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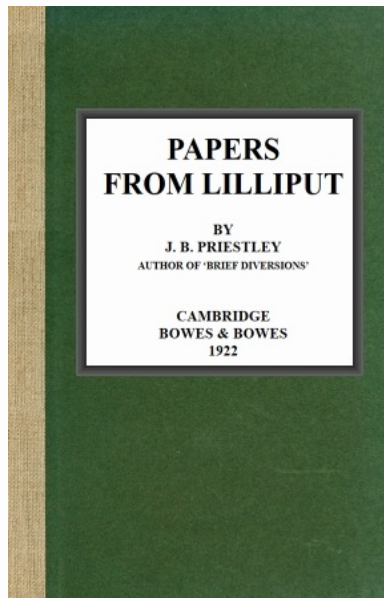
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**PAPERS  
FROM LILLIPUT**

BY  
**J. B. PRIESTLEY**  
AUTHOR OF 'BRIEF DIVERSIONS'

**CAMBRIDGE  
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1922**

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**TO  
MY FATHER**

*Some of these essays have appeared in THE LONDON MERCURY, THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, THE OUTLOOK, and THE CAMBRIDGE REVIEW. Others have been selected from a large number I contributed (week by week, under the pseudonym of 'Peter of Pomfret') to the YORKSHIRE OBSERVER. Others again are the first-fruits of a current series of such things I am contributing to THE CHALLENGE under the general title of 'New Papers from Lilliput.' I take this opportunity of thanking all the editors concerned for their hospitality to these not, I trust, too ill-favoured bantlings of mine, and hope that they will not regret it if they should now chance to renew the acquaintance.*

J. B. P.

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**ON A CERTAIN PROVINCIAL PLAYER**

It has been said that literature must use its gift of praise or it will come to nothing. Those of us who keep up a little dribble of ink, though we aspire to be very Swifts, must ultimately bestow our commendation somewhere: our praise is the last, greatest and kindest weapon in our poor armoury. If we can applaud where most men have kept silent, so much the better: we are fine fellows, using our little tricks to sweeten the world. So much preamble is necessary because I wish to bring forward, in this season of burning questions, the figure of a poor player who died over one hundred and fifty years ago and whose very name is now only known to a few. True, it can be found in many places, but who goes to them? For my part, I have rescued him from the pages of *The Eccentric Mirror*, a quaint production of four volumes, 'reflecting (I quote the title-page) a faithful and interesting delineation of Male and Female

Characters, Ancient and Modern, Who have been particularly distinguished by extraordinary Qualifications, Talents, and Propensities, natural or acquired.' There, among fat men, giants, freaks and eccentrics, I found our hero, Bridge Frodsham, a country actor, once known as the 'York Garrick.' He comes rather late in the series of characters, and is only there at all because the compiler was probably running short of better material, such as fat men, murderers, misers, and the like. Even then, Frodsham is scurvily treated; he is set down simply as a very good specimen of the conceited, self-opinionated young fool; the greatness that was in him is entirely missed; and it has been left for us, at this late hour, to give him his meed of praise. But let us turn to the details of his story, which I shall filch for the most part from *The Eccentric Mirror*, and thereby get myself some return for the four shillings and sixpence I paid for it.

Bridge Frodsham was born at the town of Frodsham, in Cheshire, in the year 1734. As you may guess, he belonged, like a true hero, to an ancient family. His education was begun at Westminster, but owing to some youthful imprudence he ran away and joined a company of strolling players. It was not long before he had drifted to York, where he became the leading actor at the little make-shift theatre. He was not, it appears, without talent, for he soon became the darling of the theatre-going crowd, such as it was, of that city. York knew no better actor than Frodsham, who was acclaimed in all the local pot-houses, where he was something of a boon companion. Hear the author of *The Eccentric Mirror* on this very theme:

'Such was the infatuation of the public at York, and indeed so superior were Frodsham's talents to those of all his coadjutors that he cast them all into the shade. This superiority was by no means a fortunate circumstance for Frodsham. It filled him with vanity and shut up every avenue to improvement; nor had he any opportunity for observation, as no actors of any high repute were ever known to tread the York stage, and he was never more than ten days in London.'

Even in this passage, short as it is, you will have remarked a certain air of patronage, a suspicion of asperity, and you will be on your guard; for this London hack, this biographer of dwarfs and infant prodigies, who dotes on filthy misers and becomes lyrical in praise of Daniel Lambert, is trying to rob our sturdy provincial of his greatness. For greatness he certainly achieved, and not at York, mark you, among his pot-house followers, but in London, during a short visit of ten days or so. He had been given a fortnight's holiday, which he determined to spend in London, to the great distress of the people of York, who thought that once Garrick saw Frodsham, the Yorkshire stage was doomed to lose its bright particular star. They did not know their man, as you shall see. Fate had decided that for once Garrick should meet his match, or more than his match, in a fellow actor; and it is Frodsham's conduct in this encounter that gives him some title to our applause. For my own part, I applaud more readily because it happened to be the great Garrick who was so disconcerted by the unknown player from the country. We have all our little prejudices, and one of mine chances to be against the swollen fame of Garrick. I am no great hater of mummer-worship, and am always ready to believe what I read of Betterton, Mountford, Kemble, Kean, Macready, and I know not how many more old actors; but somehow I have always been suspicious of Garrick. No doubt I could invent, if necessary, half-a-dozen respectable reasons, but suffice it to say that I have always felt that he was over-rated, that things went too easily with him, that for all his sense of humour he took himself too seriously; I see him as a strutting, perky little figure. I may be wrong, and it is quite possible that I do Garrick an injustice, but that matters little, in no way detracting from the newly burnished fame of our friend from York.

At the time when Frodsham determined to take a holiday in London, Garrick was at Drury Lane, and at the very height of his fame. Adulation was his daily food, and no flattery was too gross for him to swallow. A chorus of praise from high and low followed him everywhere; he could do nothing wrong; and, it goes without saying, he could make the fortune of a fellow actor with a nod of his head.

Judge then of Garrick's surprise when, one day, a card was left at his house in Southampton Street, 'Mr. Frodsham, of York,' unaccompanied by any humble request or letter of adulation. This cool conduct on the part of one who turned out to be nothing but a country player so excited Garrick's curiosity that, on the day following, Frodsham was admitted into the great man's presence. Not unnaturally, he imagined that Frodsham had come to solicit an engagement, but after some slight conversation, during which the young stranger showed astonishing coolness, Garrick, finding that no such request was made, determined to cut short the interview by offering his visitor an order for the pit for that evening, when he was to play Sir John Brute, one of his favourite parts. At the same time, he asked Frodsham if he had seen a play since his arrival in London.

'O yes,' replied Frodsham, 'I saw you play Hamlet, two nights ago,' and remarked further that it was his own favourite part.

At this, Garrick, not without irony, said that he hoped Frodsham had approved of the performance.

'O yes,' cried the provincial, unmoved, 'certainly, my dear sir, vastly clever in several passages; but I cannot so far subjoin mine to the public opinion of London, as to say I was equally struck with your whole performance in that part.'

Garrick was dumbfounded. The thing was unheard of. Here was monstrous heresy, high treason, madness, we know not what.

'Why,' he stammered, 'why now—to be sure now—why I suppose you in the country....' And then, bringing all his artillery to bear on this fortress of impudence: 'Pray now, Mr. Frodsham, what sort of a place do you act in at York? Is it a room, or riding house, occasionally fitted up?'

'O no, sir, a theatre, upon my honour,' returned Frodsham, as cool as ever.

Garrick was nonplussed, and tried to carry it off lightly: 'Why—er—will you breakfast to-morrow, and we shall have a trial of skill, and Mrs. Garrick shall judge between us.' The thing was beneath his dignity, but he was piqued and determined to lower the fellow's colours. With this, he dismissed his strange visitor, crying: 'Good day, Mr. York, for I must be at the theatre, so now pray remember breakfast.' If he expected his man to be daunted, he was mistaken, for Frodsham, still composed and affable, promised to attend him at breakfast, and retired. And I wish that our sturdy provincial could have had drums and trumpets to escort him as he marched down Southampton Street, for he certainly bore away the honours.

The next morning found him seated at Garrick's table. To quote my authority: 'During breakfast, Mrs. Garrick waited with impatience, full of various conjectures why the poor man from the country did not take courage, prostrate himself at the foot of majesty, and humbly request a trial and engagement.' But the 'poor man from the country' did nothing of the kind, though from no want of courage; and at last Garrick himself was compelled to break

the ice.

'Why now, Mr. Frodsham,' he said, sharply, 'why now—I suppose you saw my Brute last night? Now, no compliment, but tell Mrs. Garrick—well now, was it right? Do you think it would have pleased at York? Now speak what you think.'

'O certainly,' replied the other, 'certainly; and upon my honour, without compliment, I never was so highly delighted and entertained; it was beyond my comprehension. But having seen your Hamlet first, your Sir John Brute exceeded my belief; for I have been told, Mr. Garrick, that Hamlet is one of your first characters; but I must say, I flatter myself I play it almost as well; for comedy, my good sir, is your forte. But your Brute, Mr. Garrick, was excellence itself! You stood on the stage in the drunken scene flourishing your sword, you placed yourself in an attitude—I am sure you saw me in the pit at the same time, and with your eyes you seemed to say—'D—n it, Frodsham, did you ever see anything like that at York? Could you do that, Frodsham?'

Could anything have been more friendly? But it did not please Garrick, who did not relish being treated by an unknown country player with such ease and familiarity. Comedy his forte, indeed! He pretended to laugh the thing off, but determined to put an end to the fellow's impudence and folly, and said: 'Well now—hey—for a taste of your quality—Now a speech, Mr. Frodsham, from Hamlet, and Mrs. Garrick bear a wary eye.'

Here was an awkward position indeed for a young bumpkin standing before the greatest actor of the age. It had no effect, however, upon Frodsham, who plunged into Hamlet's first soliloquy without more ado. This he followed up with 'To be or not to be.' Garrick, we are told, made use of a favourite device of his when dealing with inferiors, 'all the time darting his fiery eyes into the very soul of Frodsham.' I make no doubt that as a rule it was a very effective trick, but on this occasion it failed, for Frodsham was in no way embarrassed by it. His chronicler, in a malicious vein, adds: 'On Frodsham, his formidable looks had no such effect, for had he noticed Garrick's eyes and thought them penetrating, he would have comforted himself with the idea that his own were equally brilliant or even still more so.' And why not?—we might ask. Is there a monopoly of fiery eyes that dart into souls? At best, this darting of eyes was simply a mean little trick, which deserved to be brought to nothing by a youngster's harmless conceit of himself.

When Frodsham had done, Garrick thought to finish him with a shrug and said: 'Well, hey now, hey!—you have a smattering, but you want a little of my forming; and really in some passages you have acquired tones I do not by any means approve.'

'Tones! Mr. Garrick!' returned Frodsham, tartly; 'to be sure I have tones, but you are not familiarised to them. I have seen you act twice, and I thought you had odd tones, and Mrs. Cibber strange tones, and they were not quite agreeable to me on the first hearing, but I dare say I should soon be reconciled to them.'

This was unsupportable. Neither the presence of greatness (darting its eyes) nor adverse criticism could crush this extraordinary young man from nowhere. The astounded Garrick decided to come to business, which would at least restore the proper relations between the two, the famous actor and the impudent nobody, and put the latter in his only possible place, that of a humble suppliant. 'Why now,' he cried, 'really, Frodsham, you are a damned queer fellow—but for a fair and full trial of your genius my stage shall be open, and you shall act any part you please, and if you succeed we will then talk of terms.' Which was, I think, a fair offer.

Then came the masterstroke. 'O,' said Frodsham, indifferently, 'you are mistaken, my dear Mr. Garrick, if you think I came here to solicit an engagement. I am a Roscius at my own quarters. I came to London purposely to see a few plays, and looking on myself as a man not destitute of talents, I judged it a proper compliment to wait on a brother genius: I thought it indispensable to see you and have half an hour's conversation with you. I neither want nor wish for an engagement; for I would not abandon the happiness I enjoy in Yorkshire for the first terms your great and grand city could afford.' With that, he withdrew with a careless bow, leaving Garrick speechless.

It is to Garrick's credit that he often told the story of this strange visit to members of his company. But as he probably thought that Frodsham was merely a lunatic, for he always referred to him as 'the mad York actor,' and so possibly did not realise that there was more than one side to the story, and that he was telling it against himself, we will not give him too much credit. Nor will I, for one, pass his epithet, for if Frodsham was not a mere conceited young fool, as our historian foolishly suggests he was, neither was he a plain madman. His point of view was not Garrick's, but it was a very reasonable point of view. The remarks he made were certainly not without a good deal of sound sense; they were critical, honest, and not, I think lacking in courtesy. It is true that he had a very good opinion of himself, but then so had Garrick, and so, by your leave, have you and I. The difference between Frodsham and the dozens of other young actors who sought out Garrick lies in the fact that one made no attempt to disguise his opinions, whereas the others, in all probability, cringed and lied unblushingly for an hour or two. But Frodsham, you may urge, had no sense of proportion, no idea of relative values; he could not understand the difference between the applause of York and that of London; he could not see the gulf that stretched between the darling of a local fit-up and the captain of Drury Lane. The charge is true, but is it very damaging? Such a habit of mind has prevented many a man from getting on in the world, but it never kept any man from greatness. I maintain that, over and above all conceit, there was a certain simplicity in Frodsham that came very near to greatness, if it did not achieve it, and that, in its elemental frankness and disdain of worldly wisdom, was not without a touch of real poetry.

Now that our hero has had his great moment, and has lounged, as it were, into the wings, followed by our applause, I hesitate whether to bring him back again upon the stage. Encores are rarely satisfactory to the audience, and I fear an anti-climax. To speak of Frodsham's visit to Rich after describing his encounter with Garrick is to talk of Quatre-Bras after Waterloo; and yet, seeing that our man is ready for us and may not be heard of again for many a year, I will venture it.

During his momentous holiday in London, Frodsham conceived it to be his duty, as a fellow-player and a gentleman, to pay a visit to Rich, of Covent Garden, just as he had done to Garrick. It was simply a point of good breeding, for having been told that Rich was a superficial person, more given to pantomime than good drama, he thought very little of him. So he called upon Rich and found him stroking his cats and teaching a young lady to act. After keeping him waiting some time, Rich condescended to look at his visitor, viewing him up and down through a very large reading-glass, took a pinch of snuff, and drawled: 'Well, Mr. Frogsmire, I suppose you are come from York to be taught, and that I should give you an engagement. Did you ever act Richard, Mr. Frogsmire?' On hearing Frodsham answer that he had acted the part, Rich went on: 'Why then you shall hear me act'; and proceeded to recite a speech in a very absurd manner. When he had done, Frodsham told him very plainly that he had come from

York to visit him, neither to be taught nor to hear him recite, but merely 'for a little conversation and to visit his Elysian fields.' This reply must have astonished Rich, but he was of different metal from Garrick, and it neither disturbed his indolent self-satisfaction nor roused his curiosity. With a large gesture, he said that unless Mr. Frogsmire would with humble attention listen to his Richard, he would not hear Mr. Frogsmire at all; and was proceeding to mouth—

'Twas an excuse to avoid me!  
Alas, she keeps no bed!

when he was cut short by a curt 'Good-morning' from Frodsham, who stalked out of the room.

Thus ended his second polite call upon a fellow-player, after which, his short holiday being at end, he returned to York well content, with no great opinion of London and its favourite performers. There he remained, the idol of the York playgoers, until bad hours and the brandy-bottle put an end to his life at the early age of thirty-five, in October 1768. There is even a suggestion of heroic legend and strange destiny about his end, for on the very last night that he ever spoke on the stage, he announced to the audience that the next performance would include 'What We must All Come to.' As an actor, he is said to have been not without real genius, and to have suffered only from lack of proper training, and, later, his dissipated way of living. As a man, or rather, young man, he seems to me, at this distance, to have had some admirable qualities. There was, as I have remarked, a touch of poetry in his composition, and I can well believe that his Hamlet was worth seeing. But of all his parts, there is no doubt that by far the best was that which he played without limelight, make-up or properties during his ten days' holiday in London. And I suggest that all spirited provincials, who are quick to recognise a kindred soul, should honour his memory.

## ON A NEW KIND OF FICTION

THE literary year books and reference books do not make very cheerful reading these days, but there is a certain note in one of them that should not be allowed to remain in obscurity. It is contributed by the editor of an American journal, *Ambition*, who informs all writers and would-be writers that he and his paper are prepared to accept:

Stories, 4,000-4,500 (words), in which the hero advances in position and earnings through study of a trade or profession by means of a correspondence course. (Preferred occupations indicated by Editor on application.)

One can only hope that this passage has not met the eye of any reader of *Ambition*, one who has urged himself along the steep, narrow way, and found sustenance in such heartening tales, for he might become disillusioned, lag in his course (if only a correspondence course), and turn cynic or communist. Our editor, with true occidental ruthlessness, takes us behind the scenes with a vengeance; he strips each wretched player and spares us neither paint nor plaster-and-lath; had we any illusions on the matter, any roseate dreams of 'advancing in position and earnings,' which we have not, how rudely we should have been awakened. But one would have thought that the readers of *Ambition*, grimly practical fellows, every one of them essentially 'a man of this world,' were above the mere trifling of the story-teller, that they were ready, nay, eager, to face the stern facts, the naked issues of life, without calling in the writer of fiction to beguile and comfort them with his cunning old tricks. But no, even in this bleak and forbidding region, the story-teller is welcomed; the ancient craft is not allowed to perish even in these high altitudes. But while so much is conceded to frail human nature, the earnest young people who read *Ambition* cannot have their minds stuffed with any glittering nonsense, love stories, tales of piracy, and the like; if there is to be fiction, it must be of one kind only. The hero must not be some absurd swashbuckler, the prey of we know not what romantic whims and fancies; he must be a good, solid young fellow 'who advances in position and earnings through study of a trade or profession by means of a correspondence course.' Well told, the story of such an enterprising youth must be worth any man's reading.

But while we are thus to some extent restricted—and after all, does not art imply restriction?—yet within these bounds there is ample freedom. The writer is at liberty to choose the hero's name, we take it, and may even let his fancy wander somewhat in his description of the fellow, making him tall or short, fat or thin, dark or fair, according to the author's taste in these matters. For example, he may relate how Joe Brown, short, fat, and fair, advances in position and earnings by taking a correspondence course of steeplejackery (or whatever it is that makes a steeplejack); or, again, he may show how Marmaduke Grubstock-Datterville not only advances in position, but retrieves the family fortunes by applying himself to a course (entirely by correspondence) of wholesale grocery. This, surely, is something. Moreover, the rate of advance in the hero's position and the extent of his earnings are matters that are probably left to the author's discretion, and he is no true penman who cannot make something of humour and pathos out of such material.

The type of story being thus fixed, it is clear that the most important point left is the hero's trade or profession. If the story-teller is free to give his hero any trade or profession he pleases, he has no right to complain of undue restriction. If, on the other hand, the trade or profession used in each story is determined beforehand by the authorities, then we may say that perhaps our editor is pressing a little too heavily upon his contributors. The remark in parenthesis, coming at the end of the editor's note as if it were a sudden inspiration or a kindly afterthought, settles the question: 'Preferred occupations indicated by Editor on application.' It is a compromise, and, we think, a very sensible one; neither author nor editor is enthroned or fettered; there is a possibility of mutual help and, we trust, sympathy. Note the advantages of such an arrangement. In the first place, as the readers of *Ambition* are men who have their eye on the labour market, men who know what is what, it will not do to put before them any sort of trade or profession and to talk wildly about it. Writers of fiction may be very tricky fellows, but it is quite clear that it would not be wise to leave them entirely to themselves when they are choosing trades for their 4,000-4,500 word heroes; without expert guidance there is no telling into what gimcrack, monstrous jobs they would thrust the creatures of their fancy. It is easy to see that one would have to be circumspect in this matter of a trade; in this, as in other things, there must be judgment; an apt choice is requisite. It would, for example, be quite useless scribbling down four thousand words about a young ambitious crossbowman or alchemist; we may be sure that our editor would not have his confiding readers dealt with so anachronously; he would not suffer them to be led by desires that

are several centuries beyond fruition.

Again, there are many trades that are not in the best of taste—swindling, forgery, sandbagging, and so forth; an occasional story using one of these might do little harm, and even some good, inasmuch as it might enlarge the scope of one or two readers, but a journal that began to show favour to such doubtful, and even unpopular, industries would soon lose its hold. Other occupations, while free from the objections urged above, must be regarded as useless for our purpose, because they do not appear to offer sufficient room for a really determined hero; they are cramped, confined, and show no tempting horizons; the trade of ferryman, of programme-seller, of liftman, to name only a few, must be passed over for this reason. Moreover, the selected trade or profession must be the subject of a correspondence course or the hero can make no headway; a correspondence course is essential. Now, although our correspondence schools are daily quickened by the spirit of enterprise, there are still many occupations that they have left untouched; most of the trades we have already dismissed would have to be rejected again on this count, while there are many others, such as that of torturer, milkman, astrologer, or acrobat, that we imagine to be still without correspondence courses. It is clear then that the choice of a suitable trade has difficulties, and that a mere writer of fiction should be glad to accept the proffered advice of the expert, his editor.

There is, however, another reason that more than justifies the editor's wisdom in offering to indicate 'preferred trades or professions.' Some authors, knowing more about such things than most of their fellows, might very well choose entirely suitable trades even if they were left to themselves; but there is more in the question than this mere choice, for each story must not only be acceptable in itself, but it must also be good when it is considered in its relation to the other stories that it follows or precedes. As we have seen, the tales themselves have unity, but within that unity there must be variety. The cunning arrangement of literary matter so that one item contrasts with another, the effect of both thus being heightened, is the very mark of good editing. Are the readers of *Ambition*, any more than any other readers, to be denied this variety, this beguiling blend of light and shadow, this dazzling counterpoint of literature? By no means. Our editor very wisely makes use of variety and contrast by apportioning out the trades and professions himself. Otherwise, there is no telling what would happen. Four consecutive numbers of the journal might each contain the life story of a successful young gasfitter, and there would probably be some grumbling and even a falling off in circulation. As it is, our editor can make the most of his material; one number, we will say, gives us the history of a young man who learns accountancy by correspondence, a brainy occupation, but perhaps a trifle prosaic and needing an indoor setting; in the very next number the balance is restored by a tale of a smart young correspondence school pupil who turns bee-keeper, which brings in a flavour of the open air and sunlit gardens, and is not without a touch of poetry; while in the following number we return once more to the city, with all its romantic bustle, and breathlessly follow the swelling fortunes of a square-jawed young plumber; and so it goes on.

By such means our editor has taken care to achieve both unity and variety in the stories at his disposal. What we thought at first restrictions pressing somewhat heavily upon the story-teller are now seen to be hints for his guidance, aids without which he cannot expect to be successful in this kind of fiction. If there are men of more than ordinary talent, born story-tellers, among us waiting for an opening, let them take leave of the stuff they have been writing, worn-out romance and so forth, all tears and tatters or mere coloured foppery, let them keep pace with the times, for here in the pages of *Ambition* is opportunity indeed. While they are pushing hero after hero along the road to success they can surely make shift to advance themselves 'in position and earnings.'

## A MAD SHEPHERD

THE world is at once saner and yet more given to lunacy than it used to be, for the people outside asylums are saner than their grandfathers were, yet there are greater numbers under some sort of treatment, or at least under lock and key, for madness. I do not know whether it is because there is increasing harbourage for lunatics in our time, or because it is merely becoming more difficult, every year, in the face of specialists whose own sanity is never questioned, to prove that one is not yet ready for the madhouse; but it is clear that the eccentrics and half-wits who chuckled and grimaced in our older literature, through the long tales of our grandparents, are fast disappearing. A host of notable figures in Shakespeare, from Hamlet to Petruchio, would not be suffered to walk abroad these days unless they piped in a lower key. It is a great pity that all the crack-brained, whimsical fellows are leaving us; we need a little variety in our experiments with existence, for there is a danger that we are all crazed and have only decided for unanimity, that we are Mad Hatters who will not suffer a March Hare; and these others, extravagant but harmless, have their own visions of life and we cannot prove them wrong, but can only point to the majority—a trick unworthy of us.

These bold experimentalists, the crack-brained, are now so few and so precious, that I travel with one eye open for them; for a man is as well, if not better, occupied collecting eccentric essays in life, as he is casting about for ancient coins or earthenware. Remote towns or villages make the most promising hunting-grounds, and only a short time ago, my search was well rewarded in a certain small market town. I had been in the place several days, and had come to know most of its prominent figures well by sight, when one fellow, whom I was always seeing, here, there, and everywhere, began to excite my curiosity. He was an oldish man, with a close-shaven, tanned face, and always dressed in gaiters and what seemed to be a long smock, with a curiously-shaped cap, of the same material as his smock, pressed down upon his head. These and other particulars I noted with interest, but what intrigued me most was a long pole, roughly shaped like a shepherd's crook, which he always carried in his hand, and which seemed to be some implement of his trade. But what his trade was, I could not guess; I never saw him employed in any way, never caught him piloting beasts towards the market or making any kind of use of the mysterious pole. Yet whenever I ran across him, which I did frequently, he always seemed to be fully occupied, neither rushing heedlessly nor yet loitering, but resolutely pressing forward to some important piece of business—a sober man of affairs. Even in a little market town, there are many ways of earning bread and beer that fall outside the scope of a stranger's knowledge, tiny trades that are commonplaces in one shire and unknown in the next, and I might easily have contented myself with assuming that my man was thus engaged. But the archaic costume and the quaintly fashioned pole, now so familiar, were too provocative, and led me to question my landlady, whose talk was fluent and full of good matter, though rather obscure. I had scarcely begun my description of the man before she had snatched the subject from me and panted forth the whole tale.

