallop, the men run, the houses stand, but without any indication of the muscles which move the horse, of the muscles which hold up the man, of the solid ground upon which is built, nay rather, into which is planted, the house. Hatred of Hagen, devotion of Riidger, passionate piety of Parzival—all these are things of which we do not particularly see the how or why; we do not follow the reasons, in event or character, which make these men sacrifice themselves or others, weep, storm, and so forth; nay, even when these reasons are clear from the circumstances, we are not shown the action of the mechanism, we do not see how Brunhilt is wroth, how Chriemhilt is revengeful, how Herzeloid is devoted to Parzival. There is, in the vast majority of this mediaeval poetry, no clear conception of the construction and functions of people's character, and hence no conception either of those actions and reactions of various moral organs which, after all, are at the bottom of the events related. Herein lies the difference between the forms of the Middle Ages and those of Antiquity; for how perfectly felt, understood, is not every feeling and every action of the Homeric heroes, how perfectly indicated! We can see the manner and reason of the conflict of Achilles and Agamemnon, of the behaviour of the returned Odysseus, as clearly as we see the manner and reason of the movements of the fighting Centaurs and Lapithae, or the Amazons; nay, even the minute mood of comparatively unimportant figures, as Helen, Brisei's, and Nausicaa, is indicated in its moral anatomy and attitude as distinctly as is the manner in which the maidens of the Parthenon frieze slowly restrain their steps, the boys curb their steeds, or the

old men balance their oil jars. Nothing of this in mediaeval literature, except perhaps in "Flamenca" and "Tristan," where the motive of action, mere imaginative desire, is all-permeating and explains everything. These people clearly had no interest, no perception, connected with character: a valorous woman, a chivalrous knight, an insolent steward, a jealous husband, a faithful retainer; things recognized only in outline, made to speak and act only according to a fixed tradition, without knowledge of the internal mechanism of motive; these sufficed. Hence it is that mediaeval poetry is always like mediaeval painting (for painting continued to be mediaeval with Giotto's pupils long after poetry had ceased to be mediaeval with Dante and his school), where the Virgin sits and holds the child without body wherewith to sit or arms wherewith to hold; where angels flutter forward and kneel in conventional greeting, with obviously no bended knees beneath their robes, nay, with knees, waist, armpits, all anywhere; where men ride upon horses without flat to their back; where processions of the blessed come forth, guided by fiddling seraphs, vague, faint faces, sweet or grand, heads which might wave like pieces of cut-out paper upon their necks, arms and legs here and there, not clearly belonging to any one; creatures marching, soaring, flying, singing, fiddling, without a bone or a muscle wherewith to do it all. And meanwhile, in this mediaeval poetry, as in this mediaeval painting, there are yards and yards of elaborate preciousness: all the embossed velvets, all the white-and-gold-shot brocades, all the silks and satins, and jewel-embroidered stuffs of the universe cast stiffly about these phantom men and women, these phantom horses and horsemen. It is not until we turn to Italy, and to the Northern man, Chaucer, entirely under Italian influence, that we obtain an approach to the antique clearness of perception and comprehension; that we obtain not only in Dante something akin to the muscularities of Signorelli and Michael Angelo; but in Boccaccio and Chaucer, in Cavalca and Petrarch, the equivalent of the well-understood movement, the well-indicated situation of the simple, realistic or poetic, sketches of Filippino and Botticelli.

This, you will say, is a mere impression; it is no explanation, still less such an explanation as may afford a lesson. Not so. This strange inconclusiveness in all mediaeval things, till the moment comes when they cease to be mediaeval; this richness in germs and poverty in mature fruit, cannot be without its reason. And this reason, to my mind, lies in one word, the most terrible word of any, since it means suffering and hopelessness; a word which has haunted my mind ever since I have looked into mediaeval things: the word Wastefulness. Wastefulness; the frightful characteristic of times at once so rich and so poor, the explanation of the long starvation and sickness that mankind, that all mankind's concerns—art, poetry, science, life—endured while the very things which would have fed and revived and nurtured, existed close at hand, and in profusion. Wastefulness, in this great period of confusion, of the most precious things that we possess: time, thought, and feeling refused to the realities of the world, and lavished on the figments of the imagination. Why this vagueness, this imperfection in all mediaeval representations of life? Because even as men's eyes were withdrawn, by the temporal institutions of those days, from the sight of the fields and meadows which were left to the blind and dumb thing called serf; so also the thoughts of mankind, its sympathy and intentions, were withdrawn from the mere earthly souls, the mere earthly wrongs and woes of men by the great self-organized institution of mediaeval religion. Pity of the body of Christ held in bondage by the Infidel; love of God; study of the unknowable things of Heaven: such are the noblest employments of the mediaeval soul; how much of pity, of love, may remain for man; how much of study for the knowable? To Wastefulness like this—to misapplication of mind ending almost in palsy—must we ascribe, I think, the strange sterility of such mediaeval art as deals not merely with pattern, but with the reality of man's body and soul. And we might be thankful, if, during our wanderings among mediaeval things, we had seen the starving of only art and artistic instincts; but the soul of man has lain starving also; starving for the knowledge which was sought only of Divine things, starving for the love which was given only to God.