In spite of his quaint figure, I had set my man down as a sober busy citizen, engaged in some obscure little trade of his own. He was nothing of the kind. He was even more fantastic than his clothes, more mysterious than his own strange implement. For it appeared that this fellow was nothing more nor less than a crack-brained idler, one who had—in my landlady's words—'gone soft in the head.' Up to a few years ago a lonely quiet man, expecting nothing from the world, he had suddenly come into a fortune, and the surprise and joy that followed this stroke of luck had turned his brain; thenceforward he blossomed madly and ran to amazing whims and crotchets, harmless enough, but strangely odd and diverting. His greatest and most delectable fantasy was this, that he took upon himself, from time to time, the duty of acting in a definite character, usually one of the ancient trades of the world; he would dress himself for the part, and, so far as it was possible, take over the habits, the interests, the mode of speech of the particular type he copied. Thus, he would be a sailor for some time, then a fisherman, and after that maybe a gamekeeper or forester; always dressing himself accordingly and keeping strictly to the type, and not declining to the actual indistinguishable characters of our own day, but presenting in his attire, as it were, the ideal sailor or forester; and so, tricked out in such homely yet symbolic vestments, perhaps thinking to take a place with the poet, 'in the calm and proud procession of eternal things.'

When I saw him, he was a shepherd; indeed, a shepherd appeared to be his favourite character, for he had maintained the part for some time, and, according to report, showed no signs of changing. There are few shepherds in that part of the country, and the few there are do not wear smocks or carry a crook as he did. But he followed his usual practice, looked back to a simpler, smaller and more clearly defined world, and dressed the part to mark it off from all other trades. It was the least he could do, seeing that he did no actual work and devoted all his energies to the masquerade. His apparent busyness was all moonshine. The sheep he herded could not be driven to any mart in this world, for they were nothing but drifting phantoms. When he walked the sunlit streets, his grotesque shadow pursued by laughter, he hurried to mythical appointments, moved in shadowy markets, and trafficked in thin air. At the end of the day, after being urged here and there by his lively fancy, doubtless he returned home as tired and as well-content with his day's unsubstantial labour as any sober man of business; sometimes maybe he would return elated, at others mortified, for there must be triumphs and grievous losses even in this matter of pursuing phantoms. Then, in the evening, his crook laid aside, perhaps he would make his plans for the next day; but what such plans could be, no man can imagine, for they must be dreams within a dream and shadows of a shadow. So he would pass his time, hurting no man, his life, like that of all such quaint fellows, only marred by loneliness. Nor would he lack a companion, supposing his present whimsy holds, if I had my way; for somewhere in a large and dirty city there is a sheepdog that I once knew, a dog that had never known the life it was meant to lead, never seen the hills with the sheep scattered upon them, and yet, in the yard of a warehouse, it spent its days herding invisible sheep, running round bales and barking furiously at barrels. Were that dog mine, the crazy shepherd should have him, so that the two might walk the streets together, happily pursuing their mythical flocks and otherwise busying themselves in their dream-pastures.

The maggots of the brain are not to be enumerated and labelled: what led this harmless fellow to such fantasies, no man can know. Perhaps after the sudden stroke of fortune sent his wits wandering he had been mastered by some old thought, some half-forgotten protest against the drab formlessness of labour in our day, against the absence of any marks of distinction between men of one trade and men of another; he had reverted to a more ordered clear-cut time, when every man was stamped with the sign of one or other of the ancient industries. Only in some such way, can one attempt to explain this strange masquerade of his. He has his own vision of life, his own idea of that poetry which transfigures the mechanism of blood and bone; and I trust that he will be left to himself to go his own way, for when he is weary of a shepherd's life, there are still many time-old tradesmen, from tinker to tailor, that he can personate. Nor will it be long before I see him again, caring little whether he is still a shepherd or metamorphosed into a fisherman or cobbler, so long as he is still with us, going his own fantastic gait.

## AUDACITY IN AUTHORSHIP

THERE is one certain characteristic of contemporary literature which everyone must have remarked, but to which it is very difficult to give a name. It is straining language to call it this or that quality; yet a name it must have, and Audacity will do as well as another. At the worst, it is more than audacity, it is downright impudence; at the best, it becomes engaging sauciness, youth pirouetting to the breakfast-table, or rises to magnificent unwisdom and shows us, once again, the bright fool darting before the van of the angels. It must not, however, be confused with stark originality, which presents us with the strange shape of some creature new to this world, and which is far above mere audacity. There are many ways in which a writer may approach his audience: he may seem to let us overhear him, may seem to meditate aloud, in the manner of Pater; he may take us into a corner and pour out a stream of confessions and confidences, in the manner of Hazlitt; or thrust us into the darkness and belabour us back again into the light, in the manner of Carlyle; there are these and a score of other ways, but the most of them are going out of fashion. It is all 'Boot, Saddle and Away!' with so many of our writers now, and we, as unoffending readers, are continually harassed by the sallies of these wild horsemen. No longer are we to be soothed, cajoled, fascinated or awed; unless we are shocked or irritated, the trick fails. We must be surprised by one or two great blows, or goaded into admiration by a thousand pinpricks. We must all play the part of poor, elderly, disapproving relatives, while our authors strut about as wild young nephews, who expect nothing from us but unwilling admiration and envious side-glances. Never was there such bravery at the end of a pen.

What then, one asks, are the signs and marks of audacity in literature by which it can be recognised in this place or that. They are countless. The ramifications of this fantastic growth cannot be traced; it blossoms so wantonly, drops such strange fruit, that a man has already seen it everywhere, or almost everywhere, or is by nature blind to it, having perhaps been nourished upon it, and knowing nothing else. It comes out in so many different ways that only a few can be noticed here. When a writer shows undisguised contempt for his readers, as so many writers do, then audacity is degenerating into sheer impudence. This sort of contempt is usually shown in two ways: firstly, by supreme carelessness in matter, as if to suggest that the very dregs of our author's mind are good enough for his particular audience, and perhaps better than the best of his fellow authors' brains; secondly, by supreme carelessness in manner, as if one were to receive callers in a greasy dressing-gown. Persistently to attack the cherished illusions of the reading public or to run athwart the accepted morals of the time, are tricks that will bring

their own rewards while audacity is in the ascendant; but they are not lasting. A modern dramatist who has made much capital out of these tricks must be puzzling his brains now to know what to do with a generation that has no illusions left. Again, one of our novelists who has played the naughty young man from Paris for some thirty-odd years, now finds himself regarded as a respectable elderly man-of-letters. To many, Bernard Shaw's *Life-Force* seems a sentimental crotchet, and George Moore's earlier works seem more fatuous than disreputable. If, however, there are enough of the disillusioned to make an audience, a writer who knows the value of audacity will not hesitate to swing back the pendulum by defending the old prejudices with all the force at his command. This may be the clue to the audacity of G. K. Chesterton, who has spent his time declaiming against the only people who can understand and enjoy him. Again, the characteristic may take other unwelcome forms that bring it near to impudence, as for example in the work of men who gain the ear of the public in one capacity, and then insist upon acting in another, as when a good teller of tales turns without warning into a philosopher or prophet: it is as if M. Pachmann were to ignore the piano before him and treat his audience to a few fumbling conjuring tricks. Moreover, to pronounce judgment on matters about which one knows nothing is to carry audacity to doubtful lengths. Criticism offers, and has always offered, a good field for the audacious, but a great many of us now tend to abuse our freedom. Without knowing a word of Italian and Portuguese, a man will undertake to write twenty essays proving that Camoens was a better poet than Tasso. And of late it seems that audacity of the baser sort has invaded the realm of verse; every day, our poets are more startling, though not so startling as their friends and critics.

Looking about then, with no unfriendly eye, we shall discover that audacity, not of the worst kind, is to be found in much of the best known work of to-day. It is not everywhere: there is little or no trace of it in the work of Hardy, Bridges, Henry James, Conrad, W. H. Hudson, Galsworthy, Maurice Hewlett, to name only a few. But elsewhere, though mingled with other finer qualities, there is no lack of it. It takes many strange shapes, and can be discovered lurking under many disguises. It has proved itself no small part of Bernard Shaw's stock-in-trade. It roars lustily through the essays and 'histories' of Messrs. Belloc and Chesterton, peeps slyly from Max Beerbohm's essays, screams in the devastating contributions of H. G. Wells, leers through George Moore's endless reminiscences. It drove Arnold Bennett to write essays, and is now urging John Drinkwater to create dramas. After being long the servant, it is now the master of Barrie. There is no end to it. Fortunately, these are not gentlemen of one characteristic alone; they do not content themselves with crying 'duc-dame,' for they have still something to say when the circle is formed. But there are others, novelists, verse-writers, critics, and what editors call 'publicists,' who think to run their course with nothing to speed them but audacity alone, which makes them doubly audacious, but nothing more. The drums beat, the trumpets sound, the crowd is hushed, and then follows a cough and a splutter—and then silence.

When did it begin? In its primary form, no doubt it is a characteristic as old as literature itself. It is there, full-fledged, in Aristophanes. The Hebrew chroniclers and prophets had audacity of a sublime kind. Perhaps there were once wild young literary men in China, and no doubt many an impudent papyrus in Babylon and Ancient Egypt. But in the more questionable shape we know, audacity in literature is a thing only of yesterday and to-day. Going back, we come first to Wilde, who was nothing if not audacious, an impudent confidence-trick man-of-letters. Then, Stevenson and Henley, not without a touch, surely, though more audacious in the flesh perhaps than on paper. Again, Butler, a very clever man, perhaps a great man, but still a shockingly bad precedent for young men inclined to flippancy and petulance. There is Bagehot, whose genuine originality is not unspeckled; and further back, we see the young Disraeli, busy upon *Contarini Fleming*, and compounded of velvet, macassar oil and impudence. And now we come to Blackwood's young men, Christopher North and Company, beginning a career of literary swashbuckling with the *Chaldee MS.*, and culprits one and all, triple-dyed in the fearful purple. And if a poetic criminal is wanted, there is Byron, who, from the sheer impertinence of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* to the magnificent audacity of *Don Juan*, gives us every form of impudence rhymed and rhythmized; who began the game of making the bourgeois pay for being shocked, and continuously boiled his pot with the heat of their disapproval. But can we stop here? The graves stir, and a crowd of thin ghosts press forward, waving innumerable ragged volumes. There is the lean spectre of Yorick, and, close by, the author of *Jonathan Wild*, while a little way behind, one catches a glimpse of Swift, and Defoe, and Buckingham, and a hundred more. But their claims must be denied, for we must not fall into the error of using our make-shift term 'audacity' in its widest sense, and thereby running back to the Ptolemies in search of origins; we must save something for ourselves in literature, and we have already confessed that a certain audacious trick of writing belongs to our own age; so we will take our stand upon Byron and Blackwood's merry men, and go no further.

There is one plain reason for the existence, or rather the success, of the audacious in our letters. It is not so much that writers have changed as that the audience has changed. When all that is written goes the round of one small circle of readers, is pondered over by the same leisurely few; when a writer's style and manner are discussed by those about him, and are matters of some moment, an ordinary man of letters will imitate what seems to him the best manner of the time, and a greater man will be simply himself, bringing something new into the world; but among greater or less there will be little mere posturing. A man addresses his equals jovially, carelessly, angrily, as the mood takes him; it is only for pennies in the market-place or at the fair ground that he continually makes faces and stands on his head. With a small, critical audience, some fashions of writing are not in place, being entirely unwelcome: we have not yet allowed the trombone and big drum into our chamber music. But when the little circle of readers begins to swell until it is enlarged beyond recognition by rush after rush of newcomers; when journals and newspapers begin to thrive, and the old groves and porticos take on the appearance of an auction mart, then it is time to change the manner. The audience is huge, with half its wits gone wandering, a great Saurian blinking at the mud, a thing to be tickled with a ten-foot spike; it plays the part of a vast, drowsy auctioneer lolling above a clamouring crowd of buyers, men-of-letters trying to catch its eye; and what avail now are the level tones and the sober argument when only a squeak or a roar or an insane gesture is likely to attract attention. And now that over a century has passed since the times began to change, since the literary man left his armchair and took to eating fire and swallowing the sword, if we choose to write we shall do well if we escape audacity, for it is woven madly into the texture of our letters, the note of it is louder than the loud bassoon. At the best, with a good will, we may abjure the more impudent tricks, but unless we are towering geniuses we cannot escape the characteristic itself: it is—alas!—the very marrow of this essay.



## IN PRAISE OF THE HYPERBOLE

FEW experiences are more distressing to me than being present when a person is checked at the very climax of a tale because of some paltry exaggeration that he or she has made in the heat of the moment. Husbands and wives are always at such tricks, for it very often happens that a genial, expansive, imaginative person is united to one who is somewhat cold, literal-minded, devoid of fancy. A lady, finishing a tale and warming to the task, will cry: 'No sooner had I opened the door than about fifteen people rushed out—.' 'No, my dear, you exaggerate,' her husband will interrupt, 'there were only three people there; I counted them.' And if they are among friends, he will probably turn round and add: 'Mary will exaggerate, you know; it's quite a habit of hers.' The tale then comes to a lame finish, and is indeed quite spoilt. We have been led, as it were, to expect fifteen people; the whole progress of the narrative demanded them; and then at the very moment that we are gratified by their appearance on the scene, four-fifths of them are whisked away and we have to be content with a paltry three merely to satisfy some busybody's illtimed demand for accuracy. Accuracy, exact statements, hard facts, are very well; they have their uses in the world; but a man must not allow his passion for them to carry him to dangerous lengths, or he will not only give himself a creeping style but will try to spoil every tale that comes his way; such a one will soon be unfit for decent society and will have to take to writing to the newspapers—a vile end. Such literal-minded fellows, without imagination, without any sense of art, are the ruin of good talk; let them do the world's work in laboratories and counting-houses, but when they are abroad let them keep quiet, or some of us will put them into monstrously exaggerated, scandalous tales, which will be doubly vexatious to them.

I say that these sticklers for the little facts have no sense of art. They appear to think that we distort their trumpety figures or enlarge a statement here and there, for no purpose whatever, but from sheer carelessness, lack of memory, or a mischievous love of lying. They are wrong and it is easy to see why. Such quibblers do not understand the working of the imagination; they have yet to learn that good talk is a form of art, and that exaggeration is one of art's great devices, a worthy part of its process of selection and emphasis, by which any number of petty details are brought into unity and made to serve great purposes. When we are surrounded by good listeners and in the heat of narration, that swift creative power, the imagination, ransacking heaven and earth for its own ends, takes the reins, and we find ourselves changing the mere facts so that they will produce, at second-hand, the very feelings we experienced at first-hand. Because we are only in talk and make use of the device, clumsily maybe, it is called exaggeration and sneered at by some few, and sometimes even gives rise to charges of open lying; yet this very practice of making the outward show conform to the inward and real truth consumes fully one half the time and energy of every artist, or we are mightily deceived. We have Walter Pater on our side, for did he not write very wisely, in the *Essay on Style*, of the 'writer's transcript of his sense of fact,' and what is this practice that pedants condemn but an attempt to reproduce 'the sense of fact'? Nor can it be urged that Pater was prejudiced, for he was the very prince of your scraping, paring, meticulous fellows, and would have scaled greater heights had he had a few pulls at the Falstaffian brew. Why this 'sense of fact' should be approved as fine art in writing, and yet solemnly condemned as a wanton meddling with the truth in conversation, is a mystery. If a child catches sight of a very tall man, about seven foot or so, and rushes home screaming that he has met a giant at least four yards high, he will probably be spanked for letting his idle fancies make such a commotion; yet he will be justified by all the canons of good art and talk, for while seven feet sounds to be nothing out of the way, only a few inches above the ordinary run of men, a man actually seven foot tall does look four yards high, and it is only some such figure that will reproduce something like the original experience to persons who were not present.

Even when there is no interference with the fine flushed narration of others, this cheeseparing habit in talk is detestable. There are some men who will handle words and images in their talk as if they were making miniature watches instead of re-creating a world. Give me a man like Carlyle, who roared for the truth night and morning, and yet did not hesitate to juggle with the universe, to cut and carve it and parcel it out afresh, for his own good purposes. Where there is such divine bounty, to cut the fashion of one's speech like some pitiful little tailor snipping his own cloth is the very height of meanness. It is base ingratitude, an affront to the maker of the stars, which are themselves numberless and born of a stupendous prodigality. Nature herself, the mother of us all, has a most queenly and delectable passion for hyperboles; the shadows of her monstrous exaggerations sprawl across the world, trumpeting through the forest as the elephant and floundering in the water as Leviathan. If it is Madame Nature who gives us the truth, who sets up the standard by which our talk must be judged, then there is hardly room in this universe for bold lying and no man should be accused of it.

The great poets follow Nature as closely in this love of the hyperbole as they do in other matters. It is your little poets, your timid versifiers, who write in fear of the raised eyebrows of the pedant and the guffaw of the unimaginative, and keep their images down to the level of coffee-room gossip. It is true that a man may rant it and roar it with the best, may try to scale Parnassus as the Titans did Olympus and pile up gigantic image upon image, and yet be no poet; but it is equally true to say that all great poets have shown the same love of amazing hyperboles. Those extraordinary persons who hate a swelling image, a genial exaggeration, who distrust the hyperbole, may read their Shakespeare (though I doubt it) but they cannot read him with constant pleasure. Most of his best things are either the most audacious yet triumphant specimens of the hyperbole to be found in literature or they are pieces of sheer nonsense. And with the poet's own creatures we may note differences in the manner of their talk that are significant, some characters contenting themselves with merely taking hold of stubborn fact, and others fashioning the whole world to suit their particular moods. But all the great characters, the poet's own darlings, whose speech and gestures linger in the memory, are lovers of hyperbolism and talk greatly. Dismissing Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Mercutio, Imogen, Perdita, and a host of other fine figures, we have only to examine the four that are considered his most perfect creations, Hamlet, Falstaff, Cleopatra, and Iago, to discover the truth of this. Iago has the trait in a less marked degree than the others; his talk keeps a closer hold upon circumstance; but then he is a deep rogue and has to act an unimaginative part. When he is left to himself and talking for his own satisfaction, we soon discover what manner of man he is, for then his fancy begins to boil and we hear muttered talk of Hell and Night, of poppy and mandragora. As for Hamlet and Cleopatra, they often seem to destroy the world and recreate it again in a single casual sentence; only the most towering images are allowed to wait upon their gigantic moods. And Falstaff—what of him? There are persons who disapprove of Falstaff; probably they are the very same people who will not tolerate any sort of exaggeration, who sniff at hyperboles, who dislike a thousand other fine things. We who love the hyperbolic both in literature and talk will take our stand on Falstaff, a sufficient bulwark against legions of such sticklers and

quibblers. Small pedants thrive and statisticians creep on like an army of ants; the fiery nimble spirits that can turn mere words into so many soaring coloured balloons are departing from the world; if it were not for the poets, the Sporting Press and Mrs. What's-her-name's publishers, the hyperbole would be almost unknown to our generation. In a world of calipers, ammeters, burettes, speedometers, calculating machines, card index cabinets, and blue books, where the fact is everything and its significance nothing, fortified by the great rampart of Falstaff, we will see to it that the hyperbole does not perish. Standing in that vast shadow, I for one am prepared to defend to the death even the story of the eleven men in buckram.

## ON CARTOMANCY

A SHORT time ago, in a strange town, evil chance confined me in a dingy room overlooking a dismal little street and then, having done this, left me to my own devices, without company and with few books. A grey tide of boredom and depression was already threatening and would have soon engulfed me, had I not come across a little volume in a corner of the bookshelf. It was—to set forth the full title—*Cartomancy, or Occult Divination by Cards*. The identity of the writer was not revealed; he or she was shrouded in true oracular fashion. I had heard of fortune-telling by cards; indeed, I had vague memories of having my destiny unfolded, in the dim past, by elderly ladies who tapped the assembled cards impressively and talked of letters, journeys by land, and dark ladies. But I had no idea such occult knowledge could be gleaned from books. If I had thought about the matter at all (which is doubtful), I had probably imagined that the art of Cartomancy was preserved by oral tradition, handed down through generations of maiden aunts; or that the clue to its mysteries was the inalienable property of a League of Decayed Gentlewomen. But no, here it was in a trumpery little volume, sold everywhere for a shilling. Truly, this is an age of books.

So I lost no time in making myself acquainted with the art, and boredom fled. Nor could I have found a better preceptor, for in this little book all was revealed; with fitting gravity and wealth of detail, it set forth the meaning of the cards and the various methods of laying them out. Each card had a distinct meaning, which was modified by the presence of other cards. All this was made clear, but the instructions were delightfully free from pedantry: 'If intuition leads you to give a different meaning, do so' was the advice it tendered—and what could be better? There was good reason attached to the meaning of some few of the cards, which had a very pretty symbolism. What else could the Queen of Hearts be but a fair woman? What could be a better symbol of death than the Ace of Spades reversed? Never again shall I see that innocent piece of pasteboard without feeling a sudden chill. But the symbolism of most of the cards was not so obvious. Why—it might be asked—should the eight of diamonds represent a roadway journey, the nine of spades disappointment and tears, the ace of clubs a letter of good news? These are mysteries, and not to be lightly comprehended. All the cards, however, are alike in this: they stand for the life that the centuries leave unchanged, the eternal verities of human existence, the things that are significant alike to the emperor and the clown; they do not adapt themselves to any pale, half-hearted way of living, but are downright and talk boldly of birth, death, and marriage, of jealousy, love and anger, of quarrels, accidents, and sudden endings. As to the various methods of shuffling, cutting and laying out the cards, the little book dealt with all these matters with high seriousness and at some length; and no sooner was I acquainted with one or two of the methods than I began to put them into practice. 'These coloured scraps of pasteboard,' I said to myself, as I ranged the cards, 'shall be the tiny windows through which I will stare at the past, and peer wonderingly into the future. And I shall be as a god.'

As no other person was near, I decided to read my own fortunes, past, present, and future. I learned from the book that this was a difficult thing to do, and so I found it. True it is that through the medium of the cards, 'the gay triumph-assuring scarlets—the contrasting deadly-killing sables'—as Lamb called them, my fortunes appeared to take on richer hues, to run to more passionate extremes, than I had imagined; and in the vague mass, both my past and future took on the aspect of a riotous, crowded pageant of love and intrigue, of tremendous sins and strange virtues. All this was heart-stirring enough, but there were difficulties waiting upon any sort of direct interpretation. Though I lived splendidly, and appeared to swagger through an existence crowded with incident, the whole fifty-two, hearts and all, seemed to combine to make me out a rascal, whose mind must have been corroded with the 'motiveless malignity' of an Iago. Why, for example, should I rejoice at the death of a dark boy in a railway accident? Why should I hound a white-haired old gentleman to his grave? And why—for there were numerous other incidents of this kind foreshadowed—should my villainy always take this vile form? Was I this kind of man, I asked myself and the cards, after each new instance of my calculated knavery, and if not, at what precise moment in the near future were all the forces of evil to take command of my soul. So I abandoned the attempt to discover my own fortunes, and, turning to the book, found that if one 'thought strongly of one's absent friends' it was possible to dip into their past and future.

For some little time I shrank from this course. To pry into their past was bad enough, but to attempt to look into their future, which even Time has the decency to keep covered for a while, seemed positively immoral, an action compared with which the publication of a man's love-letters was a mark of friendship. It was not long, however, before I had stifled this feeling by some sophistry about warning them of dangers and so forth; and so I proceeded to satisfy my curiosity. As I shuffled and laid out the cards, I saw myself as the sinister magician of lurid fiction, and relished the part. I had only to take up the cards and the stage was set for great dramas, bravely tricked out in crimson and sable for one secret spectator. If this is not puissance, then where is it to be found among men? What were books when one could spell out the narrative of the cards, and make each friend in turn the hero or heroine of the pictured story. Or if books were to continue, what magnificent plots could be evolved from these strange combinations of coloured paste-board! But if, through the cards, my own existence had assumed brave proportions, though everywhere smirched by villainy, that of my friends was no less highly-coloured and crowded with incident. As I ranged the cards, and spied into the secret life, past and future, of one friend after another, I was dumbfounded, aghast at my former ignorance. Men who had been hidden away, for the last twenty years, in college rooms and lecture-halls, whose outward existence had appeared as smooth and unruffled as the immemorial lawns outside their windows, now seemed to be moving in a violent Elizabethan drama. They made love to dark ladies, and were in turn adored by fair ones; they lost and gained great sums of money, aroused the jealousy of dark men, wrecked innumerable homes, and lived in a constant whirl of good and evil tidings, sea-voyages, railway journeys, and strong passions. Here was a set of men who had been living like this (and were to go on doing so) for years, and yet I, who counted myself as one of their friends, had been kept in ignorance. What consummate actors!—to present an

unruffled front to the world, and even to their friends, and yet all the while to know, in secret, a life that resembled nothing so much as a thunderstorm. Could such things be? In truth, I came, in the end, to doubt the cards.

But though I have forsworn Cartomancy, and hold such occult practices in abhorrence, I will say to every man who has suddenly found that life is one long piece of boredom, dull grey in warp and weft: Go to the cards, and see existence woven madly in black and crimson—The life they present knows nothing of boredom, for no card in all the pack stands for such a thing—Go read the cards! As for myself, I have but one confession to make: I dare not play at cards now, for they are fraught with such significance to me that I could not trifle with them in a mere game. I cannot rid them of their meanings, and while others are thinking of nothing but winning tricks, I see myself, and my unconscious colleagues, playing havoc with the destinies of dark ladies and fair men. I cannot trump an opponent's Queen, but what I feel that I am probably bringing misfortune upon some unknown innocent woman. If I fling down the Ace of Spades upon the King, it is not unlikely that I am consigning some dark man—a good fellow probably—to his grave. This would be murder, and an odd trick is not worth it. So there is nothing for it but to leave the cards alone.

## ON BEING KIND TO THE OLD

ENGLAND, it is said, is cruel to the young and kind to the old. The remark usually takes on the tone of an accusation; we who hear it from a critical foreigner find ourselves struggling against a sense of shame; we are quick to denounce something or other, the House of Lords, Sentimentality, Meat-eating, the Educational System, and we uproot and demolish, and are clearly filled with a noble public spirit. If, then, the remark is always construed as a criticism, and if it nearly always succeeds in touching us on the raw, there must be something in it. Apparently, being kind to the old is no excuse for being cruel to the young. Perhaps this kindness itself is wrong. Let us be nice in our ethics, and look a little more closely at the question.

The remark refers, of course, to our English habit of relying upon experience or even mere weight of years. We are—or have been—so apt to listen to a man only when he is tottering on the verge of senility. In politics, the clean young enthusiast has been discouraged, and only the old intriguers have been respected. We have begun to take an artist seriously only when he was past his prime. Pantaloon is our national hero. Even Mr. Bernard Shaw, who ought to know better, would have politicians living for two or three hundred years to acquire wisdom, as if there was not folly enough in the world to delude a man for thrice three hundred years if he should choose to live and look for it. As for the young, they have not been given a hearing amongst us. If one of them, of more courage and energy than his fellows, pushed his way forward and told us something we did not know, we murmured 'Oh, it's only young So-and-So,' and turned our backs upon him. We could afford to wait until his ideals and enthusiasms were gone, his energy sapped, and his body and mind shivering in their late autumn, before we listened to him. Such is our English attitude, which you and I have loudly deplored when we have met the sneers of men from newer countries. But actually there is a good deal to be said for it. In the last resort it does us credit.

But mark, this attitude of ours does not bring us any profit. We shall not try to defend it as a useful thing. When we are kind to the old, and put none but the aged and infirm in places of responsibility and trust, we are not better served; and we know it. The young, whom we put aside, would do the work much better. That, I fancy, is the ground of the criticism against us; but we are regarding it as an ethical question, and the very fact that our attitude works against our profit only makes our ethics shine more brightly. In order that we may give to the old, we have to deny the young some measure of power and substance, but whereas we are certainly kind to the one, it does not follow that we are cruel to the other.

We can afford to be hard upon the young, for youth itself is hard. The young are not dependent in any way upon what we think of them, for they are still convinced that the powers of the universe plotted amicably to fill them with greatness, so that whether the lesser mortals that encompass them think well or ill of them matters little. They are still living in Eternity, and, unlike the old, do not understand the need of claiming some measure of applause while there is yet time for it. Their hours are spacious, golden, crammed with promise. If we should put a young man into high office, it is unlikely that he would think any better of us: he owes us nothing; he has received only his deserts; he has got one office, but he might have had any one of a hundred others that were shining before his path. The world appears to him so fruitful of glorious opportunities that even to thrust him into a post of honour is to do him an injury by limiting his choice. And as for the young who scribble and paint and write music (and they are legion), what can be done for them? They are all geniuses whose work is above the understanding and taste of the age, and as such are beyond our ministrations, for your misunderstood young genius is perhaps the only completely independent, self-satisfied thing in the universe. What are little paragraphs in the papers, invitations to dinner, and the like, to him when he is the man for whom the century has been waiting to give it voice. He can exist, as a young friend of mine did, on stale cake and cocoa, and yet march about the world like an emperor, attended by the glittering cohorts of his vain and heated fancy. If it were possible to measure and tax youthful vanity; if young men could be imprisoned for egotism; if it were a hanging matter to imagine oneself a genius; then we might have a chance of being cruel to the young. Short of that, we cannot reach them. In order to protect ourselves from their dreadful efficiency, we may deny them place and profit, but what are our trumpety rewards to the largess of a fond imagination. So our gifts go where they are appreciated—to the old.

If our so-called cruelty is a myth, our kindness is yet real enough. When we put an old man into power, and give praise to mere persistence in living, our charity has taken no wrong turn. The very inefficiency, helplessness, and wistful vanity of the old make them unequalled objects of our Christian virtues. It would be easy enough to be cruel to them, for, unlike the young, they are at our mercy. They have lost all that goes to sustain youth, which could be careless of the world while it was still dreaming dreams, making love, and able to shout and sing, while life stepped out to the quick drumming of the blood. To the old, Eternity is no longer about them, and the far horizons have vanished. Their hours are remorselessly ticked away. There is no longer time to do everything and be everything: he will be a fortunate man who has rounded off even one little piece of work before the light goes. It is a monstrously silly fable that the aged are indifferent to praise, position and honour, that they have outgrown the little vanities of the world. The fact that a few old men have retired from the world because they were weary and infirm does not support the legend; and one has only to listen to their talk to discover how far such ancients have got beyond vanity.

As for your active old men, they ceaselessly bestir themselves in pursuit of notice and applause. And well they might. With the dwindling of time and the shedding of illusions, their imagination has ceased to minister to their vanity. They require some confirmation from the world of their good opinion of themselves. Now that the far horizons, infinitely beguiling in youth, have vanished, the world itself shines more brightly against the steadily deepening background, and a dedication, a respectful hearing, a salute here, some little notice there, these become matters of some moment; they warm the heart when all other fires are being heaped with pale ashes. Consider the position of an old man. His lines are fixed and he cannot begin again; all his argosies left the quayside long ago, and if some of them do not bring him some return, he will find cold comfort now in his tales of their setting out. Now that he is no longer a potential Shakespeare, Beethoven or Lincoln, as he was in youth, your ageing man will try hard to become Deputy-Mayor of Suddleton: he will have the cash in hand. Deny him that, and he has nothing left.

This being so, what is there to be said against this habit of ours. We are not cruel to the young, but we are certainly kind to the old. Nothing could be better, for even supposing that a few youngsters here and there suffer from our neglect, they have only to grow old to remedy it, and if they have not persistence enough to keep on steadily increasing their ages, they are not the men for us. The pity is, not that we have such a habit, but that, having had it for centuries, we are now letting it go at the bidding of mere popular prejudice. Our old English habit of mind wants fortifying: we should push back the age at which a man is entitled to public notice and let our youngsters do their swaggering in private or among their brother fledglings. With some little contriving, it ought to be possible to make this a land in which every man under sixty has his future before him and no past to brood over, every office and place of profit is filled with an elder, and the cackling of gratified senile vanity is heard night and day. Make way for Justice Shallow, and give an ear to Polonius, and be content, for your Prince Hal can look after himself, and as for your Hamlets, their maladies are past your doctoring and their felicity is beyond the shouting of a mob or the solemn foolery of a committee.

## THE DREAM

THE afternoon sun, rather reproachfully, reilluminated the page at which I was vacantly staring. I sank a little lower into my armchair, raised the book a trifle, and made a further pretence of reading. A few more words filtered into my brain; then the warm sun, the drowsy air, the still afternoon, drowned sense after sense....

I was hurrying along a dark side-street between two rows of houses, tall, featureless buildings, close-shuttered and with no lights showing. It was a vile night, of what season I could not tell, but seemingly wintry, for there were frequent icy gusts of wind snatching at the chimneys, and an occasional spatter of rain. I dashed forward, not trying to pick my way through the pools and mud, but splashing along as quickly as possible, a growing feeling of panic urging me on. I had no idea what was afoot, or at least the rational part of me knew nothing of the matter, but it was clear that some terror was behind. At last, panting for breath, I reached what I knew to be the back gate of my own house. It was open, and I had sufficient strength to press forward through a kind of courtyard of no great size, gain the house-door, which was also unbolted, and lock myself in the house. I found myself in a great draughty kitchen, in which there was no fire but only the cheerless flickering light of two candles. I knew it to be my own place; everything seemed familiar, though actually, of course, it was all strange. Behind the massive door, now securely bolted, I felt easier than I had done outside in that ill-favoured street; but even yet the fear of a hunted creature remained with me; I hardly dared to breathe, made no movement, but only listened intently.

There was nothing to be heard above the wind. Yet I still felt that the terror had not been evaded, that it was drawing nearer, though what form it would take I could not guess, having been precipitated so suddenly into the adventure. I was flying from something, of that there could be no doubt, but whether my pursuers were wild beasts, men or devils, there was no knowing. Whatever they were, it looked as if I had evaded them in the darkness; and as I was hidden away in one out of many similar houses, in a labyrinth of streets (for I knew somehow that I was in a large town, though not a modern one), it looked very unlikely that I should be discovered. I breathed more freely.

Then suddenly, to my horror, I heard above the wind the tramp of many feet coming down the street I had just left. It was not the sound of soldiers marching, nor yet the vague tumult of a moving crowd; but something between the two, the noise of men going in some sort of formation, men of set purpose. It was this then that I had been fearing, for now I fell into a dreadful panic, and hastened to put out the two candles, so that not even a tiny ray of light through the shutters should draw attention to the house. The whole row was in darkness; there was nothing apparently to mark off one house from another; I was safe enough. Probably the men did not even know that I had turned down this side street; they could not have seen me in such a black night. So I reasoned with myself, but got little comfort out of it.

Meanwhile, the sound was drawing nearer, and the crowd, or whatever it was, seemed to have fallen into a fairly regular step, as if assured of its destination. A moment later, the men burst out into a kind of marching song, which they voiced fiercely in a deep-throated unison. Two lines of the chorus remain with me yet:

‘You shall know him by his jolly red mouth,  
And the bushy black beard on his chin.’

the last line being repeated with startling emphasis. It seems absurd enough now, but at the time it was charged with menace, as if the very sound of it called up all manner of dreadful associations. Having fallen into such a swinging step, it appeared unlikely that the mob outside would make a halt; but to my utter dismay, as soon as the sound passed close to my window it stopped, there was a shuffling of feet, and then a great voice, the very herald of doom, cried out: ‘This is the house!’ At this, I crouched lower, and could do nothing else: there was a crawling and heaving in the pit of my stomach. I heard the outer gate being thrust open, then a stir in the courtyard, and a moment later, there came a thundering knock at the door. ‘Open the door!’ cried that terrifying voice. I could not move. Had I gone through the house, escape might have been possible; but it appeared to be one of the rules of this fearful game that I should not be able to move.

‘Open the door!’ came the cry again. Then there followed a medley of sound, shouts and yells and the trampling of feet, after which there came a series of terrific blows at the door. They were bursting it open. For a few moments it resisted the attack, but the battering increased in violence, and soon it was all over. One mighty effort, a yell of

triumph, and the door came splintering in.... But only to let in a flood of yellow sunshine, the murmur of the flies, and the sight of my own room. The windy night, the dark side street, the great draughty kitchen, the besieging crowd, all had vanished, huddled away into the lumber-room of such phantasmagoria; one twist of the brain's kaleidoscope and the strange tale was in progress, another twist and it was gone. I glanced at my watch and found that I had only been asleep for some ten minutes; I had only halted for a second near the Ivory Gate. Yet in that fraction of time, the chapter of romance, well conceived and deftly executed, was begun and ended, though the tale itself has neither beginning nor end. Surely, of all things in life, these fantastic dramas, coming and going between a few heart-beats, are the most personal and the most wonderful: ourselves alone are the authors and actors; we sketch out the scenario, fill in the dialogue, cast the parts and play them all ourselves; we it is who design and execute the scenery, clear the stage, and set the piece in motion; we it is who yawn in the stalls, shudder in the pit, and cheer from the gallery; from first to last, it is our own affair, and we alone can step forward briskly at the curtain to receive our own plaudits. Life cannot show elsewhere such a fine egotistical matter as this business of dreaming, and a dream, well done, makes even literature seem little more than its attenuated, halting shadow.

## ON FILLING IN FORMS

To the uneducated, filling in forms of any kind is a considerable task. The curt official demands puzzle them; the various particulars they are asked to give do not readily come to hand; and, not least, the actual business of writing, unfamiliar as it is, seems very long and wearisome. It is no wonder then that the uneducated detest printed forms, and even extend their dislike to the official bodies that issue such things and compel honest labouring men to scratch their heads over them. But it is curious that this dislike is shared by many of us who are not entirely without letters, who can write our names and addresses and what not with tolerable facility and despatch. We have not the same reason for our distaste as the man to whom the feel of a pen is strange; and with our superior knowledge, such as it is, it would seem that we have less excuse, for at least we can understand that such things as forms may be necessary in a world given over to figures and tabulation. Our distaste for the business, then, seems irrational and nothing more nor less than a characteristically English prejudice. Where there are definite grounds for our objection, such as a mistrust of the official motive in collecting information, or a feeling that we are being compelled unnecessarily to take trouble and so forth, it is not mere prejudice; but with most of us, grounds or no grounds, the feeling remains; and whether this filling in of forms appears to be urgent and necessary or not, we approach it, according to our mood, with something like irritation or depression. There are people, of course, who do not feel in this way, people who take kindly to all the methods of the bureaucrat, who revere an official form whether it is reasonable or not, and love organisation and routine for their own sakes. When a person comes to believe that humanity will yet be saved by double-entry and the card-index system, the beauty and significance of an official form, correctly filled in and neatly docketed, is put beyond question. We imagine that to one of Mr. Sidney Webb's admirers, the very sight of a printed form with inviting blank spaces will call forth the genuine aesthetic emotion; to such a one a form is not only desirable in itself but also beautiful because it exists as a symbol of a whole vision of life, namely, that ordered system, rigid with its hierarchy of officials in which some minds find their earthly paradise. When a man holds such doctrines he has become mystical and is past arguing with; our objection to bureaucratic paraphernalia, its forms and dockets and what not, is nothing to him but the grimacing and babbling of the half-witted. On this question of the value of forms, there are plainly two parties that can neither come to terms nor yet agree to ignore each other. We stand on each side of a great gulf, staring across, and occasionally making half-witted, menacing cries and gestures. Let us keep to our own side.

If our dislike of forms has little or nothing in common with that of the uneducated, who merely hate the unfamiliar task of recording; and if it seems to exist with sufficiently reasonable grounds, we must either bring to light reasons yet hidden or confess ourselves the victims of a stupid prejudice. It may be, of course, that we dislike forms for the same reason that our opponents, the official-minded, adore them, namely, because they can be taken as symbols of a certain kind of life for which we, on our part, have no admiration. But this will not explain our irritation at having to set down a few paltry particulars on demand: the real reason cuts more deeply, for it is a personal matter, unconnected with our social and political views. Unlike the lovers of forms, who have arid minds and are devoid of fancy, we on our side are for the most part full-minded, expansive, imaginative fellows, and in this can be found the reason for our dislike. We are asked to give an account of ourselves, but not a genuine account of ourselves, the kind we deliver to an old friend over the last few pipes and the dying fire; that kind of account we would give with pleasure at any seasonable hour to any fairly sympathetic listening official. No, our names, ages, occupations, and so forth, must be set down in various ruled columns on pieces of blue paper (usually of poor quality), which shall hereafter stand in our stead. But no piece of paper, blue, buff, or virgin white, can stand in our stead. No mere handful of facts can represent our unique and exquisite selves. If all the facts had to be given, we might be able to do something with them; they might gradually take shape into something like a personality; but to be compelled to give only a few, and those not the most essential, so that the beggarly total shall be sent abroad to represent us, this is to be subjected to a pitiless process of abstraction. It is an affront to the spirit. And it is useless to argue that the few facts demanded are sufficient for the particular official purpose for which they are required. Purpose or no purpose, we are human beings, and if we are to be made known to other human beings, let us be visible in all our colour and light. John Smith, Rosedene, Leicester Road, Cashier, 53 years of age, and the rest, is a libellous travesty of old Jack Smith, who always smokes a cherry-wood pipe and is the best amateur rose-grower in the East Midlands. Glancing at such a colourless list of petty details as—Henry Robinson, Coal Merchant's Clerk, aged 27, Single, who would imagine it was meant to represent young Robinson who is so often seen about with the fair-headed girl from the Post Office, who has a temperament and is known to be the author of the greatest blank-verse tragedy of the time, a work so far above its age that no theatrical manager will look at it? Think of—William Shakespeare, Stratford and London, age 35, Married, Three Children, Occupation—Player; or William Wordsworth, Rydal Mount, Distributor of Stamps, Married, Church of England, and so on; these things are at once grotesque and pitiful. A man in prison is simply known by a number, and it is said that this alone tends to make him lose some of his self-respect. So, too, when we find ourselves subjected to this bowless process, when we are bending over the printed forms and staring dully at their stupid demands, something of the same kind is happening to us as we answer question after question; we feel our personality evaporating as it were; the lines growing more angular and the

colours fading; until what is left is not even a caricature, not even a flickering shadow of our real essential selves. And all the while we know that we carry with us a personality, richly deft and fantastically coloured, something as opulent as the Indies and as mysterious as China. Hence the irritation, the depression, the half instinctive revolt, the protest that does not even find words for itself. And we shall do well as the forms come snowing down upon us, to recognise the revolt and assert the protest, for it may be that when we come to the end of filling in these things, we shall find ourselves to be nothing better than the paltry details we have so often set down: we shall have lost our souls.

### THREE MEN

THE first is (or was) a schoolmaster. When he was in his later teens, long before I met him, he had worked for an Oxford scholarship, and he had worked so hard that a few days before the examination he was found at a late hour babbling incoherently over his books, a nervous wreck. He never took the examination and never went to Oxford, but, when he recovered, passed into a little day-school. Nevertheless, Oxford had entered into his soul. To me, he was more like an Oxford man, or what an Oxford man ought to be, than any other person I have ever met. He had all the larger and more genial traits clearly marked, with just the least delicious hint of pleasant caricature, like a good actor presenting a character-study of a younger Don. There were little peculiar traits too, as of some mythical college, of a ghostly Balliol or an unsubstantial 'House.' It may have been the result of deliberate cultivation, or it may have been the gift of one of the younger gods, a compensation for that disastrous breakdown; I do not know, but it was harmless enough, and delicate fooling for a spectator.

I have not seen him for years, but I can call him well to mind even now; a little man with hair loosely parted in the centre and falling over his temples, and eyeglasses insecurely perched halfway down a long nose. In the small town in which he (and I too) lived at that time, there were in all five working-men's clubs. He was a member of all five. Why, I do not know, except that beer was very much cheaper in these places than it was elsewhere. But even that does not explain why he was a member of them all. But so it was. Nightly into one or other of these working-men's clubs, he carried his insecure eyeglasses and his Oxford manner, and was well received, with the respect due to 'a character,' rather than with the hardly suppressed laughter that followed him elsewhere. There he would take a friend, and over the beer (which was both cheap and excellent) he would talk at length, letting the ball of conversation roll easily down the long cadences of his speech. His favourite theme, I remember, was the utter worthlessness of the middle-classes, to which he belonged, and he was the first person of my acquaintance to speak of them as 'the bourgeois.' It is years since I last saw him, but I trust that some school still knows him, chalky and pedantic, day by day, and that at least five working-men's clubs still see him, magnificent over his beer, night by night.

The second man was a spectacled smoky fellow, getting on in years, whom I knew but slightly. His trade was the writing of boys' stories, not for expensive illustrated books but for penny dreadfuls. What else he had done to earn his bread, when he was only an aspirant, I do not know, but that was his trade when I knew him. Year after year, he chronicled the adventures of Dick This or Jack the Other at School or among Pirates or Red Indians; and his pay was one guinea for every thousand words, which was not bad, for he could turn out a good many thousand words in a week and could also fill up with Boom! Crash! Bang! a kind of writing that boys like. Although the scenes of his tales were laid in all parts of the world, there was no nonsense about him; he did not travel in search of local colour, but used a gazetteer and trusted to his powers of invention, which were well-tryed and excellent. But his heart was not in the work and he took no pride in it. At regular intervals he would simply send off so many thousand words to the Boys' Monster Tales Publishing Company Limited, and his stories came out under many different names, not one of which was his own. He had a wife but no family, few friends, and belonged to no club or society. The thing he lived for was a great work in metaphysics, at which he had been engaged for many years, and which was to be called 'The Mind of the Universe.' All his spare time and energy were given to thinking out the problems that he had set himself, and he would weary his few visitors with interminable talk in a philosophical jargon of his own making. Years before, he had read a little handbook on Spinoza, which had brought a new set of problems into his world, and which had so intrigued him that he had determined to devote the remainder of his life to metaphysics. But he had also made up his mind not to study the philosophers, because their theories might keep him from original thought: he meant to think everything out for himself. When he had erected his system, the world would recognise it for what it was, and forgive his preposterous stories of 'Jack Marraway and the Terror of the Prairie' and the rest. He was wrong. I am no metaphysician but I know that his stories were better than his grand original system of metaphysics. For, after years of labour, he had only succeeded in enunciating paradoxes that were stale jokes in Ionia, in dragging out cumbersome creaking theories that even the long extinct State University of Hohensteilschwarzburg would have rejected at a glance; and all written in that terrible jargon of his. Yet it was a manly thing to do, and though all his labour was worth little, it was not in vain, for it gave him secret incommunicable pleasure and he felt himself to be a man marked off from the common run of men; which he was. For the rest, he smoked prodigious quantities of 'Meadowsweet Flake'—a vile tobacco, grossly doctored and scented.

The other man I never knew personally, but I received many accounts of him, and his reputation, the legend of him, has been very dear to me. He was a shopkeeper and sold, at a considerable profit, optical instruments, spectacles and whatnot. But what set him apart from other men was that he had had more bad verse through his hands than any other person in these islands. It was his one great hobby to collect bad verse and publish it in anthologies. He must have known more poetasters than any other man living or dead. On the death of a well-known politician, or immediately after any great public event, he would set to work and gather up all the offscourings of the 'Poets' Corners' of obscure country papers. Thus, he it was, and no other, who edited *The Best Poetical Tributes to the late Joseph Chamberlain*, and many other anthologies. His system was, I fancy, to compel every contributor to become a subscriber and take several copies of the volume in hand, so that it was ensured a sale. The verse was always bad, the very worst conceivable, for no one who wrote good verse would have suffered him to live. Why he did it—and he produced innumerable volumes—is a mystery, for there could not have been much money in it, and the same energy and impudence would have given him a fortune in the quack medicine business. I have thought sometimes that he was a satirist of a particularly deep kind, but I have been assured by those who knew him that he was entirely serious and innocently proud of the good work he was doing. Nor did he allow his literary service to

interfere with his trade. In the centre of his shop-window there was a coloured life-size bust of Shakespeare with a pair of eyeglasses on its nose. The bust hinted delicately to all passers-by that though our man was but a shopkeeper, he too had served the Muse and was the editor of the *Hundred Best*, etc.; the eyeglasses, through which one caught the mild glance of the poet, indicated the nature of the shop. It was admirable! And though the man himself is dead, the shop remains and with it the bust. I saw it only a short time ago, and was gladdened; indeed, there seems something lacking now when I see Shakespeare without his eyeglasses; but one cannot, of course, be dogmatic about such matters of taste.

All three men lived in one town, where I too lived for a season. And there were others, more wonderful still, whom I cannot describe in this place, nor perhaps in any other, for I write to be believed.

## THE BOGEY OF SPACE

WHEN Lafcadio Hearn comes to the end of *The Romance of the Milky Way*, he tells us, a little wistfully, that the lovely old Japanese legend, which makes the heavens 'seem very near and warm and human,' has sometimes enabled him 'to forget the monstrous facts of science, and the stupendous horror of Space.' And elsewhere, he writes of the terror that he felt, in common with his philosophic guide, Herbert Spencer, at the notion of infinite Space—'the mere vague idea of that everlasting Night into which the blazing of millions of suns can bring neither light nor warmth.' Most of us, I think, have been kept from sleep, at some time or other, by similar emotions. 'Of the Kosmos in the last resort,' wrote Stevenson, 'science reports many doubtful things and all of them appalling.' From time to time, astronomers, thinking of nothing but their strange study, have brought us news of the macrocosm, bewildering measurements, and ghastly phenomena, the full import of which, suddenly realised in a quiet hour, has left us sick at heart. From these monstrous data our imagination has dizzily fashioned a vision of the universe compared with which the hells of the theologians seemed lively and companionable.

At such times all existence begins to look like an unending nightmare. We see the bright unnumbered throng of stars as so many specks of dust on the dark mantle of old Chaos, most ancient of devils. And even they appear remote and unfriendly. The fixed stars know nothing of us: the old homely constellations have an alien look. In the scarred white face of the moon we can read the destiny of our own beautiful planet, soon to be a cold cinder. Good and evil alike are as nothing in the face of the illimitable darkness that awaits us. Our most heroic endeavour cannot lighten the gloom. The greatest of our prophets and poets cannot break the silence for long; it has swallowed the shouts and songs of countless generations. Man, with all his pleasant green places, is only the tiniest accident, a slight tremor of a wheel, something that the next stroke of the machine will put to rights, obliterating him and all his works. But these shuddering negations, to which we have been led by a few scientific data, do not disturb us long. A few hours' sleep or a brisk walk destroys the whole mournful fabric, and we step out lively as before. A few misguided men, having much to do with these things, make some sort of a creed of such folly, and angrily deny that man has an immortal soul. In this they are wise according to their lights, for believing themselves to be caged in such a universe their only hope lies in a speedy extinction. The soul has no better place in their dreary cosmos than a skylark would have in a Birmingham factory.