The explanation, therefore, and its lesson, may thus be summed up in the one word Wastefulness. And the fruitfulness of the Renaissance, all that it has given to us of art, of thought, of feeling (for the "Vita Nuova" is its fruit), is due, as it seems to me, to the fact that the Renaissance is simply the condition of civilization when, thanks to the civil liberty and the spiritual liberty inherited from Rome and inherited from Greece, man's energies of thought and feeling were withdrawn from the unknowable to the knowable, from Heaven to Earth; and were devoted to the developing of those marvellous new things which Antiquity had not known, and which had lain neglected and wasted during the Middle Ages.

FLORENCE, *January*,1884.

APPENDIX.

I have seen the pictures and statues and towns which I have described, and I have read the books of which I attempt to give an impression; but here my original research, if such it may be called, comes to an end. I have trusted only to myself for my impressions; but I have taken from others everything that may be called historical fact, as distinguished from the history of this or that form of thought or of art which I have tried to elaborate. My references are therefore only to standard historical works, and to such editions of poets and prose writers as have come into my hands. How much I am endebted to the genius of Michelet; nay, rather, how much I am, however unimportant, the thing made by him, every one will see and judge. With regard to positive information I must express my great obligations to the works of Jacob Burckhardt, of Prof. Villari,

and of Mr. J.A. Symonds in everything that concerns the political history and social condition of the Renaissance. Mr. Symonds' name I have placed last, although this is by no means the order of importance in which the three writers appear in my mind, because vanity compels me to state that I have deprived myself of the pleasure and profit of reading his volumes on Italian literature, from a fear that finding myself doubtless forestalled by him in various appreciations, I might deprive my essays of what I feel to be their principal merit, namely, the spontaneity and wholeness of personal impression. With regard to philological lore, I may refer, among a number of other works, to M. Gaston Paris' work on the Cycle of Charlemagne, M. de la Villemarqué's companion volume on Keltic romances, and Professor Rajna's "Fonti dell' Ariosto." My knowledge of troubadours, trouvères, and minnesingers is obtained mainly from the great collections of Raynouard, Wackernagel, Mätzner, Bartsch, and Von der Hagen, and from Bartsch's and Simrock's editions and versions of Gottfried von Strassburg, Hartmann von Aue, and Wolfram von Eschenbach. "Flamenca" I have read in Professor Paul Meyer's beautiful edition, text and translation; "Aucassin et Nicolette," in an edition published, if I remember rightly, by Janet; and also in a very happy translation contained in Delvau's huge collection of "Romans de Chevalerie," which contains, unfortunately sometimes garbled, as many of the prose stories of the Carolingian and Amadis cycle as I, at all events, could endure to read. For the early Italian poets, excepting Carducci's "Cino da Pistoia," my references are the same as those in Rossetti's "Dante and his Cycle," especially the "Rime Antiche" and the "Poeti del Primo Secolo." Professor d'Ancona's pleasant volume has greatly helped me in the history of the transformation of the courtly poetry of the early Middle Ages into the folk poetry of Tuscany. I owe a good deal also, with regard to this same essay "The Outdoor Poetry," to Roskoff's famous "Geschichte des Teufels," and to Signor Novati's recently published "Carmina Medii *Aevi*." The Italian *novellieri,* Bandello, Cinthio, and their set, I have used in the Florentine editions of 1820 or 1825; Masuccio edited by De Sanctis. For the essay on the Italian Renaissance on the Elizabethan Stage, I have had recourse, chiefly, to the fifteenth century chronicles in the "Archivio Storico Italiano," and to Dyce's Webster, Hartley Coleridge's Massinger and Ford, Churton Collins' Cyril Tourneur, and J.O. Halliwell's Marston.

The essays on art have naturally profited by the now inevitable Crowe and Cavalcaselle; but in this part of my work, while I have relied very little on books, I have received more than the equivalent of the information to be obtained from any writers in the suggestions and explanations of my friend Mr. T. Nelson MacLean, who has made it possible for a mere creature of pens and ink to follow the differences of *technique* of the sculptors and medallists of the fifteenth century; a word of thanks also, for various such suggestions as can come only from a painter, to my old friend Mr. John S. Sargent, of Paris.

I must conclude these acknowledgments by thanking the Editors of the *Contemporary, British Quarterly*, and *National Reviews*, and of the *Cornhill Magazine*, for permission to republish such of the essays or fragments of essays as have already appeared in those periodicals.

THE END.

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