Blake was once at a friend's house when the talk turned on the vastness of Space. At last Blake, who was always irritated by this sort of talk, broke in with, 'It is false. I walked the other evening to the end of the heath, and touched the sky with my finger.' Those who are familiar with Blake's habit of mind, his way of using daring figures of speech as if they were literal statements of fact, will not dismiss this remark as the raving of a genial madman. To Blake, the artist, this perpetual raising of scientific bogeys, this emphasising of the emptiness of the universe, to the distress of our imagination, was nothing short of criminal. He believed in the 'determinate and bounding form' of all things, in 'the bounding line and its infinite inflections and movements.' 'Leave out this line,' he wrote, 'and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again....' And chaos is the arch-enemy of the artist, who strives to fashion from the corrupt materials at hand the enduring forms of his imagination. To Blake the sky appeared a most excellent canopy, a majestical roof fretted with golden fire, as it did to Hamlet or any other man. So, too, our earth appears a lovely, fruitful dwelling-place. But, according to science, one is a nightmare of space, the other a putrescent cinder. This may be the truth for science, in which there are no nightmares, but it is not the truth for us. Science, with all its data and phenomena, appeals only to one small part of a man, but the ultimate truth must appeal to the whole man, to the emotional, reasoning, moral, imaginative creature with an immortal soul. It is poetry, in the widest sense of the term, that makes this appeal, and poetry alone. The sky and the earth that we find in poetry and that we have seen for ourselves, the blue canopy stretched over the beautiful dwelling-place, are nearer the ultimate truth than anything that science can tell us.

When we go to science for an account of the cosmos and recoil in horror from the nightmarish thing that we find there, it does not mean that science is necessarily wrong (though, for the most part, it is only guessing), but that we have gone to it for something that it cannot give, and does not pretend to give—an ultimate truth that will satisfy every demand of our highly complex nature. We cannot take science out of its own limited sphere of activity without being horror-struck at the result. Thus, if we went to science, in one or other of its various branches, for a minute description of a red rose, a glass of wine, a wonderful sunset, or a lovely child, the result, in every instance, would seem to be an outlandish thing of horror. So it is with the universe; when we can apprehend it as we can a rose or a sunset, not through science but through the poetry that saturates our being, we shall see the universe in all its majesty and splendour, with all its blazing multi-coloured suns, strange planets and wild moons, moving in the endless dance.

Men like Hearn suffered because they would not keep science within its natural limits. They allowed the bogey talk of the astronomers to frighten them. Hearn never seemed to see that the old Japanese legend which made the heavens seem very near and warm and human was probably nearer the ultimate truth of things than the monstrous facts that he was always trying to forget. He needed large doses of Blake as an antidote to Herbert Spencer. As for the notion of infinite space and 'that everlasting night,' of which the astronomical dabblers have made so much, it is nothing but a bleak fiction. For my part, I have ceased to be troubled by any horror of that space in which star-systems move like specks of dust, for I have long held that the whole affair is in reality an illusion, an elaborate jest of the gods. Even the scientists are less confident than they were, for the new Einstein theory (which mathematical

friends have vainly tried to explain to me) seems to emphasise the illusory aspect of space, making our old theories and elaborate calculations look rather foolish. Meanwhile, the cosmos now appears to be more of a joke than ever, but whatever conclusions the scientists may arrive at, of one thing I am certain—it is a good joke. Probably it is the ultimate, universal, everlasting joke, of which the greatest of our jests are but distorted reflections and fleeting shadows.

## A ROAD TO ONESELF

SOMETIMES, on one of these sunny autumn mornings, when I turn my back on the town and take to the highway, I seem to have the world to myself. I walk forward, as it were, into a great sunlit emptiness. Once I am a little way out of the town it is as if the world had been swept clean of men. I pass a few young mothers, who are proudly ushering their round-eyed solemn babes into the presence of the morning sun, a lumbering cart or two, and maybe a knot of labourers, who look up from their task with humorous resignation in their faces; these and others I overtake and pass by, and then there is often an end of my fellows. I alone keep a lounging tryst with the sun, himself, I fancy, a mighty, genial idler and the father of all dreamers and idlers among men.

A light mist covers the neighbouring hills, which are almost imperceptible, their shapes and colours showing but faintly, so that they seem to stand aloof—things of dream. As I go further along the shining road I seem to be lounging into a vast, empty room. There are sights and sounds in plenty; cows looking over the walls with their great, mournful eyes; here and there a thin blue column of smoke; the cawing of rooks about the decaying woods; and, distantly sounding, the creak of a cart, a casual shout or two, a vague hammering, and, more distant still, the noise of the town, now the faint murmur of a hive. Yet to me, coming from the crowded, tumultuous streets, it seems empty because I meet no one by the way. The road, for all its thick drift of leaves, deep gold and brown, at either side, seems to lie naked in the sunshine, and I drink in this unexpected solitude as eagerly as a dusty traveller takes his ale. For a time, it comes as a delectable and quickening draught, and though outwardly a sober, meditative, almost melancholy pedestrian, I hold high festival in the spirit, drink deep, and revel with the younger gods.

One of the greatest dangers of living in large towns is that we have too many neighbours and human fellowship is too cheap. We are apt to become wearied of humanity; a solitary green tree sometimes seems dearer to us than an odd thousand of our fellow-citizens. Unless we are hardened, the millions of eyes begin to madden us; and for ever pushed and jostled by crowds we begin to take more kindly to Malthus, and are even willing to think better of Herod and other wholesale depopulators. We begin to hate the sight of men who would appear as gods to us if we met them in Turkestan or Patagonia. When we have become thoroughly crowd-sick, we feel that the continued presence of these thousands of other men and women will soon crush, stamp, or press our unique, miraculous individuality into some vile pattern of the streets; we feel that the spirit will perish for want of room to expand in: and we gasp for an air untainted by crowded humanity.

Some such thoughts as these come to me, at first, in my curious little glimpse of solitude. I am possessed by an ampler mood than men commonly know, and feel that I can fashion the world about me to my changing whims; my spirit overflows, and seems to fill the quiet drooping countryside with sudden light and laughter; the empty road and vacant fields, the golden atmosphere and blue spaces are my kingdoms, and I can people them at will with my fancies. Beautiful snatches of poetry come into my head, and I repeat a few words, or even only one word, aloud and with passionate emphasis, as if to impress their significance and beauty upon a listening host. Sometimes I break into violent little gusts of laughter, for my own good pleasure. At other times I sing, loudly and with abandon: to a petrified audience of one cow and three trees I protest melodiously that Phyllis has such charming graces that I could love her till I die, and I believe it, too, at the time. I brag to myself, and applaud and flatter myself. I even indulge in one or two of those swaggering day-dreams of boyhood in which one finds oneself suddenly raised to some extraordinary eminence, the idol of millions, a demi-god among men, from which height one looks down with kindly scorn on those myopic persons who did not know true greatness when they saw it, sarcastic schoolmasters and jeering relatives for the most part.

Only by such heightened images, seemingly more applicable to centuries of riotous life than half an hour's sauntering, can I suggest in stubborn words the swelling mood that first comes to me with this sudden, unexpected seclusion.

But as the morning wears away, the jubilation arising from this new expansion of oneself dwindles and perishes; the spirit wearies of its play. The road stretches out its vacant length, a few last leaves come fluttering down, and the sun grows stronger, sharpening the outline of the hills. The day is lovelier than ever. But I meet no one by the way, and even the distant sounds of men's travail and sport have died down. After a time the empty road and silent valley become vaguely disquieting, like a great room spread for a feast, blazing with lights, opulent in crimson and gold, and yet all deserted and quiet as the grave. I ask myself if all men have been mewed up in offices and underground warehouses, by some ghastly edict, unknown to me, which has come into force this very morning. Have I alone escaped? Or I wonder if the Last Day has dawned, and been made plain to men not by sound of trump, but by some sign in the sky that I have overlooked; a vast hand may have beckoned to all men or the heavens may have opened while I was busy lighting my pipe. Have all but one of the weary children of earth been gathered to their long rest? I walk in loneliness.

Suddenly, I see a tiny moving figure on the road before me, and immediately it focuses my attention. What are walls, fields, trees, and cows compared with this miraculous thing, a fellow human being, played upon by the same desires and passions, his head stuffed with the same dreams and fluttering thoughts? In one of the world's greatest romances is not the most breathless moment concerned with the discovery of a human footprint in the sand? Does not the world's story begin with one human being meeting another? As I keep my eyes fixed on the nearing figure the last of my vague fancies and egotistical imaginings are blown away; my mind is engrossed by the solidly romantic possibilities of the encounter. Just as I was glad to escape from the sight and sound of men, so I am eager now to break my solitude: the circle is complete. And as we come up together, the stranger and I, I give him a loud greeting, and he, a little startled, returns the salute; and so we pass on, fellow-travellers and nameless companions in a great adventure, knowing no more of each other than the brief sight of a face, the sound of a voice can tell us. We only cry out a Hail and Farewell through the mist, yet I think we go on our way a little heartened.



## THE EDITOR

I HAVE just learned from a little paragraph in a newspaper that another old acquaintance of mine has gone—old Wimpenny-Brown, 'for many years editor of the *Wallerdale Herald*'—as the paragraph is careful to inform me. But there is little need, for it was in his editorial days that I met Wimpenny-Brown, and I can only think of him as an editor. Apart from a few early years spent as a reporter on a lesser London paper, all his time had been given to the *Wallerdale Herald*. It was an obscure provincial sheet, Liberal-cum-Radical in tone, strongly upholding Free Trade and much given to enunciating those few leading principles 'upon which the prosperity and happiness of this country must inevitably depend.' But in the days when I knew its editor, the *Herald* was nothing more to me than a frame, the necessary boundaries of gilt and moulding, that set off his personality. Thus framed, my old acquaintance was a man to be sought out and gathered to oneself. To a youngster in quest of the absurd, as I was at that time, he was meat and drink. Even so long ago, he was considered one of the old school, and so true to type that he seemed to have been specially created to verify the comic novelists. He seemed to dwell in the great shadow of Mr. Potts, of the *Eatanswill Gazette*, and to be closely related to that solemn editorial host of Colonels and Majors dear to the American humorist.

A pipe and an occasional glass served Wimpenny-Brown as a tribute to the bohemianism of his profession; as hostages to respectability he had a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses at the end of a black ribbon, trim whiskers, and a large umbrella; with his staff he was—I believe—majestically paternal, but to his opponents he was a very Jupiter; and for the rest—he had a manner. In his presence, it seemed as if the *Essay on Liberty* had just been published, as if dusty men of letters were still delightedly wondering where Macaulay's style came from, as if radical masterpieces were still being issued in fortnightly parts. Many men had his respect, even his homage, but as an editor—and I never knew him as anything else—he would allow no man to dictate to him; he served only the Public and 'those few great principles.' 'An editor,' he would say, tapping a sheet of paper with his glasses, 'is the servant of the Public although his duty is to educate it.' And his innocent vanity would swell out into such monstrous proportions, would bud and blossom into such foolish phrases, that his hearer would wonder if he had suddenly strayed into the rigid world of the third-rate comic novel. But all was sincerely spoken. Wimpenny-Brown meant all that he said, and he strove hard to educate his public. He would not pander to low tastes (he has said so many a time in my hearing); nor was he prepared to tickle rather higher tastes with the bright confectionery of fiction and verse and such things. No, it was by enunciating and applying those great principles, giving solid bread, so to speak, that he meant to educate his readers. 'You must remember, sir'—he would point the glasses—'that this is a News-Paper, and not a magazine'—the last with magnificent scorn. At ordinary times, his hand was hardly to be traced in the paper; he remained hidden afar-off, brooding over the great principles. But at a crisis, Wallerdale knew what it meant to have a *Herald* and a Wimpenny-Brown as its editor. On the eve of an election, at the outbreak or at the conclusion of a war, at all times like these, he could be counted upon; leaders would flow from his pen, and the *Herald* would look Monarch, Lords, Commons, in the face, would address all Europe, and the two Americas if need be, re-assuring friends and denouncing enemies here, there, and everywhere. Opinion would perhaps differ as to when he was at his best, but I, for one, found most to admire in his leaders on the death—say—of a political opponent: the decent respect for the dead man's private virtues, tempered by regret at the waste of brilliant qualities in a bad cause, at the 'late lamented minister's fatal inability to comprehend those great principles which have ...' and so forth. One saw the gold-rimmed glasses and the trim whiskers poised over the foolscap; he was no longer a fellow-citizen but the supreme arbiter, measuring out praise and blame while the organ wails and the strange dust is borne away.

Well, he is gone now, long after he quitted the editorial chair and declined from a servant of the public (and its educator) to an old fellow mumbling in a corner of a club-room. And in thinking of what he was, I may have done him little justice; probably the soft delicate lights of character have faded out of my memory and left the crude lines of a caricature. But still the little round figure (for he was little and round) rises from the past; I see the unfathomably profound look, I hear the solemn accents, and again his unconscious absurdity swells monstrously, and again the farce is played out. He seems now as extinct as the mastodon. Even his foolish dull little paper has disappeared; Wallerdale has no *Herald* now, but listens to the brazen voices from London. Even those few great principles have sadly declined, and we hear little of them now. He would, I suppose, be as helpless as a babe in the office of a great modern newspaper. His solemn gestures, worn rhetorical finery and great principles would not carry him in that tense atmosphere. More sense of organisation, quick decisions, lightning judgments, would be demanded from him—and, I think, in vain. A greater knowledge of what can be done in a newspaper, of what catches the public eye, in short, of the tricks of the trade, would certainly be necessary. Yes, he would have to know more.

And yet, in a way, he would have to know less. Looking back at him, the obscure editor of an obscure sheet, amazingly rigid with self-importance, a little figure of fun, I realise that he was a better man than most of his successors of to-day, those undeniably clever, industrious journalists who put the great newspapers into the hands of the million. He could not have done what they do, day by day, but would he have tried? He, at least, would never have consented to become the mouthpiece of the rich, no better—nay, worse—than their lackeys. His talents were slender enough and monstrously exaggerated in his own mind, but such as they were, they were genuinely at the service of his readers. To him the public was not that million-eyed monster waiting to be cajoled and tricked which it has since become. And though his successors may be infinitely more clever, the worst of them can only run their dubious course to-day because yesterday my old editor and his like ran another and better course; the trickster of to-day is nothing but a huge parasite battenning on the good name that some honest men in his trade left behind them. That lying sheet, the What's-its-Name from London, has, I believe, taken the place of the *Wallerdale Herald*, and when a reader from those parts goes trustfully through its smudgy columns of falsehood, perhaps he does it because he still imagines that someone like Wimpenny-Brown is responsible for its utterance. Alas!—he does not know that the Wimpenny-Browns, those Servants of the Public with their few great principles, are dead and gone, and that something more than innocent folly perished with them.

## ON AN OLD BOOK OF NATURAL HISTORY

THE observation that 'Truth is stranger than fiction' is looked upon, in these days, rather as a platitude than a paradox; yet it does not necessarily follow that we, in our heart of hearts, really accept this smart saying. But

everyone who has read in our old literature must admit that it is true of our forefathers; their idea of truth and their so-called facts are a thousand times stranger to us than their fiction. The mediæval romances are full of the marvellous, but they pale before the grave books of instruction written by quite serious, learned old gentlemen. Some of the latter merely set out to edify the young mind, but the result of their labours often seems to us a very riot of the imagination, and our schoolboys would consider themselves lucky if they could meet with matter one-half so entertaining. The quaint, unconscious humour of these solemn, old authors over-shadows even their historical and antiquarian interest.

Some such thoughts as these were going through my head the other night when I was gleefully devouring, in one of the Early English Text Society's wonderful reprints, some extracts from a very quaint old book: 'The noble lyfe and natures of man, Of bestes, serpentys, fowles and fisshes,' by one Laurens Andrewe. The date of this volume is unknown, but it was probably written and published early in the sixteenth century. The Third Part of the book is particularly occupied with the noble life and natures of fishes, and begins: 'Here after followeth of the natures of the fisshes of the See, whiche be right profitable to be understande.' Now I care little for Natural History at any time, and fishes do not make a very lively subject for study, but in the hands of Master Andrewe, Natural History becomes 'all a wonder,' and the sea, to him, is certainly filled with creatures that are 'rich and strange.'

When he is dealing with the commonest fishes, like the herring, our author is fairly sure of his facts, and we get nothing very exciting, but once he leaves the familiar types, there is no end to his phantasies. The Ahuna, when in danger, withdraws his head into his belly, and, as Laurens wisely notes: 'He dothe ete (eat) a parte of himselfe rather than the other fisshes sholde ete him whole.' The most interesting fact about the Balena, a creature resembling a whale, is that in rough weather she puts her young ones in her mouth for safety. But, according to our author, the Cetus 'is the greatest whale fissue of all,' and the manner of his capture is most extraordinary. Such is the perfidious and cruel nature of mankind that the most gentle, lovable trait of this great creature becomes his undoing. For, you must know, the Cetus is very fond of music, and, in order to ensnare the unsuspecting leviathan, men assemble a number of ships, and then, with 'divers instruments of musike, they play with grete armonye.' The hapless creature, innocent of the nature of man, comes to the surface and draws nearer and nearer, being 'very gladd of this armonye,' only to find a terrible death awaiting him.

All of which our author shamelessly chronicles in great detail. For accuracy combined with brevity, what could be better than his description of the Conger, which is fashioned like an eel, but much 'greter (greater) in quantyte?' On being questioned as to the piscatory view of bad weather, most of us would say offhand that all fishes would be either indifferent to rain or glad of it, but this only shows the danger of ignorance; it seems that the Coretz 'hideth him in the deep of the water when it raineth, for if he received any rain, he should waxe blynde, and dye of it.'

In his account of the Dolphin, our author nearly achieves pathos. 'It hath no voice,' he says, 'yet it singeth like a man'; then he adds a cautious, indirect statement, 'Some say whan they be taken that they wepe.' Like the unfortunate Cetus, the Dolphin is musical, and 'will gladly listen to the playing of lutes, harpes and pypes.' There was once a king, who, after having captured a dolphin, was so moved by its piteous weeping and lamenting, that he let it go again.

Some of the other fishes have only one arresting trait of character: 'Focas, a sea bull, fighteth ever with his wife till she be dead; then he casteth her out of his place, and seeketh another.' Mulus is small of body and 'only a meat for 'gentils' (gentle-folk); of this fish there are many kinds, but the best have two beards under the mouth.' Nereydes are 'monsters all rough of body, and when any dyeth, then the other weepeth.' When the Pecten is moved or stirred, 'he winketh,' and the Pike is 'engendered with a westerne wynde.'

But the Sturgeon is our author's masterpiece. This wretched creature leads what Touchstone would call 'a spare life'—it is the anchorite of the finny tribes. The pleasures of the deep are not many, and surely good victuals at regular hours, must be counted upon. Yet the poor Sturgeon, according to our friend Laurens, has no mouth, and therefore cannot eat at all. So it lives upon the winds, waxing fat on an east wind, and sickening upon a northerly one.

Notwithstanding the large array of creatures that do at least bear some resemblance to fishes at his command, Master Andrewe does not stop here. Of him, it can be said truly that all is 'fissue' that comes to his net. We meet several old friends who are gravely described at some length. There is Scylla, a monster in the sea between Italy and Sicily, which is a great enemy to man. It is faced and handed like a gentlewoman, but hath a wide mouth and fearful teeth. Like most of the other sea-monsters, it is musical, and heareth singing gladly. Then there is the Mermayde, bringing the same old wondrous story (and tail) with her. She is a deadly beast that bringeth a man gladly to death, and she singeth a sweet song, and therewith deceiveth many a good mariner; for when they hear it they fall on sleep, and then she cometh and draweth them out of the ship, and teareth them asunder.

And then there is a quaint story from Arabye of some serpentis called sirens, and other delectable matter; but alas!—our learned friend must return to the shades. So we will bid him Godspeed!—and, as one naturally falls into Elia's manner in praising an old author, I will say: 'Blessings on thee! Master Laurens Andrewe. I believe thou knowest no more of fishes than I do, but what do we care for piscatory lore. Thou hast devised most entertaining matter, and written a worthy book. So may the earth press lightly on thy old bones!'

## ON NOT MEETING AUTHORS

If you who read this have one or two favourite authors among the living, take care that you do not meet them; above all, do not seek them out. If you think Mr. Horace Tendency's *Bones and Bottles* the greatest novel of the age, if you have concluded that Mr. Gadfly, essayist and critic, has more wit and wisdom than any man now living, write and tell them so if you like, but do not go any further. Be satisfied with exchanging a letter of admiration for a badly executed autograph, or you will court disaster. If you should want more, remember that we have a literary press that makes a business of publishing photographs or paragraphs or both. Do not imagine that you have heard the last of your favourites; I know for a fact that Mr. Tendency has a novel in the press that is even greater than *Bones and Bottles*, and I have heard that Mr. Gadfly has just signed an agreement to combine wit and wisdom in a perfectly astonishing manner.

There are several gentlemen now earning a fair living by feeding public curiosity and battenning on the fame of

its darlings. They do it by seeking out a celebrity and retailing his unconsidered trifles of talk at a good market price. When they do it maliciously, as some do by making merry with the great man's moustache or sneering at his wife, they are really doing the literary public a service, for they act as a warning and, indeed, point a moral. They and their works say to the enthusiast: If you would be happy, avoid the company of your favourite authors or you will be speedily disillusioned, and either preserve a cynical silence for the rest of your time or make capital out of your misery by falling into our unsavoury practices. It is possible, of course, to meet a few authors without wishing to do so. A good many of them go out a great deal nowadays, and some move in very decent society, so that there is no knowing when and where one may meet an author or two. At any moment, one or other of us may be faced with what appears to be a pair of overfed, pompous merchants or manufacturers, only to learn, on being introduced, that while one of them, Mr. Dash of Dot & Dash, Leadenhall Street, is the real thing, his companion is no other than Mr. Blank, the mystical poet. But to encounter authors in this way is no great matter; there is no need to reveal the fact that one knows anything about them. If they happen to be men whose work is good, some disappointment may attend the encounter, but it will only be slight, for we can afford to be amused when the meeting is accidental and we have not deliberately asked to be disillusioned. But if we are decoyed by a naive enthusiasm into seeking out our men, it is almost certain that we shall be grievously disappointed, and it is more than likely that our admiration for their work will soon be on the wane. Knowing the men, we may pretend to admire them more than ever; most of us do; but it hardly deceives anybody, and certainly not ourselves, who are left with the unpleasant thought that we have thus cut down our own pleasures.

But why, some innocent may ask, should there be any disillusionment; surely a man must be better than his books? He may be in the sight of a god, but not necessarily in the sight of a fellow mortal. A man—any man, let alone an author—is not so tractable as a book; we are rarely in a position to choose him so that he can minister to a mood; he will not wait upon our convenience like our patient volumes. A book may be a vain thing, but it knows nothing of that swelling vanity which belongs to us alone, and to creators more than most. This apart, we must discriminate between good and bad authors. A writer who has been unsuccessful in his art, one who is not master of his craft, a bad author in fact, may be, and very often is, better than his books. An encounter with such a one will not be sought after, except by the wise few, but it may very well bring surprise and delight in its train. It is far otherwise with the great craftsmen, those fine fellows that you and I admire and sometimes long to meet. A good author is his own worst book. We go to him in the hope of catching again that rounded utterance which moved us in this volume or persuaded us in the other; we go—to put the matter shortly—expecting fine talk, and completely overlook the fact that we have already had the best of the man to wait upon us. Our hopes running so high, small wonder that we discover such a falling-off; the best of our author's talk is but a slovenly paraphrase of his most successful things, or a rehash of his rejected manuscripts; and the worst is probably far below what we have to endure in the smoke-room or the railway carriage. Moreover, along with this decline in matter and style, we have to put up with unexpected and totally unwelcome mannerisms, irritating tricks of voice and gesture, and we know not what fumbling and mouthing, all of them acquired during the making of books but all kept outside the covers. And nowadays, very few writers cultivate the picturesque in their appearance or try to look the part, so that our favourites never resemble our private images of them, and inevitably they always look worse, being dingier or shorter or fatter. Can this squat, fussy nonentity be our great novelist, we cry, when we see him for the first time. Probably all of us read and admire the exquisite lyrics of W., who seems to live all his days among lovely unsubstantial things, fleeting shadows and strangely significant silences; but whereas you think of him as a tall, rather fragile man with dreamy eyes and a silky beard, I who have actually met him can only call up a very different image, that of a solid, blue-chinned fellow with an arrogant, almost sinister profile, suggesting an unscrupulous lawyer or money-lender rather than a singer of exquisite songs. Count D'Orsay, you will remember, discovered Byron in a faded nankeen jacket and green spectacles—a notable anti-climax!

We could perhaps overlook appearance and manners if only we got what we principally looked for—fine talk. We are disappointed, of course, and it is our own fault. Even if we had never reasoned the matter out, we ought to have had the sense to put away such expectations, or take care that they were never tested by reality. History shows us great writers and great talkers, but we rarely find the two combined in one figure. It is true that there was nobody more celebrated in his day as a talker than Coleridge, but he did his best literary work before he had this reputation, and the more he talked, the less he wrote. His contemporary, Mackintosh, was a great talker, but who reads Mackintosh now! Do not let us deceive ourselves by thinking that memoirs and biographies of literary men will help us; do not let us imagine that reading them is the same thing as actually meeting authors. Memoirs and biographies are books, with all the virtues of books; they can be put aside, skipped, or disbelieved, if necessary; they are art, and very good art too, some of them. Johnson as he appears in Boswell is good enough for me, for there I can enjoy that very unpleasantness which must have made an actual encounter such a risky business. As for those enthusiasts who are always telling us what they would give to spend an evening with this or the other demi-god of letters, most of them do not realise what they are saying. They would barter we know not what for one evening with Shakespeare at the Mermaid, as if they expected to find him mouthing over his liquor alternately in the manner of Hamlet and Falstaff. I, for one, would not be surprised if all Shakespeare's talk at the Mermaid was not worth a rush; he probably never did more than exchange a few commonplaces and listen smilingly to the others before he emptied his flagon and went home. The epithets that contemporaries bestowed so grudgingly upon him, 'gentle' and 'civil' and the like, suggest a quiet man and good listener. I warrant that Jonson was the better talker. Even with Lamb, who is usually the next to be singled out, an encounter might not be entirely successful. Among his intimates, he could stammer out some wonderful things, but he was apt to prove an odd, sometimes unpleasant companion for others. The hapless Distributor of Stamps who called on Wordsworth at Haydon's, whom Lamb baited so unmercifully, would be very unwilling to subscribe to the popular opinion of 'gentle Elia.' As for Milton and Wordsworth, I have no doubt that they were insufferable. And if any man argues the charm of Shelley's society from his verse, let him go into the first fanatical group he can find, single out the young man who has the greatest number of half-digested notions and talks incessantly in a high-pitched voice, and by listening to such a one for a few hours, let him test the truth of his idea that a day with Shelley would be unmixed delight. But enough—reason and experience both tell us to avoid meeting good authors, though they say nothing of bad ones. It only remains for us to decide which are good and which are bad, and we cannot begin too soon.

## THE ETERNAL CHEAP JACK

THE war has not changed him. But then all the tumults and long wars of centuries have not changed him. Like the pedant, the demagogue, or the place-hunter, the cheap-jack is an ever-enduring figure. Boccaccio's Frate Cipolla and Chaucer's Pardoner were his first cousins; from Shakespeare to O. Henry (to adopt the popular termini), he has chattered and cozened his way through literature. And he is with us yet in the flesh, for I saw him only last week. I was visiting the weekly fair in a pleasant little town, and had joined the crowd of country folks drifting about the stalls in the market square, when, suddenly, a mighty voice burst forth from the centre of a group of persons huddled in a far corner. In the country, where the long days are filled with the sight and sound of the lower creatures, there is no resisting this eruptive clamour of a human voice for an audience, and, along with others, I hurried to join the thickening press of folk in the corner. There, after many years, I found him, as of old.

There was the same indefinable air of something like bravado about his whole figure. His hard face still bore that curious trace of the Jew, mingled with something a great deal worse than the Jew. His clothes, which were new and smart, still seemed to proclaim that they had been made for someone else; and the various trinkets about his person still confessed their inability to inspire confidence. In front was the same old stall, laden with innumerable, mysterious packages, all thickly wrapped in tissue paper; and by the side of the stall stood the inevitable assistant, silent, dejected, unshaven, looking like a rough and shabbier copy of his master, or perhaps a poor relation. Nothing had changed. The great man still flourished the sign of his office, a wooden mallet with a ponderous head, with which he hammered upon the stall from time to time as a sort of dramatic punctuation.

Best of all, his voice, that one talent which removed him from common men, was there in all its pristine fullness. He spoke in the manner of his kind; in that accent which owns no shire, city, or clan, and yet is heard in all the market places in the land. His very whispered confidences were enough to stir the old bones in the neighbouring churchyard. The crowd, trying to appear sophisticated, was held and mastered by the voice that was trumpeting, cajoling, mocking, within the space of one mighty breath, and yet still went sounding on, dropping manna by the way. Unknowingly he was a passionate votary of the art that has now nearly forsaken the pulpit and the council chamber. We, his audience, stifled all doubts, and waited, promise-crammed.

There was little or no alteration in his methods. Whether they have been designed, once for all, by some Master Psychologist of cheap-jacks, or are the result of accumulated experience, a secret tradition passed from generation to generation of genial tricksters, I cannot say; but these methods, like the human nature on which they are based, do not change much. As before, he had not come among us to make money. With passionate emphasis, he declared that he was not a profiteer (a new note, this), but had been sent down here by the well-known firm of Mumble-Mumble to smash profiteering. He would teach us the meaning of the word Lib-er-al-ity—that is how he mouthed it, with splendid significance. And then he proceeded in the time-old fashion.

From some half-a-dozen persons nearest the stall, he borrowed a few coppers, promising to return the loan with the addition of a 'small present.' These people, becoming sharers in the business, naturally do not care to go away, and thus, by this simple trick, whatever may happen he has about him at least the nucleus of a crowd. Then, flourishing several mysterious packages before our eyes, he asked us to bid for them. 'Any gentleman got the pluck,' he demanded, with the dispassionate earnestness of a god, 'any gentleman got the courage to offer me a Silver Shilling for this?' Any gentleman showing the necessary public spirit was given the article in question, and his money, his Silver Shilling, was handed back to him. Nor did our friend spoil his acts of munificence by the manner of giving; every package was divested of its numerous wrappings before it was handed over to the lucky man; the contents were exposed to the public view, and described in a style that 'Ouida' would have envied. Our minds reeled before this riotous splendour of gold and jewels. Sometimes, in a frenzy of reckless generosity, he would pile up a heap of articles, and, with a magnificent sense of the dramatic, would cry: 'Here's number One! And here's number Two! And here's another one, making number Three! And another one, making number Four!'—working up to a climax that left us gasping. Then, after being extraordinarily bountiful to one person, he would pretend to answer a perfectly imaginary charge of confederacy from some member of the crowd, looking all the while very sternly at no one in particular. 'One of a click (*i.e.* clique) is 'e?' he would roar. 'One of the click! Do I know yer, Mister? Never seen yer before. I'll show yer whether 'e's one of the click! I'll show yer!' And being apparently stung by this vile taunt, he would lash himself into a fury, and proceed to squander his glittering wares even still more wildly. I left him with the sweat running down his face, his hair all ruffled and his collar a wreck; yet he was still undaunted, giving away gold watches with the magnificent air of an Eastern Emperor.

I, for one, welcome the cheap-jack because his presence in our midst proves that there is still a little poetry left in the race. For all his machinations are based on a certain notion which the experience of this world proves to be a fallacy, and which is yet as old as the hills and as little to be despised. It is the fine old notion that it is possible, somehow or other, to get something for nothing; and it was not born of this world. When we have entirely forsaken the idea, then we are lost indeed, for it comes from the depths of our primal innocence, and has about it the last lingering scent of the Garden of Eden.

## HOLIDAY NOTES FROM THE COAST OF BOHEMIA

A FRIEND of mine, who is a great traveller, has just put into my hands a letter that should be interesting to those who have not yet decided where to go for their holidays and are looking for fresh fields. This letter came from an old acquaintance of his, one Autolycus, an amusing fellow, who boasts that he has been a courtier and in his time worn 'three-pile' velvet. As a correspondent he is not to be taken too seriously, but the substance of his letter is engaging, and can be given here. He says that he can remember the time when the coast of Bohemia, his adopted land, was nothing but a desert country, but now, under the genial sway of Prince Florizel and his lovely Perdita, all is changed: the place is blossoming into a sea-bound garden; the sunlit woods and sands, the sweet air, and the good company to be found there are attracting visitors from countries near and far; and villas and hostels are springing up everywhere to lodge the host of new residents and guests. The coming season promises well, and our correspondent, himself the owner now of a large hostel, admits that he is thriving, and well on his way to 'three-pile' again.

Being an arrant gossip, Autolycus soon learns all the news of the place, and any scraps that he misses his friend

and barber, Figaro, can usually supply to him. He makes it plain that there is no lack of good company, for he mentions scores of familiar names, of which only a few can find a place here. Some of the visitors who spent last winter there have now left the district: a lively talkative couple from Padua, Benedick and Beatrice, have departed for the country house of their friends Katherina and Petruchio; a certain Major Pendennis has now returned to London, where, we understand, he is a notable figure; Senor Gil Blas has gone to relate his adventures elsewhere; and Master Touchstone, a friend of Autolycus and a fellow of some wit, has now left for the Forest of Arden, where he intends to pass an idle summer with his patrons, now Sir Orlando and Lady Rosalind de Boys. Such visitors as these, with others who have gone, will no doubt be missed, but the loss is more than made up by the crowd of new arrivals.

Prince Florizel has now opened his new Summer Palace, and is entertaining a great company. Almost the first group of guests to arrive was a gay party from Illyria, including the Duke and his Duchess Viola, Sebastian and Olivia, and that witty fellow Feste, whose strange songs are now heard throughout the land. Sir Toby and his friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, are not staying with the party at the palace, but are lodging with Autolycus, where there are cakes and ale and catches in plenty. A new tutor has been engaged for the Royal children, but little is known of him; he is thought to be a Scotsman, and has been heard muttering 'Prodeegious' on his infrequent walks abroad. Next month there comes to the palace a famous Spanish knight, who is said to have suffered strangely from the persecutions of enchanters. Some will have it that his squire, one Sancho Panza, is better worth a hearing than the knight himself.

Here and there along the coast the sea has been steadily encroaching upon the land, and the Prince has decided to fortify these places by the building of embankments and other devices. The work has now begun, under the direction of two experts, Captain Toby Shandy and the Baron of Bradwardine. Another famous martial figure has been added to the list by the arrival of Captain Dugald Dalgetty, who now commands the Bohemian Marine Horse, in the place of Bobadil—lately cashiered.

There is certainly no lack of amusements now that the season has begun, for there are dances and pageants in the open air and indoor entertainments for the occasional rainy evenings. Next month will see the opening of the new Royal Theatre, which will be under the management of that renowned impresario Mr. Vincent Crummles. There, a professional company—including, I believe, the 'infant phenomenon'—will perform. But this is not the only dramatic enterprise, for an Artisan's Amateur Dramatic Society has just been formed. The leading spirit in this venture is a recent settler on these shores, one Bottom, a weaver, who is said to have had long and valuable experience as an amateur performer. Nor should it be hard to please those who prefer graver and more edifying diversion. It appears that, only two weeks ago, a lecture on the 'Golden Cadence of Poesy' was given by Holofernes, the schoolmaster, and was well received. Unfortunately, according to report, the audience was a very small one, there being only seven people present, and that is including Master Slender, who fell asleep almost at the beginning. Some contribution will certainly be made to solid learning at the debate, upon some antiquarian question, between Jonathan Oldbuck, Esquire, and Samuel Pickwick, Esquire, P.P.C. This takes place early next month, and Justice Shallow will be in the chair. The prospect of hearing this debate alone is surely enough to draw any right-minded man, who is free to travel, across half the world.

There have been so many English visitors, of late, to this part of the kingdom that special arrangements have been made for the benefit of their bodies and souls; a small English church and a large English tavern have been built within a short distance of the sea. This year there are two pastors doing duty at the church, the Rev. Dr. Primrose and Parson Adams, both of whom have been fervent in denouncing from the pulpit the evils of the world; indeed, Dr. Primrose caused quite a stir with his 'Folly of Cosmogony.' The tavern has been named the New Boar's Head, and the hostess is Mistress Quickly, late of Eastcheap, London. Autolycus writes that it is a rowdy house, but this can be set down to professional jealousy and his ignorance of the persons concerned. The best room is now occupied by Sir John Falstaff, who is reported to be a man of some substance; and the house is becoming renowned for good talk and the drinking of 'healths five fathoms deep.'

It is unfortunate that one of Sir John's followers has got himself into trouble with the constables. The latter were recently appointed by the Prince to look after the watch, and are from Messina, where everyone knows Dogberry and Verges. So far, they have only made one arrest, and that was of Pistol, Sir John's Ancient. It seems that he, Ancient Pistol, being full of sack, encountered the constables and expressed himself in Cambyses' vein, calling Dogberry a 'dung-hill cur,' and Verges 'a recreant coward base.' This led to his arrest and confinement, where he will remain for the time being, unless the justices are willing to accept Bardolph as security....

But I have dwelt long enough on the wonders of this delectable unrivalled resort. If some of my statements above are disbelieved, or in any way questioned, I can only refer to my original authority, Autolycus, who said long ago, in answer to a similar charge: 'Why should I carry lies abroad?'

## ON A MOUTH-ORGAN

FOR the past half hour, someone, probably a small boy, has been playing a mouth-organ underneath my window. I know of no person under this roof peculiarly susceptible to the sound of a mouth-organ, so that I cannot think that the unknown musician is serenading. He is probably a small boy who is simply hanging about, after the fashion of his mysterious tribe, and whiling away the time with a little music. Why he should choose a raw day like this on which to do nothing but slide his lips over the cold metal of a mouth-organ must remain a mystery to me; but I have long realised that unfathomable motives may be hidden away behind the puckered face and uncouth gestures of small boyhood.

I have not been able to recognise any of the tunes, or the snatches of tunes, which have come floating up to my window. Possibly they are all unknown to me. But I think it is more likely that they are old acquaintances, coming in such a questionable shape that my ear cannot find any familiar cadence; they have been transmuted by the mouth-organ into something rich and strange; for your mouth-organ is one of the great alchemists among musical instruments and leaves no tune as it finds it.

It has been pointed out that whatever material Dickens used, however rich and varied it might be, it was always mysteriously transformed into the Dickens substance, lengths of which he cut off and called Novels. It seems to me

that the mouth-organ, though a mechanical agent, has something of this strange power of transformation; whatever is played upon it seems to come out all of a piece; whatever might be the original character of the tunes, gay, fantastical, meditative, stirring, as their sounds are filtered through the little square holes of the instrument, their character changes, and they all become more or less alike. 'Rule, Britannia!' 'Annie Laurie,' and the latest ditty of the music-halls somehow or other lose their individuality and flow into one endless lament, one lugubrious strain, that might very well go on for ever.

For this reason, the sound of a mouth-organ has always succeeded in depressing me. It must have been invented by an incorrigible pessimist, who sought to create a musical instrument that would give to every tune, no matter how lively, some touch of his own hopeless view of life; and probably the only time that he laughed was when he realised that he could leave this thing as a legacy to the world. I have never played a mouth-organ, because I know that my own native optimism would not be strong enough to resist the baneful influence of the music it makes. To hear it now and again is more than enough for me.

To one who is filled with the joy of life—a small boy, for example—such hopeless strains may prove only invigorating, may serve as a wholesome check upon his ebullient spirits, like the skeleton at the Egyptian feasts. But to most of us weaker brethren, frail in spirit, music that is unilluminated by even a glimmer of hope is intolerable.

For the past half hour, I have been trying to concentrate all my attention upon some fairly cheerful matter, and I have failed. It has been impossible to keep out the sound of this mouth-organ. Its formless, unknown, unending tune, only fit for bewailing a ruined world, has gradually invaded my room, penetrated through the ear into my brain, and coloured or discoloured all the thoughts there. There is in it no trace of that noble sadness which great music, like great poetry, so often brings with it; the mouth-organ knows nothing of 'divine despair.' It seems to whimper before 'the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world.'

'Oh de-ar!' I seem to hear it crying, 'No hope for yo-ou and yo-ours; Me-eser-able world! Oh de-ear!' It has brought with it a fog of depression; my spirits have been sinking lower and lower; and under the influence of this evil mangler of good, heartening tunes I have begun to think that life is not worth living.

Most music worthy of the name has such beauty that it will either raise us to a kind of ecstasy or give us a feeling of vague sadness, which some delicate persons prefer to wild joy. Sir Thomas Browne, you remember, has something to say on this point, in a passage that can never become hackneyed no matter how many times it is quoted: 'Whosoever is harmonically composed delights in harmony; which makes me much distrust the symmetry of those heads which declaim against all church music. For myself, not only from my obedience, but my particular genius, I do embrace it; for even that vulgar and tavern-music, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the first composer.'

But these mouth-organ strains will make a man neither mad nor merry, nor yet strike in him a deep fit of devotion; but if his ear is like mine, they will make him sink into depression and dye his world a ghastly blue.

It is curious that certain other popular musical instruments seem to have the same characteristics as the mouth-organ. The concertina and the accordion, good friends of the sailor, the lonely Colonist, and rough, kindly fellows the world over, seem to me to possess the same power of transforming all the tunes played upon them into one long wail. I have read about their 'lively strains,' but I have never heard them. The sound of a concertina a quarter of a mile away is enough to shake my optimism. An average accordion could turn the Sword Theme from 'Siegfried' into a plea for suicide. A flageolet or a tin-whistle has not such a shattering effect; nevertheless, both of them can only give a tune a certain subdued air, which is certainly preferable to the depressing alchemy of the other instruments, but which certainly does not make for liveliness.

The bagpipe, which has been so long the companion of the lonely folk of northern moors and glens, can produce at times a certain rousing martial strain, but, even then, a wailing air creeps into the music like a Scotch mist. Its very reels and strathspeys, which ought to be jolly enough, only sound to me like elaborate complaints against life; their transitory snatches of gaiety are obviously forced. At all other times, the bagpipe is frankly pessimistic, and laments its very existence.

There is probably some technical reason why these instruments produce such doleful tones. Perhaps our sophisticated ears rebel against their peculiar harmonies and discords. But it is certainly curious that mouth-organs, concertinas, tin-whistles, and the rest, so beloved of simple people, should be intolerable to so many of us. Is it that we have no miseries to express in sound? Or is it that our optimism is so brittle that we dare not submit it to the onslaught of this strange music? I do not know.

All that I do know is that at the present moment I am sitting in my armchair before a bright fire, depressed beyond belief by the sound that floats through my window; while outside, in the cold, there stands a small boy, holding a mouth-organ in his numbed hands and bravely sliding his lips over the cold metallic edges of the thing; and by this time he is probably as gay as I am miserable.

## AN APOLOGY FOR BAD PIANISTS

IGNORING those musical labourers who are paid so much per hour, at cinemas and dance-halls, to make some sort of rhythmical sound, all pianists, I think, may be divided into four classes. There are, first, the great soloists, the masters, Paderewski, Pachmann, and the rest, who would seem to have conquered all difficulties. With them the piano, a dead thing of wires and hammers, becomes a delicately responsive organism; its hammers are extra muscles, and its strings added nerves, running and leaping to obey every fleeting impulse; their playing is as saturated with personality as their gait or speech. Not so with the members of the second class, which is, to my mind, a dubious fraternity. They may be called the serious amateurs. Very often they take expensive lessons from some professor, who undertakes to 'finish them off.' But they never are finished off. The sign and mark of the serious amateur is that he practises assiduously some piece of music, maybe a Chopin study or a Brahms sonata, until he has it by heart; after which he assembles a number of friends (or, more often, new acquaintances), squashes their attempts at conversation, and, amid a tense silence, begins to play—or, as he would say, 'interpret'—his laboured solo. The fourth class consists of odd strummers, vampers and thumpers; young ladies who play waltzes and old ladies who play hymns; cigarette-in-mouth youths with a bang-and-rattle style of performance; all inexorable, tormenting noise-makers, from those who persist in riveting—rather than playing—Rachmaninoff's C sharp minor

Prelude to those who buy Sunday newspapers in order that they may pick out with one finger the tune of a comic song. All such are the enemies of peace and harmony, and as they cannot be ignored in any other place, here they can be quickly dismissed with all the more pleasure.

It remains now to say something of the third class of pianists, which, if it were reduced to such straits, could count me among its members. To write at some length of one's own class after perfunctorily dismissing others may seem to savour of egotism, but the truth is, we—I speak fraternally—have been so much maligned and misunderstood up to now, we have endured so many taunts in silence, that we have a right to be heard before we are finally and irrevocably condemned.

It is only on the score of technique, the mere rule of thumb business, that we stand below the serious amateurs; we belong to a higher order of beings and have grander souls; in spirit we come nearer to the great masters. The motives of the serious amateur are not above suspicion. In his assiduous practice, his limited repertoire, his studied semi-public style of performance, is there not a suggestion of vanity? Is his conscious parade of skill, taken along with his fear of unknown works, the mark of a selfless devotion to music, and music alone? I doubt it.

But our motives are certainly above suspicion. Music has no servants more disinterested, for not only do we gather no garlands in her service, but daily, for her sake, we risk making fools of ourselves, than which there can be no greater test of pure devotion. We, too, are the desperate venturers among pianists; every time that we seat ourselves at the keyboard we are leading a forlorn hope; and, whether we fall by the way or chance to come through unscathed, the only reward we can hope for is a kindly glance from the goddess of harmony.

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the fact that our execution is faulty, that we are humanly liable to make mistakes, seeing that our weaknesses have been for years the butt of musical pedants and small souls. In the dim past we received some sort of instruction, perhaps a few years' lessons, but being bright children with wills of our own we saw no use in labouring at scales and arpeggios, at the tepid compositions of Czerny, when there were balls to throw, stones to kick, and penny dreadfuls to be devoured. An unlocked door or an open window—and we escaped from the wretched drudgery, thus showing early that eager zest of life which still marks our clan.

Now, it is enthusiasm alone that carries us through. Our performance of any 'piece of average difficulty' (as the publishers say) is nothing short of a series of miracles. As we peer at the music and urge our fingers to scurry over the keys, horrid gulfs yawn before us, great rocks come crashing down, the thick undergrowth is full of pitfalls and mantraps, but we are not to be deterred. Though we do not know what notes are coming next, or what fingers we shall use, if the music says *presto*, then *presto* it must be; the spirit of the tune must be set free, however its flesh may be lacerated. So we swing up the dizzy arpeggios as a hunted mountaineer might leap from crag to crag; we come down a run of demi-semi-quavers with the blind confidence of men trying to shoot the rapids of Niagara. Only the stout-hearted and great of soul can undertake these perilous but magnificent ventures.

Unlike the serious amateurs, we do not pick and choose among pieces until we have found one to which we can give the cold glitter of an impeccable rendering. We attend concerts (for, above all, we are the concert-goers and dreamers of dreams, as O'Shaughnessy might have said) and come reeling out, intoxicated with sound; for days we are haunted by a lovely theme or an amazing climax, until we can bear it no longer; we rush off to the music-shops to see if it is possible to capture this new lovely thing and keep it for ever; more often than not we return home in triumph, hardly giving ourselves time to flatten out the music before plunging into the opening bars. Nothing that has been arranged for the piano or that can be played in some sort of fashion on the instrument comes amiss if it has once aroused our enthusiasm; symphonies, operas, tone-poems, string-quartets are all welcome. Nay, we often prefer the arrangements of orchestral things, for we do not think of the piano merely as a solo instrument; to us it is the shining ivory and ebony gateway to the land of music. As our fingers wander over the keys our great dream-orchestras waken to life.

I believe that at the very end, when the depths of our folly and ignorance are fully revealed, when all our false notes have been cast up into one awful total by the recording angel of music, it will be found that we, the bad pianists, have been misjudged among men, that we, too, have loved and laboured for the divine art. When we file into Elysium, forlorn, scared, a shabby little band, and come within sight of Beethoven, whom we have murdered so many times, I believe that a smile will break through the thunder-cloud of his face. 'Ach! Come you in, children,' he will roar, 'bad players, eh?... I have heard.... Very bad players.... But there have been worse among you.... The spirit was in you, and you have listened well.... Come in.... I have composed one hundred and fifty more symphonies and sonatas, and you shall hear them all.'

## A FATHER'S TRAGEDY

I HAVE lately received a visit from an old acquaintance who floated in my direction on such a sea of trouble that I have been in low spirits ever since. Moreover, as it was a family affair, I could not interfere in any way, and the knowledge of my own impotence has only increased my depression. My only hope of keeping my thoughts from what is, after all, no business of mine lies in passing on the tale—if such a mournful recital of family dissensions can be called a tale—and thus making others share the burden.

I cannot remember, for the moment, when and where I first met old Tom Cribcrack, my late visitor, but we have been acquainted for a good many years. He must be past fifty now (how the time goes on!), but being a fine upstanding fellow, closely shaved and with his bristly hair always cropped short, he looks considerably younger. His father, a dear old man—I met him once—was in the coining business in its best days, but such a sedentary occupation did not suit young Cribcrack, and he was soon apprenticed to a successful burglar. In his own way, Tom was an enthusiastic, clever lad, and it was not long before he became an expert craftsman himself. He decided to devote his life to the profession, and though, like other men, he has had his bad times, he has been on the whole a very successful practitioner, respected by all workers in the same field. He has had a good connection, mostly among the upper middle-class, and has always preferred a rather slow but steady run of business to a few brilliant coups; he has kept away from the showy work, and has never had the slightest desire for publicity, which is probably the reason why his name is not so well known to the general public as that of many an inferior craftsman. 'No fancy work for Tom Cribcrack,' he has said more than once in my hearing. 'Punctuality, neat workmanship, despatch—that's the motto for a man what wants to get on in my line.' In short, he was a good specimen of the modest self-made

Englishman, and is still, to this day, though now subdued in spirit by a great disappointment, as you shall learn.

It was not until Cribcrack was thirty or so and had got on to his feet that he did what most sensible men do sooner or later—he took a wife. This was a Miss Judy Graggins, eldest daughter of ‘Basher’ Graggins, of Cod’s Alley, a well-known character in his day. The result of this happy union was a family of several daughters but only one son, greatly to the disappointment of both parents. Looking back, as Cribcrack pointed out the other day, one cannot help noticing how small things have often an important bearing on the future; for whereas there had been no difficulty about the girls’ names, when it came to naming the boy there was for a time some difference between the doting parents. The father wished to give the boy a plain, sturdy sort of name, Jem or Bill, such as all the Cribcracks had borne; but, greatly to his surprise, his wife, for no apparent reason, but from sheer feminine perversity, would have none of these, and insisted on the child being called Ernest, a name unknown to the Cribcrack family and one which the father himself regarded with the greatest contempt. In the end, the mother’s whim prevailed, and the boy was known henceforth as Ernest Cribcrack.

As might be expected, the advent of a son made a great difference to my old acquaintance, who, like many other fathers, began to see a fresh purpose in life. His enthusiasm for his professional work was unabated, but his son came to share with it the first place in his thoughts, and it was not long before his one aim was to bring together these two all-absorbing, beloved things, his son and his work. Morning after morning, after the nightly duties were at end, Cribcrack would sit smoking by the fire, watching the sturdy infant at play and dreaming of the time when he could teach the boy all he knew of the ancient craft, and they could go out to work together. Then some day they would be known as Cribcrack and Son to other members of the profession, and in many a tavern some old hand would remark: ‘That was a fine piece of work young Cribcrack pulled off the other night. Just like his father, he is....’

For a time all went well. It was not long before Ernest, a sturdy little boy, would hear of no other calling for his manhood but his father’s profession. On his seventh or eighth birthday he was given the boy’s burglary outfit, and he would play for hours on end with the little jemmy and other implements, under the direction of his delighted parent. At times the boy would seem to prefer piracy or even engine-driving, but Tom knew that these were only the vagaries of childhood; the boy would soon see the course before him. Like most fathers, however, Cribcrack never opened out his heart to young Ernest, or Ern’, as he was known to the family. He cherished his dream in secret, and waited for the appointed time to speak, so that the lad might choose for himself. But again, like most fathers, he never doubted that when the moment did come the boy would choose the right course. As time went on, however, Ernest became rather a puzzle. For example, contrary to his father’s expectations, he did not show any particular aversion to ordinary schooling; indeed, he seemed to become fond of it as he grew older. In this, as in some other things, his father, a little uneasy, humoured him, so that at the time when he should have begun his real apprenticeship he was still spending his time with copy-books and geography primers. After all, Tom reflected, the boy was a Cribcrack, and would know where his duty lay.

But when the time came for the father to speak, the great blow fell. Ernest steadfastly refused to follow his father’s profession, and swept aside the career that Tom had marked out for him. Now vehement, now sulky, sometimes tearful, at other times derisive—the boy would be neither persuaded nor bullied into changing his mind. It was not that he loathed the burglar’s ancient craft, but while the father had been dreaming his dreams so, too, he had had his own vision—he would be a clerk, and nothing else would do for him. On his way to school he had seen clerks in their stiff white collars and shiny blue suits, crowding out of their offices at the dinner hour; he had caught glimpses of them as they bent over their ledgers beneath the shaded electric lights; his boy’s heart had been thrilled, and he too had had his dream. It was useless to argue that the Cribcracks had never descended to office stools; that the glamour would soon fade and leave him face to face with cold reality. Ernest had decided that he was meant to be a clerk, and a clerk he would be, however difficult and dangerous the road he must travel.

What more need be said. Cribcrack entreated, reproached, threatened, but all in vain. His great dream was shattered, and, cursing the fateful name of Ernest, he bundled the lad out of his house, and shortly afterwards came, a broken man, to see me. Ernest, I believe, is now in the office of the Origen Orange-Ale Company, and though he occasionally pilfers a few stamps, there is little of the fine old Cribcrack spirit about him.

## ON GETTING OFF TO SLEEP

WHAT a bundle of contradictions is a man! Surely, humour is the saving grace of us, for without it we should die of vexation. With me, nothing illustrates the contrariness of things better than the matter of sleep. If, for example, my intention is to write an essay, and I have before me ink and pens and several sheets of virgin paper, you may depend upon it that before I have gone very far I feel an overpowering desire for sleep, no matter what time of the day it is. I stare at the reproachfully blank paper until sights and sounds become dim and confused, and it is only by an effort of will that I can continue at all. Even then, I proceed half-heartedly, in a kind of dream. But let me be between the sheets at a late hour, and I can do anything but sleep. Between chime and chime of the clock I can write essays by the score. Fascinating subjects and noble ideas come pell-mell, each with its appropriate imagery and expression. Nothing stands between me and half-a-dozen imperishable masterpieces but pens, ink, and paper.

If it be true that our thoughts and mental images are perfectly tangible things, like our books and pictures, to the inhabitants of the next world, then I am making for myself a better reputation there than I am in this place. Give me a restless hour or two in bed and I can solve, to my own satisfaction, all the doubts of humanity. When I am in the humour I can compose grand symphonies, and paint magnificent pictures. I am, at once, Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Michael Angelo; yet it gives me no satisfaction; for the one thing I cannot do is to go to sleep.

Once in bed, when it is time to close the five ports of knowledge, most folks I know seem to find no difficulty in plunging their earthly parts into oblivion. It is not so with me, to whom sleep is a coy mistress, much given to a teasing inconstancy and for ever demanding to be wooed—‘lest too light winning make the prize light.’ I used to read, with wonder, those sycophantic stories of the warlike supermen, the great troublers of the world’s peace, Cromwell, Napoleon, and the like, who, thanks to their ‘iron wills,’ could lie down and plunge themselves immediately into deep sleep, to wake up, refreshed, at a given time. Taking these fables to heart, I would resolve to do likewise, and, going to bed, would clench my teeth, look as determined as possible in the darkness, and command the immediate presence of sleep. But alas! the very act of concentration seemed to make me more wakeful than ever,



and I would pass hours in tormenting sleeplessness. I had overlooked the necessity of having an 'iron will,' my own powers of will having little or none of this peculiar metallic quality. But how uncomfortable it must have been living with these iron-willed folks! Who would want to remonstrate and argue with them? It would be worse than beating an anvil with a sledge-hammer. I must confess that I always suspect the men who boast that they unvaryingly fall asleep as soon as they get into bed—those 'as soon as my head touches the pillow' fellows. To me, there is something inhuman, something callous and almost bovine, in the practice. I suspect their taste in higher matters. Iron wills apart, there must be a lack of human sympathy or depth in a man who can thus throw off, with his clothes, his waking feelings and thoughts, and ignore completely those memories and fancies which

“...will sometimes leap,  
From hiding-places ten years deep.”

To share a bed-room with one of these fellows is to lose one's faith in human nature, for, even after the most eventful day, there is no comparing notes with them, no midnight confidence, no casting up the balance of the day's pleasure and pain. They sink, at once, into stupid, heavy slumber, leaving you to your own mental devices. And they all snore abominably!

The artificial ways of inducing sleep are legion, and are only alike in their ineffectuality. In *Lavengro* (or is it *Romany Rye*?) there is an impossible character, a victim of insomnia, who finds that a volume of Wordsworth's poems is the only sure soporific; but that was Borrow's malice. The famous old plan of counting sheep jumping over a stile has never served my turn. I have herded imaginary sheep until they insisted on turning themselves into white bears or blue pigs, and I defy any reasonable man to fall asleep while mustering a herd of cerulean swine.

Discussing the question, some time ago, with an old friend, she gave me her never-failing remedy for sleeplessness, which was to imagine herself performing some trivial action over and over again, until, her mind becoming disgusted with the monotony of life, sleep drew the curtain. Her favourite device was to imagine a picture not hanging quite plumb upon the wall, and then to proceed to straighten it. This I tried—though putting pictures straight is no habit of mine—but it was of no avail. I imagined the picture on the wall without difficulty, and gave it a few deft touches, but this set me thinking of pictures in general, and then I remembered an art exhibition I had attended with my friend T. and what he said, and what I said, and I wondered how T. was faring these days, and whether his son was still at school. And so it went on, until I found myself meditating on cheese, or spiritualism, or the Rocky Mountains—but no sleep! Somewhere in that limbo which Earth describes in *Prometheus Unbound*, that vague region filled with

Dreams and the light imaginings of men,

is the dreary phantom of an unstraightened picture upon a ghostly wall. And there it shall stay, for I have no further use for it.

But I have not yet given up all hope of finding some way of hastening the approach of sleep. Even yet there is a glimmer, for re-reading (not for the first, and, please Heaven! not the last time) Lamb's letters, I came upon the following, in a note to Southey; 'But there is a man in my office, a Mr. H., who proses it away from morning to night, and never gets beyond corporal and material verities!... When I can't sleep o' nights, I imagine a dialogue with Mr. H., upon a given subject, and go prosing on in fancy with him, till I either laugh or fall asleep. I have literally found it answer.' ... There is promise in this, and we all have our Mr. H.'s, whose talk, bare of anything like fancy and wit, acts upon us like a dose of laudanum. This very night I will dismiss such trivial phantasies as jumping sheep and crooked pictures, and evoke the phantom of a crushing, stupendous Bore.

## ON TRAVEL BY TRAIN

REMOVE an Englishman from his hearth and home, his centre of corporal life, and he becomes a very different creature, one capable of sudden furies and roaring passions, a deep sea of strong emotions churning beneath his frozen exterior. I can pass, at all times, for a quiet, neighbourly fellow, yet I have sat, more than once, in a railway carriage with black murder in my heart. At the mere sight of some probably inoffensive fellow-passenger my whole being will be invaded by a million devils of wrath, and I 'could do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on.'

There is one type of traveller that never fails to rouse my quick hatred. She is a large, middle-aged woman, with a rasping voice and a face of brass. Above all things, she loves to invade smoking compartments that are already comfortably filled with a quiet company of smokers; she will come bustling in, shouting over her shoulder at her last victim, a prostrate porter, and, laden with packages of all maddening shapes and sizes, she will glare defiantly about her until some unfortunate has given up his seat. She is often accompanied by some sort of contemptible, whining cur that is only one degree less offensive than its mistress. From the moment that she has wedged herself in there will be no more peace in the carriage, but simmering hatred, and everywhere dark looks and muttered threats. But everyone knows her. Courtesy and modesty perished in the world of travel on the day when she took her first journey; but it will not be long before she is in hourly danger of extinction, for there are strong men in our midst.

There are other types of railway travellers, not so offensive as the above, which combines all the bad qualities, but still annoying in a varying degree to most of us; and of these others I will enumerate one or two of the commonest. First, there are those who, when they would go on a journey, take all their odd chattels and household utensils and parcel them up in brown paper, disdaining such things as boxes and trunks; furthermore, when such eccentrics have loaded themselves up with queer-shaped packages they will cast about for baskets of fruit and bunches of flowers to add to their own and other people's misery. Then there are the simple folks who are for ever eating and drinking in railway carriages. No sooner are they settled in their seats but they are passing each other tattered sandwiches and mournful scraps of pastry, and talking with their mouths full, and scattering crumbs over the trousers of fastidious old gentlemen. Sometimes they will peel and eat bananas with such rapidity that nervous onlookers are compelled to seek another compartment.

Some children do not make good travelling companions, for they will do nothing but whimper or howl

throughout a journey, or they will spend all their time daubing their faces with chocolate or trying to climb out of the window. And the cranks are always with us; on the bleakest day, they it is who insist on all the windows being open, but in the sultriest season they go about in mortal fear of draughts, and will not allow a window to be touched.

More to my taste are the innocents who always find themselves in the wrong train. They have not the understanding necessary to fathom the time-tables, nor will they ask the railway officials for advice, so they climb into the first train that comes, and trust to luck. When they are being hurtled towards Edinburgh, they will suddenly look round the carriage and ask, with a mild touch of pathos, if they are in the right train for Bristol. And then, puzzled and disillusioned, they have to be bundled out at the next station, and we see them no more. I have often wondered if these simple voyagers ever reach their destinations, for it is not outside probability that they may be shot from station to station, line to line, until there is nothing mortal left of them.

Above all other railway travellers, I envy the mighty sleepers, descendants of the Seven of Ephesus. How often, on a long, uninteresting journey, have I envied them their sweet oblivion. With Lethe at their command, no dull, empty train journey, by day or night, has any terrors for them. Knowing the length of time they have to spend in the train, they compose themselves and are off to sleep in a moment, probably enjoying the gorgeous adventures of dream while the rest of us are looking blankly out of the window or counting our fingers. Two minutes from their destination they stir, rub their eyes, stretch themselves, collect their baggage, and, peering out of the window, murmur: 'My station, I think.' A moment later they go out, alert and refreshed, Lords of Travel, leaving us to our boredom.

Seafaring men make good companions on a railway journey. They are always ready for a pipe and a crack with any man, and there is usually some entertaining matter in their talk. But they are not often met with away from the coast towns. Nor do we often come across the confidential stranger in an English railway carriage, though his company is inevitable on the Continent and, I believe, in America. When the confidential stranger does make an appearance here, he is usually a very dull dog, who compels us to yawn through the interminable story of his life, and rides some wretched old hobby-horse to death.

There is one more type of traveller that must be mentioned here, if only for the guidance of the young and simple. He is usually an elderly man, neatly dressed, but a little tobacco-stained, always seated in a corner, and he opens the conversation by pulling out a gold hunter and remarking that the train is at least three minutes behind time. Then, with the slightest encouragement, he will begin to talk, and his talk will be all of trains. As some men discuss their acquaintances, or others speak of violins or roses, so he talks of trains, their history, their quality, their destiny. All his days and nights seem to have been passed in railway carriages, all his reading seems to have been in time-tables. He will tell you of the 12.35 from this place and the 3.49 from the other place, and how the 10.18 ran from So-and-so to So-and-so in such a time, and how the 8.26 was taken off and the 5.10 was put on; and the greatness of his subject moves him to eloquence, and there is passion and mastery in his voice, now wailing over a missed connection or a departed hero of trains, now exultantly proclaiming the glories of a non-stop express or a wonderful run to time. However dead you were to the passion, the splendour, the pathos, in this matter of trains, before he has done with you you will be ready to weep over the 7.37 and cry out in ecstasy at the sight of the 2.52.

Beware of the elderly man who sits in the corner of the carriage and says that the train is two minutes behind time, for he is the Ancient Mariner of railway travellers, and will hold you with his glittering eye.

## THE PEEP

My friend Glindersby is a changed man, and, for my part, I think it a change for the better. For the one thing that had always spoiled Glindersby for the company of sane men was his ever-recurring praise of the present age and its mechanical ingenuities. Though brought up to a noble old profession, he was one of those who are for ever crying up the marvels that we have of late brought into the world; he would subscribe to such things as *Wonders of Modern Science* or *Engineering Marvels of the World*, and could be found gloating over vilely-coloured prints of airships and electric lifts. Because there was a railway at Kamchatka or a telephone at Tangiers, he could not understand why all men should not be happy. In short, he was one of those latter-day fanatics who, in a kind of ecstasy, are always crying out to each other, 'Look at Radium ...!' and 'What will they do next!' and other phrases from their dark liturgy. This was Glindersby's one failing, and it had, I knew, kept him from much good company. Now, I say, he is changed, for he seems to have lost his old damaging enthusiasm, and in the late hours of fireside confession he has now begun telling a certain trumpery tale, a piece of hocus-pocus if there ever was one, to account for the change.

A short time ago, at the house of some friends, a cranky set, he was introduced to a Hindoo who had just arrived in this country, and who might be called Ram Dar Chubb. They said little to each other on that first evening, but a few days later they met in the street, and the Hindoo suggested that they should visit his rooms. Glindersby, suspecting that the other was feeling lonely in this new world of white faces and black streets, expressed his pleasure, and accompanied the hospitable Ram Dar up three flights of stairs. He was soon making himself comfortable in a sitting-room that seemed to contain nothing out of the common, with the exception of a large graven metal bowl and some Oriental knick-knacks on a small side-table. The two men quickly plunged into talk, and Glindersby, beginning with the difference between the Eastern and Western civilisations, was not long before he was declaiming—almost breathlessly—upon his favourite themes. Here at last he had found fit audience; Ram Dar was an ideal listener. And Glindersby rose to the occasion; telephones, telegraphy, airships, turbine engines, calculating machines, electric kettles, and a thousand other marvels were all his concern. There was no end to his talk of valves, pressures, and horse power. Very soon he had paraphrased the introduction and at least half a dozen chapters of *Wonders of Modern Science* and *Engineering Marvels of the World*, and his monologue soon became as highly coloured and altogether detestable as their monstrous prints. Looking sturdily across at the immobile brown face, he expanded, boasted, and bragged, until it might have appeared that he himself was ready at any time to bridge the Channel and irrigate the Sahara Desert.

Throughout this untimely rhapsody Ram Dar sat motionless, his attitude expressive of that eternal patience of the East which all Glindersby's hearers ought to have had.

'Conquest of Nature's just begun,' cried Glindersby, who by this time was almost dithyrambic, and talked in capital letters and dots as if he were one of Mr. Wells' characters. 'You've been standing still for thousands of

years.... Stagnation!... Now we're going forward.... Made bigger advance in last hundred years than in all the thousands before.... Wireless Telegraphy!... Aeroplanes!... Space annihilated.... Just beginning.' And he leaned forward impressively: 'What will it be in one hundred years' time?... Or three hundred?... Or seven hundred?... Nature finally conquered.... All her forces harnessed..... Man.... Master of the World.... Stupendous buildings!... Marvellous machinery!... Fleets of Airships!... What wouldn't I give for a peep into the Future!...'

'You would look into the future?' broke in his hearer, for the first time.

Glindersby was somewhat taken aback by this unexpected interruption. 'I would give anything to see what we shall achieve,' he cried, 'only, of course, it's—er—impossible.'

There was a flash of white teeth opposite. 'No, it can be done,' murmured Ram Dar, 'Past, Present, Future! It is all an illusion. We have known these things a long time. You wish to look into the Future?...' And he rose to his feet.

Still suspecting some pleasantry, the other forced a laugh, and stammered out: 'Above all things.... Pity no way of doing it.... Final Conquest of Nature.'

By this time, the Hindoo had pulled forward the little side-table, on which stood the great metal bowl. To Glindersby's astonishment, the latter was filled with a liquid blacker than ink, and had, fastened to the edge, several little pans, into which Ram Dar quickly poured a quantity of grey powder.

'How far forward will you look, and at what place?' asked Ram Dar as he proceeded to set fire to the little heaps of powder.

Glindersby stared at the dense fumes that were encircling the great bowl. Half mechanically, almost unwillingly, he gasped out: 'Oh, Coventry ... go-ahead place, I b'lieve ... eight hundred years hence.' There was some muttering in a strange tongue, and then a dark hand waved across the rolling, sickly-smelling fumes. 'Come!' cried the voice of the Hindoo, who must have trafficked with the devil, whom he resembled at that moment.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, Glindersby found himself in the midst of the fumes, bending over the bowl and staring at the ebony surface of the liquid within. 'Near Coventry.... Your year, two thousand seven hundred and thirty....' The voice seemed to come from miles away. Next moment, the fumes, the bowl, everything had vanished, and he seemed to be looking, as from a great height, at a large meadow where a number of sheep with their lambs were browsing. It seemed a bright morning in early summer. There was no shadow of smoke; the air was perfectly clear. In one corner of the meadow a boy was seated under a large elm. He was bare-legged, sandalled and simply clad in a bright blue robe, and, all the time, he appeared to be playing upon a little pipe. Near by was a small shrine garlanded with red roses, and the grass around was strewn with crimson petals scattered by the breeze. Cloud-shadows drifted across the grass; the sheep moved steadily forward, with their lambs capering about them; a few more crimson petals were shaken from the shrine; the boy still fingered his little pipe in the shade of the elm....

'It is not what you expected to find,' cried a voice in his ear; and Glindersby looked up and saw the smiling face of Ram Dar Chubb above the bowl over which they had both been bending.

I say that Glindersby is a changed man, and that I, for one, approve the change in him. But I think that this story of his is full of lies; and that as for Ram Dar Chubb, he is an obvious invention, and cheap at that.

## ON VULGAR ERRORS

I OFTEN feel sorry that so many quaint and pretty fancies, such as we find gravely weighed by Sir Thomas Brown in his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, have fluttered away from our knowing modern world like so many butterflies. After all, there was little harm and often a great deal of poetry or grotesque humour in these 'vulgar errors,' as Sir Thomas called them. Now that the ordinary man has flung away these gaily-coloured fancies, I do not know that he is any better off with such dismal scraps of learning as are coming his way at the present time. His ancestors were fanciful fellows with little exact knowledge; his descendants may occupy themselves with a vast accumulated store of learning; meanwhile, he himself, our contemporary, has relinquished his old fancies and quaint dreams, and received little or nothing, as yet, in return. Now, barren of belief, he stands waiting for the meagre crumbs of science.

The Wandering Jew no longer creeps past our doors; we buried him long ago, and there is the end of a grand old tale. No Salamanders live in our fires. No more do 'swans, a little before their death, sing most sweetly'; another gleam of poetry has faded from the world. We meet with the Unicorn and the Phoenix only in coats-of-arms and commercial advertisements. The Basilisk, or Cockatrice, which came from a cock's egg, hatched under a toad or serpent, and which could kill at a distance by the power of the eye, no longer haunts the world; perhaps we do not regret him, yet the briefest glance at him, while he was looking some other way, would have been an experience worth remembering. The mermaids and mermen have long since ridden away from our coasts on their water-horses, driving their water-bulls before them. The giants have eaten the pigmies, and have themselves succumbed to indigestion. Our acetylene lights have frightened away Jack-o'-Lantern himself, and there is no green cheese in the moon, and very little cheese worth eating on the earth.

Does the Glastonbury thorn still blossom at Christmastide? Certainly the ass still bears the sign of the Cross on its back, and the haddock still shows the black marks left by the finger and thumb of St. Peter. Do our seamen still take caulks with them to guard against drowning? I am afraid that barnacles, when broken off from the sides of a ship, no longer turn into geese. Nor do mandrakes shriek out when they are uprooted, these days. Do our country girls still put the Bible, with sixpence between the pages of Ruth, under their pillows at night, in order to dream of their future husbands? How many of us put bay leaves under our pillows so that we may have true dreams?

Sneezing, in our time, does not call for a blessing. Nor do we bless the moon when it is at the full, nor ask our ladies to drop it a curtsy at the time of its rebirth. Omens trouble us no longer; it does not matter how we put on our stockings and shoes, or, at least, we do not feel that good or ill fortune is bound up with the order of our dressing. We do not attempt to read our destiny in the leaping flames on the hearth, nor look for purses and coffins in the coals that fly out from time to time. On the rare occasions when we see a lighted candle, we do not expect to find it presageful, and we are not likely to try divination from the behaviour of the gas or electric light. A tingling ear, an itching nose, a burning cheek, and other little pranks of the blood and nerves pass as a jest among us. We allow no trafficking with amulets and charms, except as the merest decoration, and we attempt to read the future only through our pass-books. We leave Fate severely alone, not because we think that it is of no importance, but

because our lives do not seem of sufficient consequence to be meddled with; wherein we are more modest than our forefathers, but also, I think, more miserable.

All these quaint beliefs have gone in the wind, and it is well, for the world cannot stand still. As I have said before, there was little harm in them, and often a great deal of poetry; they have furnished some good folk, high and low, with many a heartening tale for the chimney-corner; their web of phantasy has been woven into many a fine ballad or romance. But, shrinking from the fierce light of Truth, these fanciful notions left us long ago.

Yet we must not hasten to plume ourselves. Have we not our own over-ripe crop of errors? Are we not for ever swallowing lies a thousand times more hurtful than the old pleasing or idle fancies? We cannot weave immortal romances out of the web of falsehood that comes to us now; if we want tales, we must hire some fellow to put his tongue in his cheek and mechanically turn out volume after volume of 'bright fiction.' We cannot believe in the Salamander, a poetical notion, but we are always ready to take it on trust that Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who votes for us, is a very great hero, and Mr. Greatheart, who keeps his own counsel, is a very deep scoundrel.

The old fancies were sustained by the people's sense of wonder; they arose naturally and no one benefited by them, except an occasional sorcerer. Our vulgar errors are not a natural growth, but are forced upon us by the cunning and powerful members, who tell us what we are to believe. We do not acknowledge the Basilisk, with his deadly stare, but we have still a touching faith in Such-and-Such, the scientific reformer, with his insufferable jargon. We do not put bayleaves under our pillows to have true dreams, but we put the *Daily Dope* on our breakfast-tables so that we may have false ones. And we are too apt to believe that (in the fine phrase of a modern novelist) 'we are all very fine people,' which is a very vulgar error indeed, and more mischievous than Jack-o'-Lantern and more deadly than the Cockatrice.

## ON GOSSIP

ANY and every kind of tittle-tattle goes by the name of gossip, no matter whether the subject is the price of cauliflowers, or the foreign policy of Chile, or—darkening to scandal—the weather. In this place, I would limit gossip to that discussion of other people's characters and affairs which is so well known to us, and to every other society. And I would call it scandal and have done with it, only scandal is a dog with a very bad name, while gossip still capers and frisks, unchecked though not encouraged. There is also this distinction: we—that is, you and I—may condescend to gossip: it is the others who talk scandal.

Now this personal kind of gossip is everywhere condemned and is everywhere an unending recreation. It began with the wild gestures and uncouth jabbering of our remote ancestors, squatting in their caves; perhaps it will end only when the last fire is quenched. Wise men, priests, philosophers, and prophets have thundered against it, but their very imprecations only floated about as flotsam and jetsam on the vast ocean of gossip; their very names have come down to us only as a whispered rumour. The stream of talk flows on, and as yet no denunciations have dammed it up. Gossip is an endless game without rules; a thing untouched by changing fashions and varying modes of thought; one of the few everlasting diversions of humanity. Men, who have had more say in public if less in private, have always been prompt to accuse women of devoting too much of their time and energy to this dubious sport. Gossip, they have declared, is woman's greatest pastime. But here at least our feminists, who have spluttered over so many imaginary wrongs, have passed by one undoubted grievance, for the truth is, men are as much given to gossiping as women. Man's talk may sound more important because it involves wider interests, yet a good deal of it is nothing more nor less than gossip.

Now it seems to me that in this perpetual chatter about other people, which we all hasten to denounce, but which gives all of us pleasure at some time or other, our delight springs, broadly speaking, from two main sources, one of which is good and the other bad. And according to which predominates gossip may be described as profitable or hurtful to those people concerned in it.

The good side of gossip arises out of that eager, seemingly insatiable curiosity which distinguishes men from the brutes and civilised men from savages. Much of our idlest chatter is secretly leavened by this curiosity, which is in its purest form a noble thing. For what is the pursuit of knowledge but the play of a splendid but entirely irrational inquisitiveness? Most of the higher branches of knowledge, metaphysics, pure mathematics, and so on, serve no practical purpose; sober philosophers and studious mathematicians are in reality the wildest of fellows, for ever pursuing a laborious quest into the absolute Unknown. A great deal of this fine curiosity goes to the making of gossip, which is something more than a casual exchange of news. When we talk over the Smiths and the Browns, not only do we record events, but we examine motives and estimate character, and in a roundabout way we exchange ideas. The greatest historian can do little more; his subject is of more importance, that is all. The difference between Mrs. Jones giving the real reason why the Johnsons left the town so suddenly, and Professor Jones, writing the *Life and Times of Cardinal Richelieu*, is one of degree only; both are undertaking the same kind of work, and probably both are stirred by the same motives. We are all historians without knowing it.

Our gossip and scandal is a grub, which in a hundred years' time, with the advent of the historian, will become a chrysalis; and in four or five hundred years' time, the hard shell will be burst open, and there will be seen the winged splendour of epic poetry or romantic drama. Have not all the subjects of history and epic poetry once been nothing more than eager talk in the court or the kitchen? 'Have you heard the latest?'—the cry went: then followed the pretty little scandal of Helen, wife of Menelaus, and the Troy affair; or perhaps a full account of that queer business of Prince Hamlet at the Court of Denmark; or the whole story of those strange doings at Verona, in which Montague's son, young Romeo, cut such a figure. The names and stories that were whispered in ante-rooms and bawled out in taverns, centuries ago, will yet provoke future historians, fire poets and romancers yet unborn, and will yet move unknown generations to wild laughter and tears, to anger and pity. How many noble studies have arisen out of this eternal curiosity of men! How many lovely things have flowered from this common soil of Gossip!

The other source of our pleasure in this personal kind of gossip is less innocent; indeed, it is—and ever has been—a great worker of mischief. It proceeds, I believe, from the strain of the Pharisee that is in most of us. When we discuss the weaknesses and misfortunes of others, we are not solely prompted by that spirit of curiosity to which I have referred. Nor is it, as a rule, direct enmity or mere malice that prompts us, for the people we discuss may be almost unknown to us, or, on the other hand, they may be old, well-tried friends. But when we are indulging in this

sort of talk, we suddenly feel a sense of our own superiority, we glow with added self-respect. Thus, there are four or five of us chattering, and someone mentions the absent Jones, who is a common acquaintance. 'Ah! Poor old Jones!' we exclaim; and are quickly in full cry after the quarry. 'The trouble with old Jones, ...' one begins. 'You know, he ought not to have, ...' opens the next critic. 'As I've told Jones many a time, ...' cries a third. So voice after voice swells the chorus of criticism. The superficial show of concern and sympathy is a mere formality and deceives nobody; everyone is eager to contribute his or her scrap of censure; eyes are brightening, tongues are loosened. That slight but distinctly uncomfortable sense of inferiority which we may possibly have felt in the actual presence of Jones is now compensated for by a marked sense of our own superiority and a glow of self-satisfaction.

Unless we are on our guard, we are ready to sacrifice victim after victim for the sake of this delectable but transitory feeling. Every night, in countless drawing-rooms, knives are reddened and altars smoke to propitiate this dark god of self-righteousness. And the victim of this dreadful worship is too often young and open-hearted and beautiful—and a woman.

## A ROAD AND SOME MOODS

I HAVE been living lately near a fine highway, which cuts across the blurred edge of a town and makes straight for the open country. By this road a man may quickly escape from the town and start upon almost any journey. The road will take him some part of the way to Edinburgh, or Moscow, or Bagdad, or the mountains of the moon. Or he may use it, as I do, for a saunter in the morning sunshine.

The road rises as it leaves the town, and a little way beyond my windows it climbs to a summit, so that, walking forward, one sees nothing in front but the sharp, slightly curved edge of the road against the sky. Though I have travelled this way so often, each time that I set eyes on the clean cut of the road and the great emptiness beyond, something in me is thrilled, faintly yet perceptibly, like taut wires troubled by a gust of wind. I know well, none better, what lies at the other side of the hill, the easy stretch of highway descending into a pleasant green valley; yet the sight of the little summit still holds for me some vague promise. But every hill in the world is brother to that 'peak in Darien.' One day, maybe, I shall stand on the crest of this tiny hill, and find that all beyond is changed. I shall look down, maybe, upon a sea covered with strange ships, or into the thronged streets of a magical city.

The other morning I left the house for the first time for several days, and walked slowly up the road. There was a touch of autumn abroad. In the mellow sunlight the trees were putting on their last splendid livery. The air was still, and had in it a faint odour of burning leaves.

In such a season, golden, spacious, but already whispering of the end, there will often come to a man a certain solemn mood, a vein of not unpleasing melancholy, and for a little while he will see all life moving to a grave measure, an adagio for strings. But the mood that encompassed me that morning was very different, and much less welcome. As I walked forward I seemed to sink into depression:

And fears and fancies thick upon me came;  
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

In a fair state of health and unassailed by bad fortune, I walked in that genial sunshine—as a man will—the victim of self-torment or inexplicable misery, the Old Man of the Sea heavy on my shoulders.

Now when I came to the summit of the road and looked down the other side, my whole mood was changed in a flash. And for no other reason than this: an inn stands there, a little way back from the road, and its walls had been newly done a creamy white, so that they showed dazzlingly against the foliage near by. That is all.

But the moment that my eyes fell upon these gleaming white walls my mood was changed, and I saw another vision of life. At that moment, as when a loved person enters a room, it seemed to me as if the footlights of the world were suddenly turned up, and I could hear the strings and flutes of the great orchestra of life. I saw the road before me dancing away to the hills, and the hills themselves standing in silent jubilation. It was one of those rare moments when the passion, the wonder, the mystery of life smite through a man's flesh and bone, and set his spirit towering above good and evil fortune, fearless, exultant, eager for the best and worst of human existence. Such moments come to us on a sudden wave of exultation, and then leave us to be carried gently forward by the customary easy flow of thoughts and emotions. What marks their passage in a man's life, what heroic promptings they bring, what valorous decisions are born of their passing cannot be told, least of all by the man himself. I know that I stayed for a few seconds on the crest of the hill, and then continued my walk. The rare moment had come and gone, sweeping away my former dull mood and leaving me in a pleasant reverie. I walked along, thinking, maybe, of inns and the part they have played in Romance, or of whitened walls and the time when even London was a city of white buildings; or I thought about myself (as you do), and what a fine fellow I should be if I were not a fool. It is no great matter what I thought.

But mark how little of a man's life he can explain, no matter how often he opens the doors and searches the dusty lumber rooms of his mind. There was no reason, in or out of nature, for my first mood of depression. And, to me, there would seem as little reason for the sudden change, the momentary exultation, and the pleasant aftermath. At times the sight of a mountain of felicity will not raise a man's spirits; at other times, if his foot trips over a molehill, he will cry out in ecstasy at the goodness of life. We never talk to less purpose than when we say of a man who is almost a stranger: 'He ought to be happy, for he has this and that at his command.' Knowing our man, and being aware of what life is doing with him and what he is doing with life, we might hazard a guess at his state of mind, but even then it is perilous. Mark also how we realise the beauty and blessing of life itself only in rare, inexplicable moments, and then most keenly. It comes to us then like a sudden blare of trumpets in the wind. We are always ready to talk and write about the wonder of human existence, but, unless we are something more than common men, we do not pass the day and lie down at night thrilled by the thought of our participation in this greatest of games. We go our way as best we can, carried forward or swept back by the ebb and flow of circumstance, and are by turn triumphant, masterful, listless, fearful, despairing.

Perhaps to some of us the moments of revelation, the flashes of insight, never come at all; to the best of us they come but rarely. Life has seemed to us, for months or years maybe, an overcrowded, beggarly repast, at which a man

must snatch at morsels and crumbs of joy: now, in one flash of time, it will seem a divine banquet, the high festival of immortal creatures. The moment passes, but something has been left behind.

## ON A CERTAIN CONTEMPORARY ESSAYIST

IN the early thirties of the last century, readers of *Fraser's Magazine* were puzzled, startled or irritated by a certain 'Clothes-Philosophy,' which was expounded to them month by month by an almost unknown Scotch fire-eater, a lover of brand-new words and riotous syntax. Such readers were privileged to witness the first great eruption of the Carlyle volcano. Doubtless it took most of them nearly twenty years to bring themselves to say that they had enjoyed the spectacle, and even then they were probably lying; but still, it was a privilege. But lest we should be too humble about our own day, I hasten to point out that we too have our 'Clothes-Philosophy,' and that it is cast in a simpler, more pleasing mould than the older one. It is, too, much more of a true 'Clothes-Philosophy' and is no elaborate mystification, no clumping Teutonic allegory, born in a study, but the real thing, coming newly every week or month from the tailor's counter. Although he has his place here as a man of letters and may never have handled a needle or a pair of scissors, Mr. H. Dennis Bradley, I am sure, will not object to being called a tailor. It would be absurd of him to do so, for it is this very trade of tailoring, hitherto somewhat slighted, that he is now ennobling with his pen. But it would be equally absurd if we, on our part, set down Mr. Bradley merely as an astute advertiser who simply wants to make us buy his suits, one who is satisfied with clothing our carcasses and is ready to leave mind and soul untended.

If Mr. Dennis Bradley is not at heart a man of letters, then I do not know the breed. From the very beginning, I divined the essential quality in him. I see him, in my mind's eye, turning from the bundles of spring suitings, from the company of cloth merchants and cutters, into his sanctum to be alone with his art, or rather, his second and greater art, that of writing. There, I see him laboriously yet lovingly beating out phrase after phrase until each little essay is worthy of his great public. Lamb once said of a man that he would have been a tailor only he lacked the spirit. But think of how Lamb would have praised Mr. Bradley, who has the spirit to be not only an excellent tailor but a writer as well; and not, mark you, merely a tailor playing at authorship and trying to keep the needle and thread out of our sight, but an author and tailor at one and the same time, giving us, as it were, the literature and philosophy of shopkeeping and suit-making. This is to be a man of note, an originator, a force in letters. I fancy I can hear the unborn professors rustling their papers on 'Bradley and His Age' or 'The Old Bond Street Circle.'

Being an original, Mr. Dennis Bradley cannot be fitted into any of our little pigeon-holes; he is not easily labelled; but as I have already spoken of his essays, we will keep the term and call him an essayist. His work, however, has had, and still has, so many phases that we shall do well to discriminate a little. There has been, for example, a change in his manner; and it has shown us, on the whole, a steady development, that advance towards the perfection of the instrument which marks the true artist. In his early work there was an irregularity, a wildness, a careless profusion, which promised much but hinted that the artist was not yet fully grown. He tried, if I remember rightly, to push his prose as near to poetry as it would go; and it was only later, when the thought became more weighty, that he turned to the quieter yet more impressive manner, the chiselled form and the pregnant phrase. During this early period, one of his favourite themes was Youth and Age; no new thing, it is true, but one to which he gave new significance by his characteristic treatment. When he exalted Youth and covered Age with ridicule, was he not interpreting the spirit of the times? One can discover, in that alone, the born man of letters. The times, disillusioned, were all for Youth, and he, divining it, stepped forth as our spokesman. Just because he happened to be also a tailor, just because young men happen to spend more on clothes than old men do, is no reason why Mr. Bradley should be robbed of his praise as a writer sensitive to our subtle changes of feeling.

Although there are some persons, not unpretending in criticism, who would have us believe that they prefer the earlier, wilder note, happily they are few, and most of us, I imagine, pass with pleasure to the later, more chastened form. Here we can remark his versatility, his admirable method of appealing to one type of mind after another. Now, he will give us a bright little philosophical treatise, and, sweeping away the accumulation of trivialities, he will dig in a brisk sentence or two to the roots of life, as in his essay on 'The Three Essentials.' Now, he will frankly appeal to the hard-headed man of affairs, and will annihilate half-a-dozen economic heresies in one paragraph. Sometimes it is the social rather than the purely economic problem that engages him. But his large sweep does not make for easy classification, and I, for one, cannot attempt to discriminate between such things, say, as 'A Prophet on Profits,' 'Comparisons,' and 'Economy and Rubbish.' Now and again, it is true, he seems to lay himself open to the charge of sacrificing everything to the topical appeal; but, after all, these are critical times, when men are looking for light; and, at the worst, the manner, unique in our letters, will remain to beguile us. Moreover, there also will remain the personal note, for like all your true essayists he does not hesitate to reveal his personality, to make the reader his confidant.

But when all is said and done, the most remarkable thing about Mr. Bradley, the thing that makes him unique, is his double rôle. One would have thought that his author-self would have come to despise and ignore his tailor-self. But no—their allegiance holds, and is, indeed, stronger than ever. In the early days, there was not always a perfect understanding between the two. The author would come forward and have his say, without leaving any opening for the tailor, who had perforce to push his way to the front and shout the louder. In short, the transition from pure literature to commerce was not always well done: one was often uncomfortably aware of a hiatus. But now—to be apt in metaphor—such creases have been ironed out and the whole thing fits together and is apparently seamless. We begin in the outside world, with all its heart-breaking problems, its gloom and strife; we are driven hither and thither, menaced with ruin; and yet when we come to the end, always we find ourselves in the same solemn temple, our one place of refuge, serene as demi-gods among the spring and autumn suitings. We never know at first what terrible problem we shall be asked to face, but always we have but to follow this new Ariel of ours to be led out of the world into the sanctuary in Old Bond Street. There are times, indeed, when the author, the victim of temperament, is so plunged into gloom that it is the tailor alone who saves the situation, who arrives just when we seem altogether lost, so that his inevitable final refrain of 'Lounge Suits, Dinner Suits, Dress Suits, and Overcoats' comes to our ears like a benediction.

Surely it is pleasant to reflect that one so unique in our letters is able, week by week and month after month, to appeal to such a large public, to dower his work with such lordly space and noble type, to have his own illustrator,

even though this last is somewhat out of key, being a trifle too flippant and sybaritic for such solemn letterpress. I will wager that this 'Clothes-Philosophy' of ours has made more friends, not least among editors and others, than ever did the one our grandfathers knew. Which is a fine feather for Mr. Bradley's cap—if ever he should take to wearing one.

## ON LIFE AND LUCKY-BAGS

READER, does your mind ever run back to the time when you were in receipt of a regular allowance, when you could be described almost as a 'person of independent means'? The other day I mused in this vein, and fell to thinking of the day before yesterday, when I was a chubby, pudding-fed lad, and the aforesaid allowance amounted to four shillings and fourpence at the end of a year, but was delivered into my hands at the rate of one penny per week. Saturday morning was the appointed time, I believe. Of course, I often received other and larger sums; aunts and uncles were usually good for half-a-crown, or even more, and grandfathers in those days seemed to be literally made of silver coin. But the Saturday penny differed from these occasional presents in that it was my very own; there were no hints of money-boxes and savings-banks and 'rainy-days'; the penny was placed in my hand, and could be used immediately as a sacrifice on the glittering altar of Juvenile Folly. This was very much to my taste, for, like most healthy children, I scorned those doubtful deities, Thrift and Prudence; even now I can hardly bring myself to accord them the worship which is, from what I hear, their due.

A number of my playmates received their weekly pennies at the same time—almost at the same moment, I imagine—and it was our invariable custom to retire in a body to a little shop near by. It was a tiny fancy-goods and sweet shop, whose owner must have subsisted almost entirely on the patronage of such small fry as ourselves. To us, as we clustered round the window, it was a veritable land of Heart's Delight, for a penny was a potent talisman in those days, and we had the choice of a bewildering array of entirely useless articles. (What do children receive on Saturday mornings these times, I wonder; a ten shilling note or a War Bond?). So, clutching our pennies in warm, moist little hands, we would spend a delicious half-hour gazing through the shop window, a round-eyed, shrill-voiced crowd of speculators, until, after much discussion, our minds made up, we would clatter—one by one—into the shop and come out triumphantly hugging our purchases. The rest was a swift descent into prosaic life. The great moment had come and gone.

Now, sympathetic reader, I will discover to you the depths of my folly. For you must know that some poetic rogue, some Autolycus of the fancy-goods trade, had invented and placed upon the market the thing called the lucky-bag. It was my bane, and the cause of my weekly undoing. Never was there such a snare for an imaginative child! It was a large, sealed paper-packet, bulging auspiciously; it contained articles of great variety, and some, so ran the legend on the cover, were of 'immense value.' Here was wealth, touched with chance and mystery and magic; here was El Dorado within sight. When I add that the price of this marvel was exactly one penny, there is nothing more to be said.

At first we were all victims. But, alas!—nothing of 'immense value' was forth-coming. The packets contained nothing of more importance than some trivial little wooden article, and a few contemptible pink sweets—a vile pennyworth! The bulging, which gave one the idea that the bag was crammed with bulky toys, was caused, I regret to say, by a sheet of stiff brown paper artfully disposed beneath the outer covering. So my companions, worldly wise in their generation, laughed to scorn the wiles of the lucky-bag merchant, and betook themselves to other and more solid purchases—a top, a ball, or a pennyworth of bulls-eyes or toffee. Here they receive a pennyworth for a penny and were satisfied.

It was otherwise with me. I wanted the land of Heart's Delight for a penny, and though I have never got it, there were moments when, holding the newly-bought, unopened bag in my hand, I had glimpses of joys beyond mere pennyworths of this and that. Week after week, month after month, the lure of the magic packet held me in thrall. There were times when I would resolve to break my bonds, and traffic no more with the cheater, the mocker of sweet innocence, but it was all to no purpose; as soon as I approached the fateful shop and caught sight of the bulging packets my resolutions went like smoke, and once again my penny would be swept into the till, and once more I would stand, with heart beating high, looking into the mysterious bag.

And always the same hollow mockery; always the stiff brown paper bringing my dreams to earth. My collection of little wooden egg-cups and tables grew apace; often I nearly made myself sick by trying to find some consolation in the abominable pink sweets. My elders laughed at me, and I was the scorn of my youthful playmates. Yet I think those pennies were well expended, for I moved, unknowingly, in great company—among the happy simpletons on the one hand and the fantastic dreamers on the other. Don Quixote, Parson Adams, Pickwick, and the rest at one elbow; Lully, Paracelsus, and all the other seekers of Philosophers' Stones, Elixirs of Life, and Lands of Gold jostling me on the other side.

So I was in my innocence, and even now when I am 'if a man speak truly, little better than one of the wicked,' I have not changed so much. Though the pennies do not come so easily as of old, the dreams have not yet faded, the magical lights have not yet been quite extinguished; the solid pennyworths still fail to satisfy me, who have been on the very frontiers of El Dorado. So, though the disappointments still come thick and fast, I have my moments, perhaps you, too—?

But I fear my name will never head a subscription list or cause a commotion in Lombard Street. I sometimes think I shall never even be asked to open a bazaar.

## GRIGSBY—A RECORD AND AN APPRECIATION

*(Being an attempt to capture an admired manner.)*

IT was, I think, Mr. S. P. B. Mais who told us that we live 'in an age of amazing geniuses.' The observation is so profoundly true, and one owes so much to this critic's sane and luminous appreciations of contemporary writers, that one cannot help feeling surprised that he nowhere makes any mention of Grigsby. Certainly, in these fruitful times, a man cannot criticise all his fellow-authors; there are other omissions, notably D. S. Ballowby, Geoffrey Domsteen,

Hilda Perkstone (who wrote *Wherefore?*), and Anna Lummit; nevertheless, a lover of contemporary letters can hardly forgive the critic's strange neglect of Grigsby. Therefore, although making no pretence of being specially fitted for the task, I feel that my long admiration for the poet and my several years' acquaintance with the man himself, render it a duty on my part to try and give a sketch, however slight, of his career, personality, aims and achievements.

Harold Hopkins Grigsby, poet and littérateur, was born sometime in the late seventies of the last century in the pleasant old town of Channingford. Like many other famous men of letters, he came from a family that showed no particular devotion to literature or the other arts; his father, a not very prosperous corn-merchant, spent his leisure hours breeding fox-terriers, while his mother was chiefly occupied with domestic duties. Grigsby himself, troubled maybe by painful memories, has said little of these early days, so little that I am unable to state where it was he received his education, but tuition of some sort he undoubtedly had. When we next see him, he is nearing the threshold of manhood, and is far removed from Channingford, being at Wolverhampton, apprenticed to an oil and colour merchant. There, in the oil and colour shop, he was indeed a caged soul; even yet he cannot speak of those Wolverhampton days without a trace of bitterness: 'The oil did not make my path more smooth; the colour did not make my world less drab,' he has said to me more than once. Then it was that his fancy began to take wing; he turned to literature. Friendless, away from home, misunderstood by those about him, he turned to the poets for consolation. 'I owe more than man can repay,' he has frankly confessed to me, 'to Snipper's fourpenny "Flowers of Poesie" series!' He became an ardent student of the poet's craft, and it was not long before he himself began to write. Several little things of his found their way into the Poets' Corner of the local journal, and shortly after his twenty-second birthday, there appeared the first volume from his pen, *Blossoms of Sorrow* (West Midland Almanac and Railway Guide Publishing Co.). It was not a success, being rather an immature production and quite unlike the poet's later work; indeed, for years, he was ashamed of the volume, and refused to speak of it even to his intimate friends. Yet those of us who are fortunate enough to possess a copy (it is very scarce now, and must fetch a good price), can turn to *Blossoms of Sorrow* and find, here and there, the definite promise of what has since been so magnificently achieved, can discover among so much immature writing more than a few hints of what was to come, the occasional note of the real Grigsby. Lines like these:

'The withered flowers of an outworn passion  
Trodden under the feet of the dawn....'

Or

'...You and I  
Are weary of life and enamoured of death,  
The end of the travail of blood, the labour of breath,'

are not without their significance now, when we know to what fulness of meaning and felicity of phrase such things are leading us.

About this time came the darkest hour of Grigsby's early struggles. The volume, as I have said, was a failure; meanwhile, the poet's father had died, owing money; and there had been a quarrel with the oil and colour merchant. Grigsby had now neither employment nor friends to whom he could turn. But the good fortune that has attended some few of our poets (notably Wordsworth) waited upon Grigsby when he had almost given up hope. He learned to his surprise that an aunt, whom he had not seen for years, had died leaving him a considerable sum of money, for the most part safely invested in Imperial Mineral Waters Pref. He was now free to devote all his time to the pursuit of letters, and it was not long before he did what most young geniuses do sooner or later, he went up to London. I have not space to chronicle his early years there, though a full record would make a very fascinating chapter in the literary life of the time; let it suffice to say that he moved as far as was possible in the literary and artistic world, formed many valuable friendships, yet never let a day pass without taking up his pen. Like many other brilliant young literary men, he soon came under the influence of R. U. Bortwith, the editor of the *Pale Review* and the literary oracle of his day. It was in the *Pale Review* that Grigsby's first narrative poem, 'Palomides,' appeared, along with occasional lyrics. He also edited *The Apothecary in English Literature* in the well-known series published by Messrs. Downe & Cashe, wrote a monograph on Henry Kirke White, and contributed some excellent criticisms and reviews to various periodicals. All this time, though he was becoming known to a small but influential group of critics and editors, no second volume of verse had come from his pen.

His friendship with Bortwith, however, soon brought him into touch with several other young poets, Robert Blorridge, Geoffrey Domsteen, Anna Lummit, and others, and it was not long before the famous 'No Verb' group was formed, a group of which, I have reason to know, he was the leading member. Whatever may be said to the contrary, there is no doubt that it was Grigsby, and Grigsby alone, who kept the 'No Verbs' together. By this time, everyone knows the aims and achievements of this enthusiastic little band of writers; how they triumphed in spite of a storm of hostile criticism is now ancient history; and we are only concerned with the movement so far as it affected Grigsby. To him most of the credit is due, for the original idea was his: I have had the story from his own lips. They were talking late one night at Domsteen's, some four or five young poets, and the subject was, as usual, their art. It was agreed upon by all present that the old forms of verse were outworn, and that if the fresh beauty of English poetry was to be restored, there would have to be a change of form. It was then that Grigsby, in a flash, saw a solution to the problem—the Verb!—English verse must be shorn of its verbs to recover its beauty and arise rejuvenated. The idea was quickly outlined, and all his hearers took it up with enthusiasm. There and then, it was decided to eliminate the verb, and the group dispersed to begin experiments with the new form. Who can forget the battle that followed—the indignant letters, the replies, the hisses of derision and disapproval from pedantic critics, the answering battle-cry of 'Down with the Verb!?' But we are not concerned now with the movement itself, but with what was its finest fruit—Grigsby's second volume, *Nullity*, the book that made his reputation. It was only to be expected that a volume by a writer so original, and, moreover, written in the 'No Verb' manner, would be ignored or derided by conservative critics; nevertheless, it met with a warm welcome in some influential quarters. A review that appeared in *THE BELLMAN'S JOURNAL* was particularly enthusiastic, and did credit to its author, who, by a singular coincidence, chanced to be no less than Grigsby's cousin. All good judges would not hesitate now to agree with the concluding remarks of the review: 'By his sincerity, courage, extraordinary wealth of imagery and happiness of phrase, force of passion and depth of thought, Mr. Grigsby in *Nullity* has shown himself not only a writer to be reckoned with, but one who has



gained for himself, in one bound, a foremost place among contemporary poets.' No sooner does one recall the volume than countless wonderful lines leap to the memory, passages of such sombre beauty as:

'Faint press of worn etiolated feet  
Upon the dun mephitic street,  
Under a bulging reasty sky....'

or such well-remembered things as:

'Spring!—the breezy spinster, sour-apple green,  
Acidulous virgin, lengthy and lean,  
And all our red-flannelled days at an end....'

or the familiar lines from 'Decayed Trades,' with all its quaint symbolism:

'Weary of butchers with hands as heavy as lead,  
And fruiterers, fulsome as their old wares;  
Weary of bakers, sweaty with paste, and seemingly dead  
To all higher things, to all nobler cares.'

Though opinions may differ as to the value of the 'No Verb' manner, none can deny the beauty of the verse in *Nullity*. Indeed, the only just complaint that can be urged against Grigsby in this volume concerns itself with the note of pessimism that undoubtedly finds its way into the majority of the poems. But this, I have reason to know, was not the result of a foolish pose; Grigsby has always been too sincere an artist for that; but he himself was journeying through the 'valley of the shadow' at the time when the book was written, and the verses are the genuine expression of his moods and thoughts. There is no trace of pessimism or bitterness in his later work.

It was shortly after the appearance of *Nullity*, if my memory serves me, that I met the poet for the first time. I had dropped into the habit of looking in at Ivorstein's studio, and it was on one of my visits there that I found a group of artists and men of letters listening intently to a tall, slim young man in their midst. He was declaiming, if I remember rightly, against Miss Sylvia Sylcox, the popular poetess, whose *Noughts and Kisses* was then going through edition after edition. The speaker was no other than Grigsby; and when afterwards I had the fortune to make my way homewards in his company, I counted myself a lucky man. Nor was I wrong, for after years of—what he has been good enough to call—friendship, my admiration for the artist is only equalled by my respect for the man. A brilliant conversationalist, witty yet always kindly, with a fund of just comment upon authors living and dead always to hand, I know no man of letters who makes such a genial, wise companion. But this is by the way. A little later, the great happiness of his life came to him, his marriage, which in itself did not a little to widen his outlook and touch his work to even finer issues. The lady of his choice, who has proved herself an invaluable helpmate and a very charming hostess, was Miss Cecilia Snorks, daughter of the late Canon Snorks, and herself the writer of two well-known books, *Humble Hearts in Many Mansions* and *The Heptameron Retold for Children*. But we must pass lightly over the next few years, during which time, however, Grigsby's pen was not idle. He published two slim volumes, *Palomides and Other Poems* and *Buckingham: A Tragedy*, which did not attract so much attention as *Nullity*, but yet commanded respect and doubtless added to their author's reputation. Also, as before, he was engaged in periodical work, for the most part critical essays and reviews, many of which he afterwards collected and published in *A Poet—And Some Others* (Downe and Cashe). Then, after a prolonged retreat in South Lancashire, he produced the work his friends had long been expecting, the work that many of us believe has given him—or will give him—a high place in English literature. I refer, of course, to *The Golden Garnering*, a volume of lyrics of no great size, but yet packed with poetry of the highest order. Here, at last, we have the true Grigsby, self-confident, matured, in full command of his powers. All that had gone before, his childhood at Channingford, the early struggles at Wolverhampton, the days and nights with his brilliant set in London, the ripeness of later, quieter years, all lead to *The Golden Garnering*; and not in vain, for it is one of the few enduring contributions of this age to letters. In these lyrics of Grigsby's, one discovers all the best qualities of our older English verse, along with a great deal that is new, being native to the poet. Over and above the beautiful lyrical flow, the sharply etched phrase, the abundant fine imagery, familiar to all lovers of our verse, there is a touch of restless modernity, an increasing burden of thought, that mark the true poet of our own time. Dropping the 'No Verb' manner and returning with increased power to the older forms, Grigsby, in this volume, presents us with an extraordinary variety of measures, alike only in their marvellous fitness for each subject and mood. At times, he will move us with exquisite cadences, perfectly wedded to the matter, as in—

'Sleep, gentle sleep, I know not whence it comes,  
Sleep from the dusk of some immortal dream,  
Clouds to the eyes and hazes o'er the mind....'

At other times, we are roused and delighted by one startling yet just image, as in—

'Day, a white pack, chases the black fox, Night,  
And faster than horse and hound, the fled-away shades....'

Again, the poet will express himself with force and passion, yet seem to be singing a carelessly beautiful song, as, for example, in the oft-quoted 'Hymn to the Clubmen'—

'Men of wrath, your tongues are burning  
With the angry words unspoken;  
And all love and beauty spurning,  
Nature has for you no token....'

Or in the less lyrical but still more forceful and characteristic lines beginning:

'The dust of noonday shall be cursed  
To him: and he shall slake his thirst  
In many a public place....'

And, here and there, we see the poet using the full compass of his instrument, as in the now famous 'To the Ox,' and particularly the familiar fourth stanza, beginning:

'Thou know'st naught of our bitterness, grave beast;  
No angry Pharisees can frown thee down;  
For thee, the hills have spread their dewy feast  
Of agelong green, outlasting road and town....'

But one could go on quoting until the volume was exhausted. There is, however, something still to be said before leaving *The Golden Garnering*. There is no doubt that Grigsby shows himself in this book as one in the true tradition of our great English poets; he takes his place in that magnificent procession which includes Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley and all the other masters of the craft; and his verse has so clearly the same qualities as that of his great predecessors that perhaps it is not surprising that some critics, of more ill-will than knowledge or judgment, have gone so far as to accuse Grigsby of plagiarism. The accusation is, of course, so unjust, nay, so utterly absurd, that it merely recoils on the heads of those who have been foolish enough to make it. But as some of the passages quoted above have been actually cited as instances of the so-called plagiarism, readers who have not already dismissed these charges have here an opportunity of discovering what importance need be attached to them. Those of us who know the poet have no fear of the result. And here, this slight sketch of Grigsby's life and work must end. He has much yet to offer a public that is looking to him more and more for vision and hope; there is, to my knowledge, at least one volume still in manuscript that will surprise even the most ardent lovers of *The Golden Garnering*. We may be sure that what follows from his pen will not fall below the very high standard he has set himself. And pondering over the poet's career, still happily unfinished, though none of us can hope to claim such genius, we may at least try to emulate the other virtues that, in this rare instance among men of letters, go along with it, the patience and perseverance, the unselfish, even temper, and, not least, that devotion to a high ideal which is not so uncommon among men of our race as our enemies would have us believe.

## A PARAGON OF HOSTS

MR. MAX BEERBOHM, in his delightful essay on *Hosts and Guests*, declared that 'In life or literature there has been no better host than Old Wardle.' It is an affirmation that does him credit, and I, for one, would not readily tilt against this or any other judgment of his. Nevertheless, I have just discovered a man who, considered simply as a host, seems to me greater than even Old Wardle himself. Life has a knack of over-reaching letters, and so it chanced that my candidate is no mere character of fiction, dispensing the vast but insubstantial hospitality born of a novelist's flow of fancy and ink, but one who was a real—a very real—person in his day. And I account him the greatest of hosts because he dedicated his life to the business, or rather to the noble service, of hospitality: he seems to have had no other passion in life, no other motive for living, apart from this desire to entertain his friends as friends should be entertained; he aimed at perfection and achieved it, and so remains the host unblemished, immaculate, a luminous ideal. Once out of the brutish state, man is a hospitable creature; his records are crowded with instances of unsparing bounty, of prodigal feasts and fortunes squandered upon entertainment: the table groans through the ages. But neither legend nor history shows us the fellow of him whom I praise. Even in the most magnificent figures of hospitality there is some flaw; emperor or oligarch, merchant-prince or baron, not one but shows some motive outside pure benevolence, some speck of pride, some touch of self-seeking. He alone is unspotted, hospitality incarnate, the perfect host, whose story I have lately read in an old volume that is a gallery of strange forgotten figures. There, it is true, he appears only as a man of whims, an eccentric, an oddity in a collection of oddities; but it takes time for a man to come into his own. But though nearly two hundred years have gone over his grave, Mr. Mathew of Thomastown, for such was his designation, shall take his true place yet as the pattern of hosts and the idol of all who go out as guests.

Mathew, whose Christian name has not come down to us, was an Irish gentleman who inherited a large estate at Thomastown, in the county of Tipperary, a patrimony that was worth some eight thousand a year. This was a good income even in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In Ireland, where things were cheaper, it was almost princely. No sooner had Mathew taken over his estate than he determined to build a large mansion, after a design of his own, for the special purpose of entertaining, and to surround it with grounds, laid out in the newly adopted mode of English gardening and comprising some 1500 acres of his best land. This meant an enormous outlay, and so, in order to avoid incurring any debt on the estate, he did what few other Irish gentlemen of his or any other day have done—he deliberately cut down his own expenditure. For seven years (how these significant numbers crop up!) he retired to the Continent and lived on six hundred a year, while the remainder of his income was used to carry out his great scheme, or, if you like, to nurture his most glorious hobby-horse. Already, you see, he plainly shows himself no ordinary man. His great plan, his long view, his voluntary exile—these things mark him off from the common run of men. He was a man with a purpose, with a vision that kept his feet travelling along one straight road. Most men of this type, men with a purpose, have looked to vastly different ends; their purpose has been to gain as much power, to obtain as much of other people's money, as possible; on the other hand, the end that he proposed was the spending of money on other people. Irish gentlemen of his day were, of course, hospitable and generous to the point of eccentricity, but then they differed from him in having no vision to which they shaped their destiny. They were capable of spending all, and more than all, their incomes on entertaining, but they were certainly not capable of doing what Mathew did, of living for seven years on less than a twelfth part of their incomes for the sake of future hospitality. It is clear that Mathew had qualities that are rarely combined in one person; he could not only dream, plan, and try to shape his destiny, he could also afford to wait; and people who have ideas and can afford to wait are very seldom found either in his day or since, particularly in the county of Tipperary. He was a great man, and we cannot know too much about him.

At the end of his seven years' exile he returned to Dublin and spent some time there, probably to meet as many good fellows as he could before settling in the country and beginning his noble career as host. He must have had a good many adventures at home and abroad, but only one has come down to us, and that happened during his stay in Dublin. The story is worth telling because it shows him in another light. At that time, towards the end of Queen Anne's reign, party feeling was at its height; Whigs and Tories had just been bitterly divided about the Peace, and the question of who was to be Anne's successor was widening the rift between parties. As usual, Dublin was a storm-centre; blows were following words more closely than ever, and gentlemen were calling each other out every day. News of this delectable state of affairs in Dublin reached the ears of two fighting men in London, Major Pack and Captain Creed, who thought it a good opportunity to try their skill in fence among the Irish, and so set out for Dublin in search of adventures. Determined to go to the fountain-head of honour, they made inquiry in the Dublin coffee-houses for the best swordsmen, and learned that a gentleman lately arrived from France was accounted one of the best in Europe. This was no other than our friend Mathew. Major Pack, who was clearly no Bobadil, resolved to take the first opportunity of picking a quarrel. Seeing Mathew carried along the street in his chair one day, the fire-eating major, after the manner of his kind, deliberately jostled the fore-chairman. Mathew, however, being a quiet fellow for all his swordsmanship, gave the major the benefit of the doubt and took no notice of the incident. But, unfortunately for himself, Pack boasted of the affair in a public coffee-house, giving it out that Mathew had not the spirit to ask for an explanation. A friend of Mathew's, Macnamara by name and one of the best fencers in Ireland, happened to be present, and he promptly took up the quarrel, told the major that his friend Mathew would certainly have chastised him had he observed the affront, and promised, on his absent friend's behalf, a speedy meeting if that was what the major was wanting. The upshot of it was that within a few hours' time, in a private room in a tavern, four Christian gentlemen were busily engaged in trying to let each other's blood out. Four—because the seconds, Macnamara and Captain Creed, could not allow themselves to be mere spectators, and so fell to work with their principals. The fight, which should cut some figure in the annals of the duel, was long and bloody. But though the two English officers fought with great obstinacy, they were clearly out-matched, and finally were so exhausted from the wounds they had received that they were compelled to admit defeat.

Here Mathew's biographer, after describing the combat, tells us of a singular circumstance, which is best related in his own words. 'Upon this occasion,' he writes, 'Mathew gave a remarkable proof of the perfect composure of his mind during the action. Creed had fallen first, on which Pack exclaimed: "Ah, poor Creed, are you gone?" "Yes," replied Mathew, with the utmost calmness, "and you shall instantly *pack* after him," at the same time making a home thrust quite through his body, which threw him to the ground. This was the more remarkable as he was never known in his life, either before or after, to have aimed at a pun.' Bravo, Mathew! Had you never been the greatest of hosts, had you never attained such skill with the sword, yet we could have made shift to send you down to posterity as 'Single-Pun Mathew.' I am not sure, however, that our chronicler is right when he gives us this as an example of Mathew's perfect composure of mind. Surely this solitary pun, this lonely but splendid star, was due to the temporary absence of that perfect composure of his mind; a momentary feeling of elation crashed through his lifelong habit of avoiding puns, and out the thing flashed. On this incident alone one could build up a very pretty defence of those Shakespearian puns which appear to be the bane of so many worthy persons' admiration for the poet. But Major Pack and Captain Creed are still bleeding on the tavern floor—we must return to them. The surgeons, finding it impossible to have them moved, had beds brought into the room, where the two officers lay for many weeks. At first their lives were despaired of, but being stout fellows, they contrived to astonish everybody by recovering. It is pleasant to relate that their most constant visitors were Mathew and his friend Macnamara, that all four were soon on the best of terms, and that Pack and Creed were completely cured of their fire-eating propensities. We can safely leave them to rejoin their regiments, and turn to Mathew in his greatest *rôle*, Mathew as host.

He had stayed long enough in Dublin to gather about him a circle of excellent friends, and so he determined to retire to his estate at Thomastown and begin his great work. All his plans had been put into execution, and everything was ready. And now you shall discover what manner of host he was. But first let me ask you to consider, in strict private, your own trials as a guest; think of the visits you have made that you began in high hopes and cut short in utter weariness; remember the tribulations that only the guest, modest, sanguine, wistful, long-suffering, can know, those thorns thick-set about the rose of hospitality; enumerate the things that have made you invent appointments to get away and tell lies innumerable to avoid returning; consider what might have made your stay in Jones' house a pleasant memory and your good friend Brown a better host; and when you have done all this, you will be more apt to appraise Mathew at his true worth.

His house had accommodation for forty guests and their servants, and each guest had every convenience to hand in his own suite of rooms. If he wished, a guest could take his meals in his own apartment, ordering what he wanted from the kitchen and, if he felt inclined, inviting other guests to dine with him. If he wanted society, he could go to the common dining-room, where a 'daily ordinary'—as they called it then—was kept. Here there was none of the customary ceremony; the host took his place anywhere; all ideas of rank and precedence were laid aside; they were all good fellows together. This dining-room must have been like nothing that we have known in a private house; it comes nearer to a restaurant, but a restaurant somewhere in the Happy Isles, a restaurant of men's dreams, where the company is select and small, the fare choice, the waiters quick and obliging and innocent of tip-hunting, and, not least, one where there is nothing to pay. This was the day of the coffee-house, and Mathew had one of his largest rooms fitted up to resemble one of these places, upon which contemporary civilisation seemed to be dependent. It had all the features of the City coffee-house, such as Will's, the haunt of Dryden, or Button's, beloved of Addison; there were barmaids and waiters, ready to supply refreshments at all hours of the day; and chess-boards, backgammon tables, newspapers, pamphlets, and what not. But more wonderful still, the mansion contained not only a coffee-house, but a tavern! Oh, noble Mathew! One could, of course, take a glass in one's own room or the coffee-house, or split a bottle in the dining-room—there was no restriction; still, for the sake of the jolly Pantagruelian fellows among his guests, Mathew set up a tavern. There, attended by a 'waiter in a blue apron' (then the fashion in taverns), they could give their orders without restraint, and fuddle and roar it after supper without fear of disturbing the more sedate members of the house-party.

There were plenty of games at Thomastown, but no gamesters, for the only restriction we hear of in the place refers, wisely enough, to gambling. It was the sportsman's paradise. There were two billiard tables and a bowling green; fishing-tackle of all kinds and various guns; a pack of buckhounds, another of foxhounds, and yet another of harriers, and twenty hunters in the stable for the use of those guests who had not their own. We hear nothing of a

library, but perhaps because it is taken for granted. I hope so. Mathew, I am certain, was no Squire Western, but a man given not to devouring books, but at least to delicate bouts of reading; no student or 'wit,' but one, as the fashion then was, with a gentlemanly taste for letters. I like to think that there was a library, perhaps immediately above the coffee-house, where one could range among the tall folios and now and then come upon a 'kind-hearted play-book,' and also have the pleasure of taking down one or two things strange to one, new books, something by Crébillon or Le Sage, Prior's poems or the brand-new work by Mr. Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*. Nor do we hear anything of music, but this, too, we may surely take for granted. In all this changing company of Irish gentlemen there must have been more than a few musicians, and somewhere on the premises a clavichord or spinet and a viol or two for them to play. One would like to think that a select company, before adjourning to the 'tavern' after supper, could listen to something in the strain of *Stay, Shepherd* or *Whither runneth my Sweetheart?* a song by Dr. Blow or something from one of Mr. Purcell's operas, and perhaps even a sonata by Corelli or one of Couperin's suites, which had once set our host Mathew tapping his feet when he was in France. These are perhaps idle fancies, but we are not to be denied them, and they are not too idle to complete the picture.

But Mathew's great glory comes not so much from the lavishness of his hospitality, in which, of course, he has been often surpassed, though perhaps by none of equal means, as from the spirit in which that hospitality was given, from his own conduct as host. When he showed each new guest over the house, he always told him: 'This is your castle; here you are to command as absolutely as in your own house.' We have all heard some such words as these, but Mathew really meant what he said. As we have seen, a guest could dine or sup where he pleased; there was no ceremony at the table, and Mathew took his place anywhere. In fact, he made a point of mixing with his guests as one of themselves, and neither invited nor expected compliments and thanks. Without good organisation his scheme would have ruined him in a very short time: but he had some faithful stewards and had so contrived his system of domestic economy that there was no possibility of the waste and thieving common in most large establishments then and since. He himself, it seems, superintended everything, even the daily accounts, and did it early in the morning before his guests were afoot. The house was always full, but we are told that there was never any confusion or disorder. Mathew himself sometimes went away for several days at a time, but everything went smoothly in his absence. He was fortunate enough, it appears, to have solved the 'servant problem,' which, if we may believe Swift and other contemporary writers, was very pressing at that time, and it says something for his luck or wisdom that the idle, drunken, lying rogues of servants, so familiar to readers of contemporary memoirs and so on, were entirely absent from the house at Thomastown. And this mention of servants brings us to our hero's master-stroke. 'Mr. Mathew,' our authority tells us, 'was the first that put an end to the inhospitable custom of giving *vales* to servants, by making a suitable addition to their wages; at the same time assuring them that if they took any afterwards they should be discharged with disgrace; and to prevent the temptation, the guests were informed that he would consider it as the highest affront if any offer of that sort were made.' After that, to dwell longer on his rare virtues as a host would be to paint the lily. Who will dare now to contest the claim I have made for him? Oh, peerless Mathew!

Of the excellent persons who enjoyed such famous hospitality we know little, with the exception of two to be noticed hereafter. But they seem to have been all of one sex. In the short sketch of Mathew's career that I have plundered so freely, I can find no record of any ladies among the guests. Nor is there any mention of a Mrs. Mathew, which is not surprising, for woman, who knits up the social fabric and keeps civilisation intact, does not favour these noble experiments, these staggering ideals, these gigantic whims; she puts the golden hobby-horse between the shafts or at the end of a towing-line. As a husband and family man Mathew would have been admirable and still the very soul of hospitality, but, you may depend upon it, he would never have carried out his astonishing scheme, never have had his coffee-house and tavern and what not at Thomastown, never have come down to us as one of the most delightful eccentrics of his age. As it was, the life at Thomastown was a purely masculine affair, as remote from femininity as that of a monastery or a college, and better than either, where men not desperately in love could 'fleet the time carelessly,' away from their ladies' eyes.<sup>[A]</sup> It is fortunate that we do know the names of at least two of those lucky gentlemen who stayed with Mathew, and that one of them happens to be a great man, a man who might be called a 'hard case' so far as guests are concerned, a man with a capacity for being displeased that had not its equal in Europe, whose enjoyment may reasonably be taken as the very acid test of Mathew's scheme—no other than Dean Swift. Yes, we are told that the great Dean himself rode down to Tipperary and spent some time at Thomastown. The fact is not recorded, so far as I know, in any of his numerous biographies; I have taken it on trust from the old volume that contains Mathew himself. Like many other stories, if it is not true it ought to be. But I see no reason to doubt it.

[A] But I am assured by a gentleman bearing the same name, and presumably of the same family, as our hero, that actually Mathew was married twice; also that his Christian name was George—"Grand George" he was called.

Swift's friend, Dr. Sheridan, had charge of Mathew's nephew for a time, and not unnaturally became one of the welcome guests at Thomastown. Through him Swift heard a great deal about the place, and, after a time, wanted to find out for himself how much truth there was in these reports of marvels, which seemed to him a monstrous tissue of exaggeration. Mathew, hearing of this through Sheridan, despatched a polite note to Swift, requesting the honour of a visit, in company with Sheridan, when the latter should have his next school vacation. Swift, though a little dubious, accepted the invitation, and some little time afterwards set out for Thomastown with Sheridan and a near relation of Mathew's. The three of them rode all day through miry lanes and at length reached one of the wretched wayside hovels that passed then for inns in Ireland. Here they were to spend the night. Swift, who was very fastidious (did he not once complain of 'dirty sheets' and get in return a rebuke that is—or should be—historic?), began already to regret the adventure. But they had not been in the inn more than a few minutes when a magnificent coach-and-six thundered up to the door. It had been sent by Mathew to carry them the remainder of the journey to Thomastown, and contained a delectable supply of food, wine, and other liquors. Swift, we are told, 'was highly pleased with this uncommon mark of attention paid him, and the coach proved particularly acceptable as he had been a good deal fatigued with his day's journey.' And an entertaining ride it must have been, too, with the Dean in good spirits, little Dr. Sheridan chuckling over the impromptu supper, and one and all rolling through the night on the road to Tipperary.

When they came within sight of the house, Swift was astonished at its size, and cried: 'What, in the name of heaven, can be the use of such a vast building?'

'Why, Mr. Dean,' returned Mathew's relative, 'there are no less than forty apartments for guests in that house,

and all of them probably occupied at this time, except what are reserved for us.'

Swift was down in the dumps in a moment. You could not expect the author of *Gulliver* to relish his fellow-humans in a lump. Sticking his head out of the window, he called to the coachman and told him to drive back to Dublin, as he could not think of mixing with such a crowd. Then, luckily for himself, as it turned out, he saw that the affair had gone too far to be thus lightly abandoned. 'Well,' he declared gloomily, 'there is no remedy; I must submit; but I have lost a fortnight of my life.' He had not; but how many fortnights in that long unhappy life of his might not he have lost and yet only gained thereby, perhaps won some little touch of heart's ease?

He was received at the door by Mathew, who conducted him to his room, made the usual speech about the customs of the house, and then retired, leaving Swift, still gloomily submissive and not a little incredulous, to his dour meditations. Shortly afterwards, however, the cook appeared with his bill of fare, and the butler with his wine list, ready to receive orders. 'And is all this really so?' Swift demanded of his two companions; 'and may I command here as in my own house?' Dr. Sheridan and his friend assured him that he might, that the host desired all his guests to suit their own inclinations without the least restraint. 'Well then,' cried Swift, 'I invite you and Dr. Sheridan to be my guests while I stay, for I think I shall scarcely be tempted to mix with the mob below.'

Now listen to our historian, for we hasten to the climax:

Three days were passed in riding over the demesne, and viewing the various improvements, without ever seeing Mr. Mathew or any of the guests: nor were the company below much concerned at the dean's absence, as his very name usually inspired those who did not know him with awe, and they were afraid that his presence would put an end to the ease and cheerfulness which reigned among them. On the fourth day Swift entered the room where the company were assembled before dinner, and addressed Mr. Mathew in a strain of the highest compliment, expatiating on all the beauties of his improvements, with the skill of an artist, and with the taste of a connoisseur. Such an address from a man of Swift's character could not fail of being pleasing to the owner, who was, at the same time, the planner of these improvements; and so fine an eulogium from one who was supposed to deal more largely in satire than panegyric was likely to remove the prejudice entertained against his character, and prepossess the rest of the company in his favour. He concluded his speech by saying: 'And now, gentlemen, I am come to live among you, and it shall be no fault of mine if we do not pass our time agreeably.'

There is something almost startling in the *naïveté* of our historian's observation that 'such an address ... could not fail of being pleasing.' Pleasing indeed! Hearty praise in public from Jonathan Swift was worth all that seven years' sacrifice.

After that, we are told, all constraint vanished. Swift, as we know, could be the very prince of good fellows in his best days and when the mood was on; and now he entered readily into the life of the place, devised all manner of jests, and kept Thomastown in a roar. Never, we are told, were there such days and nights at Thomastown; and those of us who have more than a superficial acquaintance with Swift can readily believe it. Soon, all too soon, came the time when Sheridan had to return to his school. But Swift was not allowed to depart with his friend; the whole company entreated him to remain; even Mathew himself for once broke through his rule of never soliciting a guest to stay; and the upshot of it was that the great man stayed on, and finally, in place of that wasted fortnight, spent four months, four happy months, as the guest of Thomastown. Thus, though we know so little of Mathew's guests, at least we do know this: he sheltered beneath his roof for more than a hundred nights one of the greatest intellects of his time; he was enabled to give some little time of rest and forgetfulness, snatched, as it were, before the coming of a dreadful darkness, to one of the greatest and most unhappy spirits known to our literature. That, surely, was no little thing. Nor did it lack recompense. I have said that Mathew, this eccentric personage, this king of hosts, was not without greatness, not yet suitably acknowledged. But I was wrong. For whatever he did, if the tale holds true, the world repaid him in full, the thanks of all guests to this greatest of hosts have long ago been given their voice, and the debt is cleared. For was he not praised by Swift?

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**Typographical error corrected by the etext transcriber:**  
yet did not hesitate to juggle=> yet did not hesitate to juggle {pg 46}

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